Urban Social Aesthetics

Individuating Contemporary Art's Urban Marxist Tendency

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Contents

Abstract

This thesis examines what I call 'urban social aesthetics', which, I contend, is an 'urban Marxist' tendency in contemporary art, characterised by 1:1 scale engagement with the social urgencies of urban sites as a means for anti-capitalist agency and resistance. It is my contention that, within contemporary art scholarship, instances of this urban Marxist tendency are often not individuated from the mass of other existing urban art productions. Despite engaging with the most pressing urgencies of our contemporary moment (i.e. housing, gentrification, homelessness and contemporary forms of racial segregation), there is arguably a lack of debate that singles out and underscores this urban Marxist tendency. How can art theoreticians and scholars pinpoint this urban Marxist category of contemporary practice? How can such intellectual actors individuate this practice from the multitude of other urban art productions and approaches so that it may acquire critical, discursive independence? In this thesis, I suggest that the discourses and practices of 'Situationism' and 'experimental institutionalism' could contribute to this task. This thesis' overarching aim is to contend that the urban-centric debates and praxis of the Situationist International and experimental institutionalism could contribute to the examination of contemporary art's urban Marxist tendency ('urban social aesthetics'). The Situationist International was a predominantly European art collective that sought to resist capitalism and transform urban experience. On the other hand, experimental institutionalism is a field of curatorial practice, institutional reform and debate concerned with the art institution's potential transformation into a socially responsible agent. I argue in this thesis that said field's socially responsive approach to instituting and curating tends to engage with decidedly *urban* conditions. Conferring with the major hub for experimental institutionalism that is the L'Internationale museum confederation (as well as its collaborators and partners), this thesis asks—is it the urban post-Marxist theory of the Situationists that could lend to an examination of urban social aesthetics or the ongoing debates/praxis of experimental institutionality?

Keywords: Urban Social Aesthetics, Urban Marxist, Capitalist-Urbanism, Situationist, Experimental Institutionalism, Contemporary Art.

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List of Illustrations

List of Terms

1:1 Scale

Artworks that operate on a 1:1 scale engage directly with their subject matter rather than depicting it through representational practice. 1:1 scale works exist and operate within everyday social contexts and environments.

Urban Social Aesthetics

An 'urban Marxist' tendency in contemporary art, characterised by 1:1 scale engagement with the social urgencies of urban sites as a means for anti-capitalist agency and resistance.

Urban

(Also: urbanism, urbanisation)
1. A set of ideas and/or conditions connected to cities and towns | 2. In the context of this research, 'urban' infers a spatially grounded set of social practices that represent capitalist production's extension into the physical built environment.

Capitalist-Urbanism

(Also: capitalist urbanisation, capitalist-urbanism nexus)
Indicates the nexus between capitalism and the urban environment. From an urban Marxist perspective, this term implies that the 'urban' is a spatial extension of capitalist production.

Urban Marxism

(Also: Urban Marxist)
A field of scholarship concerned with how capitalist production extends into the urban environment, revealing the vital relationship between capitalism and urbanism.

Situationist International

(Also: Situationists, S.I.)
A predominantly European, twentieth century avant-garde collective of artists and social activists who aimed to resist advanced capitalism and transform the urban experience.

Situationism

Situationism refers to the work, ideas, theory and praxis of the Situationist International—their specific quasi-movement in contemporary art. This term is functional in pointing to and discussing the ideas and approaches the Situationist International took as so-called 'Situationists'.

Experimental Institutionalism

(Also: experimental institutionality, institutional experiments)
A field of curatorial practice, institutional reform and debate that is concerned with transforming art institutions into socially responsible agents.

Repurposing

(Also: repurpose | past: repurposed)
Using something towards different ends (See Wright 2016, 483).

Urban-Institutional Interstice

The idea that contemporary art institutions, particularly those engaged in forms of experimental institutionality, are increasingly engaging with urban concerns and that urban activism can emerge from *within* art institutions.

Minor Urbanism

The idea that critical approaches to urbanism can emerge from within urban institutions (including art institutions) and institutional actors can be social activists and agents for change in the urban milieu. In other words, minor urbanism means a 'criticality from within'—a criticality that takes place from *within* urban and artistic institutions (See Sandström 2019, 100).

Antagonism

In political theory, antagonism suggests a "we/them relationship in which the two sides are enemies who do not share any common ground" (Mouffe 2005, 20). In this research, antagonism suggests an 'oppositional' approach to urbanism, or rather, to urban hegemony, and I connect it to the Situationist International's urban engagements and discourses.

Agonism

Agonism is productive conflict. As political theorist Chantal Mouffe (2013, 9) describes, agonism is not about overcoming the 'we/them' relationship of antagonism, but establishing it in a more democratic, pluralistic form. 'Experimental institutionalism' arguably suggests an *agonistic* approach to urban activism, as it rejects the oppositional approach of Situationism and instead opts for a more pluralistic approach in which criticality emerges from within art institutions.

Urban Negotiations of Artistic Institutionality

This term refers to the likes of biennials, documentas, commissioning agency projects and art festivals, which occupy a curious position in-between urban 1:1 scale engagement and the structures/conventions/programming of art institutions.

Agency

Agency speaks to the capacity to act politically and engage in social change.

Collaboration/Co-Labour

Collaboration/Co-Labour points to the social dimension of labour that is suppressed in a capitalist society. It offers a counter-model to the reality of 'co-operation' in the capitalist production process that exploits our basic sociality to increase productivity and, ultimately, capital.

Co-production

The idea that the urban environment, its spaces and architecture should be inclusive of the desires and needs of its common publics. In this research, co-production suggests a horizontal, collective and bottom-up approach to developing urban sites.

Conspiratory Institutions

Jesús Carrillo's (2018, 280–83) idea that institutions can tactically employ their reputable statuses with city councils and urban governance to go 'under cover' and serve working-class communities. Carrillo's (2018) concept infers a situation in which art institutions and communities 'conspire' together against the dispossessing and expropriating forces of urban hegemony.

Constituents

(Also: constituencies)
Experimental institutionalism reimagines its publics as 'constituents'—as active *co-producers* of art institutions and their broader urban social conditions (See Byrne et al. 2018). Constituents are the public or users of 'socially responsible' art institutions.

Constituent Power

This is the historically misplaced idea that the ultimate source of all political authority is located in an entity known as 'the people' (See Loughlin 2017).

Constructed Situation

The Situationists' notion of a deliberately constructed moment of life that is supposed to counteract, or at the very least, alleviate, the effects of the spectacle economy. The constructed situation would counter the spectacle's reduction of the *real* to *ideology* through an intensely lived situation. It would offer an alternative to social passivity and non-intervention (See S.I. 1958/2006, 51).

Decolonising

(Also: decolonise| past: decolonised)
Decolonising is the dual process of understanding the colonial histories attached to cultural institutions and identifying moments that indicate a different type of practice that overcomes or resists the colonial condition (See L'Internationale 2015, 5).

Dérive

The Situationists' experimental walking activity in which participants were asked to abandon all of their usual motives for movement in the city and instead be led by the 'attractions of the terrain' (See Debord 1958/2006, 62).

Destituent

Activism and forms of socio-political resistance that occur outside of the institution. This can signify extra-institutional or anti-institutional activity (See Agamben 2014).

Détournement

(Also: Détourn | past: détourned)
Détournement is the Situationist-inspired practice of subverting capitalistic meanings and operations. Capitalistic media or operations would have their original meanings removed and given new meanings/political charge. Imagery, linguistics and spatial organisations—these things can all be subjected to 'détournement' (See Maxwell and Craib 2015, 288).

Diaspora

(Also: diasporic)
Those who are either socio-politically displaced (homeless) or geographically dispersed (immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees).

Expanded/Dispersed Exhibitions

Art exhibitions that take place outside of the institution in the public realm or are dispersed across a variety of urban sites. This type of exhibition is a common aspect of experimental institutionalist programming.

Dialogical

This terms points to the focus on dialogue and conversation in contemporary art practice and its institutions. Instead of a governing and oppressive discourse that delivers information in a unilateral stream, dialogue creates a two-way, reciprocal exchange of information and builds relationships. Dialogue and conversation has been used, within contemporary art and its institutions, as a specific form of urban activism.

Directly Lived

The immediate and spontaneous aspects of everyday experience that are yet to be relegated to economic capture and thus exist in direct opposition to the spectacle's artificial pseudo-world.

Gentrification

(Also: gentrifying| past: gentrified)
Gentrification is the transformation of a working-class or vacant area into middle-class residential and/or commercial space (See Lees, Slater and Wyly 2008, xv).

Gift Economy

(Also: symbolic exchange, potlatch)
The gift economy is a radical counter-model to a capitalist economy. Within a gift economy, value is 'gifted', sacrificed or lost in an unequal exchange to create and strengthen social bonds.

Museum 3.0

The 'museum 3.0' expresses experimental institutionalism's ambition to form art institutions centred on social responsibility and usership (See Byrne et al. 2018; Inquiry into the Civic Role of Arts Organisations 2017; Szreder 2018).

Myth

Although instrumentalised by capitalism, myth is largely suppressed under capitalism. From the Situationists' perspective, myth is a socially unifying tool that can respond to and counter capitalist separation (See Vaneigem 1967/1994, 224).

Non-Sign

A non-sign is an image that negates signification processes/meaning production in the urban visual landscape. To be a 'sign', urban visual media must 'signify'—it must, at all costs, convey meaning. 'Non-signs' resist meaning, creating a rupture in the urban spectacle (See Baudrillard 1975/1993, 78–79).

Politics of Care

Responding to the decline of care within urbanism and capitalist society by and large.

Play (urban)

The Situationists believed that 'play' is a vital and necessary aspect of the human condition supressed by capitalism's quasi-puritan work culture and consumer-driven 'leisure time'. In dedication to this notion of 'play', Situationist comrade Constant Nieuwenhuys devised *New Babylon* (1956–74)—a utopian city that would be devoted to 'homoludens' (men at play).

Psychogeography

This was the Situationists' experimental, cartographic practice that prioritised the horizontal, everyday perspective of the common masses over the all-seeing view of urban governance (See S.I. 1958/2006, 52).

Qualitative Time

This is time that has a *qualitative* nature, which opposes the dominant temporalities of capitalism. In a capitalist society, time is largely characterised by 'irreversible time' and 'pseudo-cyclical time'—the temporalities associated with production and consumption. Artists like the Space Hijackers have attempted to create urban, socio-aesthetic situations in which quality time can be reinstated and experienced.

Racial Capitalism

A field of Marxist scholarship that contends that racial inequality is integral to capitalist production. It contends that, without racialisations, capitalist production ceases to function or even exist.

Radical Inclusivity

I would argue that 'radical inclusivity' is the experimental institutionalist idea/practice of creating physical and discursive spaces for uniting urban subjects in spite of racialised social tensions.

Radical Pedagogy

This describes an artistic or institutional pedagogy in which cultural agents are social activists as well as educators. It describes a pedagogical method in which learning takes place from within the context of immediate social struggles and urgencies.

Radical Subjectivity

This was the Situationist idea that individual subjectivities should be celebrated, but not at the expense of equality and community (See Vaneigem 1967/1994, 245). It meant expressing subjectivities externally, sharing them amongst the collective.

Relationality

This is the state or condition of being 'relational' or engaging in social relationships.

Sign-Value

'Sign-value' is the significance attributed to a commodity because of its social prestige and the assumption that it will improve one's quality of life. Commodities under the reign of spectacle exude 'sign-values'—values that signify various social principles and goals such as beauty, class, wealth, status etc.

Situationist Space

Situationism's range of urban-spatial ideas and debates (i.e. unitary urbanism, dérive, psychogeography and détournement).

Social Space

Contemporary art's institutional or urban 1:1 scale formulations of spaces for sociability and conviviality that are unmediated by capital. Social space offers an alternative to spaces in the fragmented urban milieu where sociality is captured and instrumentalised by capitalism.

Spectacle

The spectacle is a late capitalist economy in which our lives are no longer primarily defined by consumption or *having*, as it were, but by the passive reception of images broadcast to us by the media-economy alliance (See Debord 1967/2014).

Subjectivisation

A socio-politically situated approach to self-representation—a process in which an individual affirms or chooses his or her role in society. Integral to experimental institutionalism's decolonising activities has been the creation of openings for immigrant, refugee and asylum seeker communities to enter into empowering and positive processes of subjectivisation.

Symbol

Unlike the 'sign', the function of the 'symbol' is not to refer to *something else*, but to unite the persons who produce and receive it within their socio-cultural context. Whilst the sign is associated with capitalist production, the symbol is connected to non-market notions of social cohesion (See Chauvet 1987/1995).

Ultra-détournement

'Détournement' that operates in everyday life (See S.I. 1959/2006, 68).

Unitary Urbanism

The Situationists' set of conditions for a leftist transmutation of urbanism. Unitary urbanism was not a doctrine but rather a *critique* of capitalist-urbanism (See Vaneigem and Kotányi 1961/2006, 86–89).

Unity

In the context of this research, unity means negating the rigid separations prescribed by capitalist urban planning in favour of a more 'unified' environment. Unity can also mean countering the fragmenting effects of urbanism's social fracture, creating spaces for sociality, care and collaboration.

Urban Regeneration

A process of redevelopment used to address urban decline. Within the context of capitalist urbanisation, regeneration has arguably become a harbinger of gentrification and housing expropriation.

Useful Art/Usership

A significant field of debate and practice within experimental institutionalism, which centres on the use-value of art and the ambition to transform art institutions into 'useful' civic centres in the urban landscape (See 'museum 3.0' in Aikens et al. 2016).

Use-Value

Distinct from 'useful art/usership', in this research, 'use-value' refers to the prioritisation of social use-values in the urban realm over its quantifiable exchange-value aspects.

Methods

This research project comprised a multi-method design that aimed to collect and evaluate solely qualitative data. A combination of theoretical and empirical methods (primary and secondary) formed the research design—theoretical, comparative, historical montage, dialectics, Marxism (urban), archival, oral (semi-structured interviews) and experiential (visits and meetings). A multi-method design was opted for as this research contends, for the first time, that the debates/praxis of the Situationist International and 'experimental institutionalism' may contribute to the analysis of what I call 'urban social aesthetics'. Producing such a novel and experimental contribution to urban contemporary art scholarship has required several diverse conduits for data gathering. Therefore, a multi-method design was arguably necessary and appropriate for this research.

Integrating an interdisciplinary range of theories, deriving from aesthetics, philosophy, politics, political economy and urban studies, the theoretical method was appropriate for this research project. As a result of conducting research into the field, I would contend that, within contemporary art scholarship, instances of what I call urban social aesthetic practice are often subsumed into the broad category of 'urban non-gallery-based art'. This research's theoretical approach enabled the production of rich, critical analyses that could help pinpoint contemporary art's urban Marxist tendency ('urban social aesthetics'), individuating it from the mass of other urban art productions. However, this research's deployment of the theoretical method was arguably inevitable, as the debates/practices that it repurposes—those of Situationism and experimental institutionalism—both combine art theory with ideas from sociology, political economy, philosophy and urban studies. Nevertheless, I was still in command of whether I pursued a purely theoretical approach or diluted this with primary methods. To avoid an overreliance on literature, I opted with the latter and achieved this through empirical research, which I will return to below.

At the heart of this research's theoretical approach is the creative, intellectual tool of 'repurposing'. In this research project, I have been interested in repurposing as a means of producing new ideas and knowledge—in particular, how *repurposing* the debates/praxis of the Situationist International and experimental institutionalism could contribute much-needed analyses to contemporary art's urban Marxist inclinations. As philosopher and writer Stephen Wight (2020) described in a recent interview,

'repurposing' means using something towards different ends. However, by repurposing the debates and practices of Situationism and experimental institutionalism, this research is not engaging in some form of 'neo-extractivism'. The intention of this research is not to mirror capitalism's insidious 'extractivism' (its 'extraction' and 'expropriations' of value). Indeed, as Wright (2020) confirmed to me during interview, repurposing arguably represents an alternative to capitalist extractivism. Unlike capitalist extractivism, repurposing does not infer a unidirectional extraction of value. Repurposing highlights the *use* of the thing it repurposes towards different ends and thus arguably returns some value. In other words, repurposing is centred in *usership* because it infers a process in which the value of the repurposed idea/thing is celebrated—it does not suggest a unilateral process of *extracting* value. This research's repurposing of Situationism and experimental institutionality is not a linear, one-sided *extraction* of their theoretical values, but rather, could be understood as a 'reciprocal repurposing'. By repurposing Situationism and experimental institutionalism, I advocate their values and suggest their status as vital moments within contemporary art's urban Marxism.

The comparative method has also been integral to the design of this research. Via a 'most similar design',[1] I have compared Situationist/experimental institutionalist ideas with urban social aesthetics in order to discern the various ways they could contribute to its critical analyses. I also used the comparative method within this research's broader speculation of whether it is Situationism or experimental institutionalism that could offer the most qualified analysis to urban social aesthetic practice. The comparative method in this enquiry, however, is concerned with both *similarity* and *difference*, although perhaps leaning more towards a 'most different design' ('comparison' that brings *differences* into focus). The comparative method is appropriate because, as David Collier (1993, 105) highlights, 'comparison' can contribute to the "discovery of new hypothesis and to theory building." My interest in the comparative method primarily emerges from comparison's ability to produce new knowledge—how new ideas and concepts emerge from comparing two things based on their similarities. I am concerned with how linking Situationism/experimental institutionalism with contemporary art's urban Marxist tendency can produce new and illuminating analyses for the latter.

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[1] As David Collier (1993, 105) suggests, a 'most similar' design in comparative research involves, "bringing into focus suggested similarities". In this research, I bring into focus through comparison 'suggested similarities' between (1) Situationism and urban social aesthetics (2) Experimental institutionalism and urban social aesthetics. The incentive for highlighting these 'similarities' is to produce new knowledge in the field of urban contemporary art, contributing qualified analyses to contemporary art's urban Marxist tendency ('urban social aesthetics').

It is arguably a novel idea that the debates of Situationism and experimental institutionality could contribute useful analyses to what I call urban social aesthetics. In trialling this unchartered enquiry, this study has utilised the experimental method. For the first time, this research repurposes Situationism and experimental institutionalism towards the examination of urban social aesthetics. It does this by repurposing ideas from these debates/fields of praxis that could contribute relevant and novel analysis to urban social aesthetic artworks. I have applied these 'repurposed' ideas to urban social aesthetic works via the method of comparison. Comparison is arguably the technical, rational device through which this research trials its original hypothesis—the means through which it undertakes and methodically controls its theoretical 'experiment'. Through drawing comparisons between historically or contextually separated contemporary art debates and movements, 'historical montage' has also been used as a method. This research brings together distinct urban-centric art debates and praxis from different times in contemporary art history—i.e. urban social aesthetics, the Situationist International and experimental institutionalism. This theoretical reconciliation of historical and contextual separations rejects traditional historical linearity in favour of the theoretical insight formed by 'constellating' different moments within contemporary art's urban Marxism. Using historical montage has aligned the research methodically with the anti-capitalistic, post-Marxist values that pervade this thesis' passages. Marxist philosopher Walter Benjamin (1940/2003, 389–400) understood historical montage (or 'constellating history') as effective anti-capitalistic practice, as it problematises the linear perspective of time that often serves to ideologically-mirror capitalist production. *Constellating* different moments within contemporary art's urban Marxism challenges capitalist linearity and enables the illuminating effects and knowledge production of the comparative method to take place.

Because this thesis concerns two opposing approaches to resisting capitalist urbanisation through urban Marxist contemporary art, it could be considered dialectical. 'Dialectics' can be defined as "the process or art of reasoning through discussion of conflicting ideas" (Merriam-Webster 1998). It means as Tommi Juhani Hanhijärvi (2015, 6) describes, "thinking in oppositions, conflicts or contraries." This thesis discusses the Situationist International's antagonistic, oppositional attitude to capitalist-urbanism in tandem with experimental institutionalism's agonistic 'minor urbanism'. As a result, this thesis is a *dialectical* exploration of contemporary art's urban Marxism. Dialectics is an appropriate method for this research as it enables a fuller, more nuanced examination of urban social aesthetics. Exploring the conflicting and contradictory aspects of contemporary art's urban Marxist tendency (its antagonistic, urban-non-gallery-based aspects versus its agonistic, institutional features) gives a

more comprehensive understanding. This is invaluable, as contemporary art's urban Marxism is often overlooked and conflated with the mass of other existing urban art productions and approaches.

In this thesis, Marxism has been a theoretical perspective and a method. Its appropriateness as a method derives from the fact that it arguably constitutes the most credible analytical framework one can use to examine the effects of capitalism in urban sites. I am solely concerned with employing the philosophical mode of analysis that this method offers. I have used this method in the way one might have before its acceptance as 'scientific socialism'. The Marxist method used in this thesis is specifically 'urban Marxist'. My enquiry into contemporary art's resistance to capitalist-urbanism connects to a substantial field within urban sociology that highlights the relationship between capitalism and urbanisation. This field of scholarship is called 'urban Marxism', and amongst its most acclaimed contributors are Friedrich Engels, Walter Benjamin, Henri Lefebvre, Manuel Castells and David Harvey. This 'urban' approach to the Marxist method was necessary, as again, it is the most credible analytical framework within which to approach contemporary art's urban Marxism.

My research design was partially empirical and experiential, as this would prevent my thesis from becoming overly theoretical. The archival method represented one of the research's main means of collecting primary material. This method effectively balanced out the mass of theory in my thesis with empirically sourced knowledge. Throughout this research project, I have consulted the following archival collections—Situationist International: The John McCready Archive and Liverpool Biennial Archive. These collections reside within Liverpool John Moores University's Special Collections and Archives. Professor Colin Fallows, who is a member of my supervisory team, was instrumental in the acquisition and curation of the above LJMU archives and has therefore been a vital resource for gaining further knowledge of their contents. I have also undertaken empirical research concerning the institutional aspects of this thesis. My Director of Studies (John Byrne) is LJMU's Coordinator for its partnership with L'Internationale.[2] Via this established research partnership, I was able to confer with institutional actors and attend L'Internationale summits. I conducted semi-structured interviews with cultural agents from the L'Internationale confederation—a key repository of experimental institutionalist activity and debate (Papastergiadis 2020, 6).

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[2] L'Internationale is a confederation of seven European contemporary art institutions—Museo Reina Sofía (Madrid, Spain), MACBA (Barcelona, Spain), M HKA (Antwerp, Belgium), MG+MSUM (Ljubljana, Slovenia), MSN (Warsaw, Poland), SALT (Istanbul and Ankara, Turkey) and the Van Abbemuseum (Eindhoven, Netherlands). MIMA (Middlesbrough, UK), The Whitworth (Manchester, UK) and Liverpool John Moores University (Liverpool, UK) are partners and associate members of this European museum confederation (L'Internationale 2009).

Research interviews were a suitable empirical method, as primary, orally sourced material reconciled the shortage of literature regarding experimental institutionalism and, in particular, the field's developing urban thematics. Furthermore, as former curator of public practice at Tate Liverpool, my supervisor Dr Michael Birchall has also brought valuable empirically informed insights into the connection between art institutionality and urban art practice. Through this established partnership between LJMU and Tate, I have conferred with cultural agents involved with 'Tate Exchange'—a programme and dedicated space at Tate Liverpool/Tate Modern that is connecting curation and institutional praxis with the urban social milieu through various projects and initiatives (Tate 2016a). Experiential research also constituted the visitation of L'Internationale institutions and associates—MACBA (Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona), Museo Reina Sofía, MIMA (Middlesbrough Institute for Modern Art) and The Whitworth. Meetings were held both in-person and online with key actors within experimental institutionalist debate and praxis. Most vitally, these meetings provided opportunities to test this research project's ideas and arguments with central figures in experimental institutionality.

These empirical aspects of the research, however, were decidedly interpretivist in nature—they possessed no positivist leanings, although this tends to be the case with this type of approach. In this research project, I was only interested in the direct experience of research material for further interpretation and qualitative findings. In other words, I have taken an 'interpretive-empirical' approach. This research's intent towards the contemporary art examples addressed is solely theoretical. This thesis is primarily concerned with contributing novel, qualified theory to the art practice it addresses and examines. This is also why I do not exhaustively scrutinise one specific urban site—because I am only concerned with *theoretically* interrogating the premise that a significant yet discounted urban Marxist tendency exists within contemporary art. This research has an art-theory-driven intent in relation to its examples, not an ethnographic intent to examine all of their ontological specificities. I have not aimed to ambitiously map each artwork's unique and local socio-spatial 'situatedness'.

In closing, with the multi-method research design outlined above, this thesis aims to shed further light on contemporary art's urban Marxist tendency, contending that the debates/praxis of Situationism and experimental institutionality could contribute to its critical examination.

Introduction: An Urban Marxist Tendency

This thesis examines contemporary art through the lens of urban Marxism. It investigates what I call 'urban social aesthetics', which, I contend, is a very particular kind of urban *tendency* within contemporary art practice. The term 'urban social aesthetics' will be used in this thesis to refer to a distinctive category of urban contemporary art practice that responds to the urgencies of the capitalist-urbanism nexus. I will propose that this practice is an 'urban Marxist' tendency in contemporary art, characterised by 1:1 scale engagement with the social dimensions of urban sites as a means of anti-capitalist resistance. The overarching aim of this thesis, however, is to argue that the urban-centric debates and praxis of the Situationist International and 'experimental institutionalism' could contribute to the analysis of contemporary art's *urban social aesthetic*. In other words, in this thesis I repurpose[1] Situationism and experimental institutionalism towards an analysis of urban social aesthetics. I will contend that these two domains of urban art debate/praxis could produce a qualified examination of urban social aesthetics and ultimately assist in individuating it from the mass of other urban art productions in existence today.

How can art theoreticians and scholars pinpoint this urban Marxist category of practice? How can such intellectual actors differentiate this practice from the multitude of other existing urban art productions and approaches so that it may acquire critical, discursive independence? In this thesis, I propose that the debates and activities of Situationism and experimental institutionalism could effectively contribute to this task. I will investigate whether the ideas, theorisations and praxis of Situationism and experimental institutionalism can illuminate contemporary art's somewhat overlooked urban Marxist leanings. The Situationist International (1957–72) was a predominantly European collective of artists and social activists who sought to critique advanced capitalism and transform urban experience (Debord 1967/2014; Vaneigem 1967/1994; Libero and Costa 1997; McDonough 2009; Sadler 1999). Experimental institutionalism, on the other hand, is a field of curatorial practice, institutional reform and debate concerned with the art institution's transformation into a socially responsible agent (Ribalta 2008; Aikens et al. 2016; Hudson 2017; Byrne et al. 2018; Papastergiadis 2020). This field's socially responsive approach to instituting and curating has arguably

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[1] 'Repurposing' is a process that involves using something towards different ends (Wright 2020, 2016). In this thesis, the theory/debates/praxis of Situationism and experimental institutionalism are put "to new purposes" as philosopher and writer Stephen Wright (2016, 483) would say. In other words, this thesis *repurposes* them towards an examination of 'urban social aesthetics'.

urban leanings. Conferring with the L'Internationale[2] confederation and its partners and collaborators, this thesis questions—is it the urban post-Marxist theory of the Situationists that could contribute to an examination of urban social aesthetics or the ongoing debates/praxis of experimental institutionality?

Whilst Situationism and experimental institutionalism are perhaps symptomatic of and relevant to an urban Marxist tendency in contemporary art history (as both demonstrate an anti-capitalistic, socio-aesthetic approach to urbanism), I would argue that they do not constitute urban social aesthetic *practice*. Whilst they are helpful and relevant to the examination of urban social aesthetics, I would suggest that they do not constitute examples of this practice. Rather, I would instead characterise them as being corresponding, supplementary *discursive material*. Situationism does not constitute urban social aesthetic *practice* because it was a mostly *theoretical* project (Sadler 1999, 105–106; Banash 2000, 6). It was also precursory to most examples of urban social aesthetics, as it emerged in the late 1950s and ended in the early 1970s (Sadler 1999, 2; Wark 2008, 6; Stracey 2014a, 3). On the other hand, experimental institutionalism is not an example of urban social aesthetics because it can sometimes constitute on-site programming, exhibitions and projects. Indeed, it suggests curatorial and artistic praxis occasionally situated within the physical architecture of the contemporary art institution. What I call 'urban social aesthetics' is a 1:1 scale, non-gallery-based art practice that is situated and embedded within the urban social milieu.

Of course, it could be queried—'why repurpose these two specific contemporary art debates/fields of praxis? What makes them so distinctive that this research *repurposes* them only?' This thesis repurposes Situationism and experimental institutionalism because they are, I would argue, the most qualified urban Marxist art debates/fields of praxis within contemporary art history. I would contend that they offer a rich range of ideas, theory and critical lexicon that could effectively contribute to the analysis of what I call 'urban social aesthetics'. Furthermore, they appear to constitute diametrically opposing approaches in art's resistance to capitalist urbanisation and are therefore compelling to situate side-by-side in a dialectical dynamic. Arguably, whilst the Situationists possessed an antagonistic, oppositional approach that aimed to deconstruct urbanism and its institutions (including art institutions), reconstructing a socialistic urbanism from the ashes, experimental institutionality has contrastingly

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[2] L'Internationale is a confederation of seven European contemporary art institutions—Museo Reina Sofía (Madrid, Spain), MACBA (Barcelona, Spain), M HKA (Antwerp, Belgium), MG+MSUM (Ljubljana, Slovenia), MSN (Warsaw, Poland), SALT (Istanbul and Ankara, Turkey) and Van Abbemuseum (Eindhoven, Netherlands) (L'Internationale 2009). Nikos Papastergiadis (2020, 6) states in his recent text on L'Internationale that 'experimental institutionalism' is a primary interest of the confederation.

opted for an agonistic, 'criticality from within' approach ('minor urbanism'). The Situationist approach to urbanism was 'destituent' (Agamben 2014). The group felt that a radical urbanism could only arise from an 'extra-institutional' position (from outside of the institutions of art and urbanism). Experimental institutionality, however, appears to take a 'constituent' approach, inferring that urban activism can come from *within* art institutions. As each chapter of the thesis unfolds, this contrast between Situationism and experimental institutionality emerges. I will return to these opposing approaches later, elucidating them further. This research could be considered 'dialectical' because it discusses the Situationists' antagonistic urban approach in tandem with experimental institutionalism's 'minor urbanism'. Taking a 'dialectical' approach means "thinking in oppositions, conflicts or contraries" (Juhani Hanhijärvi 2015, 6). It refers to a process of reasoning that occurs through the discussion of conflicting or contradicting ideas (Merriam-Webster 1998). I would therefore argue that this thesis is a dialectical exploration of contemporary art's urban Marxist tendencies. This thesis will discuss antagonistic approaches towards capitalist-urbanism ('Situationism') in tandem with agonistic urban activist forms that come from within the art institution ('experimental institutionalism'). These opposing approaches to urban socio-aesthetic activism will be interweaved, contrasted and compared through dialectical analyses.

This research's *repurposing* of Situationism and experimental institutionalism is not a unidirectional 'recycling' of their theoretical values, but rather, is proposed as a 'reciprocal repurposing'. Through the intellectual method of 'repurposing', this research advocates their values, designating their status as vital moments within contemporary art's urban Marxist tendency. Philosopher and writer Stephen Wright (2016, 483) has described 'repurposing' as having a "transformative dynamic", as the process puts the "given to new purposes." Arguably, these new purposes rescue and illuminate values that might have otherwise been forgotten or overlooked. When repurposing the debates/praxis of Situationism and experimental institutionalism, I am not aiming to engage in some form of 'neo-extractivism'. The express intention of this thesis' use of repurposing as an intellectual tool is not to mirror capitalism's insidious 'extractivism' (its 'extraction' and 'expropriations' of value). As Wright (2020) claims, repurposing proposes an alternative to capitalist extractivism. Unlike capitalist extractivism, repurposing does not involve a unidirectional extraction of values. Repurposing highlights another potential 'use' of the thing it repurposes and therefore arguably *returns* value (Wright 2020). The Situationist project is often retrospectively perceived as overambitious, as having failed to develop theory into praxis or escape absorption into the co-opted discourses and spectacle of mainstream culture (Sadler 1999, 105–106; Stracey 2014a, 29; Banash 2000, 6). It is also often devalued for its

racial omissions, Eurocentric bias and alleged sexism (Gibbons 2015; Stracey 2014a). On the other hand, examples of experimental institutionality are criticised at times for 'failing' to move beyond the limitations of neo-Kantian display, bureaucracy and neoliberal ideas (Byrne 2018, 95; Marstine 2017, 184; Mahoney 2016). By repurposing Situationism/experimental institutionalism, I contend that, despite their shortcomings, they still offer valuable ideas and approaches for examining contemporary art's urban Marxist leanings. Therefore, in the context of this thesis, repurposing is a *reciprocal* process in which values are not only taken and used but also reflected onto the repurposed debate/praxis.

As a result of conducting the research contributory to this thesis, I would contend that, within contemporary art debate and scholarship, instances of what I call urban social aesthetics are often subsumed into broad categories such as 'urban art', 'urban interventions', 'contemporary urban artistic practices', 'street art' and 'public art'. Such terms gather very different types of urban art practice into one common bundle, confusing and disguising discriminations that should be interrogated and discussed. Engaging with the most pressing urgencies of our contemporary urban moment (such as housing, gentrification and contemporary forms of racial segregation), I would argue that urban social aesthetic practice requires its own discursive space and critical lexicon that can effectively distinguish it from the mass of other urban art productions. Arguably, with its post-Marxian commitment to the social urgencies of capitalist-urbanism, this practice demands to be addressed in more specific terms and treated to more intensive critical analysis. Frustratingly, existing debate and scholarship in the field tends not to individuate urban social aesthetic practice from the wealth of other urban art productions. An example of this, I would argue, is *Trespass: A History of Uncommissioned Urban Art* (2010)—a comprehensive, mostly visual survey of so-called 'urban art' written by curator Carlo McCormick and 'street art' producers Marc Schiller and Sara Schiller. I would argue that this text is emblematic of contemporary art scholarship's broad and homogenising approaches to urban art production. Although a comprehensive catalogue of insurgent artistic approaches to the urban environment, this book broadly incorporates many divergent practices and approaches—i.e. fine-art projects, murals, graffiti, sensationalistic urban performances and interventions. Examples of contemporary art's urban Marxist tendency are scattered amongst this incredibly miscellaneous assemblage of artworks and projects. In this text, works by Gordon Matta-Clark, Reclaim the Streets and Steve Lambert, which actively respond to capitalist urban themes, are subsumed into the very generalising category of 'uncommissioned urban art'.

This broad approach to art within the urban sphere was also observed during the *Urban Creativity* (2019) conference in Lund, Sweden.[3] A large variety of urban art forms and activities—parkour, graffiti, murals, design and fine art—were amassed under the general theme of 'urban creativity'. Therefore, almost a decade after *Trespass* (2010), it appears that it is still common to uncritically amass a large variety of artistic practice and creative activity under some vague, yet unanimous, notion of 'urban art/creativity'. I would suggest that contemporary art's urban tendencies are reductively reduced to some vacant *other* that exists outside of the institutions of art, which is far too mercurial and nebulous to treat to a more thorough, critical approach. During *Urban Creativity* (2019), there were some inspiring engagements with the urban Marxist tendencies of contemporary art, but these were subsumed into the overwhelming generality of the conference theme. Urban scholar David Pinder gave a keynote paper titled *Insurgent Creativity: Art, Politics and Spatial Struggle* (2019), which offered vigorous analyses of urban Marxist examples of contemporary art such as Graeme Miller's *Linked* (2003–Ongoing) and Matta-Clark's *Bronx Floors* (1972–73). Inspired by David Harvey's urban Marxist writings on the potential for 'insurgent' spatial approaches, Pinder's (2019) paper was a dynamic exploration of the *social*, post-Marxist engagements of art in urban sites. However, like Pinder's older studies (2005, 2008), this urban Marxist practice was not explicitly identified but was instead placed under the broad designation of 'insurgent creativity'.

Pinder's earlier works—"Arts of Urban Exploration" (2005) and "Urban Interventions: Art, Politics and Pedagogy" (2008), refer to "radical practice that has developed in recent years alongside and at times in dialogue with critical urban theory" (Pinder 2008, 731). This "critical urban theory" is seemingly that of urban Marxists such as David Harvey, Henri Lefebvre, Rosalyn Deutsche and the Situationist International (Pinder 2008, 733). However, artistic approaches to urban Marxism remain, yet again, a vague tendency that is not blatantly identified and approached—they are described generally as 'urban interventions' and 'arts of urban exploration' (Pinder 2005, 2008). Similarly, in *Art, Space and the City* (1997), Malcolm Miles places his urban Marxian analyses of art's resistance to gentrification and urban development under the very generalising designation of 'public art'. This text is a comprehensive analysis of art within an urban context, which attempts to coalesce contemporary art practice and design with critiques of the city generated in urban sociology and geography (Miles 1997, 1). However, the decidedly 'urban' art practices that Miles attempts to treat with theory are

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[3] Urban Creativity was a conference that took place in May 2019 at Lund University in Sweden. The event was organised by Urban Creativity Lund, an interdisciplinary network of researchers who, since 2018, have been examining practices and phenomena that have the potential to present alternative ways of using and understanding cities (Urban Creativity 2019).

crudely described as 'public art'. To generalise even further, Miles (1997, 1) suggests that this urban 'public art' practice constitutes:

> "…a diversity of not always compatible approaches to making and siting art outside conventional art spaces—from the exhibition of sculpture outdoors, to community murals, land art, site-specific art, the design of paving and street furniture and performance as art."

Again, I would argue that Miles' approach to urban art practice here is incredibly non-specific, as it is inadequately expanded into some generalised notion of 'non-gallery-based public art'—of being generally situated *outside* of "conventional art spaces" (Miles 1997, 1). Urban Marxist analyses of art are seemingly subsumed, in Miles' (1997) text, into the sweeping generalities of 'public art'. Miles (1997) does not individuate them from radically different practices such as urban sculpture and murals (object-based, representational and non-socially-responsive ('autonomous') art practices). With its title's reference to the work of Manuel Castells, Saara Liiinamaa's *Third Text* article "Contemporary Art's 'Urban Question' and Practices of Experimentation" (2014) initially appears to offer a promising analysis of contemporary art's urban Marxism. However, I would contend that her article, like the previously discussed literature and academic debate, actually engages in a generalised, non-specific notion of what she calls 'contemporary urban artistic practices' (Liinamaa 2014, 539). Liinamaa (2014, 534) problematically attempts to unite diverse examples of contemporary art's 'urban umbrella' via a "general set of shared characteristics that represent the mixed traditions of urban practices, from conceptualism to community art." These terms and conditions are incredibly broad and include practice that "exists outside of formal gallery spaces…in urban everyday spaces", which also "solicits collaboration" and is "process rather than product oriented" (Liinamaa 2014, 534). Despite her blatant references to urban Marxism, Liinamaa (2014) does not identify its extension into contemporary art production. Instead, I would argue, she engages in a broad, non-specific definition of 'contemporary urban artistic practices'.

Although this is not his primary intent, artist and activist Gregory Sholette (2011) offers a valuable analysis of contemporary art's urban Marxist tendencies in his text *Delirium and Resistance: Activist Art and the Crisis of Capitalism* (2017). Nevertheless, the overarching aim of this text is to examine, more broadly speaking, activist art practices. In his chapters, "Nature as an Icon of Urban Resistance" and "Art After Gentrification", Sholette (2017) provides an incisive analysis of contemporary art that responds to capitalist urbanisation's urgencies of 'revanchist urbanism' and gentrification. Such analysis corresponds well to the research I have conducted for this thesis. However, like the scholars previously mentioned, Sholette (2017) does not distinguish this post-

Marxist, urban art practice from the mass of other urban contemporary art forms that exist today. These other urban art forms being *entirely* and *exclusively* representational and object-based works that do not respond to the social urgencies of urban sites on a 1:1 scale, as in the practices of public art monuments, decorative/depoliticised design interventions, site-specific installations and 'street art' murals. Despite being physically situated within urban sites, said art forms are trapped within the ideology of 'autonomous art' (art that only seeks to resolve art-intrinsic problems).

Whilst Sholette (2017) certainly speaks to contemporary art's urban Marxist tendency, he does not do so explicitly and, as a result, this practice is left undifferentiated from those I have mentioned above that are non-socially responsive, exclusively representational/object-based, depoliticised, decorative and ultimately entrenched in the idea of autonomous art. In her foreword to the text, art writer, critic and curator Lucy Lippard (2017 xvii) further masks the distinctly urban Marxist themes of the text when she situates Sholette's scholarship within the extremely broad context of the 'urban art world'. What Lippard (2017 xvii) calls the 'urban art world' invokes a wide range of artistic practices that exist well outside of urban Marxist contemporary art (i.e. street art murals, public art monuments and site-specific installations). I would argue that this term ('urban art world') does not specifically speak to the urban, post-Marxist approach that Sholette (2017) occasionally takes. Generally speaking, however, *Delirium and Resistance* is less an intensive and focused examination of contemporary art's urban Marxist tendencies than a thorough examination of 'activist art practices'— of 'activist/community/political/socially-engaged art' as Lippard (2017, xvii) describes sweepingly. Sholette's (2017) text is, first and foremost, an examination of activist art's resistance to the 'delirium' of capitalism and the crisis-ridden era of neoliberalism.

Like Pinder's recent work on 'insurgent creativity', Rosalyn Deutsche's *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (1996) offers insightful and qualified analyses of contemporary art's urban Marxist tendencies. For instance, Deutsche (1996) conducts a dynamic examination of Krzysztof Wodiczko's New York anti-gentrification works from the 1980s such as *Homeless Projection: A Proposal for the City of New York* (1986) and *Homeless Vehicle* (1987–89). Deutsche's (1996) analysis of the urban Marxist tendencies of contemporary artists such as Wodiczko is, however, short-lived, as in the latterly presented essays collated in this book, she veers into discussions on other 'spatial' topics within art and critical theory such as expressionist paintings of the city, site-specificity, Marxist geography's feminist omissions and public art monuments. Therefore, I would suggest that Deutsche's (1996) text is not primarily concerned with contemporary art's urban Marxism. Instead, it appears to be engaged, more generally,

with what she calls an 'urban aesthetic'—a discourse that "combines ideas about art, architecture and urban design" with "theories of the city, social space and public space" (Deutsche 1996, xi). Focusing on this broad 'urban-spatial discourse' of 'urban aesthetics', I would contend that Deutsche (1996) only provisionally engages with art's urban Marxist inclinations.

In response to the field's demonstrated omission of contemporary art's urban Marxist tendency ('urban social aesthetics'), my thesis constitutes an attempt towards a more explicit analysis. As a result of this omission present in the field, I will contend in this thesis that the debates of Situationist International and experimental institutionalism may contribute more specific analyses of contemporary art's urban Marxist tendency. I would characterise this research as an interdisciplinary project that integrates contemporary art theory and urban sociology/political economy with a discussion around alternative forms of artistic institutionality. This research possesses four fundamental conceptual pillars—'urban social aesthetics', 'urban Marxism', 'Situationism' and 'experimental institutionalism'. I will now introduce each of these independently amongst a general outlining of this study's specifics and parameters.

Urban Social Aesthetics

I will use the term 'urban social aesthetics' to refer to instances of contemporary art practice that are engaged, from a post-Marxian position, with the social urgencies of capitalist urbanisation. I would contend that urban social aesthetics is not a movement in art history (c.1960–present), but a specific urban *tendency* in contemporary art, characterised by a commitment to social art practice within the context of the West's 'capitalist-urbanism nexus'.[4] Testimony to the fact that urban social aesthetics is not a 'movement' is the fact that its examples appear across various decades of artistic production and within different urban sites. I propose that an 'urban social aesthetic' refers to a distinct category of urban-embedded social art practice, characterised by a post-Marxist engagement with the social urgencies of capitalist-urbanism such as gentrification, the housing crisis, 'urban spectacle'[5] and the fragmentation of the social milieu. Arguably, whilst the 'urban' and 'aesthetic' aspects of this moniker indicate an engagement with the aesthetic dimensions of urbanism, 'social' points to this practice's commitment to engaging on a 1:1 scale with the 'social' urgencies of capitalist-

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[4] In the context of this research, 'capitalist-urbanism nexus' refers to the relationship between capitalist production and urbanisation processes (Engels 1845/2009; Debord 1967/2014, 90–91; Lefebvre 1970/2004, 1972/2016; Harvey 1989a, 2003/2012; Merrifield 2002).
[5] 'Urban spectacle' refers to the capitalist spectacle economy's extension into the urban environment. The 'spectacle' is a late capitalist economy in life is defined by the passive reception of images broadcast by the media-economy alliance (Debord 1967/2014).

urbanism. 'Social' could also imply *socialist* or *socialism*, as this practice is an artistic expression of urban Marxist approaches. The 'social' part of this term may appear tautological and redundant as what we call 'urbanism' is "a spatially grounded set of social practices" and is therefore inherently 'social' (Harvey 2001, 350). However, 'social' is arguably necessary to include, as it points to art practice in the urban realm that is responsive to the social urgencies of capitalist-urbanism—that is not, for example, a decorative mural, public art monument or a decorative/socially-indifferent aspect of urban design. 'Social' implies how this practice has both a social *context* and social *form*. 'Urban *social* aesthetic' is also more succinct than 'contemporary art's urban Marxist tendency'.

This thesis will focus on examples of contemporary art from 1968 to the present, situated in largely urbanised sites in developed capitalist regions of the UK, Europe and North America. I will address urban social aesthetic practice in various urban localities within the said socio-geographical parameters. As mentioned in the 'methods' section, because this is a theoretically driven thesis and not an ethnographic study, I will discuss artworks from multiple and diverse urban locations. Some of the urban social aesthetic works discussed are also situated in what would be technically called 'towns' and not just large Western urban epicentres or 'global cities' (cities where "global processes materialise") (Sassen 1991/2001, 347). Distinctions are often made between 'cities' and 'towns'—'cities' being areas with larger populations to 'towns' that are also considered more 'important' socially, economically, culturally and politically (Spilsbury 2013, 4). However, in this thesis, I am concerned primarily with the 'urban condition', which I contend, transcends this traditional geographical distinction between 'cities' and 'towns'. I am concerned less with the scale, population size and global influence of urban locations and more (abstractly and theoretically) with the conditions of capitalist urbanisation that feature in towns and cities alike. As urban geographer John Rennie Short (2006/2014, 2) describes, 'urban' is an umbrella term that means, "pertaining to a city or town." Focusing on art in towns and small cities in addition to big global cities such as New York and London also perhaps confronts the 'locational hierarchy' that exists in the art world in which said locations (so-called 'art capitals') are preferred sites of activity (Andersson, E. Andersson, and Mellander 2011, 275; Harris 2017, 25–26). Consequently, this thesis proposes that compelling urban Marxist aesthetics can also occur in towns and smaller cities.

An 'urban social aesthetic' has also potentially manifested in a variety of non-Western contexts, as in the work of Opavivará!, Colectivo Cambalache, Minerva Gueras, Ruangrupa, Taring Padi and Okin Collectives, to name just a few examples. However,

this thesis' examination of contemporary art's urban Marxist tendency has a decidedly Western socio-geographical focus. This is because the fields of praxis/debate repurposed in this thesis (Situationism and experimental institutionalism) possess a demonstrably Eurocentric and/or Western bias. Existing scholarship highlights how the Situationist International had a Eurocentric bias and overlooked capitalist urbanisation's racialised inequities (even when these affected confederates from their Algerian section) (Gibbons 2015; Stracey 2014a). I will further address this omission of Situationism in chapter two. On the other hand, experimental institutionalism disproportionately exists in relation to art institutions in the UK, Europe and North America. Further, L'Internationale, a major proponent of experimental institutionalist debate and activity, is a confederation of only British and European art museums. Even more vitally, urban Marxism, a field of scholarship at the very heart of this research project, also possesses a clear Western bias with its British, European and North American proponents (i.e. Walter Benjamin, Henri Lefebvre, Manuel Castells, David Harvey and Andy Merrifield), who have interrogated capitalist urbanisation's effects in a predominantly Western frame.

It would not feel appropriate, sensitive or critically adequate to apply, in this thesis, such Western-centred discussions and frameworks onto non-Western examples. It is hoped that urban Marxist scholarship develops its interrogations of capitalist urbanisation outside of Western contexts so that this can support future studies into urban social aesthetics. Stepping outside of Western socio-geographic parameters could be a feature of future research into urban social aesthetics, but tremendous care will need to be taken. As 'dependency theory' describes, whilst the forces of globalisation have integrated the impoverished nations of the global south into the 'world system', they have done so via the exploitation of its natural resources for the benefit of the developed global north (Sassen 2010). Despite globalisation creating networks of cities that are connected primary nodes in a global economic complex, the continuing concentration of wealth and neo-colonial exploitation means that urbanisation is experienced very differently by those in the West and those outside of it in the likes of the Global South (Sassen 2010; Sachs 1988). If urban social aesthetics is explored outside of a Western context in future research, it will be necessary to acknowledge capitalist urbanisation's uneven geographical development and how the urban experience differs in and outside of the West.

This thesis traces contemporary art's urban Marxist tendency from 1968 to the present. One might assume that I selected this timeline due to 1968's urban Marxist associations. May 68' was, of course, a period of urban unrest in France when workers

and students revolted against Fordist capitalism (Viénet 1968/1992; Rohan 1988; Situationist International 1968/2006, 435–45; Kings College 2018; DeRoo 2006, 19–24). The Situationist International, crucial to the urban Marxist discussion of this research, also played a significant role in May 68' (Viénet 1968/1992; Merrifield 2018). As "genius agitators and organisers" their presence was felt both "practically and theoretically" (Merrifield 2018). Also, 1968 was the year that Henri Lefebvre (1968/1996) introduced his influential concept of 'the right to the city'—a call to action to reclaim the city as a co-created space detached from capitalist hegemony. Regardless of these urban Marxist connections to 68', however, this thesis' timeline primarily functions to highlight urban social aesthetic artworks from the 1970s that I will characterise as 'symbolic/performative protests'. I would argue that contemporary art's prevalent 'public art/new genre public art' dichotomy[6] censors these 'symbolic protest' works of the 1970s.

Miwon Kwon's text *One Place After Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity* (2002, 60) outlines contemporary art's binarism of 'public art' and 'new genre public art'. Within this formulation, object-based 'public art', dominant in the 1960s and 1970s, is characterised as having been considerably disengaged with the social urgencies of public sites (Kwon 2002, 60). Meanwhile, 'new genre public art' pointed to an allegedly new generation of public art practice that sought to respond to the social conditions of public spaces (Kwon 2002, 60; Lacy 1995). I would contend that this 'public art/new genre public art dichotomy' in contemporary art debate censors urban social aesthetic works, especially in the 1970s, that actively responded to urban urgencies via performance or symbolic protest (i.e. Gordon Matta-Clark's international *Building Cuts* (1972–78) series, William Pope.L's multi-locational *Crawl* project (1978–Ongoing) and Adrian Piper's New York-based *Catalysis* (1970–71) performances. Constituting neither 'indifferent monuments' nor 'practical instruments' said artworks contradict this polarised conception of contemporary urban art practice. This censoring of 'symbolic protest' works could be compared to the 'useful art' debates currently dominating contemporary art discourse as seen in the work of Tania Bruguera's *Association of Arte Útil* and L'Internationale's 'uses of art' focus. In chapter one, for example, I briefly discuss how recent discussions around art's 'usefulness' and 'efficacy' risk overlooking post-Marxist engagements with the urban that are embedded more in symbolic protest

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[6] 'Public art/new genre public art dichotomy' refers to the binarism constructed in contemporary art discourse between 'objected-oriented' and 'socially-oriented' public art. 'Public art' refers to artworks presented in the 'public' realm, outside the institutions of art. In the context of this public art/new genre public art dyad, 'public art' is an art practice that is only *physically* situated within public space (Kwon 2002, 60). Defined and theorised by artist and writer Suzanne Lacy in *Mapping the Terrain* (1995, 12), 'new genre public art' is "socially engaged, interactive art for diverse audiences." Engaging with the social urgencies of a site and its people, new genre public art was theorised as a more "socially responsible" form of public art (Kwon 2002, 82).

or disruptive intervention. I would argue that the 'public art'/'new genre public art' dichotomy mentioned above is a reductive binarism that disregards the nuances of urban contemporary art production, such as how it comprises contradicting or opposing approaches, i.e. symbolic and pragmatic engagements. Furthermore, such submission to simplistic binary oppositions arguably invokes outmoded modernist thinking and reveals again the extent to which urban contemporary art practice is subjected to generalising modes of analysis and categorisation.

It is also important to clarify that 'contemporary art' is, within the context of this thesis, an overarching set of conditions that emerged in the c.1960s, as is the traditional consensus in art history (Osborne 2013, 19). This research rejects the idea that 'contemporary art' has a temporal meaning. Arguably, to associate 'contemporary art' with 'contemporaneity' is to remove the critical potency of the term, replacing it with an uncritical 'descriptive' meaning. As former Museo Reina Sofía colleagues, Beatriz Herráez, Jesús Carrillo and Francisco Godoy Vega (2018, 21) have argued, "contemporary has become a 'soft' signifier…one which adheres to an uncritical experience of time." I would argue that the urban social aesthetic examples discussed in this thesis are 'contemporary', as they correspond to a paradigm shift in artistic practice that can be dated back to the 1960s (Osborne 2013, 19–20). I will therefore argue in this thesis that the prescribed terms and conditions of an urban social aesthetic are 'contemporary', 1:1 scale works, whose production is shaped by the West's capitalism-urbanism nexus.

I will also contend that urban social aesthetic works operate on a '1:1 scale'. This does not mean that they are "scaled down" in any sense but that they directly engage with their subject matter (urban social urgencies) instead of depicting it through representational practice. As Stephen Wright (2016, 469) has described, "the ontological discontinuity between map and land—and by extension, between art and whatever life form it permeates—disappears as soon as the territory is made to function on the 1:1 scale." However, just because art is 'situated' within the urban environment does not mean that it is constitutive of what I call 'urban social aesthetics'. I would suggest that an artwork must do more than physically exist within an urban site or be 'site-specific'—it must engage with and respond to the social urgencies of capitalist-urbanism. I would argue that an 'urban social aesthetic' must not be confused with the type of 'pseudo-urban-social' artworks that Miwon Kwon (2002, 60) highlights, which are Modernist-looking artworks that have been merely 'transferred' from the gallery space as, through their traditional aesthetics and spectatorship (lack of audience engagement), they remain in dialogue with this site. Arguably, an urban

social aesthetic pertains to works that actively respond to the urban environment and its correspondent ideologies—artworks that are conscious of their existence in the urban milieu. Some examples of urban social aesthetic practice are more blatantly and intensely opposed to the processes and operations of capitalist urbanisation than others. Some artworks may not initially present themselves as 'urban Marxist' per se, but arguably, upon closer inspection of their production process and outcomes, it is clear that they offer countermodels to aspects of the capitalist urban experience.

Because it operates on a 1:1 scale, engaging directly with the urban social milieu, I would argue that urban social aesthetics is largely 'non-representational' or rather it is not constituted by *exclusively* representational practice in the urban realm such as murals or public art monuments. However, I would also suggest that this does not mean that it cannot be 'visual'. I will return to this idea in chapter four of the thesis where I examine urban social aesthetic works that respond to urban spectacle. The works addressed in chapter four by the likes of Robert Montgomery and Daniel Buren are visual, but for the most part, reject 'representation' as they resist the social semiotics of capitalist-urbanism on a 1:1 scale. I would therefore contend that visual artworks could potentially be urban social aesthetic as long as they favour 1:1 scale practice over representation. Works given as examples of urban social aesthetics like Gordon Matta-Clark's *Fake Estates* (1973), Krzysztof Wodiczko's *Homeless Projection* (1986) and Sophie Calle's *Los Angeles* (1984), have *some* representational aspects, but I would argue that the most dominant part of these works is 1:1 scale engagement with urban social urgencies. I would contend that, within urban social aesthetic works, representation, if present to some degree, is only present in so far that it is ultimately in the service of some more dominant urban 1:1 scale intent. As I have mentioned above, the socially responsive, 1:1 scale attributes of urban social aesthetics differentiate it from *exclusively* representational practices in urban sites.

Operating on a 1:1 scale with a socio-political intent, urban social aesthetics can be articulated as a form of socially engaged art practice. 'Socially engaged art' is often collaborative, co-authored art practice that responds to social issues and challenges Modernism's artistic conventions of 'autonomous art' such as 'purposeless purpose' and 'disinterested spectatorship' (art that dismisses usership, responds to art-intrinsic problems separate from everyday social life and has a passive spectator audience). As Claire Bishop (2012, 284) explains, socially engaged art has a 'double ontological' status meaning that it functions simultaneously as both 'artwork' and as 'something else'—be it an urban development project (*Park Fiction* and *Granby Four Streets*), a community centre (*Immigrant Movement International*), restaurant (Matta-Clark's

FOOD) or whatever else. Connections could also be made to the community arts movement of the 1960s and 1970s, which was a vital predecessor to today's socially engaged art practices (Jeffers and Moriarty 2017, 133–60). Characterised by a community-oriented grassroots approach in often deprived settings, the community arts movement aimed to make art that would reach beyond visual art audiences so that non-expert/non-artist individuals and communities could benefit from being involved with art and creativity (Kelly 1984; Crehan 2011; Matarasso 2013; Jeffers and Moriarty 2017). Like urban social aesthetics, the community arts movements used art to affect social change and often in urban contexts—although as Alison Jeffers and Gerri Moriarty (2017, 2) highlight, just as many groups engaged with rural areas, small towns and villages. As Kate Crehan (2011, 79) describes, in 1982, British community arts group Free Form set up their Design and Technical Aid Service (D&TAS) through which they engaged with a variety of London-based urban regeneration projects. Free Form's engagements with impoverished urban estates like Goldsmiths and Provost are urban social aesthetic in nature, as they responded to the housing and development inequities of capitalist urbanisation (Crehan 2011). However, I will not be using community arts projects as examples of urban social aesthetics in this thesis because the movement was such a vital influence for *all* social art practice that it requires much more attention than I can give it here. Whilst socially engaged art and its community arts predecessor are crucially connected to urban social aesthetics, my express intention in this thesis is not to vigorously unpack these connections but to examine contemporary art's overlooked urban Marxist tendency.

An urban social aesthetic would appear to comprise two categories of work—'practical instruments' and 'symbolic protests'. The former, I would argue, describes artworks that produce pragmatic responses to the urgencies of capitalist urbanisation—for example, durational housing and regeneration centred artworks such as Liverpool anti-gentrification project *Granby Four Streets* (1998–Ongoing) and the projects of Jeanne Van Heeswijk.[7] The latter category, on the other hand, arguably infers more performative, symbolic protest works such as Gordon Matta-Clark's international *Building Cuts* (1972–78) series or the dissident urban inventions of London-based art collective, the Space Hijackers (1999–2014).[8] I would contend that these works

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[7] Jeanne Van Heeswijk is a Dutch artist and curator whose socially engaged art initiatives aim to help urban communities take control of the future of their neighbourhoods. See Van Heeswijk, Jeanne. 2002. "Jeanneworks, Typologies & Capacities." Accessed March 19, 2020. http://www.jeanneworks.net/about/.

[8] The Space Hijackers were a London-based art collective and group of self-professed 'anarchitects' who, in their fifteen years of existence, created a multitude of disruptive interventions and irreverent performances to disrupt the flows of capital in urban sites. See Space Hijackers. 2003. "Space Hijackers." Accessed February 20, 2020. https://www.spacehijackers.org.

continue the disruptive nature of the avant-garde and, contrary to our natural assumptions, are just as necessary and effectual as 'practical instruments' as they remind us that the existing urban social systems are not rigidly predetermined but socially mutable and flexible. Through their disruptive performative/symbolic actions, they arguably expose the constructed, non-fixed nature of capitalistic urban social structures. Whilst 'practical instruments' engage with direct, embodied actions, what I call 'symbolic protest' works appear to be situated more within the realm of *critique*. Within this thesis, such 'symbolic protest' works are not aligned merely with a 'politics of gestures' and are not secondary to or less important than 'practical instrument' works. Both categories of urban social aesthetics will be favoured equally in this thesis. I would argue that symbolic and performative artworks in the urban realm can be an effective means for solidarity and social unity. Furthermore, these works appear to not require as much access to funding, resources and materials that 'practical instruments' necessitate. I will return to these categories of urban social aesthetics in the thesis chapters.

Biennials, documentas, festivals, public art programmes and commissioning agencies occupy a curious position within this research as they can occasionally constitute examples of urban social aesthetics and can sometimes be considered instances of experimental institutionality. This complex, hybrid status arguably comes from the fact that they are what I would call 'urban negotiations' of institutional programming because they can simultaneously constitute examples of urban situated art practice and experimental, self-reflexive institutional programming. This is not a dilemma per se but a valuable indication that contemporary art's urban Marxist inclinations require more research, as they comprise many nuances. However, as we will see in the thesis chapters with examples like *2Up 2Down* (2010–13) and *Immigrant Movement International* (2011–18), the greater issue at stake here with the 'urban negotiations' above is that they highlight the fact that urban social aesthetics need not just be viewed as 'artworks' but could also be curatorial or institutional forms. Indeed, as I have come to conclude within this research project, what I call 'urban social aesthetics' can have both destituent and constituent expressions.

Urban Marxism

In this thesis, the term 'capitalist-urbanism' will be used to describe the urban environment's status as a spatial extension of capitalist production (Engels 1845/2009; Debord 1967/2014, 90–91; Lefebvre 1970/2004, 1972/2016; Harvey 1989a, 2003/2012; Merrifield 2002). In other words, I will use this term to refer to the implicit

relationship that exists between capitalist production and urbanisation processes. There is, in fact, a field of scholarship devoted to this idea known as 'urban Marxism' (Merrifield 2002; Fraser 2014). Amongst its most acclaimed contributors are Friedrich Engels, Walter Benjamin, Henri Lefebvre, Manuel Castells and David Harvey. Highlighting the possibility of an urban Marxist art practice, Situationism also belongs to this field of scholarship (Debord 1958/2006a; Chtcheglov 1953/2006; Nieuwenhuys 1974/1997, 1959/2006; Kotányi and Vaneigem 1961/2006; Situationist International 1959/1997). In his text *Metromarxism: A Marxist Tale of the City* (2002), Andy Merrifield clearly highlights this Marxian inclination towards the urban. As Merrifield (2002, 1) explains, urban Marxism is about "enriching our critical understanding of the kind of city most of us inhabit today: the capitalist city." I would argue, however, that urban Marxism not only involves understanding the capitalist city or town, it also necessitates active resistance or seeking alternatives (Chtcheglov 1953/2006; Letterist International 1955/2006; Nieuwenhuys 1974/1997, 1959/2006; Harvey 2012, 2003/2012; Urban Front 2020). Urban Marxism is both "unashamedly pro-Marxist and decidedly *pro-urban*"—it denounces "the unfair plenty of the capitalist city" whilst also upholding the "virtues and latent possibilities of urban life" (Merrifield 2002, 5). I would suggest that this thesis is, at its essence, an art historical approach to urban Marxism.

As Rennie Short (2006/2014, 2) describes, 'urban' is "an umbrella term that relates to cities and city living…as an adjective it literally means pertaining to a city or town." However, within the context of this research, 'urban' also takes on a Marxist dimension, as it is understood as a vital apparatus of capitalist production. According to Harvey (2012, 120), traditional leftist urban social movements have been considered autonomous from, or supplementary to, anti-capitalist struggles. Capitalism naturally produces its own geography (the urban environment) but, paradoxically, Marx did not give this idea much attention (Harvey 1989a, 5; Merrifield 2002, 7). In its consideration of contemporary art's urban Marxist tendency, this research also responds to this theoretical omission within traditional Marxism. By highlighting contemporary art's response to the nexus existing between capitalist production and urbanism, this thesis contributes to urban Marxist debate. David Harvey (1989a, 2001, 2003/2012, 2012) has written extensively on the relationship between capitalism and urbanism. According to Harvey (1989a, 22), "capital accumulation and the production of urbanisation go hand in hand." In his text *The Urban Experience* (1989a), Harvey explains how the urban environment is integral to capitalism's ability to overcome or alleviate its inherent issue of over-accumulation—how the urban environment vitally absorbs the surpluses of the capitalist production process. Harvey (2003/2012, 5) has

illuminated urbanism's connection to ideas that are also integral to capitalist production—accumulation and class struggle:

> "From their very inception, cities have arisen through the geographical and social concentration of a surplus production. Urbanisation has always been, therefore, a class phenomenon of some sort since surpluses have been extracted from somewhere and from somebody."

As Harvey (2003/2012, 5) highlights here, capitalism's 'accumulation by dispossession' directly extends into urbanism, as the urban built environment absorbs surpluses that have been extracted "from somewhere and from somebody". Urban sites are responsible for absorbing capitalism's surpluses and are therefore integral to its stability and survival as an economic system (Harvey 1989a). Harvey (2012) has also reiterated Lefebvre's (1968/1996) idea of 'the right to the city'—an idea that crucially speaks to the need to reclaim urban experience from the grips of capitalist hegemony. More fundamentally, however, capitalism needed a space conducive to its ideologies in order to exist and develop into the global economic model that it is today (Harvey 1989a, 24). As Harvey (1989a, 24) contends, "a built environment potentially supportive of capitalist production, consumption and exchange had to be created before capitalism won direct control over immediate production and consumption." It is the city/town that was and continues to be this obligatory capitalism-supporting environment. The Situationist International, integral to this thesis' analyses, observed long before Harvey (1989a, 2003/2012) urbanism's status as a supportive physical environment for capitalist ideology. As Situationist Guy Debord (1967/2014, 91) argued, urbanism provides the "material foundation" for capitalism's "technical forces." If every *ideology* has its equivalent *site*—its veritable 'temple' for operation and 'worship'—it is apparent then that the urban realm is the correspondent site of capitalism. Whilst religions have their temples, capitalism has the urban environment.

Now the S.I...

The Situationist International (S.I.) [9] was a predominantly European organisation of artists and social activists whose work aimed to construct a critique of advanced capitalism and transform the city—two unified objectives, of course, as they recognised urbanism's crucial status as an extension of capitalist production (Debord 1967/2014,

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[9] The Situationist International (1957–72) was founded in July 1957 in Cosio D'Arroscia, Italy (Wollen 1989, 67; Sadler 1999, 4; Ford 2005, 9; Wark 2008, 6; Stracey 2014a, 2). Three women and six men from two prior avant-garde groups (the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus and the Letterist International) met in a bar in Cosio D'Arroscia and established the Situationist International (Home 1988, 30; Wollen 1989, 67; Sadler 1999, 4; Wark 2008, 6; Stracey 2014a, 2). After fifteen years of resisting the pervasive capitalist consumerism of the Cold War years, the S.I. dissolved in 1972 (Sadler 1999, 2; Wark 2008, 6; Stracey 2014a, 3).

90–91). As Situationist quasi-leader Guy Debord (1967/2014, 90–91) stated, "urbanism—"city planning"—is capitalism's method for taking over the natural and human environment." For the S.I., the urban everyday was curiously and profoundly dialectical; it was a vital locus of capitalist oppression but also a potential site for proletariat empowerment (Wark 2011/2015, 150). In the wake of their disintegration in 1972, the Situationists left behind a rich toolkit of urban-centric art theory and lexicon— 'unitary urbanism', 'psychogeography', 'dérive', 'détournement', and 'the constructed situation'. In light of its urban socio-aesthetic formulations, it is therefore tempting to posit that Situationism could contribute to the analysis of urban social aesthetics. Throughout the thesis chapters, I will contend that the Situationists' approach to capitalist-urbanism was antagonistic[10] and oppositional. Situationist 'unitary urbanism', for example, constructed an oppositional relationship with capitalist urban sites—it sought to antagonistically counter the spatial organisations of 'official' urbanism (Barnard 2004, 108). This Situationists antagonistic urban Marxism will be contrasted with experimental institutionalism's agonistic 'criticality from within' approach.

This thesis focuses primarily on the debates and practice of the Franco-Belgium section of the Situationist International led by Guy Debord, as this section constituted the 'theoretical' fraction and was also largely concerned with capitalist urbanisation (Wollen 1989, 69; Debord 1967/2014, 90–91). Other sections, such as the German and Scandinavian ones, engaged in much more conventional artistic practices and this was why Debord eventually excluded them (Wark 2008, 26; Wollen 1989, 69). The ideas and practice of CoBRA artists (an acronym for Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam) like Constant Nieuwenhuys will be a small exception to this parameter. Constant's (1974/1997) formulations around utopic, leftist city model, *New Babylon*, cannot be disregarded by this study's analysis of urban Marxist art practice. Therefore, when I say this thesis "repurposes Situationism", I mean to say it repurposes the *theoretical*, Franco-Belgium section of the Situationist International—that it is putting their ideas, debates, and praxis ('unitary urbanism', 'psychogeography', 'dérive', 'détournement' and 'constructed situation') towards a different use—towards the examination of 'urban social aesthetics'. I will use the term 'Situationism' to refer to the work of the Situationists—be it their ideas, debates or praxis. The Situationists actually refused this term, claiming that it made their work sound like a "doctrine" (S.I. 1958/2006a, 51). 'Situationism' for them inferred the dangers of becoming academic in their procedures

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[10] In political theory, 'antagonism' suggests a "we/them relationship in which the two sides are enemies who do not share any common ground" (Mouffe 2005, 20). The Situationists' 'antagonistic' approach to urbanism is akin to urban praxis, which demonstrates absolute dissent towards any form of urban institution such as protests, squatting and occupations (Barnard 2004, 108; Merrifield 2002, 98).

(Sadler 1999, 3). However, as Simon Sadler (1999, 3) suggests, 'Situationism' may be unavoidable as a term because "there has to be some way of verbally demarcating whatever it was that the Situationists thought they were doing by being Situationists." Indeed, it is likely that the Situationists "knew full well that there was such a thing as Situationism, just as anyone with a critical hold on their practice realises that it is subject to certain parameters, ideologies and methodologies" (Sadler 1999, 3). Therefore, in this thesis, I will use the term 'Situationism', as I contend that it is functional in terms of pointing to and discussing the specific positions and approaches this group of artists were taking as so-called 'Situationists'.

Repurposing Situationism, this research has consulted primary source texts fundamental to the collective's radical, socio-aesthetic scheme—*Society of the Spectacle* (1967), *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (1967), *Mémoires: Structures Portantes D'Asger Jorn* (1959) and *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* (1988). Relevant primary source articles and essays from the collective's journal *Internationale Situationniste* (1958–1969) and its Letterist precursor *Potlatch* (1954–1957), have been examined, as well as essential pamphlets, objects and other ephemera from *Situationist International: The John McCready Archive* (LJMU) such as Debord's *Psychogeographic Guide of Paris* (1957). Arguably, the most demonstrable aspect demanding resolution in primary Situationist literature is that it represents theory not actualised to its intended extent (Banash 2000, 6; Sadler 1999, 105–106). By demonstrating Situationism's apparent manifestation in urban contemporary art practice, this thesis will argue that its literary outputs do not have to maintain their reputation as unrealised theory. In chapters one, four and five of this thesis, I assert that Situationism can instead be re-evaluated as a compendium of ideas that may contribute invaluable analyses to urban social aesthetics.

This thesis contributes to existing scholarly debates, which draw upon the post-Marxist congruencies between the Situationist International and urban contemporary art practice. Elisha Massemann's *Urban Art Interventions and Molecular Flows* (2014) has correlated Situationist ideas with urban art practice, but only in a partial manner, as this comparison emerges in only one of her analyses. Massemann (2014) compares Jason Eppink's New York-based intervention work, *Pixelator* (2003–Ongoing), to the Situationist concept of détournement, as it subverts the capitalist significations of a subway advertisement. In its coda section, Frances Stracey's *Constructed Situations* (2014a) also makes comparisons between Situationist theory and the contemporary art practices of Reclaim the Streets and Krzysztof Wodiczko. However, again, these comparisons are brief and lack rigorous analysis. In its initial theory-driven

chapters, Nicholas Whybrow's *Art in the City* (2010) also highlights the urban debate present in Situationist discourse, indicating its influence on contemporary art. However, Whybrow (2010) separates his theory from his analysis of urban contemporary art, and thus his discussion of the Situationists exists as an autonomous section of descriptive research. Whybrow's (2010) failure to bring Situationist theory into his analysis means that the opportunity to form a historical constellation between Situationist theory and urban contemporary art is lost. Relational/socially engaged art theoreticians, Nicholas Bourriaud (1998/2009), Claire Bishop (2006b, 2012) and Nato Thompson (2012) have also connected Situationist (although mostly Debordian) thought with contemporary art practice. However, I would contend that these connections are brief remarks and are situated broadly within the context of relational and socially engaged art practice. Citing Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1967), said authors highlight relational/socially engaged practice's derivation from a 'neo-Situationist'[11] desire to respond to the social fragmentation, passivity and non-intervention that arise under the conditions of capitalist spectacle. This thesis builds-upon this existing research, as it aims to conduct a more rigorous comparison between Situationism and contemporary art.

Urban-Institutional Activism (Experimental Institutionalism)

Conferring with the L'Internationale confederation (via LJMU's established research partnership), this thesis also argues that 'experimental institutionalism'[12] could contribute relevant and illuminating analyses to 'urban social aesthetic' practice. I must make it clear, however, that I am not concerned, in this thesis, with contemporary art institutions in general—only with contemporary art institutions/institutional projects, engaged in forms of what I call 'experimental institutionality'. The reason for this invested interest is because experimental institutionalism constitutes, I would argue, a socially responsible type of art institutionality that possesses an *urban* focus. I would suggest that 'experimental institutionalism' speculates and pragmatically demonstrates the idea that anti-capitalistic urban activism can take place from *within* the art

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[11] 'Neo-Situationist' means a new or revived form of Situationism.
[12] 'Experimental institutionalism' emerged as a term in an interview with curator and director Charles Esche in an issue of *Oncurating* (Kolb and Flückiger 2014b, 22). However, Esche used this term to describe the activities he was involved in as director of the Rooseum, which, I would argue, was much closer to 'museum 2.0', participation-centred 'new institutionalism'. Esche's use of the term is thus different to the examples of progressive art institutionality I will discuss in this thesis. Nikos Papastergiadis (2020, 6) uses the term 'experimental institutionalism' in his recent L'Internationale text. Some authors have also used the term 'institutional experiments' (Carrillo 2017, 2018; Szreder 2018). As Emma Mahoney (2016, 219) highlights, a large variety of terms have been used to describe this institutional praxis/debate ('new institutionalism', 'alter institutionalism', 'relational institutionalism', 'discursive museum', 'reflexive museum' and the 'museum 3.0'). However, I find the term 'experimental institutionalism' functional because such institutions are *experimenting* with what the art institution can be in society and, in the particular interests of this thesis, within the urban milieu.

institution. 'Experimental institutionalism' (also: 'experimental institutionality' and 'institutional experiments') is a field of curatorial practice, institutional reform and critical debate that is concerned with the self-reflexive transformation of art institutions into socially responsible agents (Ribalta 2008; Aikens et al. 2016; Byrne et al. 2018; Hudson 2017; Szreder 2018; Papastergiadis 2020, 9; Fowle 2018, 306; Whitworth/LJMU Summit 2020). In other words, I would argue that experimental institutionalism can be characterised as a socially responsive way of curating and conducting institutional activity—centring the praxis of the art institution around its *social* 'outside', and in my particular interest, its urban *social* 'outside'.

Experimental institutionalism is largely associated with the 'museum 3.0' or the 'useful museum' meaning the art institution that has reconceptualised its publics as 'users' who 'co-produce' the programme and are placed at the centre of its social ontology (Byrne et al. 2018; Inquiry into the Civic Role of Arts Organisations 2017; Szreder 2018). This 'museum 3.0' ethos aims to develop the art institution into a 'civic centre', which can be *used* in a way that responds directly to the social needs/urgencies of its 'users' or 'constituents' (Aikens et al. 2016; Byrne et al. 2018; Inquiry into the Civic Role of Arts Organisations 2017; Szreder 2018; Whitworth/LJMU Summit 2020). There is arguably limited published literature on the subject of experimental institutionality. There are key pieces of literature, however, which have been published by the contemporary art confederation, L'Internationale, such as *What's the Use?* (2016), *Glossary of Common Knowledge* (2018) and *The Constituent Museum* (2018). Nina Möntmann's *Art and Its Institutions* (2006), Janet Marstine's *Critical Practice: Artists, Museums, Ethics* (2017) and James Voorhies' (2016, 2017) work also offer helpful and insightful analyses into recent 'institutional experiments'. Furthermore, public cultures researcher and professor Nikos Papastergiadis has recently published *Museums of the Commons: L'Internationale and the Crisis of Europe* (2020, 6)—a text, which comprehensively highlights the L'Internationale museum confederation as a site of 'experimental institutionalism'. This research will aim to contribute to this existing literature on experimental institutionalism by teasing out and highlighting its significant yet overlooked 'urban' threads.

It is my contention, in this thesis, that said experimental institutionalism's aspiration towards socially responsible institutionality is increasingly revealing urban leanings. Throughout the course of conducting this research, I recognised a growing interconnection between urban experience and experimental institutionality—what could be referred to as 'an urban-institutional nexus'. I would argue that there are many compelling examples of this nexus. During its 2000-2008 period, Museu d'Art

Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) sought to connect its institutional 'experiments' with Barcelona's social movements, re-establishing the relationship between "the museum and the city" (Ribalta 2008). The Museo Reina Sofia in Madrid, on the other hand, has connected its debates and praxis to the surrounding working-class neighbourhood of Lavapiés, which has been a site of urban anti-capitalist activism for several decades (Carrillo 2020). For example, since 2018, the Reina Sofia's *Museo Situado* collaboration network has been engaging groups and residents of Lavapiés, connecting their social needs to the space of the museum (Civic Museums 2019).

Furthermore, in 2011, cultural agents from Museo Reina Sofia played a significant role in preventing the eviction of alternative cultural venue *La Casa Invisible* in Malaga (Carrillo 2018, 281; Durán and Moore 2015, 61). In 2013, during the build-up to the anti-gentrification Gezi Park protests in Istanbul, contemporary art institution, SALT, offered "an agonistic sphere where difficult questions could be posed" (Papastergiadis 2020, 10). As Papastergiadis (2020, 97) highlights, two years before the 2013 Gezi Park protests, SALT organised over ninety events that confronted the issue of public space. Arguably, these urban-institutional 'experiments' have been emerging in the UK too: The Whitworth's upcoming *Ruskin Road* project, for example, developed in collaboration with artist Adam Sutherland and Hayatsu Architects, will work with Manchester locals to develop an urban community park. As curator Poppy Bowers (2020) outlines, the proposal for *Ruskin Road* at The Whitworth "involves the building of a road…an environment that people can use." The project will involve a kitchen, garden, beehives, bread oven and outdoor classroom—"almost to make a circular economy of the garden" (Bowers 2020). Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (MIMA), on the other hand, has held a continuous focus on the issues of urban housing and diasporic communities (See *Middlesbrough Settlement* 2018–20, *New Linthorpe* 2014–Ongoing and *New Linthorpe: Coffee House* 2014–Ongoing).

As this thesis will demonstrate, experimental institutionalism makes the case for the importance of institutional activity within contemporary art's urban Marxism. Whilst conducting the research that forms this thesis, I have come to the compelling realisation that there is a significant 'urban' thread within experimental institutionalism's debates, literature and 'reprogramming' endeavours—within its public programming, exhibition thematics and on-going development of new critical artistic language. Contemporary art institutions engaged in forms of experimental institutionality have seemingly aimed to disperse their activities across the city so that they can directly confer with their urban 'constituencies' (Byrne et al. 2018). Curator, writer and director of the Van Abbemuseum Charles Esche (2011, 15–16) has claimed, "I'm trying to work

on an idea of what I call a 'dispersed' museum…a museum that is no longer located in an architecture, but is an idea which travels throughout the city like a transformer." Consequently, within the unique and recent formulation of experimental institutionalism, art institutionality and the 'urban' no longer exist in a rigid and conflicting dichotomy, but arguably, share a much more nuanced relationship. Arguably, this relationship is summarised by the term 'minor urbanism'. 'Minor urbanism' refers to critical approaches to urbanism produced from *within* institutions— in other words, a 'criticality from within' (Sandström 2019, 100–101). Unlike the antagonistic approach to urbanism of the Situationists, I would argue that experimental institutionalism suggests an agonistic[13] 'minor urbanism' approach, which implies that anti-capitalistic urban praxis may be produced from within the art institution. It could therefore be contended that with the emergence of what this thesis will call 'experimental institutionalism', art institutionality should not be immediately disarmed as a bureaucratic organisation completely separate to critical, post-Marxist engagements with urbanism.

It is the purview of this thesis that art institutions can be sites of urban activism that refute the conditions of capitalism and 'corporate institutionalism.'[14] Many scholars and theorists have made the case for contemporary art institutions being potentially radical, activist sites. Arts critic and professor Shannon Jackson (2011, 16) has argued, "if progressive artists and critics unthinkingly echo a routinised language of anti-institutionalism and anti-statism, we can find ourselves unexpectedly colluding with neoliberal impulses that want to dismantle public institutions of human welfare." Political theorist Chantal Mouffe (2013, 100), on the other hand, has claimed that art institutions could exist as "agonistic public spaces", where hegemony is contested and the ideological framework of consumer society can be subverted. Similarly, as Marchart (2019, 25–26) points out, museums, exhibition spaces and biennials are "hegemonic machines", but this also means that they are "potentially powerful *counterhegemonic* machines whose symbolic efficacy must not be underestimated." In other words, because institutions are where power lies, it may be wiser to make them

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[13] For political theorist Chantal Mouffe (2005), 'agonism' is productive conflict. As Mouffe (2013, 9) describes, agonism is not about overcoming the 'we/them relationship' of antagonism, but establishing it in a more democratic, pluralistic form. Agonism 'sublimates' antagonism's passions by "mobilising them toward democratic designs" (Mouffe 2013, 9). Experimental institutionalism arguably suggests an agonistic approach to urban activism, as it rejects the 'we/them' oppositional approach of Situationism and instead opts for a more pluralistic approach in which criticality emerges from within the 'hegemonic machine' that is the art institution.
[14] 'Corporate institutionalism' infers the corporate takeover of institutions, institutionality or institutional organisations within society. It points to the condition of institutions (both cultural and non-cultural) as being both constituted by and constitutive of capitalist and/or neoliberal agendas. This term indicates that, like education and healthcare, institutions have not been immunised to the pervasive hegemony of advanced capitalism.

the site of activism—to put the art institution's "hegemonic" powers towards a more radical, socially responsible purpose. Marchart (2019, 26) thus agrees with Mouffe (2013, 100) that it would be "unwise for artist-activists to entirely abandon institutional struggle." Art institutions engaged in forms of experimental institutionality, however, are still not fully inoculated against capitalist co-option. Indeed, as Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (1999) highlight, the threat of co-optation is a constant, always latent possibility, as capitalism assimilates its critiques. Critique makes it possible for capitalism to equip itself with a 'spirit' (an ideology that justifies engagement in capitalism) and therefore helps it to constantly transform and endure (Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999). Whilst experimental institutionalism's leftist critique of corporatised art institutionality could itself be assimilated, funding and sponsorship also provide obvious openings towards co-optation, although this is currently an under researched topic.

As it stands, experimental institutionality may only be considered truly 'urban Marxist' in relation to its programming and the intents of its associated directors, curators, producers and other institutional actors. Experimental institutionalism socialistic 'museum 3.0' intent to create socially responsible art institutions is yet to expand into *all* areas of its associated institutions—particularly their financial structures and management. As I will discuss in chapter two, the Serpentine Gallery's *Edgware Road* project eventually had its funding taken away when Westminster council realised the curators did not want to reiterate the 'diplomatic condition' of the arts in gentrification processes. Notwithstanding, as Jesus Carrillo's (2018, 280–83) idea of 'conspiratory institutions' suggests, the prestige and hegemony of art institutions can enable activist practices to be smuggled into museum spaces and urban sites alike. From a certain perspective, if it were not for *Edgware Road's* associations with the prestigious Serpentine Gallery, the project's commendable anti-gentrification endeavours would have never taken place at all. By the same token, although a large, prestigious art institution with much corporate sponsorship, the Museo Reina Sofia in Madrid is an L'Internationale confederate that has remained a site where institutional actors have carved out spaces for criticality. In 2011, for example, cultural agents from the museum played with the expectations of Malaga city council to have a branch of the prestigious Reina Sofia in Malaga in order to prevent the eviction of alternative cultural venue *La Casa Invisible* (Carrillo 2018; Durán and Moore 2015, 61)*.* Thus, curators radically used the prestige of Reina Sofia that, in part, points to its co-optation by hegemonic forces, as a 'Trojan horse' within which to smuggle creativity into a precarious urban site. Arts Council England's *Creative People and Places* fund is also an example of how, by assertion, a funding body is supporting social art practice in parts of the country where involvement in arts and culture is significantly below the national

average (Arts Council England 2018).[15] Through 'place-based' funding, *Creative People and Places* "recognises the need for and possibility of equity, not competition between places" as we see in the 'creative cities' approach (Jancovich 2019, 3). The Whitworth in Manchester is seemingly tackling the issue of funding and co-optation head-on. In partnership with Vastari Labs, its ongoing research project *Economics the Blockbuster* (2019–2022) will see The Whitworth enter into the world of non-fungible tokens (NFTs) to test out alternative models of financing social art practice. Culminating in a large-scale exhibition in 2022, the project will explore the potential of blockchain technologies and cryptocurrencies to test ways of diverting private capital into social funds. Whilst co-optation and funding remains an unresolved problem within experimental institutionalism, I will speak to many examples throughout this thesis in which institutional practitioners have effectively carved out spaces for criticality and where activism has been tactically smuggled into art institutions and urban sites.

Through visits, interviews and meetings/summits, I have conferred, in this doctoral research, with major repository for experimental institutionalist debate, L'Internationale (Papastergiadis 2020, 6). L'Internationale is a confederation of seven major European contemporary art institutions—Museo Reina Sofía (Madrid, Spain), MACBA (Barcelona, Spain), M HKA (Antwerp, Belgium), MG+MSUM (Ljubljana, Slovenia), MSN (Warsaw, Poland), SALT (Istanbul and Ankara, Turkey), and Van Abbemuseum (Eindhoven, Netherlands). Institutions such as Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (Middlesbrough, UK), The Whitworth Gallery (Manchester, UK) and Liverpool John Moores University (Liverpool, UK) are associates and collaborators ('complementary partners') of this European museum network and hub of experimental institutionality (L'Internationale 2009; Papastergiadis 2020, 6). Appropriating the name L'Internationale from the left-wing worker's anthem, this confederation aims to "transcend the bureaucratic and self-referential nature of cultural institutions", promoting instead the idea of the "civic institution", which is also a marked aim of experimental institutionalism (L'Internationale 2009; Papastergiadis 2020, 1, 9). As Nikos Papastergiadis (2020, 6) describes in his comprehensive new text, L'Internationale is heavily aligned with 'experimental institutionalism'. Arguably, the confederation connects to experimental institutionalism's aim to "reset the function of the museum", transforming art institutions into "civic institutes where art is used for public benefit" (Papastergiadis 2020, 6; Marstine 2017, 173).

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[15] Arts Council England. 2018. "Creative Places and People." Accessed October 4, 2021. https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/guidance-and-resources/creative-people-and-places

In this thesis, I suggest that a distinction needs to be made between what I call 'experimental institutionalism' and what has been referred to as 'new institutionalism' (Ekeberg 2003, 2013; Kolb and Flückiger 2014a; Möntmann 2006; Marstine 2017; Voorhies 2016, 2017; Doherty 2004; Farquharson 2006). It is the purview of this research is that 'new institutionalism' was a short-lived, *precursory* stage of institutional self-reflexivity occurring in Europe in the 1990s whose dissolution could be attributed to its far-too-internally-self-reflexive nature—that is, its fundamentally 'high art' agenda (Voorhies 2016, 31). 'New institutionalism' was a series of curatorial, art educational and administrative practices from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s (Kolb and Flückiger 2014a, 4; Marstine 2017, 163). Poaching the term 'new institutionalism' from the social sciences, curator Jonas Ekeberg (2003, 10) applied it to the self-reflexive activity occurring at art institutions in Europe from the mid-1990s onwards such as the Rooseum in Malmo, Palais De Tokyo in Paris and the Bergen Kunsthall in Norway (Marstine 2017, 163; Voorhies 2016, 6–7; Kolb and Flückiger 2014a, 5).[16] New institutionalism was about absorbing the 'institutional critique' formulated by artists in the 1970s and 1990s, developing 'institutions of critique' that sought to redefine the art institution and its role in shaping art and society (Möntmann 2009a, 155; Marstine 2017, 164; Voorhies 2016, 6–7; Farquharson 2006).

The proponents of new institutionalism were also largely seeking to "redefine the art institution and its use of the exhibition as a critical means to reduce emphasis on the singular art object", and generally "increase situations for audience involvement" (Voorhies 2016, 7). Emerging alongside 'relational aesthetics'[17], promoted by curator Nicholas Bourriaud and the unfolding socially engaged art practice of the 1990s, the proponents of new institutionalism aimed to reject the "established showroom function" of the conventional art institution, transforming this site of disinterested, passive spectatorship into one of audience engagement and participation (Esche 2004; Voorhies 2016, 7; Marstine 2017, 163; Doherty 2004, 1). In other words, like relational aesthetics and socially engaged art forms dominant at the time (the mid-1990s/early 2000s), new institutionalism favoured 'participatory' institutional activity over the display of art objects for passive consumption (Doherty 2004, 1; Voorhies 2016, 7). As Ekeberg (2003) describes, art institutions at this time engaged in new institutionality

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[16] Curator Jonas Ekeberg introduced the term 'new institutionalism' in *Verksted #1* (2003), which was the first in a series of thematically focused journals published by Office for Contemporary Art Norway (OCA). Edited by Ekeberg, the issue sought to historicise and highlight a selection of institutional activity under the rubric of new institutionalism.
[17] *Relational Aesthetics* was a term produced by the curator Nicholas Bourriaud in the late 1990s to describe contemporary art's increasing tendency towards 'relationality', which is to say the state or condition of being 'relational' or engaging in social relationships. Bourriaud's (1998/2009) text, published in 1998, was an ambitious attempt to characterise the artistic practice of the 1990s, asserting its 'relational' inclinations.

"seemed at last to be ready to let go of the limited discourse of the work of art as a mere object, but also of the whole institutional framework that went with it." It could be contended that the aspiration was to move towards a 'museum 2.0' model of participation, away from the "institutional framing of an art object as practised since 1920" (Kolb and Flückiger 2014a, 4). Fundamentally, 'new institutionalism' was about "developing new institutional strategies that moved art into an active social engagement with the spectator" (Voorhies 2017, 215). However, as Voorhies (2016, 13) highlights, like its contemporaneous art practice of 'relational aesthetics', new institutionalism possessed a "definitive connection with the exhibition form" and its activities were situated "solidly within the realm of art." In other words, new institutionalism embodied its proponents' aspirations towards an art institution centred in audience participation and sociability ('museum 2.0') as opposed to the passive spectatorship of objects. However, this 'participation' possessed a high-art agenda as it was principally situated within the context of gallery spaces and exhibitions (Voorhies 2016, 31; Inquiry into the Civic Role of Art Institutions 2017).

As a result of researching into the field, I would suggest that new institutionalism was a "short-lived" quasi-movement in the 1990s and early 2000s (Mol 2017, 22; Hoffman 2010), which was superseded (roughly) at some point in the post-millennial era[18] by 'experimental institutionalism'—a progressive field of institutional debate/praxis, less invested in 'participation' ('museum 2.0'), and more so in the social responsibility of art institutions ('museum 3.0'). I would argue that some authors have continued to use, or rather, critically exhaust the term 'new institutionalism' to refer to more recent/current practice in such a way that, what was occurring in institutions several years ago, is confusingly conflated with today's more socially responsible 'institutional experiments' (Möntmann 2006; Marstine 2017; Farquharson 2006; Ribalta 2008; Mahoney 2016, 219; Nae 2018; Szreder 2018; Papastergiadis 2020, 6, 85, 89). The distinctive nuances of these institutional quasi-movements and their respective historical, socio-economic and political influences are overlooked and, I would argue, incorrectly conflated into one unified category of 'progressive' or 'alternate' art institutionality.

Like new institutionalism, the recent institutional 'experiments' discussed in this thesis regard the self-reflexive transformation of art institutions, internalise 'institutional

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[18] There was probably a 'transitional' phrase in-between new institutionalism and experimental institutionalism in the early 2000s. This is why some practice from this early millennial period is more akin to 'new institutionalism' (i.e. the Rooseum in Malmo under Charles Esche's directorship), whilst other examples infer the rise of experimental institutionality (i.e. MACBA's 2000–2008 period). I thus contend that I am not making a theoretical omission in suggesting that new institutionalism met its demise in the early 2000s, and that experimental institutionalism is (roughly) 'post-millennial' practice to present day.

critique', aim to shift away from neo-Kantian displays of art objects, and oppose corporate institutionalism (Aikens et al. 2016; Byrne et al. 2018; Marstine 2017; Ribalta 2008; Kortun 2017). However, whilst it was a clear predecessor to today's ongoing 'institutional experiments', I would argue that new institutionalism indicates something different. I would contend that it is an all-together distinctive, preceding stage of 'progressive' art institutionality. Not only did 'new institutionalism' not possess a museum 3.0 ethos (art institutionality centred in social responsibility), it also did not have 'constituents' or engage in 'decolonising' practices (Voorhies 2016, 31; Byrne et al. 2018; Papastergiadis 2020, 19). It is arguably necessary to differentiate new institutionalism of the 1990s from more recent 'institutional experiments' because these two quasi-movements in art institutionality were/are informed by very different socio-political contexts. As art historian and theorist Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen (2018, 1–2) highlights, so many urgent socio-political events have occurred in our post-millennial Western world, and they have naturally influenced art production—9/11, the Iraq War, the 2008 financial crash and Brexit. Furthermore, I would add, in the past few months, Covid-19 and Black Lives Matter (BLM). Is it wise, then, to conflate institutional practices that come from such different socio-political contexts? Is it critically adequate to continue to use a term attached to institutional praxis from several years ago ('new institutionalism') when art institutions today are situated in such different situations socially, politically and economically? As curator Poppy Bowers (2020) suggests:

> "Experimental institutionalism is a better term because it is more open, and something you can carry forward. New institutionalism automatically dates it to a temporal moment. It is a very different climate that we are in now politically and economically."

Arguably, experimental institutionalism has revealed a greater propensity towards the social milieu because, within today's conditions of crisis and urgency, art institutions have been compelled to self-reflexively examine their position in such a context. 'New institutionalism' emerged from a distinctive socio-political context, and also very specific art world conditions (Marstine 2017, 163). As Marstine (2017, 163) highlights, what we call 'new institutionalism' "emerged from a distinct set of European political, economic and cultural circumstances", which had their roots in the 1990s. One historically specific influence was, for example, the growth of public spending on museums and galleries in the northern European welfare state (Ekeberg 2013, 52, 54). New institutionalism also grew out of the era's biennale culture, which produced a body of independent curators who moved into directorial or curatorial positions in European contemporary art institutions (i.e. Charles Esche at the Rooseum in Malmo and Maria Linda at the Kunstverein München in Munich) (Kolb and Flückiger 2014a, 10; Sheikh 2012, 366–69; Hoffman 2006, 324). Furthermore, new institutionalism was grounded in

the "increasingly prominent role of the curator, who emerged from being a caretaker of collections and organiser of exhibitions to an impresario and creative producer" (Voorhies 2016, 73). In experimental institutionalism, however, curators are seemingly less venerated for their intellectual and creative prowess and, instead, become active agents and allies in social struggles (Aiken et al. 2016; Byrne et al. 2018; Whitworth/LJMU Summit 2020).[19]

I would therefore ultimately contend that 'experimental institutionalism' could be associated with (roughly speaking) post-millennial, institutional self-reflexivity that aims to move beyond 'participation' into social responsibility and usership (Aiken et al. 2016; Byrne et al. 2018; Inquiry into the Civic Role of Arts Organisations 2017; Whitworth/LJMU Summit 2020). I would suggest that an overarching way to conceptualise the distinction between 'new institutionalism' and 'experimental institutionalism', is to understand the former as the 'museum 2.0' and the latter as 'museum 3.0' (Inquiry into the Civic Role of Arts Organisations 2017). The 'museum 2.0' was an institution of *participation* albeit 'pseudo-participation', as public participation in art/museum education and community projects was still in support of a primarily 'high art' agenda (Voorhies 2016, 31; Hudson 2017). The 'museum 3.0' ('experimental institutionalism'), on the other hand, aspires towards a user-centred art institution, reconceptualising publics as 'users' who *co-produce* the institution (Byrne et al. 2018; Whitworth/LJMU Summit 2020; Inquiry into the Civic Role of Arts Organisations 2017). The difference between new institutionalism and today's institutional experiments is arguably that the latter demonstrates greater commitment to social responsibility and seeks to divorce this from high art agendas.

What perhaps differentiates 'experimental institutionalism' (whether it be institutions or specific projects) from the host of other contemporary art institutions today is its distinct museum 3.0 ethos—its marked aim to promote the social function or 'use' of art and develop art institutions into socially/politically *activated* "civic institutions" where social urgencies are directly confronted and approached (L'Internationale 2009; Papastergiadis 2020). Whilst conventional art institutionality presents neo-Kantian displays of objects for passive, disinterested spectatorship, experimental institutionalism favours 'usership' (Aikens et al. 2016). It aims to transform the contemporary art institution into a 'civic centre' that can be 'used' by its publics (Aikens

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[19] There are curators like Charles Esche and Maria Lind who potentially span both 'new institutionalism' and 'experimental institutionalism' and therefore complicate this binary. Nevertheless, when articulating the shift from 'new institutionalism' to 'experimental institutionalism', it is generally helpful to understand the curator's role as having gone from a 'creative impresario' to 'facilitator of social change'.

et al. 2016; Byrne et al. 2018; Hudson 2017, 2020; Inquiry into the Civic Role of Art Institutions 2017). Unlike other contemporary art institutionality, experimental institutionalism involves redefining visitors as 'constituents', meaning taking them "not as passive receivers of predefined content but as a member of a constituent body" (Byrne at al. 2018, 11). Visitors do not receive the content of the art institution in a passive, unidirectional manner. Rather, as "constituents" they actively 'co-produce' it and are thus ultimately perceived as 'co-producing' the institution itself (Byrne et al. 2018). It could also be suggested that experimental institutionalism generally opposes conventional, contemporary art institutionality's yielding to 'corporate institutionalism'— its tendency to attract corporate sponsorship, draw in mass audiences with blockbuster exhibitions and be a magnet for global tourism (Aikens et al. 2016; Byrne et al. 2018; Kortun 2017; Fowle 2018, 306). As Vasif Kortun (2017), former director of research and programs at SALT, describes, experimental institutions steer away from terms like "audience, customers, or visitor" and look toward notions of "users" and "constituencies". Furthermore, "unlike the late capitalist museum", experimental institutionality does not emphasise "scale, spectacle, interactivity and entertainment" (Fowle 2018, 306). With its themes of social engagement ('museum 3.0'), usership and constituents, experimental institutionalism arguably suggests a *socialist* reimagining of the art institution within the context of rampant capitalism and neoliberal crises.

Thesis Structure

Each chapter of this thesis will examine a key modality of urban social aesthetics in isolation—'space', 'race', 'relationality', 'visuality' and 'situations'. Chapter one, *Urban 'Socio-Spatial' Aesthetics: Situationist Space and Institutional Experiments in Urban Spatiality,* speaks to the spatial project of contemporary art's urban Marxist tendency. This chapter examines urban social aesthetic works that have been shaped by the socio-spatial urgencies of capitalist-urbanism such as gentrification, the housing crisis and the precarious commodification and privatisation of urban space. This opening chapter contends that the urban-spatial theorisations, debates and praxis of the Situationist International and experimental institutionality could contribute to the analysis of contemporary art's spatial urban Marxist engagements. Chapter one asks: how can theorists, art practitioners and cultural agents discuss in specific terms instances of contemporary art that approach the spaces of Western urbanism as vital sites for anti-capitalistic resistance? In this chapter, I propose that 'Situationist space' and experimental institutionality could respectively contribute to this complex task. I conclude that both said debates/fields of praxis contribute new and helpful analyses to the spatial project of urban social aesthetics. However, I suggest that 'Situationist

space'—the Situationists' renowned toolkit of urban-spatial ideas and practices—more consistently offers relevant and effective analyses. I conclude that 'Situationist space' largely offers more effective analyses because its oppositional, antagonistic critiques better align with the bottom-up, dissenting spirit of urban social aesthetics. Furthermore, 'Situationist space' enables the analysis of works that resemble 'symbolic protests' in urban space because it is itself centred in *critique*. Crucially, chapter one introduces some of the urban-spatial debates (i.e. gentrification, housing and displacement), which chapter two examines through an urban Marxist, 'racial capitalism' lens.

In chapter two, *Decolonising Institutions, Decolonising Urbanism: Contemporary Art's Urban Marxism and Race*, I will address experimental institutionalism's engagements with capitalist-urbanism's most pressing racial dimensions such as colonial spatial agendas (i.e. gentrification and displacement), xenophobia and 'revanchist urbanism'. I contend in this chapter that experimental institutionalism's decolonising debates and praxis could help to clarify urban social aesthetics, as they similarly speak to the racial inequalities of capitalist urbanisation. This second chapter demonstrates how experimental institutionality has extended its decolonising programme into the urban landscape—how 'decolonising the art institution' and 'decolonising urbanism' are connected projects within the context of experimental institutionalism. Because both experimental institutionalism and urban social aesthetics dexterously interweave contemporary art, capitalist urbanisation, race and decoloniality, this chapter contends, for the first time, that the former could contribute much needed clarification and analysis to the latter. Through the discussion of ideas like 'radical inclusivity', chapter two also touches upon the difficulty of social cohesion in capitalistic urban sites, but in a racially centred context. Nevertheless, this discussion introduces and leads into the theme of chapter three—relationality and social fragmentation in capitalist urban sites.

Chapter three, *Institutional Experiments in Urban Relationality: Sociality, Conviviality and Collaboration*, discusses experimental institutionalism's attempts to reconfigure the art institution as a site for relationality in the socially fragmented landscape of late capitalist-urbanism. In this chapter, I argue that the themes of sociality, conviviality and collaboration, present in the debates, praxis, and programming of experimental institutionalism, could contribute to the analysis of relational urban social aesthetic works. Chapter three speaks to the breakdown of the social bond under capitalism and its general extension into the urban environment, creating conditions that hinder relationality. It describes how, within this formulation, experimental institutionalism has reconfigured the art institution as a site for sociality, conviviality and collaboration. I

suggest in this chapter that contemporary art's urban Marxism arguably moves beyond Nicholas Bourriaud's relational aesthetic theory. Whilst relational aesthetics embodied a high art, 'participation-centred' approach to relationality, enacted from within the exclusive spaces of the art world, today's institutional experiments connect the social potentials of the art institution to everyday urban sites. Although relational aesthetics has dominated analyses of sociability-centred arts practice, I contend that experimental institutionality offers an arguably greater frame within which to examine relational urban social aesthetic practice. Chapter three touches upon the oppressive effects of informational capitalism in urban sites that operate via flows of data and signs. This sets-up the context of chapter four, which addresses 'urban spectacle'—a late capitalist urban model, centred on the dispersed, immaterial forces of semiology and imagery.

Chapter four, *Urban Spectacle and Modes of Détournement: Subverting the Visual Within Capitalist-Urbanism*, shifts exclusively towards the Situationists' antagonistic urban approach. In this chapter, I argue that Situationism's ideas of 'spectacle' and 'détournement' may contribute to the examination of contemporary art shaped by 'urban spectacle'. Contrary to the dominant narratives within contemporary art scholarship, in this chapter, I argue that visual art does not have to be 'spectacle-reaffirming'. Repurposing Situationist debate, this chapter will demonstrate how, in the context of capitalist-urbanism, visual contemporary art can be a powerful tool for undermining, and even problematising, urban spectacle. Operating within the urban spectacle's very own territory, and tactically subverting its semiotics operations, has arguably been a vital aspect of contemporary art's urban Marxism. Chapter four thus raises important questions around the potentially radical, post-Marxist potential of the visual in socially invested urban art practice. It also generally highlights the need to challenge some of the assumptions we have around the visual in contemporary art. The urban spectacle will also constitute chapter five's conceptual point of departure. However, this fifth and final thesis chapter will shift attention away from countering the urban spectacle on its own terrain ('the visual'), and instead focuses on its opposing force—'directly lived' experience.

In chapter five, *Urban Situations and Radical Authenticity: Reinstating the Directly Lived in the Spectacular Urban Landscape*, I examine urban social aesthetic works that construct dynamic, anti-capitalistic 'situations' within the spectacular urban landscape. In this chapter, I contend that the Situationist International's 'constructed situation' and its connected theoretical tropes, could assist in examining the post-Marxist, situation-constructing tendencies of urban social aesthetics. Building on from the détournement centred analysis of chapter four, this chapter approaches the 'constructed situation' as

another counter-spectacle device in the Situationists' antagonistic urban project. Contrary to the belief that theatre and performance are spectacle-reaffirming devices ('theatrical spectacle'), in this chapter, I demonstrate how contemporary art's urban Marxism (urban social aesthetics) has used performance/theatrical elements as tools for anti-capitalistic urban activism. Drawing on the legacy of the Situationists' constructed situation, I argue, in chapter five, that some urban social aesthetic practice possesses staged/constructed/performative aspects that are socially invested and respond to urban urgencies on a 1:1 scale. Thus, in this chapter, I arguably uncover a category of urban social aesthetic practice that could be referred to as 'activated' or 'socially invested' performance.

Chapter 1

Urban 'Socio-Spatial' Aesthetics
Situationist Space and Institutional Experiments in Urban Spatiality

In this opening chapter, I will discuss the spatial project of urban social aesthetics. I will contend that the urban-spatial theorisations, debates and praxis of the Situationist International and experimental institutionality could contribute to the analysis of contemporary art's spatial urban Marxist engagements.

The capitalist-urbanism nexus of the West is arguably a hotbed of socio-spatial urgencies that typify the precariousness of our contemporary urban moment—'socio-spatial' here meaning social problems that have spatial contexts and implications. I would also suggest that these socio-spatial urgencies are a central focus of what I call 'urban social aesthetic' practice and therefore constitute an appropriate starting point for this thesis. This chapter examines urban social aesthetic works that have been ostensibly shaped by the socio-spatial urgencies of capitalist urbanisation such as gentrification, the housing crisis and the precarious commodification and privatisation of urban space. The aim of this chapter, however, is not to provide an exhaustive conceptual map of this spatial classification of urban social aesthetics, but rather, to consider whether the urban-spatial formulations of the Situationists and experimental institutionality could lend to its critical examination, contributing new and illuminating analyses. How can theorists, art practitioners and cultural agents pinpoint and discuss, in specific terms, such instances of contemporary art that approach the spaces of Western urbanism as vital sites of anti-capitalistic resistance? I propose, in this chapter, that 'Situationist space' and experimental institutionality could respectively contribute (provisionally, yet valuably) to this complex task.

It is perhaps not a revelation to say that twentieth-century avant-garde collective the Situationist International left, in the wake of their disintegration, an extremely rich toolkit of spatial ideas and lexicon (i.e. unitary urbanism, dérive, psychogeography and détournement). It is not only tempting, but also necessary, I would suggest, to posit that 'Situationist space' could contribute significant analysis to the spatial project of urban social aesthetics. Recent institutional experiments, on the other hand, have appeared to forge agonistic 'minor urbanist' engagements with bottom-up planning processes, anti-gentrification resistance and diasporic communities. Contrasting to the

Situationists' antagonistic urban-spatial programme, experimental institutionality has arguably demonstrated a 'criticality from within'—a critical approach to urban space that comes from within the ideological confines of the art institution. Experimental institutionality therefore offers a compelling counter model to Situationist space, which could also contribute useful analysis to the spatial aspirations of urban social aesthetics. I will provisionally discern which of these two debates/fields of praxis contributes most effectively to the analysis of contemporary art's spatially focused urban Marxism. In the context of this chapter, 'Situationist debate' will point to what I will call 'Situationist space'—that is, Situationism's dynamic range of urban-spatial ideas (i.e. unitary urbanism, dérive, psychogeography and détournement). I must also stress that this chapter is not concerned with art institutions in general but with contemporary art institutions that have engaged with urban-spatially-invested forms of 'experimental institutionality'—institutions who, through their agonistic, self-reflexive attempts to become socially responsible agents, have confronted some of Western urbanism's most pressing socio-spatial urgencies (i.e. regeneration, gentrification, housing and diasporic experience). This chapter will now commence with a general outlining of 'Situationist space' and 'institutional experiments in urban space'.

Situationist Space

Admittedly, production has developed enormously since the Situationists. The deregulatory, privatising forces of neoliberalism and its urban equivalent, 'urban entrepreneurialism',[1] have inflamed Western urbanism's spatial urgencies to striking levels (Harvey 1989c). Nevertheless, Situationist debate arguably remains an invaluable theoretical resource for understanding contemporary art's spatial urban Marxist manifestations. The reason for this, I would assert, is that Situationism is one of the most available urban-centric debates in contemporary art that holds at its centre, the critical supposition that urban space is a key locus of capitalist oppression and resistance. From the Situationists' post-Marxist perspective, urban space was a major site from which capitalist ideologies are exerted (Debord 1967/2014, 90–91). As a result, the collective formed an aesthetic spatial program in bold opposition, which I will concisely refer to in this chapter as 'Situationist space'. The group existed amongst many other experimental post-war groups who also opposed the ubiquitous capitalist culture of the cold war years. The Happenings, Fluxus, and GRAV (Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel) also offered experimental responses towards capitalist urban

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[1] 'Urban entrepreneurialism' describes the shift in urban governance that occurred in the early 1980s. In contrast to 'urban managerialism', which concentrated on the provision of public services, 'urban entrepreneurialism' prioritises boundless economic growth, enabling the private sector to flourish.

spatiality. Nevertheless, this research contends that Situationist space offers a decidedly urban-centric toolkit of artistic theory and lexicon that is simply unavailable in the other post-war avant-gardes. In other words, these other post-war avant-garde groups may have possessed a similar ethos to the Situationists, but they did not produce a comprehensive theoretical debate on urban spatiality that was anywhere near close to adequate comparison.

The Situationists never officially prescribed a clear and concise definition of space that could assist in delineating the general philosophy that marked all of their spatial theories-cum-practices. Nevertheless, examining some of the marked precursors and successors of Situationism may assist in articulating its definition of space. For example, early proponents of social geography, whose work contested the scientific, positivist approaches of academic geography, were a considerable source of inspiration to 'Situationist space' (McDonough 2004b, 250). These social geographers contested the beliefs of traditional thinkers such as Paul Vidal De La Blanche, who considered cartography a geographical science whose ultimate goal was "taxonomic description" (McDonough 2004b, 294). According to Tom McDonough (2004b, 294), social geography highlights how "description is not an ideologically neutral term", but rather, implies an exclusionary process in terms of what is presented. Therefore, despite its ambitions to be a product of scientific positivist study, the 'taxonomic description' of academic geography was considered biased by social geographers. Social geographers, such as Paul-Henry Chombart De Lauwe, characterised space as a socially produced category—as a fluid, constantly changing architecture—and therefore opposed academic geography's fixed, descriptive analyses.

For Chombart De Lauwe, whilst space could be understood as a context for social relations, it did not, however, serve as a passive and indifferent receptacle. Rather, it was actively constituted by and constitutive of social relations (McDonough 2004b, 252). Similarly to Chombart de Lauwe, Henri Lefebvre (1974) considered space, not a neutral receptacle of social, economic and political activity, but instead a physical and ideological architecture that is socially produced. Lefebvre (1974/1991, 26) famously asserted that, "(social) space is a (social) product." This premise of 'space as social construction' also reverberates in the post-Situationist writings of Michel De Certeau (1984, 117), who identified space as 'practiced place', claiming that, "space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalise it and make it a function." If space is a product of social relations, it is then feasible to suggest that the hegemonic forces of capitalism continuously produce a space specific to its operations and ideological goals—an idea, of course, that was clearly maintained in

Situationist writing (Debord 1967/2014, 90). As Guy Debord (1967/2014, 5) contended, capitalism refashions "the totality of space into its own particular décor." However, as Lefebvre (1974) and De Certeau's (1984) descriptions of 'space as social product' infer, everyday urban users can be construed as *activators* of space—that is, they have the ability to create spatial organisations and/or transform existing ones. Although this concept of space as something that can be actively produced is not openly disclosed in Situationist writings, upon closer inspection of their oeuvre, it is undoubtedly present. In fact, one could argue that this social constructivist approach is absolutely foundational to Situationist space. For example, through experimental pedestrian acts (dérive, psychogeography and détournement) and leftist transmutations of urbanism (unitary urbanism and *New Babylon*), the Situationists demonstrated the idea that everyday urban users could subvert and override official, capitalistic spatial forms and actively co-produce cities. It can be summarised then that Situationism demanded a horizontal, co-produced approach to urban space.

Institutional Experiments in Urban Space

Over the last twenty years, via both on-site and off-site ('dispersed/expanded') exhibitions, durational projects and programming, urban socio-spatial urgencies have appeared to be an ever-increasing source of focus in experimental institutionalism. In its fundamental quest to develop art institutions into socially responsible agents ('museum 3.0') or "sites of social transformation" (Papastergiadis 2020, 9), experimental institutionality has inevitably come face-to-face with the spatial urgencies of its respective cities and towns. Indeed, it is seemingly by virtue of this overarching quest towards an institutionality of agency, responsibility and 'social transformation', that the urgencies of urban space have arisen as a crucial area of interest and application. Unfortunately, again, there is not a prescribed definition of 'space' that could be understood as underlying all of experimental institutionalism's activities and debates relating to urban spatiality. However, it is my contention that a general impression can made of experimental institutionalism's approach to urban space through its existing activities, literature (although limited) and various discursive outlets. What is generally delineable is that experimental institutionality aims to place its publics ('constituents') at the centre of its approach to urban space, acting as an agent and ally in their struggles against housing problems, gentrification, displacement and the like. This chapter will demonstrate how such institutional experiments have attempted to reconfigure the art institution symbolically and physically as a 'civic centre' for strategising, *conspiring* and acting with communities in their struggles against capitalist-urban spatiality. Within the debates and curatorial practices of experimental

institutionalism, the space of the museum appears to be reconceptualised as a 'social power plant' that is integrated with urban space symbolically, and often even physically, via expanded practice (Esche 2011, 15–16; Byrne et al., 2018).[2] A critical *juncture* is imagined in-between the art institution and urban space.

Urban Regeneration Urgencies

The research will firstly address urban social aesthetic practice engaged with the socio-spatial urgencies of urban regeneration such as gentrification and housing struggles.[3] I will speculate whether Situationist 'unitary urbanism' or experimental institutionalism's 'minor urbanism' approach, lends effectively to the analysis of regeneration-centred, urban social aesthetic projects. Whilst 'unitary urbanism' could be characterised as an *oppositional* approach to urban space, experimental institutionalism is indicative of a 'minor urbanism' approach.

This dichotomy could be related to the 'antagonism'/'agonism' contrast that has been made within post-Marxist political theory. Experimental institutionalism's 'criticality from within' approach to urban spatiality is comparable to 'agonism', which political theorist Chantal Mouffe (2005) defines as mutually respectful and productive conflict that can never be fully resolved.[4] 'Antagonism', on the other hand, is comparable to the Situationists' 'unitary urbanism' approach, as it suggests a "we/them relationship in which the two sides are enemies who do not share any common ground" (Mouffe 2005, 20). Experimental institutionality involves a critical approach to urban space that exists in a 'productive conflict' with official urbanism, as it attempts to enact a criticality that comes from *within* the professional, institutional sites of art. Since Mouffe (2013, 100) lauds the agonistic potentialities of art institutions, it could be assumed that she also trusts their capacity as effective sites for urban spatial activism. Mouffe (2013, 100) believes that art institutions could exist as "agonistic public spaces" where hegemony is contested and the ideological framework of consumer society is subverted. For John

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[2] For examples see: Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art's (MIMA) various urban regeneration initiatives *New Linthorpe* (2014–Ongoing), *Gresham Wooden Horse* (2017) and *Middlesbrough Settlement* (2018–20), as well as its ongoing community day and garden; The Whitworth's upcoming *Ruskin Road* urban park project; Liverpool Biennial and Jeanne Van Heeswijk's *2up2down* (2010–Ongoing); the Serpentine Gallery's *Edgware Road* (2009–11); Moderna Galerija's 'dispersed/expanded' exhibition *Museum of the Streets* (2008); Reina Sofia's involvement in the prevention of *La Casa Invisible's* eviction (2011).

[3] 'Gentrification' is the "the transformation of a working-class or vacant area of the central city into middle-class residential and/or commercial use" (Lees, Slater and Wyly, 2008, p.xv). 'Housing struggles' is an umbrella term for the main issues that working-class communities face with urban housing such as, expropriation, displacement and commoditisation.

[4] 'Agonism' still possesses aspects of 'antagonism'. As Mouffe (2013, 9) describes, agonism is not about overcoming the 'we/them relationship' of antagonism, but establishing it in a more democratic, pluralistic form. Simply, agonism 'sublimates' antagonism's passions by "mobilising them toward democratic designs" (Mouffe 2013, 9).

Pløger (2004), agonistic approaches to urban planning (such as the experimental institutional examples I will soon discuss) could be invaluable, as they establish it as a site for addressing conflicts pluralistically and democratically. Contrasting to experimental institutionality, Situationist 'unitary urbanism' constructed an oppositional 'we/them' relationship with official urbanism, aiming to antagonistically counter the spatial organisations of official urbanism (Barnard 2004, 108). In an urban spatial context, an agonistic 'criticality from within' approach relates to interventions initiated by municipalities, architects, urban planners and urban policy makers—activist practices that act through collaboration with urban institutions.[5] The Situationists' oppositional, antagonistic approach, however, is akin to spatial practices that demonstrate a general dissent towards any form of urban institution, i.e. protests, direct actions, squatting and occupations (Barnard 2004, 108; Merrifield 2002, 98). What is compelling about the urban social aesthetic works addressed in the following passages is that many appear to possess qualities of both antagonism and agonism in their responses to gentrification and housing.

Unitary Urbanism

The Situationists' principles for a leftist transmutation of urbanism were known as 'unitary urbanism'. Unitary urbanism can be succinctly defined as Situationism's distinctive critique of official urbanism, as well as their provisional terms and conditions for an alternative model. Resenting the fact that urbanism was a spatial extension of capitalist production, the group formed a set of principles for a leftist 'alter-urbanism' (Vaneigem and Kotányi 1961/2006, 86–89). Arguably, unitary urbanism's key principles were (yet not limited to) the following:

- *Co-production*: The city's spaces and its architecture would be inclusive of the desires and needs of its common publics.
- *Use-Value*: The social use-value of urban space would be favoured over its conversion into quantifiable exchange-values.
- *Unity*: Rigid separations prescribed by capitalist urban planning would be negated in favour of a more 'unified' environment.
- *Détournement*: In the context of unitary urbanism, the Situationists' acclaimed concept of détournement suggested the tactical subversion of the capitalistic narratives and operations embedded in urban space.

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[5] Collective housing alternatives like CLTs and Co-ops could also be considered agonistic, minor urbanism approaches. As Matthew Thompson (2020, 21) highlights, CLTs and Co-ops are not the radical, "fully realised embodiments of a commons" that many people assume them to be, as they act from within the bounds of existing urban property laws.

For the purposes of this chapter, only a selection of unitary urbanism's most vital tenets are outlined here. The following analyses will by no means aim to represent a total overview of the Situationists' proposal for reforming urbanism. The principles outlined above are arguably qualified for examining works like Harbour Edge Association's *Park Fiction* (1994–Ongoing).[6] Developers made a bid on a riverbank property in a working-class neighbourhood of Hamburg (St. Pauli) and locals risked losing their only available space for public use (Thompson 2012, 200; Rühse 2014, 36–37). Instead of protesting against the gentrification threat, St. Pauli locals began picnicking on the site as though it would soon house a public park (Thompson 2012, 200). Although extremely quotidian, these picnicking activities kick-started a community-led planning process that eventually deterred developer's plans (Park Fiction 2013). Micro-level actions of locals infiltrated urban development's macro-level discourse, infusing it with inclusive, collaborative values. According to the Situationists, urban planning reiterated the exclusionary, non-participatory nature of what they called 'spectacle' (Debord 1967/2014, 90–91). The spectacle is a late capitalist economy in which our lives are no longer primarily defined by consumption, but rather, by the passive reception of images that media-economy alliance broadcasts to us in a unidirectional stream (Debord 1967/2014). Representing something in which participation and co-production appeared impossible, urban planning was therefore understood as problematically reaffirming the spectacle economy's unidirectional discourse. *Park Fiction* reiterates unitary urbanism's demand for co-production through its development of special tools that made urban planning accessible to the whole community such as a plasticine office, an 'archive of desires', questionnaires, maps and a telephone hotline with answering machine for those who get creative at night (Park Fiction 2013; Thompson 2012, 201). The planning process was therefore rendered game-like, encouraging co-production and negating urban regeneration's exclusionary thematics.

As Situationist Guy Debord (1957/2006, 40–41) stated, "the most pertinent revolutionary experiments in culture have sought to break the spectator's psychological identification with the hero, so as to draw them into the activity." Actualising this statement, Harbour Edge Association handed out a game board that shared all of the playful ways that locals could get involved in *Park Fiction's* alternative planning process. *Park Fiction's* tools have therefore sought to shatter St. Pauli's identification with the so-called 'heroes' of urban governance. These tools have seemingly aimed to highlight the fact that locals themselves can become active agents of the city through a simple ludic process. Furthermore, the desires of locals were directly incorporated into

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[6] See Harbour Edge Association. 2013. "Park Fiction." Accessed December 2, 2019. http://park-fiction.net/park-fiction-introduction-in-english/.

the park's now iconic design. A drawing made by a local boy in 1997, for example, inspired the site's now iconic artificial palm tree island (Park Fiction 2013). Therefore, in *Park Fiction*, co-production has arguably transcended the process of planning, manifesting into the physical end result. Ultimately, unitary urbanism's idea of co-produced urbanism appears to be referenced through *Park Fiction's* demonstrable rejection of 'expert' culture—particularly through its engagement in a collaborative planning process with a non-artist community.

A potential criticism could be that *Park Fiction's* artistic mediation contradicts the Situationists' 'anti-spectacle' rhetoric that was constituent to their demand for a co-produced urbanism. The Situationists' spectacle rhetoric bluntly criticised and rejected mediation as it, of course, described a socio-economic situation in which one passively consumes a world made by others, rather than producing their own world (Debord 1967/2014). However, such a criticism could be contested as the artists in *Park Fiction* could be understood as functioning more as 'sympathetic facilitators' of a community's agendas. Furthermore, the spectacle economy's mediation pacifies and disempowers, but in *Park Fiction* and the works latterly addressed, artistic mediation is applied as a means through which urban working-class communities are 'activated' and supported. Even in the case of the more symbolic/performative works addressed in this chapter, artistic mediation inspires agency by revealing openings in everyday life for resisting the capitalist operations and narratives that extend into urban space. It could be argued that mediation is inevitable if any activity or project is to possess an ontological status as 'art'. However, works like the ones highlighted in this chapter, can be viewed as effectively negotiating artistic mediation's potentially spectacle-reaffirming nature. These works reframe the artist as 'facilitator' or 'supporter' of horizontal, co-produced activity, and/or inspire urban communities to become activated agents of social change. Therefore, *Park Fiction's* referencing of unitary urbanism's co-production tenet is also arguably contingent upon a redefinition of artistic mediation as a potentially empowering tool, rather than a disempowering spectacle-reaffirming system.

Debord (1967/2014, 10) suggested that individuals are "linked solely by their one-way relationship to the very centre that keeps them isolated from each other." Like the spectacle, gentrification only unites those threatened with displacement in their separateness, but both *Park Fiction*'s production process and outcome has created a space for genuine social unity and community solidarity. Countering gentrification's separating forces, the project therefore also reiterates unitary urbanism's aim to create conditions of unity. In other words, because the project unites the local community through a variety of collaborative, playful urban planning activities, it arguably mitigates

gentrification's socially fragmenting effects. However, St. Pauli's solidarity has been developed, in a more simple sense, by virtue of having a common goal that benefits everyone. In other words, the project has supported community solidarity by focusing on a source of common struggle—gentrification threat. As a collaborative project, it promotes unity via a shared labour process between artists and non-artist locals. Therefore, unity is not only constituted by the project's end-goal (to create a free space for social unity), it has also been vital to the work's production process. Commoning practices[7] were used as a means to unify space and its resources, breaking down the separating forces behind urban space's privatisation. Space has been reclaimed as a shared resource—as a place for commoning—in which locals can also be in common with each other (Park Fiction 2013; Rühse 2014). On a more critical, aesthetic level, with their notion of unitary urbanism, the Situationists aimed to unite spheres of activity that are normally kept apart into one immersive, 'Total Art' environment. *Park Fiction* also embodies this perspective of Situationist 'unity', as it unifies everyday social life with urban design, art, architecture and archive.

Like unitary urbanism, *Park Fiction* favours the use-value of space over its exchange-value by reclaiming an area for social relations unmediated by capital. The project also prioritises the lived use of space over capitalism's spectacle of space. Capitalist-urbanism appears to prioritise the exchange-value of space, transforming it into a mere image-commodity that can only be 'looked' at by the majority of urban publics being it privatised, or caught in the machinations of speculative capital. *Park Fiction* arguably opposes the spectacle of urban development with directly lived activities. 'Spectatorship' is replaced with 'direct action'. Speculative exchange-values are undermined by social, community-centred use-values. If gentrification constitutes a spatio-temporality dominated by quantitative time (time of production and consumption), *Park Fiction* has created a spatio-temporality that reinstates 'qualitative time'—a temporality that functions as a receptacle for quality social exchanges and values. The Situationists (Debord 1967/2014, 82) suggested that time under capitalism is characterised by a "suppression of any qualitative dimension." The project's focus on social use-values has ultimately created a space in which quality time can be spent socialising and enjoying oneself—particularly in ways that are unmediated by quantitative, exchangeable values.

Liverpool-based urban art initiative *Granby Four Streets* (1998–Ongoing) by Granby Four Streets CLT and art/architecture/design collective Assemble, has also actualised

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[7] 'Commoning practices' "produce what is to be named, valued, used and symbolised as common" (Stavrides 2016, 35). In other words, they are "practices which define and produce goods and services to be shared" (Stavrides 2016, 2).

unitary urbanism's favouring of space's use-values over its exchange-values, but with a particular focus on housing struggles.[8] This project grew out of a community's twenty-year struggle against the local governments' attempts to demolish their homes (Granby Four Streets CLT 2005).[9] It provided a socio-aesthetic vehicle for residents of a neglected area in Liverpool to own assets and develop a thriving urban environment outside of the housing profit motive. Remarkably, the residents of Granby in Toxteth, Liverpool, initiated the project. It was only later on that Assemble came into the picture, supplementing the creative groundwork that locals produced (Assemble 2011).[10] Thus, again, we witness a true mirror of unitary urbanism's core value of co-production—non-artists commanding art for their community, rather than art commanding a community as a glossed-over form of serving power's interests. Arguably, Assemble have not been 'elevated outsiders', but rather, 'sympathetic facilitators' who helped Granby residents achieve their own agendas. Therefore, this project is arguably another example of artistic mediation functioning as an agent of facilitation and empowerment as opposed to a disempowering, spectacle-reaffirming mediation.

Around the mid-2000s, Granby residents started forming creative methods of everyday resistance—planting, sitting at tables, redecorating boarded up buildings and, most vitally, developing knowledge of housing and property laws (Byrne 2016, 69). Similarly to *Park Fiction,* this project reiterates unitary urbanism's co-production tenet via its use of quotidian activities as tools for aesthetic activism. By reinstating housing's use-values and negating its irrational position as a 'cash cow' for speculative capital, *Granby Four Streets* is, foremost, an underscoring of unitary urbanism's rejection of urban space's exchange-values. The houses in Granby were not demolished (the more profitable solution), they were instead restored and inhabited by locals, who reinstated their use-values as homes—as repositories of shelter, security and community. The promotion of use-value over exchange-value was also expressed beyond Granby's resistance of gentrification and housing expropriation, through the production of useful objects and materials for the community and its surrounding neighbourhoods (Granby Workshop 2015).

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[8] See Granby Four Streets CLT. 2005. "History of the Four Streets." Accessed December 2, 2019. https://www.granby4streetsclt.co.uk/history-of-the-four-streets.

[9] Nuria Güell's *Intervention* (2012) series is arguably another excellent example of an urban social aesthetic project that criticises urban housing's position as a capitalist commodity. This series made visible the legal strategies used by banks in Spain and Italy to expropriate housing from the state and deprived urban communities (Güell 2012). Güell responded by establishing a co-operative through which she contracted a construction worker to remove doors from expropriated properties in Barcelona. I would suggest, however, that Güell's project was less co-productive and socially cohesive than the Granby project and thus benefits less from being theoretically situated within the ideas of S.I. unitary urbanism.

[10] See Assemble. 2011. "Granby Four Streets." Accessed December 2, 2019. https://assemblestudio.co.uk/projects/granby-four-streets-2.

Fig. 1.1 Granby CLT and Assemble, *Granby Four Streets (Painted Houses)*
1998–Ongoing. Toxteth, Liverpool. Photo: © Amy Melia.

Fig. 1.2 Granby CLT and Assemble, *Granby Four Streets (Plantings)*
1998–Ongoing. Toxteth, Liverpool. Photo: © Amy Melia.

Granby residents were involved in actively decorating derelict houses, planting, and also crafting items for sale on the local market. Crafting everyday useful items has also more formally taken place in the *Granby Workshop*, which is ran by a member of Assemble who trains locals in pottery and ceramic skills (Granby Workshop 2015).[11] Granby has therefore become a rich site for producing useful objects that arguably counters the passive consumption cycle that consumer capitalism necessitates— especially in the urban neoliberal landscape. Encouraging communities to actively create everyday practical tools, it is therefore perceivable that a community-centred 'economy of use' has been established in the area, further reiterating unitary urbanism's valuing of use over exchange. Bureaucratic ideas of 'public interest' and 'common interest' have seemingly been replaced with 'the fulfilment of common needs' by the community, for the community. The Granby community has democratically managed their own common interests. Ultimately, similar to *Park Fiction*, unity was not only an outcome of *Granby Four Streets*; it was also an integral part of its production process, as locals were united through collaborative labour ('co-labour').

Granby Four Streets' activities of planting, socialising and painting, which in all their modesty have remarkably problematised housing expropriation, could also be understood as spatial détournements (Fig. 1.1/Fig. 1.2). Situationist détournement was an activity in which one reused existing capitalist cultural forms in ways that radically altered or misappropriated their meanings (Debord 1959/2006, 67). Capitalistic media would be turned against itself, or have its significations negated altogether, so that new, subversive meanings could be produced (Maxwell and Craib 2015, 288). As the Granby project encouraged activities not usually undertaken in spaces planned for demolition and redevelopment, it arguably produced détournements of urban space. Likewise, in *Park Fiction*, modest picnicking activities on a site planned for redevelopment were fantastically transformed into a means of occupation that prevented gentrification. The Situationists characterised détournement as a "real means of proletariat artistic education" (Debord and Wolman 1956/2006, 18). Correspondingly, in *Park Fiction* and *Granby Four Streets,* the détournement of urban space is an accessible artistic strategy—a tool with which even non-artists can problematise gentrification and housing expropriation.

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[11] See Granby Workshop. 2015. "Granby Workshop Catalogue." Accessed December 2, 2019. http://www.sharethecity.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/15-10-07s-Assemble-Granby-Turner-Prize-Workshop-Catalogue.pdf.

Contrastingly to the Situationists' antagonistic *critique* of official urbanism and its spatial organisations, experimental institutionalism's developing approach in our present neoliberal urban landscape, can be described as an agonistic 'criticality from within'. Institutional experiments in urban regeneration could be understood as opting for a 'minor urbanism' approach.

Minor urbanism can be described as a "position of not acting in opposition to institutional frameworks, but from within the major practices" (Sandström 2019, 100). According to architect Ida Sandström (2019, 100), 'minor' is understood as "a critical force, which acts within the cracks and crevices of major practices or institutions and affects them from within", and 'urbanism' is "the professional production of the city." Therefore, minor urbanism is "the professional production of the city that affects the major practices of urban planning from within the institutions themselves" (Sandström 2019, 100–101). Isabelle Doucet (2015) describes a 'criticality from within' when she compares opposition activism with activist approaches that act through collaboration with institutions and power structures. She suggests that criticality does not have to be delivered from an external viewpoint, articulated in opposition to institutions ('destituent' as Giorgio Agamben (2014) would say). Rather, an agonistic 'criticality from within' can be just as powerful and effective (Doucet 2015, 79–102). Operating their critical approaches to urban regeneration urgencies from within art institutions, institutional experiments demonstrate a minor urbanism approach, which contrasts majorly with the antagonistic, oppositional approach of Situationism. Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (MIMA) arguably exemplifies the nuanced relationship that is developing between experimental institutionalism and urban regeneration—a relationship in which the former attempts to resist and counter the problematics of the latter through minor urbanism approaches. With projects such as *New Linthorpe* (2014–Ongoing), *Gresham's Wooden Horse* (2017), *Middlesbrough Settlement* (2018–20), as well as its weekly community day and garden, MIMA embodies experimental institutionalism's minor urbanism approach to neoliberal urban regeneration. The institution's permanent collection and display that was developed through dialogues with locals, also touches upon Middlesbrough's socio-spatial urgencies as a deprived, post-industrial town with a large diasporic community.[12]

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[12] Statistics have shown that Middlesbrough has the highest percentage of residents born outside of the UK in the Tees Valley. 8.2% of the town's total population were born outside of the UK as at census 2011, which is double the North East rate of 4.95% (Middlesbrough Council 2016). According to government guidance, no more than one in every 200 of the local population should be an asylum seeker. With one in 186, Middlesbrough is the only place in the UK that breaks that limit (Reed 2015).

As a result, a minor urbanism approach seemingly runs throughout all aspects of the institution's programming. The *Middlesbrough Settlement* project, run by events assistant curator Kate Moses, however, arguably constitutes MIMA's most demonstrable, pragmatic attempt to forge a critical, community-serving approach to urban regeneration from within the walls of the art institution.[13] The project's area of focus is Gresham, Middlesbrough, an area close to the institution with a large working-class and diasporic community, which has also been the focal point of controversial redevelopment plans. Official plans are to redevelop this deprived residential area into private housing and a student village. *Middlesbrough Settlement* aims to counter these exclusionary plans, by highlighting residents' voices and developing their resilience via off-site workshops centred on the development of practical creative skills such as cooking and craft (MIMA 2018a). As its name suggests, this project revisits the 'settlement' movement. Settlement houses were established in the late nineteenth century to unite the rich and the poor, so that they could exchange knowledge and skills (Snape 2010, 20). As Robert Snape (2010, 20) describes, settlement houses provided a range of social and pedagogical services, delivered by middle-class, university educated individuals, who would supposedly aid the poor in overcoming the liabilities of deprived urban living conditions and also encourage social mobility.

In their more successful moments, biennials could also be considered an effective context for experimental institutionalism's engagement with urban regeneration urgencies. In the past, however, biennials have struggled to resist, not only institutional capture, but also general absorption into capitalist urban regeneration agendas, as their ability to function as touristic spectacle is often instrumentalised. This was arguably the case with the sixth Berlin biennale, *What Is Waiting Out There?* (2010), curated by Kathrin Rhomberg. This edition of the biennale was controversially held in Kreuzberg, Berlin—a former working class district that was slowly "transforming into a fashionable place for the middle class, as well as for budget tourism" (Novy 2010, 195). During this time in Kreuzberg, there was a significant rise in what has been called 'new tourism'—also referred to as 'Flâneur tourism', 'post tourism', 'alternative tourism' and the 'easyjetset' (Braun 2010). This brand of tourism typically "avoids popular main sites like the Brandenburg gate and the TV tower" (Ramirez 2015, 170). Rather, this newly emergent form of tourism seeks out a more 'authentic' local experience of the city. It seeks out that which produces true monopoly rent in a city—a truly genuine, local experience. Kreuzberg's locals were already living precariously due to increasing 'new tourism' trends and the bienniale was perceived as simply exacerbating the situation.

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[13] See MIMA. 2018a. "Middlesbrough Settlement." Accessed December 4, 2019. https://visitmima.com/whats-on/single/middlesbrough-settlement/.

Enraged by the situation, residents of Kreuzberg plastered posters throughout the neighbourhood that publically denounced the curator, Kathrin Rhomberg, and director, Gabrielle Horn (Ramirez 2015, 173). The posters featured the curator's photographs and personal contact information, along with the caption: "good day, my name is Gabriele Horn/Kathren Rhomberg, I'm a gentrifier" (Ramirez 2015, 173). Locals were aware that the cost of living in the neighbourhood was rising in direct correlation with the influx of capital brought in by the bienniale and, as a result of this, so were the prospect of gentrification and displacement. As in the case of the thirteenth Istanbul biennial ('Mom, Am I a Barbarian?'), curated by Fulya Erdemci, criticality and co-optation can sometimes co-exist. The thirteenth Istanbul biennial took place in 2013, the same year as the Gezi Park protests—a wave of demonstrations and civil unrest in Turkey that aimed to challenge gentrification and increasing authoritarianism in Turkish society. Erdemci sought to sympathise with the protestors and curate in solidarity, most notably by withdrawing the biennial from the public spaces occupied by the Gezi Park protests (Verhagen 2013). In spite of these efforts, however, Erdemci's decision to call off the projects situated in public spaces was criticised as a "reluctance to petition the very authorities that were closing those spaces to the protestors", and as avoiding possible confrontations regarding the biennial's ties with sponsors such as Koç Holdings—Turkey's largest industrial conglomerate (Verhagen 2013).

However, it could be contended that biennials do, at times, successfully exhibit experimental institutionalism's 'criticality from within' approach to urban regeneration.[14] As curators Elena Filipovic, Marieke Van Hal and Solveig Øvstebø (2010) stress, whilst biennials are institutions in and of themselves, they can introduce a criticality that challenges official systems. Because they combine 1:1 scale practice with institutional aspects, biennials can help bring critical approaches towards urban regeneration into art institutions. They can enable institutions to temporarily access 'harder', more critical approaches to regeneration urgencies. In other words, biennials can be a means for institutions to achieve a 'criticality from within'—a minor urbanism approach. I would also speculate that the biennial model's urban 1:1 scale elements enable it to produce much more embedded projects in communities and neighbourhoods as in Liverpool Biennial and Jeanne Van Heeswijk's *2Up 2Down* (2010–13). This ability to form more embedded projects means artists, curators and cultural agents can get familiar with a

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[14] Arguably, the opposite is also true—institutions can also assist biennials in achieving minor urbanism approaches (Marstine, Bauer, and Haines 2013, 92). Because biennials are non-collecting institutions, they may have no permanently engaged audience. Furthermore, biennial curators often do not live/work in the hosting city and therefore their relationship with it can be very terminal (Marstine, Bauer, and Haines 2013, 92). Art institutions are often more familiar with a hosting city's community and their socio-spatial urgencies. From this fixed and embedded position, art institutions can potentially bring criticality to biennials.

community, taking time to listen and develop rapport. This was visible, again, in *2Up 2Down* (2010–13) in which Van Heeswijk fostered a good relationship with the residents of Anfield, Liverpool (Breaking Ground Festival and Homebaked CLT 2021). Further, because they are not limited to a fixed physical architecture like an art museum and instead inhabit a more dispersed, urban model, biennials can therefore form supportive, network-like structures between communities, artists, curators and producers, and are able to engage many local stakeholders outside of the arts who can contribute to critical and radical projects.

There are many examples of urban criticality emerging out of biennials. For example, during the seventy-fifth edition of Whitney biennial (2010), artist and urban planner, Theaster Gates, transformed the museum's sculpture court into a dynamic installation space that functioned as a site for performances, social gathering and contemplation (Whitney Museum 2010).[15] Curated by Francesco Bonami, this edition of the biennial therefore transformed museum space into a critical site for urban commoning within New York's long cycle of gentrification. Documenta 5 (1972), curated by Harald Szeemann, brought the radical urban-spatial interventions of Austrian art collective, Haus-Rucker-Co, into the conventional, neo-Kantian architecture of Kassel's Fridericianum museum. During the event, Haus-Rucker-Co's *Oase No. 7* (1972) protruded off the front façade of the Fridericianum (Spatial Agency 2009).[16] It was a large, inflatable structure that was meant to create an 'oasis' (as its title suggests) within the urban environment, signalling the 'beach beneath the streets' as it were. The group's visions of a utopian, leftist urban regeneration were physically integrated into the physical architecture of the museum.

Jeanne Van Heeswijk's biennial project, *2Up 2Down* (2010–Ongoing) (now known as *Homebaked*), is another marked example of how biennials have also exhibited experimental institutionalism's 'criticality from within' approach to urban regeneration (Fig. 1.3).[17] For curator and writer, Je Yun Moon (2020, 40), *2Up 2Down* exemplifies the capacity of biennial practice to create a space in which people can make change in their community (Homebaked CLT 2021). Van Heeswijk was commissioned in 2009 by Liverpool Biennial to work on a project responding to a neighbourhood affected by housing market renewal (Homebaked CLT 2012).

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[15] See Whitney Museum. 2010. "Theaster Gates." Accessed December 4, 2019. https://whitney.org/exhibitions/2010-biennial/Theaster-Gates.
[16] See Spatial Agency. 2009. "Haus-Rucker-Co." Accessed December 4, 2019. https://www.spatialagency.net/database/haus-rucker-co.
[17] See Homebaked Community Land Trust. 2012. "Homebaked." Accessed December 4, 2019. http://homebaked.org.uk/community_land_trust/.

Fig. 1.3 Jeanne Van Heeswijk, Liverpool Biennial, and Homebaked CLT,
2Up 2Down/Homebaked, 2010–Ongoing. Anfield, Liverpool.
Photo: © Amy Melia.

The *2Up 2Down* project has since revived a formerly closed bakery in Anfield, which was, in its former years, a highly valued community-hub. Furthermore, in tandem with the bakery regeneration, Homebaked Co-op is currently developing affordable housing next to the site in collaboration with locals who will be selected to live there. This bottom-up regeneration site in Anfield, Liverpool, has become a hub of community-led regeneration activities. The site provides young people's workshops, public events, training courses, drop-in sessions and meetings to inform locals about the project. The exclusionary narratives of urban regeneration have been countered by the project's collaborative, bottom-up planning process that has prioritised locals' needs and desires. It is vital to understand, however, that the project has a successful life post-biennial. This is markedly revealed by a linguistic difference. As a biennial commission, it was titled *2Up 2Down* and as a long-term urban art initiative managed by the local CLT, it is now known as *Homebaked.* Such a dynamic is characteristic of Van Heeswijk's urban regeneration initiatives, as she tends to eventually pass on projects to local communities, CLTs and associations, so that they can manage them in the long term (Koren 2019, 110). As suggested by its title change, the shift from housing to community resources has meant that the project has become even more collaborative in its post-biennial existence, inviting the engagement of more local stakeholders beyond its CLT board members. For instance, in collaboration with Designer Nicolas Henninger, the CLT has developed a recreational area for Anfield residents known as

'The Rec', and has also seeded initiatives like *Homegrown Collective*—a social business established in 2019 by local brewers and horticulturalists.

Arguably, said experimental institutional engagements with capitalist urban regeneration reimagine urban communities as being 'constituent' or as a 'constituent power'. Experimental institutionalist debate has recently developed the idea of a 'constituent museum', defined as a cultural institution that "takes the visitor not as a passive receiver of predefined content but as a member of a constituent body" (Byrne et al. 2018, 11). 'Constituent power' is associated with the idea that "the ultimate source of all political authority is located in an entity known as 'the people'…" (Loughlin 2017). In other words, common publics are viewed as having real socio-political agency, as it is through them that the 'constituted power' is selected. This idea of viewing museum publics as a 'constituent' collective who drives museum programming appears to have expanded into experimental institutionalist engagements with urban regeneration urgencies. In MIMA's various projects and *2Up2Down*, cultural agents become 'sympathetic facilitators of a community's agendas that lead from behind'. The paternalistic, colonial idea of 'parachuting in', as it were, is aptly avoided through this positioning of urban communities as 'constituent'. This idea is central to how institutional experiments are able to achieve a 'criticality from within' in their response to urban regeneration urgencies. Arguably, by recognising urban communities outside the institution as having agency, professionals working from within institutions can better establish themselves as genuine critical allies in regeneration struggles.

Such an approach has also been taken in working-class anti-gentrification art initiatives, *Granby Four Streets* and *Park Fiction*. In these projects, collaborating artists, architects and urban planners have enabled working-class urban communities to initiate direct actions and centre interventions on their needs and desires. Instead of being pacifying, paternalistic and colonising, institutional figures in these projects (artists, architects and urban planners) appear to supplement already established working-class resistance, supporting and facilitating it in the long term. Although *Granby Four Streets* won Europe's most prestigious contemporary art award, the Turner Prize, in 2015, I would contend that this does not discredit Assemble's minor urbanism approach as artists and architects. Although the project now exists within the established institutional frames of the art world, it still manages to maintain working-class, critical approaches to urbanism. In fact, winning the Turner Prize arguably establishes further the project's minor urbanism approach—that a progressive, critical approach towards urban regeneration can be achieved from within institutions, and that professional urban actors can be genuine allies and agents.

I would argue, however, that institutional experiments in urban regeneration have not always achieved this radical reconsideration of urban communities as active 'constituencies', which is integral to achieving a minor urbanism approach. For example, in MIMA's *Middlesbrough Settlement*, a potentially colonial rhetoric comes from repurposing a movement in which middle-class, educated individuals are ushered into a struggling community. Settlement leaders allegedly "placed emphasis on individual improvement rather than political organising", suggesting a condescending focus on 'elevating' the poor as opposed to directly challenging the deeper, systemic problems of capitalism's extension into the urban environment (Rohe and Gates 1985, 22). Furthermore, "settlement leaders were concerned with helping individuals move out of the lower class rather than eliminating the lower class" (Rohe and Gates 1985, 22). By reactivating the settlement model, MIMA arguably implies that its workshops foster social mobility. The settlement house, as a fixed, physical architecture driven by middle-class intellectuals, disputably mirrored the enlightenment idea of the museum as a site that 'civilises' and 'elevates' working classes. The settlement arguably reinstated the idea that museums and high culture in general "should serve as a civilising force in a newly industrialised, urbanised and materialistic society" (Snape 2010, 20). This implied activity of 'elevating' locals through creative workshops, could also be mistaken for gentrification's tendency to harness 'culture' in order to make communities fall into line with official plans. Personal responsibility, self-improvement and self-help are suggested here—values, which scholars like David Harvey (2020, 17) have argued characterise neoliberalism. In neoliberalism, poverty is not the system's fault; it is the fault of those who have failed to 'invest correctly in themselves' (Harvey 2020, 17). *Middlesbrough Settlement* seems to invoke this flawed neoliberal rhetoric that poverty should be avoided through personal responsibility and 'hard work'.

Whilst undoubtedly positive to teach practical, creative skills that can render members of precarious communities much more resilient and capable of escaping the passive cycle of consumption, there is, nevertheless, a potential ethical issue with focusing on a social reform model that has such strong narratives of self-determination and self-help. *Middlesbrough Settlement* therefore arguably risks reinstating neoliberalism's 'politics of aspiration', or rather, its demand for people to seek social mobility. A significant aspect of MIMA's *Middlesbrough Settlement* has been workshops with youngsters that claim to examine "where, what and how we eat." Through creative cooking workshops, the project allegedly aims to "increase knowledge around the origins of food, health and nutrition" (MIMA 2018a). Educating local populations about growing and producing their own food is arguably an effective way of developing an active, creative neighbourhood that resists the submissive, dehumanising cycle of

consumption to which deprived urban communities are often subject. It is apparent that, under capitalist production, low socio-economic neighbourhoods are expected to passively consume whatever services offered or media that is broadcast to them in a unidirectional stream, whether it be food, commodities or, more urgently, housing expropriation. However, educating locals about 'where, what and how they eat' could be understood as reinstating gentrification's class struggles as opposed to alleviating them. Is it not the inherent contradictions of neoliberal urbanism that are the issue here and not a community's lifestyle choices?

The settlement house can also be recognised as an attempt towards urban renewal that is led by middle-class intellectuals. With its repeated reference to working-class eating habits, arts and crafts and settlement houses, MIMA's urban-spatial activities appear to have 'bourgeois reformist' associations. Contrastingly, urban social aesthetic regeneration projects (i.e. *Park Fiction* and *Granby Four Streets*) are centred on working-class, bottom-up resistance—communities having agency and not being led by middle-class outsiders. Production has also developed enormously since the Victorian settlement. Arguably, the settlement's notion of 'elevating' communities out of poverty through middle-class intervention has ethical issues when repurposed in the context of today's neoliberal urban landscape in which gentrification struggles are severely inflamed. MIMA also arguably risks reiterating long-standing middle-class aspirations to elevate working-class people by changing their eating habits. As John Coveney (2002, 19) highlights, paternalistic narratives around food, health and middle-class aspirations to educate and elevate the working-class, were particularly dominant during nineteenth century welfare crusades. Furthermore, as Nichols Larchet (2012, 798) describes, during the progressive era in nineteenth/twentieth century American—a period of largely middle-class-driven reform and social activism—middle classes sought to 'rationalise' working-class eating habits. Through its focus on working-class eating habits, *Middlesbrough Settlement* also runs the risk of appearing ignorant to the fact that class-based inequality produces significant barriers to accessing affordable, healthy food for many inner city inhabitants (Heynen, Kurtz and Trauger 2012, 305).

Another way in which institutional experiments can achieve a 'criticality from within' in urban regeneration is through 'conspiring' with precarious working-class communities. 'Conspiring' means that institutions act as 'double agents', mobilising their esteemed reputations with urban governance to go against established structures and actually serve communities in need (Carrillo 2018). In his description of what he calls 'conspiratory institutions', Jesús Carrillo (2018, 281) gives as an example the Reina Sofia's intervention on behalf of *La Casa Invisible* in Malaga. In 2011, cultural agents

from the museum played with Malaga city council's expectations of having a branch of the prestigious Reina Sofia in Malaga in order to stop the eviction of alternative cultural venue *La Casa Invisible* (Carrillo 2018, 281; Durán and Moore 2015, 61). As Gloria Durán and Alan Moore (2015, 61) have described, through the "not-so-subtle intervention of agents from the Reina Sofia Museum, the right-wing city government had been pushed to give the Casa a contract in 2011." Consequently, it may be suggested that institutions should take advantage of the fact that councils and urban governance may believe them to be on their side, assuming their allegiance to 'extreme centre'[18], as this can allow their radical actions to remain undetected and enable them to 'plot' and 'conspire' with the urban communities with whom they aim to be allies (Carrillo 2018, 281). *2Up2Down* arguably exemplified this, as it used its reputation as a biennial commission to serve a community facing a displacing regeneration process. The project has also transcended the institution of the biennial and is now ran and managed by the local CLT. In retrospect, Liverpool biennial functioned as an institution from within which a genuine anti-gentrification criticality could emerge. The institution of the biennial seemed to provide the perfect 'facade' to please the Liverpool city council, and once all systems were adequately established, the artist then handed the project over to the community.

Park Fiction's anti-gentrification-inspired quest for loopholes in urban governance systems could also be examined under this idea. Applying for Hamburg Department of Culture's *Art in Public Spaces* programme, the project's artists tactically acquired greater political influence with the city council that still wanted to sell the site for building purposes (Rühse 2014, 40). Hamburg Department of Culture initially supported the project but then subsequently withdrew funding with an official statement citing 'procedural difficulties' (Rühse 2014, 41). The consensus was that the politicians did not want to be connected with critical activists. Nevertheless, in order to prevent mass social upheaval, the city finally made special allowances in 1997 (Rühse 2014, 41). *Park Fiction* only appealed to the requirements of urban governance in so far that it could act as a double agent and ultimately serve St. Pauli's gentrification resistance. In other terms, *Park Fiction* only 'appeared' to please the desires of the municipality in order to divert power's agendas and 'conspire' with Hamburg locals to successfully reclaim urban space.

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[18] Since the 1990s, centre left and centre right has arguably been superseded by 'extreme centre'—a neo-liberal consensus characterised by complicit service to the market. As Janna Graham (2017) suggests, councils and governments often assume that the arts have allegiance to this 'extreme centre'.

Use and Usership

'Use' and 'usership' are themes integral to experimental institutionalism that could also be enormously helpful in examining the spatial project of urban social aesthetics. Experimental institutionalism's 'usership' debate has a promising theoretical significance to urban social aesthetic works that contest capitalism's commodification of urban space and instead reinstate its social use-values. Use/usership have been at the core of experimental institutionalism's ambition to develop socially responsible art institutions. Instead of continuing the museum's outmoded position as a container of autonomous art objects for disinterested spectatorship, the use/usership debates and activities of experimental institutionalism promote art's use-value in society and the potential civic 'uses' of institutions. Such theoretical deliberations have led to the formulation of what has been called the 'useful museum' or the 'museum 3.0'. The useful museum/museum 3.0 is theorised as a reformist, tertiary stage in the evolution of artistic institutionality. Quoted by the Inquiry into the Civic Role of Arts Organisations (2017), Whitworth director and 'useful art' advocate Alistair Hudson claims:

> "Museum 1.0 is where people come along and see the precious artefacts and become better human beings for the experience. Version 2.0 is one of participation, people participating in art and participating in the museum, in education and community projects, but all these things work in support of that primary high-art agenda, it is participating in someone else's agenda. 3.0 is the user-generated version: working with our constituents, working with our users, to create the programme and the reason for the organisation's being."

The museum 3.0 supposedly surpasses previous models with a 'user-centred' version, reconceptualising its publics as 'users', who co-produce the programme and are placed at the centre of its social ontology. Artist Tania Bruguera's quasi-movement, the *Association of Arte Útil* (meaning 'useful art' in Spanish), has also been a vital catalyst in this experimental museological inclination towards 'use'.[19] Although there are certainly exceptions, this focus on use and usership in museums has mostly come from institutions that are either members or associates of the L'Internationale confederation. The confederation's dialogue and activity on use/usership was initiated back in 2013 by its a five-year program *The Uses of Art—The Legacy of 1848 and 1989*. It is clear, however, that some institutions have focused on 'use' more intensely than others—for instance, the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven and institutions that have, at some point, been directed by 'useful art' supporter Alistair Hudson (MIMA, Middlesbrough and the Whitworth, Manchester). These deliberations around 'use' also address how contemporary art institutions can assist in producing 'useful' urban space. MIMA has

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[19] See Association of Arte Útil. 2015. "Arte Útil." Accessed August 24, 2019. http://www.arteutil.org/.

offered many examples such as *New Linthorpe*, which sought to find local uses for clay taken from demolished, soon-to-be-gentrified areas of the city, and *If All Relationships Were to Reach Equilibrium, Then This Building Would Dissolve* (2016), an exhibition that offered various useful services (food bank, computers and legal advice) to immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees faced with displacement (MIMA 2016).[20] During its *Museum of Arte Útil* (2013–14) exhibition, the Van Abbemuseum reimagined itself as a 'social power plant' from which various the 'uses' of Eindhoven's urban space could be strategised (Van Abbemuseum 2013).[21] Students from Eindhoven Design Academy, for example, used the Van Abbemuseum's archive room to generate ideas for new social housing.

This institutional shift towards urban space's use-values, in a rally against its excessive commodification under capitalism, assists in examining urban social aesthetic works such as Michael Rakowitz's mutli-locational project, *Para(SITE)* (1998–Ongoing). Since the late 1990s, Rakowitz has been creating temporary shelters homeless people in various US cities. These mobile homeless shelters are inflatable, using the HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning) systems of buildings for their assembly. The project's title criticises how homeless peoples are portrayed within capitalist-urbanism as spatial 'parasites' that infringe on the bureaucracy of private-ownership. However, the urban built environment is perhaps the real 'parasite' in this equation. In *Urban Experience* (1989), David Harvey explains how surpluses from the capitalist production process are invested into the urban built environment in order to prevent the loss of profit. Urbanism essentially absorbs capitalism's surpluses, providing much-needed stability for an unstable economic model. This process of absorption, however, could be understood as 'parasitic', as the over-accumulation created from the production process is not given back to the workers whom assist in its production. Instead, surpluses are invested into the urban built environment to produce more capital. The urban built environment is suggested, by Rakowitz's project title, to be a mass 'parasite' for the surpluses of capitalist production—it absorbs large amounts of capital to produce more for private investors, whilst an increasing degree of urban civilians are excluded from it, living rough on the streets. Rakowitz therefore arguably mirrors experimental institutionalism's debates around 'usership' by creating 'useful' practical instruments for the urban homeless.

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[20] See MIMA. 2016. "If all Relations Were to Reach Equilibrium, Then This Building Would Dissolve." Accessed December 9, 2019. https://visitmima.com/whats-on/single/if-all-relationships-were-to-reach-equilibrium-then-this-building-would-dissolve/.
[21] See Van Abbemuseum. 2013. "Museum of Arte Útil." Accessed December 9, 2019. https://museumarteutil.net.

As Stephen Wright explains in *Lexicon of Usership* (2016), a key piece of experimental institutionalist literature, 'use' is opposed to private ownership. According to Wright (2016, 481), "usership's inherent interests stand opposed to ownership." Correspondingly, as Rakowitz's project highlights, the *use* of urban space is a threat to its *private ownership* within capitalist production. Rakowitz breaks down the boundary between private and public space through his 'useful' spatial formulations, threatening capitalist-urbanism's institution of private ownership by and large. Experimental institutionalist debate has also placed 'usership' in a diametrical oppositional with 'expert culture'. Indeed, "users are invariably misusers" and therefore 'experts' must fulfill the role as "wardens of the possible" (Wright 2016, 468). *Para(SITE)* 'misuses' urban space, from an 'expert' perspective, in favour of reinstating social use-values to a site. Rakowitz 'misused' air ventilation systems of urban buildings to shelter the homeless. *Granby Four Streets* has also 'misused' a site planned for demolition and gentrification by gardening, painting, cleaning, redecorating and socialising—all actions, which are untypical of such a site. Furthermore, locals in Granby challenged the 'artist as expert' with their radical 'misuse' actions that were implemented before Assemble arrived to facilitate the community-led regeneration. For example, the Housing Market Renewal initiative's *Living Through Change* programme bricked up windows and doors of housing that was set to be demolished, but residents boarded over the grey breezeblocks and painted messages of hope and resistance such as "DON'T GIVE UP!" (Thompson 2020, 210–11). Placing graffito with messages like "GAMES (PLEASE)", residents invited ludic activities and play, normally uninvited in areas subject to Housing Market Renewal. In this 'useful' approach to urban space, artists have redefined themselves as 'facilitators' and not 'experts', which is very much akin to how cultural agents in the 'useful museum'/'museum 3.0' are quickly becoming facilitators of art's use as opposed to experts of autonomous art objects.

As highlighted in L'Internationale text, *What's the Use?* (2016), Marx's 'use-value/exchange-value' distinction also suggests a more fundamental, metaphysical distinction between 'qualitative materiality' and 'quantitative abstraction' (Byrne 2016, 118). Reader in The Uses of Art and director of The City Lab (LJMU), John Byrne (2016, 118), suggests that experimental institutionalism's 'usership' discourse may be illuminated by a distinction between 'useful' qualitative materiality and capitalistic quantitative abstraction. MIMA's *New Linthorpe* project arguably exemplified this distinction in its useful approach to Middlesbrough's housing crisis, as it repurposed the clay from demolished, expropriated areas into useful pottery for locals to produce. Leftover materiality formed the project's 'useful' approach to urban space, which resisted the quantitative regeneration of the city. This alleged connection between

materiality and use also illuminates urban social aesthetic works, which favour urban space's uses over its exchange-value. In Rakowitz's work, useful, qualitative materiality is pitted against the quantitative, abstract values of commodified urban space. Rakowitz's useful urban-spatial project employs demonstrably *material* inflatable shelters, which cling onto the materiality of private urban architecture. *Granby Four Streets*, on the other hand, has transformed the base materiality of housing decay into 'useful' items for revitalised homes such as fireplaces and doorknobs (Granby Workshop 2015). It could be contended, however, that experimental institutionalism's ideas around use and usership can only assist in examining spatial urban social aesthetic works, which are *literally* 'useful', practical tools.

Arte Útil curators, Alexandra Saviotti and Gemma Medina (2018), and Whitworth director, Alistair Hudson (2020), have clearly expressed, during meetings and summits that art must be a 'tool'—an instrument for an embodied, pragmatic intervention. Saviotti and Medina (2018) argue that more performative, symbolic works can be *discussed* in relation to 'useful art', but they cannot *constitute* examples of 'useful art'. Saviotti (2018) gives Gordon Matta-Clark's *FOOD* (1971) as an example of 'useful art', but what about his more 'symbolic' protest works such as *Building Cuts* (1972–78)? Stephen Wright (2020), theorising on the 'usological turn' in contemporary art, agrees that this is a significant issue within the 'user-centred' debates of recent institutional experiments. Although his work has thoroughly philosophised and advocated artistic usership, Wright (2020) disagrees with the strict terms and conditions of 'use' demanded by L'Internationale and Tania Bruguera's *Arte Útil* project. In a recent interview, he concurred that the 'useful art' debates of these institutional projects does not allow for the analysis of 'symbolic' works centred more in *protest* and *critique* (Wright 2020). Arguably, the 'useful art' debate and activities of experimental institutionalism do not support the analysis of more 'symbolic', performative critiques of urban space's lack of use-values under capitalist production. For instance, crucial examples of an urban social aesthetic such as Gordon Matta-Clark's *Fake Estates* (1973) and *Building Cuts* (1972–78), would not qualify for discussion under experimental institutionalism's rigid terms and conditions for what constitutes 'useful art'. However, as exemplified above, the Situationists' 'unitary urbanism' ideas around 'use' could be repurposed towards such analyses, as they are not reliant on such strict terms and conditions for what can be considered 'useful'. In other words, Situationism allows for an analysis of more symbolic critiques of urban space's dissolution of use-values under capitalist commodification.

Unitary urbanism was not a 'doctrine of urbanism', but rather, a *critique* of urbanism (S.I. 1961/1997, 109). Arguably, as a 'critique' of urbanism's reduction of space to mere exchange-values, unitary urbanism (unlike in experimental institutionalism's 'useful art' debate) could support the examination of works, which forge *symbolic* protests against urban space's commodification/loss of use-value. Like unitary urbanism, Matta-Clark's *Fake Estates* (1973) was a *critique* of urban space's loss of social use. In the early seventies, Matta-Clark discovered that the city of New York was publically auctioning off tiny, useless spaces of land that belonged to nobody. Appalled at the absolute negation of space's use-value in favour of commodification, and in order to highlight the marked absurdity of this situation, Matta-Clark purchased fifteen of these gutter space properties that were far too small to be of any genuine utility. As Rosalind Kraus and Yve-Alain Bois (1997, 226) argue, "(these spaces) would not be seen, not so much because they were inaccessible (although this was occasionally true), but because they possessed no use-value whatsoever." *Fake Estates* was effectively highlighting that capitalism is so rapacious in its desire to commodify urban space that its operations descend into irrationality. Matta-Clark was essentially exposing capitalist economy's fear of 'anti-matter', meaning that which it cannot commodify. Although the City tried to commodify these unusable, residual spaces, it was to no avail, as commodities need at least *some* use-value to function adequately within a capitalist system.

Unitary urbanism's critique of urban space's increasing exchange-value was also clear in Matta-Clark's renowned *Building Cuts* (1972–78)—an international series of work which saw the artist making large incisions in urban architecture. *Splitting* (1974), a widely celebrated work within this series saw the artist making a major vertical cut in a derelict house in New Jersey that was set to be demolished. Matta-Clark's incision also opened up enclosed urban space. *Splitting* was therefore symbolically dismantling the principles of private property, disturbing its means of turning public space into a commodity. Matta-Clark was *symbolically* returning space to the collective human milieu. The artist was presenting a symbolic protest against urban space's exchange-values in favour of its social use-value. The use of dilapidated architecture arguably signified yet another critique of capitalist exchange-value's proliferation through urban space. *Splitting* embraced anti-progressivity, making use of a site that was no use to the capitalist economy, as it no longer produced profit. *Splitting* temporarily sustained the existence of the city's outmoded architecture in its anti-matter state, and therefore embraced its inherent lack of exchange-value. Whilst turning a derelict building into a quasi-architectural object could be viewed as a catalyst of gentrification, Matta-Clark was, in truth, enhancing the dereliction with his cut-outs in order to prolong the

building's status as 'anti-matter'. *Splitting* opened up a state of enclosure, which is a pretext for isolation (Wall 1976, 74). Matta-Clark (quoted in Wall 1976, 74) asserted:

> "By undoing a building [I open] a state of enclosure, which had been preconditioned not only by physical necessity but by the industry that proliferates suburban and urban boxes as a pretext for insuring a passive, isolated consumer—a virtually captive audience."

This statement is uncannily similar to Debord's (1967/2014, 92) incisive remark that, "the same collective isolation prevails even within the *family cell*, where the omnipresent receivers of spectacular messages fill the isolation with the dominant images—images that derive their full power precisely from that isolation." Urban living spaces were deemed environments conducive to the creation of isolated consumers. Encouraging us to form relations with spectacular images presented through domestic technologies, urban living spaces provide the perfect conditions for consumption's temporary fulfilment of social isolation. Matta-Clark's demand to reinstate the use-value of urban space ultimately speaks to unitary urbanism's status as a Marxian critique of urbanism. Indeed, like Lefebvre's (1974/1991) 'abstract/social space' discourse, it was an extension of Karl Marx's (1867/1990) use-value/exchange value commodity analysis onto urban space.

Experimental Mapping

As exemplified by the theory/praxis of psychogeography, however, unitary urbanism was also a call to celebrate ground-level experiences of urban space. Cartography, the practice of map-making, has been identified as a tool for capitalism's organisation of space. As Harvey (2001, 220) has claimed, cartography "opened up the possibility for the rational organisation of space for capitalist accumulation." Correspondingly, for the Situationists, maps were ideologically charged objects, instrumental to capitalism's production of urban space. Far from a neutral guide for urban orientation, cartography was considered a practice subjugated by "ideological filtering" (Harley 2002, 67). As David Pinder (1996, 408) has remarked, cartography is "an often unconscious way in which powerful interests are reproduced." Although cartography is supposedly based on the rhetoric of scientific accuracy, its seemingly unshakable processes of inclusion and exclusion renders it a far from neutral and objective depiction of space. Maps are formed via the sole subjectivity of their powerful creators and their specific interests. Situationist psychogeography therefore aimed to challenge and subvert power's stranglehold over urban cartography and the real-time explorations that it guided.

Fig. 1.4 Guy Debord, *Psychogeographic Guide of Paris*, 1957.
Photo: © Courtesy of Situationist International: The John McCready Archive at
Liverpool John Moores University, Special Collections and Archives.

Psychogeography was an experimental, cartographic practice that prioritised the horizontal, everyday perspective of the common masses over the all-seeing view of urban governance (as prescribed by the conventional map) (Stracey 2014b). Pre-existing urban maps that reflected the perspectives and ideological interests of power were détourned into new ones that represented the quotidian urban journeys that are censored by 'official' or rarefied historical representations of metropolitan space. Possibly the most renowned Situationist maps are Guy Debord's *Naked City* (1957) and *Psychogeographic Guide of Paris* (1957) (Fig. 1.4).[22] These 'anti-cartographical' maps, constructed from fragments of previously existing ones, contained representations of places in Paris connected by multiple arrows to reveal similarities in ambience and represent the journeys of their pedestrian, ground level creators. Debord's *Psychogeographic Guide of Paris* features nineteen cut up sections of the most popular map of Paris—the *Plan de Paris*. As with any conventional map, the goal of the *Plan de Paris* was "taxonomic description" (McDonough 2004b, 249). In other terms, it was structured via the discourse of 'description', which acts to mask urban space's movement and temporality, presenting it as if "all were present at the same time" (McDonough 2004b, 246). Debord's *Psychogeographic Guide of Paris,* on the

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[22] Guy Debord's *Psychogeographic Map of Paris* (1957) was accessed via LJMU's Special Collections and Archives. It was insightful and illuminating to empirically examine the object with the assistance of Tom McDonough's text *Situationist Space* (2004b).

other hand, was structured via the discourse of 'narrative', as in bold contrast to the false timelessness offered by academic geography's 'descriptive' map, it was demonstrably 'diachronic' (McDonough 2004b, 246). Debord's map of Paris reveals urban sites that have reclaimed their authentic temporality from the spectacle of cartographic representation—sites that recapture temporality and subjectivity.

Arguably, Sophie Calle's *Los Angeles* (1984) gains qualified means for analysis in the philosophies and values of Situationist psychogeography. In this work, Calle approached strangers on the streets of Los Angeles and asked them each the same question—"since Los Angeles is the city of angels, where are the angels?" (Calle et al. 2003, 317). The answers she received led her to a variety of locations such as a liquor store, a man's house and a Baptist church. The strangers Calle met and their personal, unique responses to her question are arguably what constituted her map. Therefore, this performance realised psychogeography's fundamental ambition—to celebrate ground-level experiences over power's biased, coercive and agenda-driven perspectives. As Calle lived and breathed personal narratives through her exploration of urban space, she seemingly negated the emotionally distant, panoptic cartography of the capitalist urban planner. Furthermore, Calle's documentation of this performance, through photography and text, somewhat mirrors the Situationist map as a visual representation of unorthodox cartographical practice. Because her directions were informed by the subjectivities of others, Calle appeared to resist the ideological filtering of official cartography. Presenting a range of subjectivities also radically counteracted the idea of the sole author who projects bias onto the map-making process, as well as the map's promotion of the spectacle's unidirectional discourse onto urban space. The radical multiplicity of psychogeography was referenced through the variety of perspectives that informed Calle's mapping process. Calle's experimental mapping process mediated the *co-production* of spatial narratives—that is, its artistic mediation seemingly inspired agency in pedestrian engagements with space. Mediation was, in other words, not spectacle reaffirming as it is within the conventional descriptive discourse of the map, but rather, 'citizen activating.' I would also suggest that, through its promotion of diverse personal perspectives, *Los Angeles* also symbolically 'détourned' capitalism's homogenisation of urban space. The diverse, local experiences that Calle's mapping process explored invalidated urban space's homogenisation through their cultural and personal differences.

Situationist psychogeography's aim was to re-establish lived experience as the real 'map of the city' (Whybrow 2010, 218). Likewise, in Calle's *Los Angeles*, urban space was no longer a 'dead' image to be passively consumed—a commodified reality

ossifying in the spectacle economy's image repertoire, but rather, a receptacle of joyous, directly lived narratives. As Debord (1967/2014, 2) claimed, "everything that was directly lived has receded into representation." The spectacle was "a concrete inversion of life, an autonomous moment of the non-living" (Debord 1967/2014, 2). As an inauthentic collection of images that has literally come to the point of masking the real, the spectacle is a 'concrete inversion' of directly lived experience (Debord 1967/2014, 2). As records of urban movement informed by directly lived narrative and memories, *Los Angeles* provided a cartography that was radically existential in nature as opposed to a dead, static, objective representation. Indeed, much like the psychogeographic map, Calle's images and text were not dead, ossified cartographical representations, but records of a directly lived urban mapping process. The Situationists believed that at the ideological core of late capitalism is a 'stranglehold over language' that can be summerised as "unanswerable communication" (Debord 1967/2014, 177). The authoritarian language of the spectacle is embedded in the map, which suggests to its user that it is the official guide to urban geography, and therefore its accuracy must not be questioned. Calle's cartography, however, appeared participatory. This is because it disregarded a monolithic, unanswerable discourse in favour of a participatory, pluralistic one in which a number of individuals could have their experiences of urban space represented. The stories that constituted Calle's cartographic experience all came from a horizontal, pedestrian perspective of Los Angeles, actualising the anti-hierarchal cartography to which the Situationists aspired.

Paul Harfleet's international *The Pansy Project* (2005–Ongoing) is another example of psychogeographic 'horizontal' cartography (Fig. 1.5). In this project, Harfleet has engaged in the experimental and evocative process of planting pansy flowers where he and others have received homophobic abuse in urban space (Harfleet 2005).[23] Therefore, in this project, urban mapping arguably becomes an emotional and subjective experience that serves a community whose struggles are censored by official cartography. Whilst a most commendable act of defiance, strength and catharsis, the act of planting also seems to reinstate psychogeography's core drive to represent everyday pedestrian experience over that of power. Just as in Calle's piece, the unidirectional discourse of the spectacle is countered with the inclusion of multiple subjectivities—various flowers map a multiplicity of stories and experiences, boldly dismantling the spectacle's unidirectional discourse. Subjective perspectives were literally planted, representing a concrete intersect in capitalism's uninterrupted monologue through urban space. Harfleet's mapping reiterated psychogeography's

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[23] See Harfleet, Paul. 2005. "The Pansy Project." Accessed December 9, 2019. http://www.thepansyproject.com/about.

aspirations towards a lived cartography in the sense that personal memories dictated the mapping process. However, Harfleet's work seemingly mirrors psychogeography's demand for a lived cartography in a two-fold sense—through mapping directly lived memories, and doing so via the physical act of planting. Furthermore, the flowers that Harfleet and his participants plant, represent the typically autonomous map's enjoinment with physical urban space. In other words, the ontological discontinuity between map and territory is boldly dissolved through Harfleet's urban cartography.

Fig.1.5 Paul Harfleet, *The Pansy Project*, 2005–Ongoing. Various Sites.
Photo: © Paul Harfleet.

Consequently, it could be said that Harfleet's *The Pansy Project* went one step further than psychogeography through its direct, physical mapping of horizontal personal subjectivities onto space. Through unifying cartography and urban space, map and territory, cartography was once again rendered lived as opposed to a dead representation. Arguably, by planting in spaces where homophobic abuse is experienced, Harfleet counters the censoring and displacing forces of capitalist-urbanism—such forces are often present in the spaces of revanchist urbanism from which the LGBTQI+ community is often excluded and displaced. Psychogeography was similarly invested in undoing the censorship of the spectacle by representing ground-level subjectivities. The Situationists' pluralistic cartographical approach has truly illuminated the key commonalities between *Los Angeles* and *The Pansy Project.* Like Situationist psychographic maps, both projects demonstrate that, even if official urbanism excludes those at ground level, by mapping our personal perspectives, we might at least symbolically reclaim our 'right to the city' as Lefebvre (1968/1996) would

say. Even though cartography as a representational form is referenced in these works, it is true that artistic representation becomes a means to activate agency, and not reinstate the oppressive forces of the spectacle economy. Like psychogeographic maps, Calle and Harfleet use artistic representation and visual aesthetics to celebrate the 'directly lived' aspects of urban spatiality. In both works, ground level, collective memories of urban sites become an opening towards reconciling the ontological discontinuity between map and territory, forming a lived cartography that breaks away from the spectacle's reduction of the *real* to *ideology*.

Representing Diaspora

Like Situationist psychogeography, experimental institutionalism has made attempts to represent ground level urban experience but, more commendably, with the intention of highlighting the social inequities prevalent in cities and towns. As demonstrated by the examples discussed below, it has shifted the art museum's powers of representation (its authority as a representational frame for art) away from traditional displays of objects and images, and onto the overlooked narratives embedded within urban space. Experimental institutionalism has focused on representing diasporic[24] communities— those displaced from spaces of the city, whose experience is typically censored. Communities that might not have the political agency to represent themselves in urban spatial discourse are represented through this institutional praxis. Diasporic subjects are not represented in the traditional confines of the museum display for unethical colonial spectatorship, but are literally represented in the exact urban spaces from which they have been displaced or excluded. In the following urban-institutional projects, 'the map becomes the territory', as the ontological discontinuity between artistic representation and subject is arguably reconciled. In fact, this could actually be a way for cultural institutions to approach the seemingly impossible task of formulating representational models that do not reiterate spectacle. By 'representing diaspora', experimental institutionalism's discourses and activities are perhaps underlined by a greater empathy for those affected by the socio-spatial urgencies of capitalist-urbanism than Situationism that seemed to place the urban proletariat and their struggles into one homogenising category.

Curated by Zdenka Badovinac and Bojana Piškur, Moderna Galerija's 'expanded' urban exhibition *Museum of the Streets* (2008), for instance, demonstrated this inclination towards representing diasporic subjects in their very sites of displacement.

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[24] 'Diasporic' refers to those who are either socio-politically displaced (homeless) or geographically dispersed (immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees).

Works presented in the exhibition included Saso Sedlacek's *Beggar* (2008), a project in which a robot went into areas from which homeless peoples are normally displaced, and *Workers Without Frontiers* (2008), a work in which immigrant workers currently working on the renovation of Moderna Galerija were represented on urban advertisements. Arguably, this idea of 'representing diaspora' is also pertinent in urban social aesthetics. Rakowitz's *Para(SITE)* (1998–Ongoing), for example, made the city's homelessness visible. It called attention to this overlooked community, who are in constant state of flux, via attention-grabbing inflatable architectures. Krzysztof Wodiczko's subversive installation piece *Homeless Projection: A Proposal for the City of New York* (1986), also mirrored this experimental institutionalist inclination, as it projected images of New York's homeless straight onto the monuments of Union Square Park—the exact site from which they were being displaced due to an ongoing 'revitalisation' (Deutsche 1996). In fact, the City was employing the park monuments, onto which Wodiczko projected his images of homeless people, as part of a 'revitalisation' to enhance the area's reputation. Therefore, again, the exact site from which diasporic subjects are displaced is the exact site in which they are represented.

There have also been instances when diasporic urban communities have been represented in the exhibition form such as MIMA's *If All Relationships Were to Reach Equilibrium, Then This Building Would Dissolve*.[25] However, even in this context, urban diasporic subjects were being represented in the context of those sites in urbanism from which they were displaced such as Middlesbrough's demonstrably racist housing crisis and gentrification. Subjects also represented themselves through their activation of the exhibition's 'useful' aspects. The exhibition represented Middlesbrough's diasporic community in relation to their real sites of struggle—i.e. language, living (food bank) and legal matters. In its provision of services, the exhibition responded to the underrepresentation of immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees in certain sectors of urban living (MIMA 2016). These services, however, could also be understood as having alleviated their diasporic condition, ultimately helping them to integrate. Representation was therefore unified with service or usership—giving genuine support to the urban diaspora. This idea could also be applied to an analysis of *Para(SITE)*, as this project both *represents* urban diaspora whilst also *practically* assisting its integration into the built environment though the pragmatic offering of homeless shelters. Ultimately, 'representing diaspora' seems to comprise artistic mediation that

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[25] See MIMA. 2016. "If all Relations Were to Reach Equilibrium, Then This Building Would Dissolve." Accessed December 9, 2019. https://visitmima.com/whats-on/single/if-all-relationships-were-to-reach-equilibrium-then-this-building-would-dissolve/.

[1] 'Decolonising' means departing from colonialist orientations (Papastergiadis 2020, 36).
[2] Grenfell Tower Fire was a severe blaze in a London residential tower block. At around

leads to self-representation; its subjects are not represented *objects* for disinterested aesthetic contemplation, but instead, individuals with an agency to self-represent.

Walking as Art and Urban Activism

The quotidian praxis of walking also speaks to being *present* and *represented* in urban space, of transgressing the boundaries and limits that capitalist urbanisation places on our identities, bodies and mobility. The Situationist dérive revealed that, when situated within the context of capitalist-urbanism, walking becomes a potential tool for spatial subversion. The dérive was an experimental walking practice in which participants were asked to abandon all of their usual motives for movement in the city and instead "let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain" (Debord 1958/2006a, 62). It required its participants to let go of the normal capitalistic drives for urban movement (labour/consumption), but also, at the same time, be acutely aware of the physical, emotional and psychological effects of the spaces encountered (Debord 1958/2006a, 62). The dérive was a component of psychogeography, as it required its participants to examine the various ambiences of urban spaces, observing how one's feelings and behaviours were affected (Debord 1955/2006, 8). These observations would be key to understanding how spaces could be tactically subverted.

Inspiration for the Situationists' elevation of walking to a radical aesthetic practice partially came from the experimental practices of Dada and Surrealism (Careri 2002). In 1921, via an excursion to the Parisian church of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre, Dada artists established a practice called 'the excursion', which involved journeying to banal urban spaces in order to fuse humdrum, everyday life with art (Careri 2002, 68). The excursion was a spatial extension of objet trouvé as, through walking, the Dada artists were arguably establishing spaces of the city as urban *ready-mades* (Careri 2002, 75). Following the Dada excursion, the Surrealist group created an activity known as 'the deambulation'. The Surrealist deambulation was a means through which to encounter the unconscious part of a particular site via walking, achieving a state akin to hypnosis (Careri 2002, 82–83). The deambulation could therefore be described as a walked version of Surrealist *automatic writing* (Careri 2002, 87). As a result, it can be contended that, unlike Situationist psychogeography and the dérive, Dada and Surrealist walking did not aim to counter capitalist-urbanism. Rather, they were simply advancements of the distinctive practices of these movements—the Dada *ready-made* and Surrealist *automatic writing*. The flâneur, a nineteenth century urban motif, is another concept often related to the Situationist dérive, although this is a problematic comparison. The term refers to a cultured and dandyish gentleman who wandered the

streets observing modern urban life—particularly the shopping arcades where capitalist consumer society was rising in alignment with the growing bourgeois class (Sadler 1999, 56). According to Marxist philosopher Walter Benjamin, the flâneur was an emblem of capitalism. For Benjamin (1938/1997), the flâneur was a passive observer of consumer activity who failed to actively participate in the urban social milieu. Therefore, these earlier, pre-dérive conceptualisations of walking also elevated walking to an aesthetic practice, but they failed to imagine it as a serious tool for socio-aesthetic activism. I would therefore argue that 'Situationist space' (namely the theory/praxis of the dérive) is a more qualified concept with which to examine the following examples of urban social aesthetics.

Adrian Piper's New York-based walking performance/intervention *Catalysis III* (1970) arguably acquires qualified means for analysis in the Situationists' 'psychogeographic', theory-cum-praxis of the dérive (Fig. 1.6). Similarly to the Situationist dérive, *Catalysis III* presented urban mobility as a powerful way to empirically problematise the meanings and operations embedded in urban space. This performance, from Piper's *Catalysis* (1970–71) series, saw the artist performing a series of actions in New York City designed to confront perceptions of social order and appropriateness. In *Catalysis III,* Piper covered her outfit in white paint and placed a sign across herself that read: "WET PAINT". Piper journeyed down busy streets and went shopping, disconcerting others as she transgressed the non-visible social boundaries contained with urban space. *Catalysis III* arguably referenced psychogeography's appropriation of walking as a tool to expose urban space's effects on the body. Psychogeography was, after all, defined as the "specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals" (Debord 1955/2006, 8). Via her experimental mobility, Piper also invoked the dérive's role as a physical actualisation of psychogeography's aim to expose the effects of urban space. Photographic documentation of Piper's performance shows members of the public disconcerted by her actions, serving as demonstrable proof that urban space is encoded with certain rules of conduct.

Catalysis III appeared to expose the oppressive bio-politics of capitalist-urbanism, reminding us that its spaces are not neutral containers of socio-political activity, but as psychogeography and the dérive inferred, ideologically charged environments that reshape our movements and behaviours. Within capitalist-urbanism the body becomes an emitter of signs, and Piper's sullied body did not conform to accepted corporeal significations. Piper's subversion of the social rules contained within urban space arguably revealed that, when walking through the city's spaces, we become what

Michel Foucault (1977/1995, 25) called 'docile bodies'. Foucault (1977/1995) claimed that the rise of capitalism was largely dependent on the development of individuals whose bodies and behaviours were congruent with its objectives. According to Foucault (1977/1995, 25), "the body is directly involved in a political field: power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs." Without the formation of 'docile bodies', whose behaviours and attributes correspond to the type of labour and pleasure it demands, capitalism's objectives would be thwarted. Piper's performance reveals that, in the consumer spaces of the late capitalist city, bodies must comply with that of a 'good consumer'.
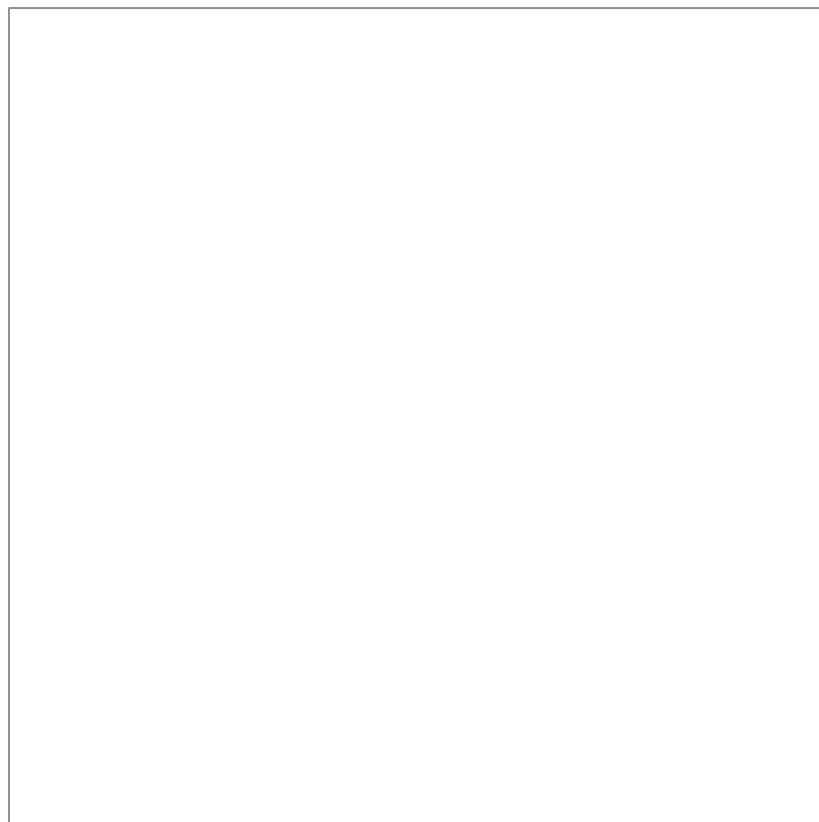
Fig. 1.6 Adrian Piper, *Catalysis III*, 1970. New York.
Photo: © Rosemary Mayer.

As Mark Jayne (2006, 81) suggests, urban consumer spaces must be seductive, pleasant, "strongly bounded and purified"; they must exclude those who pose the danger of the 'other', so that desire for consumption can be encouraged. Piper's abject body threateningly disregarded this, and her unperturbed stroll seemingly cemented her performance's status as an arguable act of spatial détournement—another marked goal of the subversive, anti-capitalist dérive. By using her body to oppose the capitalistic social order contained within urban space, Piper arguably actualised psychogeography's goal to expose and critically examine the effects of capitalistic

spaces on urban users. Piper's performance demonstrated that we do not have to radically transform the city's architecture or spatial planning to implement a détournement of capitalistic urban space. Her performance revealed that urban users can achieve powerful subversions of urban space through refusing to possess 'docile bodies' as they transport themselves through the city. Piper reinstated the potential for urban walking to be an act of powerful subversion via our physical embodiment, and this resonates greatly with the Situationist dérive. Piper demonstrated that we do not have to co-opt architecture or spatial forms to détourn capitalism's stranglehold of urban space. Rather, subversion can be achieved via a refusal to comply with the necessity to have docile bodies as we travel through urban spaces in which capitalistic ideologies are present. Arguably, Piper reinstated the dérive's promotion of walking as an act of powerful lived, corporeal and psychosomatic subversion.

I would contend that William Pope.L's New York *Times Square Crawl* (1978) performance also presents the mobile body as a powerful opening towards 'détourning' capitalist urban space's encoded significations. Like Piper's performance, Pope.L's crawl performs the body exiled or displaced from urban consumer space, and employs this performed identity as a tool for détourning urban space's exclusionary operations. In this performance, Pope.L deliberately doubled the assumed 'otherness' of his body as an African-American by crawling through the streets, enacting a means of movement considered improper in urban consumer space. This intervention was arguably a redolent underscoring of the racial inequalities that still comprise the foundations of capitalism and its spatial extension—the Western city. Indeed, we are reminded of the racialised body as a site of contestation in 'primitive accumulation'— capitalism's pre-history within which Marx places the slave trade (Marx 1867/1990, 915). We are reminded that colonial histories and the racial aspects of primitive accumulation are not merely mirrored by neoliberal urbanism, but are demonstrably continued through its often racialised socio-spatial urgencies. Therefore, like the dérive, this work seemed to illuminate the alienating forces embedded in urban space through experimental mobility.

Furthermore, by bringing the marginalised body into a sumptuous consumer area, Pope.L exposed urbanism's socio-spatial fragmentations. Capitalist production is characterised by separations—divisions of labour, specialisation and class. Unsurprising, this tendency is continued through urban space, as social inequality is expressed spatially (Savage, Warde and Ward 2003, 72). The dérive was contingent on identifying, not only similarities in ambience between urban spaces, but also differences, as this would assist in exposing the social divisions present. On a similar

note, by placing his struggling ethnic body into a glossy consumer area, Pope.L arguably exposed capitalist-urbanism's tendency to displace vulnerable and so-called undesirable publics. Pope.L's unusual axis mirrored the dérive's focus on the city's ground level micro-narratives, and also boldly exaggerated the dérive's horizontal values. It is interesting to consider that the artist promoted horizontal mobility in Times Square, New York—the veritable mass shrine to capitalist-urbanism's vertical fixation. Verticality invokes capitalist progress, the masculine symbolic realm of language, civilisation and culture. Pope.L's performance rejected verticality for the horizontal, invoking the anti-progressive and the abject—a metaphor for those on society's outskirts, living in conditions of poverty or homelessness.

As geographer Stephen Graham (2018, 16) asserts, orientation metaphors are deeply embedded into the way humans conceptualise and understand the world. Graham (2018, 16) suggests that, because of our corporal experience as 'vertically erect beings', verticality comes to be understood as a more privileged axis than horizontality. Graham (2018, 17) proposes that, "as well as the more obvious use of upper, lower and under to describe social class, the words status, stature, statute, estate and institute all derive from the verb *to stand.*" If standing invokes power's verticality, Pope.L's crawl thus arguably represents those who are subordinated, displaced and dispossessed. Piper also referenced horizontality through her abject performance, as she pointed to individuals and aspects of urban living that are subjected to the underbelly of the city, away from the clean and civilised order of consumer space and symbolic architectures of verticality. Ken Knabb (1976, 60) has correspondingly claimed that, "those in a dérive have the experience of being in exile, of being marginalised." Both Piper and Pope.L have appeared to use horizontal walking as a metaphor for capitalist-urbanism's displacing processes of gentrification and dispossession. Piper and Pope.L's use of horizontality could be understood as a means to expose the oppressive and separating forces that orient urban space, which was absolutely vital to the dérive. This horizontality thematic, in fact, has seemed to appear continuously throughout this chapter's debate. It has not only suggested highlighting ground level experiences, but more vitally, giving agency to these.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the spatial classification of urban social aesthetics. The aim of this opening chapter was to consider whether the urban-spatial formulations of the Situationist International and experimental institutionality could contribute to the examination of contemporary art's spatially centred urban Marxism. I would conclude

that both said debates/fields of praxis contribute new and helpful analyses to the spatial project of urban social aesthetics. However, I would contend that 'Situationist space'—the Situationists' renowned toolkit of urban-spatial ideas and practices—was more consistent in offering relevant and effective analyses. Arguably, the antagonistic, oppositional and destituent approach to urban spatiality that 'Situationist space' offers, corresponds more with the bottom-up, dissenting spirit embodied in many of the urban social aesthetic examples addressed in this chapter. As I have also highlighted, Situationism allows for the analysis of works that resemble 'symbolic protests' in urban space because it is itself centred in *critique*. This chapter's analyses, however, have lacked one crucial area of discussion—how urban spatial urgencies are inseparable from issues of racial inequality. The following chapter, however, addresses these connections between race, capitalism and urban experience. It will contend that the decolonising activities and debates of experimental institutionalism can contribute to the examination of racially centred urban social aesthetic works.

Chapter 2

Decolonising Institutions, Decolonising Urbanism
Contemporary Art's Urban Marxism and Race

This chapter addresses the 'decolonising'[1] project of experimental institutionalism, which I contend is *urban* in character. I will argue that experimental institutionalism's decolonising debates and praxis could help to clarify urban social aesthetics, as they similarly speak to the racial inequalities of capitalist urbanisation.

In light of contemporary tragedies such as Grenfell Tower Fire,[2] it is arguably vital to address the urgencies of capitalist-urbanism as being not only rooted in class struggle, but also racial inequality and the blatant continuation of the West's[3] colonial histories (Danewid 2019). Using this argument from urban scholarship as its theoretical point of departure, this chapter takes as its context the racial inequalities of capitalist urbanisation and their influence on contemporary art. This chapter will examine experimental institutionalism's engagements with capitalist-urbanism's most pressing racial dimensions such as neo-colonial spatial agendas (gentrification) and 'revanchist urbanism'. The aim of this chapter is to contend that the decolonising debates/praxis of experimental institutionalism could help to clarify and examine urban social aesthetic practice that responds to the racist, neo-colonial processes of capitalist-urbanism. Via on-site and off-site programming, 'expanded exhibitions' and long-term urban projects, experimental institutionalism appears to be increasingly interrogating the racist and

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[1] 'Decolonising' means departing from colonialist orientations (Papastergiadis 2020, 36).

[2] Grenfell Tower Fire was a severe blaze in a London residential tower block. At around 12.54am on June 14, 2017, an exploding fridge-freezer set fire to a flat on the fourth floor of Grenfell Tower in West London (Hodkinson 2019, 1). Grenfell Fire took the lives of seventy-two people (Apps 2017). It is believed that the Tower's nine million pound refurbishment in 2014–16 contributed to the devastating speed with which the blaze spread (Hodkinson 2019, 2). Non-combustible cladding, originally meant for the tower, was rejected in favour of a cheaper, combustible substitute to please the cost-cutting pressures of Conservative austerity policies (O'Neill and Karim 2017). Controversy has surrounded the refurbishment of the tower and its disregard for health and safety in favour of neoliberal cost-cutting agendas.

[3] As Saloni Mathur (2005, 705) highlights, colonialism also occurred in many non-Western contexts in places like Brazil and Southeast Asia. However, as I explained in the introduction, this thesis has a Western socio-geographic focus. This is because the debates/praxis repurposed in this thesis towards the examination of urban social aesthetics (Situationism and experimental institutionalism) have a Western/Eurocentric bias. I therefore contend that it would be critically inadequate to neatly transfer their ideas and theoretical frames onto non-Western contexts and examples. In this chapter, I repurpose experimental institutionalism, a field of art institutionality predominantly associated with institutions in the UK, Europe and North America, whose associated confederation L'Internationale is also exclusively European. As a result, in this chapter, I focus only on the neo-colonial aspects of Western urban sites.

neo-colonial aspects of capitalist urbanisation processes. Such critical, urban Marxist responses to racial inequality have arguably constituted part of experimental institutionalism's decolonising project and, more fundamentally, its ambition towards socially responsible art institutionality (or the 'museum 3.0').[4] I will contend in this chapter that these specific institutional practices and debates could lend to the analysis of urban social aesthetic practice, concerned with capitalist-urbanism's racially biased urgencies. Because both experimental institutionalism and urban social aesthetics dexterously interweave contemporary art, capitalist urbanisation, race and decoloniality, this chapter contends that the former could contribute much needed clarification and analysis to the latter.

Many art institutions and museums are engaged with decolonising debates and practices. Colonial histories and critical discussions of race are at the heart of much contemporary cultural institutionality—especially at present, in the aftermath of the international Black Lives Matter (BLM)[5] insurrections. However, in this chapter I am only concerned with the decolonising project of contemporary art institutions engaged in forms of 'experimental institutionality'. This is because experimental institutionalism's decolonising project possesses distinctly urban 1:1 scale elements. Despite the enormous significance that colonial histories and racism have within our contemporary urban moment, with the likes of post-9/11 and Brexit xenophobia, urban tragedies such as Grenfell Tower Fire and the recent BLM protests, there is a marked lack of art theory and language with which to examine racially centred, urban Marxist art practice. As a field of debate/praxis concerned with the radical undoing of colonial and racist narratives within the context of an 'urban-institutional interstice', experimental institutionalism arguably offers a qualified basis for examining said practice.

In this chapter, 'colonialism' and 'racism' may be discussed concurrently at times. These terms refer to two separate things—'racism' meaning discrimination on the grounds of race, and 'colonialism', the dispossessing, hegemonic domination of new

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[4] 'Museum 3.0' points to the ambition to connect artistic institutionality to the everyday social sphere (Hudson 2017). Experimental institutionality's decolonising project is seemingly part of this museum 3.0 incentive, as it connects the reformation of the art museum to dismantling everyday urbanism's racial inequalities.

[5] Following the murder of George Floyd in the US on May 25, 2020, many Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests arose in cities and towns across the world. Arguably, through these dramatic events, the neo-colonial and racist aspects of urban experience were intensely highlighted. Not only did the protests take place in urban areas, but they also centred on aspects of urban experience such as public monuments and statues. On June 7, 2020, protestors in Bristol brought down the statue of slave trader Edward Colston and eventually threw it in the Harbour. On July 15, 2020, a statue of a BLM protester (Jen Reid), made by the British artist Mark Quinn, replaced the Colston statue. However, twenty-four hours after Quinn's new statue was erected, the council removed it as they felt it was up to the people of Bristol to decide what would replace the Colston statue (BBC 2020).

geographies. However, within contemporary capitalist urbanisation processes, and thus, in the context of this chapter's discussion, these things arguably conflate in different and nuanced ways. For example, the racist attitudes of wealthy, white middle-class urbanites, city councils, town planners and developers, can often lead to contemporary colonial forms such as gentrification (Smith 1996; Atkinson and Bridge 2005; Danewid 2019). As Rowland Atkinson and Gary Bridge (2005, 2) propose, "contemporary gentrification has elements of colonialism as a cultural force in its privileging of whiteness." Also, 'revanchist urbanism' (a racially discriminating approach to urbanism) often leads to neo-colonial processes of racialised gentrification, dispossession and displacement (Smith 1996). Furthermore, as the recent BLM protests highlighted, urban monuments also constitute a significant nexus between racism and colonial histories in cities and towns (BBC 2020). This conflation of racism and colonialism will be revisited and further unpacked within this chapter's analyses.

Although Situationist debate is also presented in this thesis as another potential debate to repurpose towards an urban social aesthetic, it arguably fails to adequately address capitalism's racial dimensions—particularly in an urban context. Racial matters are missing in Situationist debate, as the group considered them 'micro-politics' (Stracey 2014c; Gibbons 2015). From the Situationists' perspective, specialised subjects of protest, such as anti-racism, were an altogether inconvenient distraction, "from a critique of the totality of the spectacle" (Stracey 2014a, 116). Arguably, this was an enormous theoretical omission, as ethnic and diasporic communities often constitute the 'surplus population' who experience issues of displacement, gentrification and class struggle, which are necessary to capitalist-urbanism's systemic survival (Danewid 2019). As a result, this chapter solely repurposes experimental institutionalism's decolonising project into a means with which to examine urban social aesthetic works. The underlying purview of this chapter's debate runs contrary to said Situationist positions. Indeed, the underlying perspective of this chapter is that capitalism possesses fundamentally racist and colonial foundations and, as a vital spatial extension of this economic order, urbanism does too.[6] The research will therefore commence with an overview of what has been referred to as 'racial capitalism'—an idea that reveals how capitalist production and its urban extensions cannot be separated from issues of race and colonialism. As Ida Danewid (2019, 3) argues, "the

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[6] Within its racially centred discussion, this chapter will naturally refer to a range of diasporic identities—'immigrants', 'refugees' and 'asylum seekers'. An 'immigrant' is a person who has made the conscious decision to leave their country of origin and settle long-term in a foreign country. An immigrant is someone who moves for permanent residency. 'Refugee' denotes a person who has been forced to flee their home because of war, violence or persecution. An 'asylum seeker' is a person who is also seeking international protection from dangers in their home country, but whose claim for refugee status has not yet been legally determined (International Rescue Committee 2018).

violence of neoliberal urbanism cannot be understood without a racial theory of capitalism." I will firstly interrogate the historical and ongoing racial dimensions of capitalist production and how this extends into the capitalist-urbanism matrix.

Racial Capitalism and its Urban Extensions

'Racial capitalism' is a post-Marxist field of scholarship that "highlights the centrality of race-making practices to political economy" (Danewid 2019, 5). This field of scholarship contends that, without racialisations, capitalist production ceases to function or even exist. This is because "capitalism relies upon the elaboration, reproduction and exploitation of racial difference: on the production of populations that are surplus, expendable and disposable" (Danewid 2019, 9). Racial discrimination provides the exploitable subjects from whom capitalism must extract land and labour (Melamed 2015, 77). In other terms, 'accumulation by dispossession' is integral to the survival of capitalism. People racialised as non-white often play the role of the dispossessed. From the perspective of racial capitalism, racism is approached, not only as racial discrimination, but also as a constituent logic of capital. Amongst its most prominent voices are Cedric Robinson (1983), Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007) and Robin D. G. Kelley (2015). These debates on racial capitalism have sought to reconcile traditional Marxism's failure to account for the racist foundations and aspects of capitalism. Traditional Marxism views racial violence as an anterior condition of capitalist accumulation. It reduces race relations to "the status of a reflex in class dynamics" (Leonardo 2004, 483). Race is considered secondary or epiphenomenal to capitalist production (Leonardo 2004; Spencer 2006; Mignolo 2007). Traditional Marxism suggests that racial urgencies are a 'mask' that serves to obscure the real relations of power in a society, which are class-based.

Fundamentally, the importance of ethnic difference is played down (Spencer 2006, 82). Walter Mignolo (2007, 483) has called this Marxism's "colonial fracture"—the failure of Marx's work to take up the colonial mechanism of power underlying capitalism. Mignolo (2007, 483) has highlighted that, "although 'against' capitalism (and indirectly empire), Marx also remains within the macro-imperial narrative because he misses the colonial mechanisms of power underlying the system he critiques." Thus, paradoxically, traditional Marxism assimilates the colonial narrative of the society from which it emerged and was situated historically. As Cedric Robinson (1983, 9) argued, Marxism "incorporated theoretical and ideological weaknesses which stemmed from the same social forces which provided the basis of capitalist formation." Lastly, in traditional Marxist approaches, colonialism is a "vital stage in the ultimate structural change that

societies must undergo to evolve towards socialism" (Spencer 2006, 82). As illustrated by the title of Robinson's seminal text *Black Marxism* (1983), the discursive emergence of racial capitalism served to reconcile traditional Marxism's theoretical omissions regarding race. Robinson's (1983) belief was that race, enslavement and colonialism have been central to the formulation and survival of capitalist production. He keenly challenged the common, yet inaccurate belief, that capitalist production neatly replaced its preceding political-economic models of feudalism and primitive accumulation (Robinson 1983). According to Robinson (1983, 9), "the creation of capitalism was much more than a matter of the displacement of feudal modes and relations of production by capitalist ones." For Robinson (1983, 10), capitalist production does not represent a total overthrow of the feudal and primitive accumulation stages of political economy because, quite simply, they constitute its ideological foundations. Feudalism and primitive accumulation's histories of racial exploitation and dispossession, as expressed by slavery and violent colonial expansion, ultimately informed capitalist production (Robinson 1983). Racial violence and conflict were not an *anterior* condition of capital accumulation, but rather, a *permanent* condition—one that intricately connects seemingly divergent phases of economic development and history. Capitalism not only emerged from the racial violence of its preceding economic forms, it *continues* this violence (Robinson 1983).

As a spatial extension of capitalist production, Western urbanism also continues the colonial histories and racist rhetoric of its preceding socio-economic models (Danewid 2019). Contemporary urban urgencies such as gentrification, for instance, have been conceptualised by Neil Smith (1996) as constituting new forms of racial segregation that have a close resemblance to the colonial imaginary of the 'frontier'—of white, middle-class 'settlers' colonising urban spaces occupied by ethnic and diasporic communities. Similarly, Atkinson and Bridge (2005, 16) have described gentrification as a "new urban colonialism." Danewid's (2019, 13) recent interrogation of racialised urbanism, however, makes the important observation that said debates suggest that gentrification merely *resembles* "previous forms of colonial and mercantile expansion" when, in truth, "it actually builds on distinctively colonial forms of urban housing policy and city planning." Danewid (2019, 13) also highlights that "modern forms of urban planning—including ideas of segregation, slum administration and urban renewal— were first experimented with in colonial cities before they were put to use in imperial metropoles." Arguably, as 'decolonising' increasingly takes centre stage in the programming and curation of experimental institutionalism (Papastergiadis 2020, 19), the racialised urgencies of urbanism also become a key focus in this field.

Decolonising Institutions, Decolonising Urbanism

It is my contention that experimental institutionality has placed 'decolonising' at the centre of its quest to forge a more ethical, socially responsible museum architecture (Papastergiadis 2020, 19; Byrne et al. 2018; Badovinac et al. 2018; L'Internationale 2015). Museum confederation L'Internationale (2015, 5) (a major site of experimental institutionality) has defined 'decolonising' as "understanding the situation museums are in, critically and openly, and identifying those moments that already indicate a different type of practice that overcomes or resists the colonial condition." In other words, from the purview of experimental institutionalism, decolonising is characterised as the dual process of acknowledging the museum's crucial role in colonial histories and highlighting openings for resisting neo-colonial conditions. The confederation has rejected the term 'post-colonial' as the current moment is not 'post' when it comes to art institutions, museum practice and colonialism (L'Internationale 2015, 5). L'Internationale (2015, 5) avoids the term 'post-colonial', as art institutions and museums are still saturated in colonial histories despite demonstrable attempts, particularly in our contemporary context, to resist and ultimately negate such positions. As a majority of the experimental institutionalist debates and practices highlighted in this chapter are aligned with L'Internationale, either through membership or post-Brexit 'partnership', the said definition can be understood as underlying this chapter's analysis. Although experimental institutionality seeks liberation from the orthodoxies of collecting and exhibition-making in cultural institutions, its decolonising debates and activities are, nevertheless, situated historically and theoretically, within the broad museological specialism of 'decoloniality'—that is, resisting and challenging the colonial histories that have saturated cultural institutions. Although this chapter is only concerned with the decolonising project of experimental institutionality, it is necessary, in providing sufficient context, to highlight the shift towards decoloniality taking place in many contemporary art institutions and museums at present.

Since their emergence as sites of enlightenment, education and progress, colonial and imperial histories have saturated many aspects of art institutions and museums. In the nineteenth century, for instance, cultural institutions were vital apparatus for imperial, colonial expansion and global domination—especially in Britain and France (Schubert 2016, 22). As Alexandra Sauvage (2010, 107) has described, "the presentation of a large section of humanity as 'primitive peoples' was absolutely essential to the definition of Western nations at the apex of human history." However, the racial violence, underlying some nineteenth century cultural institutions, was largely enacted through the unethical dispossession of non-Western nations via cultural looting. Many,

although *not all* cultural institutions today, based their initial collections on the cultural looting of Western colonies and wealthy donors who benefited from empires (Sauvage 2010; Shoenberger 2019). Objects poached from colonised peoples came into Western countries for display in the collections of ethnographic cultural institutions (Shoenberger 2019). For example, Irish physician and collector Sir Hans Sloane funded his collection (the foundation for the British Museum's ethnographic collection) with earnings from his wife's slave plantation in Jamaica (Shoenberger 2019). In a contemporary context, the ethical, moral and legal position of ethnographic collections and colonial-originating collections is being widely challenged and debated (Giblin, Ramos and Grout, 2019). Decolonisation is being increasingly recognised and treated as a crucial aspect of contemporary cultural institutional praxis.

As John Giblin, Imma Ramos and Nikki Grout (2019, 472) suggest, 'decolonising' can comprise many things—"from the sharing of collections via long term loans or repatriation to the challenging of curatorial, directorial, scientific, and other forms of established expertise, to empower previously excluded voices and generate conversation and debate." Experimental institutionalism's decolonising project is seemingly part of this wider shift in contemporary cultural institutionality. However, as this chapter's analyses aim to show, it is also quite unique, as it distinctively speaks to the racial urgencies of everyday urbanism. It is nevertheless important to note that not all cultural institutions obtained their collections through illicit means, as a result of colonial exploitation and dispossession—the situation is much more nuanced (Kingdon 2019). As Zachary Kingdon (2019), curator of African collections at National Museums Liverpool argues, collections of art institutions and museums were also occasionally obtained through legal, non-illicit means. Kingdon (2019, 4–5) argues that scholars have "underplayed the role of African agency as a prime factor in the make-up of museum collections of African artefacts." Kingdon's (2019) text, *Ethnographic Collecting and African Agency in Early Colonial West Africa* examines the flow of hundreds of objects from West Africa to Northwest England museums during the colonial era. Speaking of the 'flow' of some West African objects to English museums, Kingdon (2019, 1) contends that:

> "While this flow is seen to have been fundamentally the product of imperial infrastructures, ideas and processes, most of it cannot be understood as having the spoils of colonial conquest, nor can it be seen simply as the result of coercion, or unequal power relations."

According to Kingdon (2019, 1), records show that West African peoples contributed hundreds of artefacts as gifts to Liverpool's World Museum. Kingdon (2019) therefore aims to demonstrate in his text that some collections were formed as a result of

'African agency'—that is, they came from the active involvement of Western African individuals. Arguably, what distinguishes experimental institutionalism's decolonising project from the mass of other cultural, institutional decoloniality, is its 'museum 3.0' efforts to extend outside of institutional boundaries, connecting debate and practice to the everyday racial urgencies of capitalist urbanisation. I would contend that, in the context of experimental institutionalism, it is possible to configure 'decolonising institutions' and 'decolonising urbanism' as profoundly interconnected projects.

To focus only on decolonising the institution would be far too internally self-reflexive, and would contradict the very virtues of usership and social responsibility to which experimental institutionalism aspires (Aikens et al. 2016; Byrne et al. 2018; Hudson 2017). Experimental institutionalism's quest towards a museum 3.0 reconfigures the art institution as a civic centre—as an integral part of the urban public sphere, which is to be 'used' as a social resource (Aikens et al. 2016; Byrne et al. 2018; Hudson 2017). As Papastergiadis (2020, 9) suggests, such institutions aim to be "sites of social transformation." Therefore, in its fundamental quest to develop museums into socially responsible agents that serve their constituencies ('museum 3.0'), experimental institutionalism was arguably bound to engage with the racialised urgencies of urban sites. Expanding outside of the art museum's physical and ideological architectures surely leads to encountering the complex and problematic landscape of everyday urbanism of which racial inequalities comprise a large part. It is seemingly because of this that the decolonising projects of experimental institutionality have naturally responded to the racialised urgencies of their respective urban surrounds. If the decolonising project of these institutions was not concerned with the rich, socio-political situation of race 'outside'—within the urban social realm—this would seemingly lead to it being far too internally reflexive, which is the trap that new institutionalism of the 1990s fell into (Voorhies 2016, 31). With initiatives such as Tania Bruguera and Queens Museum's community-led organisation, *Immigrant Movement International* (2011–18) (*IMI Corona*)[7], Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art's (MIMA) immigrant,

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[7] *Immigrant Movement International (IMI Corona)* is a community space in Corona, Queens, which is a New York City borough heavily populated by immigrants (Wallis 2018, 222). With support from non-profit arts organisation Creative Time, IMI Corona was established in 2011 as a partnership between artist Tania Bruguera and the Queens Museum. The project was inspired by Bruguera's notion of Arte Útil ('Useful Art') and Queens Museums' (arguably experimental institutionalist) interest in addressing the pressing needs and potential of Corona's immigrant community (Queens 2011; Bruguera 2011). The space offers a free educational programme, health and legal services to immigrants (Queens 2011). Each week free workshops are hosted at the space including: nutrition, childcare, computer literacy, dance, construction safety, English language through art history and immigration law (Queens 2011). Recently (2018–19), IMI Corona transitioned into an independently run community centre called Centro Corona. There is, therefore, a linguistic difference that indicates the projects existence as an institutional valorisation and as a community-led site.

refugee and asylum seeker work[8] and the Serpentine Gallery's *Edgware Road* (2008–16), there is arguably no reason why the decolonising project of experimental institutionalism cannot contribute to the analysis of racially centred urban social aesthetic practice.

The biennial form, as another arguable form of experimental institutional activity, also appears to signify an interesting nexus between urban arts initiatives, colonial histories (evolving out of nineteenth century world's fairs) and decolonising institutional experiments. Not only are biennials arguably 'urban negotiations' of art institutional programming, reconciling the 'urban' with art institutionality, according to Oliver Marchart (2013, 2), they also "aid in constructing local, national and continental identities." Because of this, Marchart (2013, 2) explains, the biennial format "directly links up with that of the world's fair, which provided institutional backing for the internal national building of the colonial and industrial nations during the nineteenth century." World's fairs were large-scale international exhibitions that showcased the achievements of nations as an imperial chest-puffing exercise. As Marchart (2013, 2) describes, they were "colossal hegemonic machines of a globally dominant Western culture." However, Marchart (2013, 2–3) asserts that, even if world's fairs were a forerunner of the biennial format, biennials are no longer an instrument in which "former colonial nations of the West bask in the glamour of their own artistic production." Rather, Marchart (2013, 3) argues that biennials today are instrumental in 'decentralising the West'. On top of this, there has been an upsurge of biennials in the non-Western world—so-called 'peripheral biennials' held in Latin American and Asia. 'Decentralising the West', contemporary biennialisation cannot be understood as a mere (historically-undeveloped) replication of the colonial-affirming Worlds Fair exhibition ethos, nor just as an ideological reflex to globalisation (Marchart 2013, 3). As Marchart (2013, 3) suggests, contemporary biennialisation can be considered part of decolonising struggles. There is thus the possibility of decolonising art institutions through the contemporary biennial's purported 'decentralising' effect.

Contemporary art biennial Manifesta is pan-regional, occurring in a different location for each iteration and therefore further embodies this decentralising effect of biennials, which Marchart (2013, 3) believes makes them contributory to decolonising struggles. This decentralising effect of contemporary biennials could be connected to experimental institutionalism's ambition to establish art institutionality based on

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[8] MIMA has also recently produced a year long (2019–20) decolonial rehang of its collection. Through a collaboration with research group Black Artists and Modernism, MIMA has audited its collection for contributions by artists of African, Asian, Middle Eastern and North African descent in the UK from twentieth and twenty-first centuries (MIMA 2019).

"dispersion and connection" as opposed to models of "expansion and connection" (Byrne et al. 2018, 77). It could also be related to the L'Internationale confederation's seemingly decolonialist ambitions towards a "decentralised internationalism" (Papastergiadis 2020, 35). Nevertheless, as exemplified by Christoph Büchel's *Barca Nostra* (2019) at the fifty-eighth Venice Biennale, art biennials, much like art institutions and museums, are still struggling to shake-off the colonial histories associated with their dominant modes of display and practice. As L'Internationale (2015, 5) have inferred, contemporary cultural institutions are still nowhere near a 'post-colonial' phase—there is plenty of work to be done and progress to be made. However, as occasionally promising sites for urban-institutional experimentation, they can nevertheless offer examples of effective decolonising intervention. For example, the eleventh edition of Liverpool biennial *The Stomach and The Port* (2021), curated by Manuela Moscoso, excavated Liverpool's colonial histories as a port city—situating explorations of the body within Liverpool's maritime history as a point of global contact and circulation (Liverpool Biennial 2021).[9] Although not directly admitted, this focus on bodies and the urban role of a port presumably alludes to Liverpool's historical connections to the slave trade, empire and colonisation. Connecting the decolonising project of art institutionality with urban racial/colonial histories, the biennial is therefore another area of institutional experimentation that is invaluable to this chapter's analysis. Arguably, the same goes for other urban negotiations of institutional programming like public art programmes, which do not have the same colonial ties as biennials but offer an interesting nexus between urban socio-aesthetic activity, anti-racism and decolonising institutional experiments. The chapter will approach these 'urban negotiations' of institutional programming (biennials and public art programs) as additional forms of experimental institutional practice that may assist in examining the urban social aesthetic works addressed.

Racialised Spatial Urgencies

When examining contemporary art's racially centred urban Marxism, an appropriate point of departure is arguably urban space. In this opening section, I will discuss experimental institutionalist engagements with the racist/neo-colonial dimensions of urban space. I will suggest that these institutional engagements could contribute valuable analysis to urban social aesthetic works that counter the racist spatial relations of Western metropoles and the neo-colonial conquest of space. Scholarship on urban socio-spatial urgencies tends to focus on class struggle, completely overlooking their racial bias (Lees 2000, 400; Danewid 2019). However, scholars are

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[9] See Liverpool Biennial. 2021. "The Stomach and The Port." Accessed February 3, 2020. https://biennial.com/2020/exhibition.

increasingly highlighting the pertinence of racial and colonial narratives to urban spatial urgencies—in particular, gentrification (Smith 1992; Atkinson and Bridge 2005; Hwang 2015; Danewid 2019). In the UK, ethnic people are 75% more likely than white people to experience housing deprivation and one in three homeless people in the UK are people of colour (Gulliver 2016).[10]

Danewid's (2019) analysis of urban space's racial dimensions focuses on Grenfell Tower Fire as an example—a tragedy, which for many commentators, was formed by "neoliberal privatisation cuts, gentrification and deregulation." Danewid (2019, 2) crucially highlights that, although race was either "relatively absent or discussed in isolation from the supposedly more fundamental problem of widening class inequality under neoliberalism", a majority of the victims were London's racialised poor including Arab, Muslim, and European immigrants and refugees. The first victim to be identified in the Grenfell tragedy was a 23-year-old Syrian refugee who moved to Britain for a better life. This victim survived the Syrian revolution, ISIS bombings, and the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean, only to die three years later in the Grenfell Tower Fire (Danewid 2019, 12). Such dreadful facts arguably exemplify how perilous capitalist urbanisation processes can be for ethnic and diasporic groups—that even state-driven violence, can, in some extraordinary way, be less life threatening than the spatial urgencies of capitalist-urbanism in the West. In light of these facts, it could be contended that urban social aesthetic practice engaged with racialised spatial urgencies has enormous contemporary value. Vitally, experimental institutionalism's decolonising project could arguably assist in developing qualified analyses of this important, yet discounted art practice.

A key instance of experimental institutionality (preceding Grenfell Tower Fire) that sought to counter racialised gentrification processes, is arguably the Serpentine Gallery's *Edgware Road* project (2008–16) (Fig. 2.1). Curated by Sally Tallant, Janna Graham and Amal Khalaf, this was a multi-year programme of artist residencies, public events and research-led commissions that responded to the ongoing gentrification of Edgware Road in London. Whilst Edgware Road in London has a large community of immigrants and is viewed by some as a relatively run-down area, it is also, at the same time, a locus of extreme wealth—a longstanding home to some of the capital's wealthiest families (Graham 2017, 189; O'Neill and Doherty 2011, 202). At the time of this project, there were significant interests in 'lifting' the area amongst wealthier

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[10] These racialised urgencies of urban space are not unique to the UK. According to the *Urban Displacement Project*, the San Francisco Bay area in the US is revealing a new wave of racial segregation enforced through gentrification and displacement trends (Urban Displacement Project 2015).

residents and their tory representatives in the Westminster council.[11] These interests indicated a subtle, but clear, racist, xenophobic and neo-colonial rhetoric. Plans involved bringing immigrant businesses into line with the vision for the area, making cosmetic changes to store fronts that adhered to the affluent white culture and tastes of the area (Graham 2017; Edgware Road Partnership 2013). This arguably suggested a neo-colonial conquest of urban space. Westminster council also made seemingly racist complaints about the area's hygiene and the appearance and character of local businesses (Graham 2017, 35; Edgware Road Partnership 2013). There were significant complaints from the council regarding the area's 'cleansing and waste levels' (Graham 2017; Edgware Road Partnership 2013). Offsite from the Serpentine, a space called the *Centre For Possible Studies* was physically established on Edgware Road.

Fig. 2.1 Serpentine Gallery, *Edgware Road*, 2008–16, London.
Photo: © Anton Kats.

Locals described the studies done on them by the council and local developers, geared towards constructing the 'need' for gentrification (Graham et al. 2015, 5). The *Centre For Possible Studies* was therefore meant for discussing other possibilities for the area that could operate contrary to neoliberal urban agendas and instead fulfil the needs of immigrant residents. Working with these residents, the centre explored different possibilities for the area. For example, locals were invited on neighbourhood walks in which they would post statements regarding possible improvements that could be

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[11] The regeneration "priorities" of Edgware Road Partnership (2013) clearly reflect curator Janna Graham's (2017) observations. In the partnership's vision, begging is described as "anti-social behaviour", there are hygiene complaints, and intentions are revealed to 'rationalise' street signage (clearly referring to immigrant-owned businesses) (Edgware Road Partnership 2013).

made to neglected and underused places (The Edgware Road Project 2016). Locals also handed out questionnaires on the street to discover what other residents felt about Edgware Road and established an archive to record possibilities for the area (The Edgware Road Project 2016). Unfortunately, because of the project's affiliation with the Serpentine (a well-established art institution), developers and local Politicians assumed that it was siding with the official plans (Graham 2017, 35). Members of the project and its collaborating artists were invited to clandestine meetings, held by local governments and developers, to discuss "the cleansing of the area of 'undesirable' entities including beggars, sex workers, 'Kurdish youth gangs' and business owners who used Arabic signage, all of whom were described using a variety of blatantly racist vocabulary" (Graham 2017, 35). As Graham (2017, 39) has described, one government official claimed that the *Edgware Road* project was to bring "a strong curatorial vision for the neighbourhood." Bringing a 'curatorial vision' meant that curators were to sustain an appearance of engagement whilst simultaneously keeping the area's most disadvantaged residents from establishing a genuine role in the process (Graham 2017, 39). This particular demand of the council for a 'curatorial vision' was arguably more 'colonial' than 'racist', however, as it assumed the art institution's position as a model of colonisation and expansion—as a means to help wealthy white residents conquest space over London's racialised poor.

Despite its efforts to resist racially-biased gentrification processes, the *Edgware Road* project eventually lost the support of developers and politicians when it became clear it was not on board with the official plans and was attempting to be an ally for Edgware's immigrants (Graham 2017, 37). The project's curators and collaborators no longer got invited to the meetings held by developers and local politicians, and ultimately, their funding was taken away (Graham 2017, 37). The project's curators were later ordered by their superiors at the Serpentine to develop new programmes—"not a direct set of conflicts but a revelation of the art world's quieter mechanisms" (Graham 2017, 37). Just because this project possessed experimental institutionalist ambitions to act as a genuine ally in struggles against raced gentrification, this did not mean that urban governance understood or felt obliged to facilitate this commendable ethos. From the perspective of urban hegemony, community-serving art initiatives seem trivial. Arguably, the forces of capitalist-urbanism are intent on fulfilling their own profit-driven interests, even if this means engaging with racist, neo-colonial conditions.

The *Edgware Road* project was not only co-opted by Westminster council's racialised gentrification process (*Edgware Road Partnership*), but also London's prestigious Serpentine Gallery who funded the project (Graham et al., 2016, 7). A "prime example"

of "the neoliberalisation of cultural institutions", the Serpentine Gallery was, for project curator Janna Graham (2016, 8), emblematic of what she calls the 'diplomatic condition' of the arts in urban neighbourhoods in which arts organisations act as release valves, massaging and assuaging conflicts and claiming positions of neutrality while actively participating in neighbourhood redevelopments. Unfortunately, this 'diplomatic condition' was demonstrated by the *Edgware* project. Relying on funding from the Serpentine led to the project neutralising "the sensible and interrelational aspects of the development process, while masking its violent apparatus" (Graham 2017, 37). Because funding was coming from the Serpentine, this meant that some artists were selected for the project by Serpentine staffs that were 'outsiders' to the project and its correspondent community. Whilst curators like Graham were initially able to select artists who truly wanted to be allies in the gentrification struggles, the artists selected by institutional actors at the Serpentine clearly sought to fulfil their artworks rather than offer genuine solidarity (Graham et al., 2016, 7). This project is therefore a crucial example of how funding and sponsorship still offers demonstrable openings towards co-optation and remains an ongoing issue in experimental institutionality and its engagements with urban neighbourhood redevelopments.

Fig. 2.2 Jeanne Van Heeswijk, *Freehouse*, 2008–Ongoing.
Afrikaanderwijk, Rotterdam. Photo: © Jeanne Van Heeswijk.

Although *Edgware* may have failed to resist co-optation and bureaucratic capture, it still arguably represents a rich repository of ideas, which could inform an analysis of urban social aesthetic practice engaged with racialised spatial urgencies. First of all, the *Edgware Road* project was arguably an interesting example of what Jesús Carrillo's

(2018) experimental institutionalist idea of 'conspiratory institutions'. Former head of cultural programmes at Museo Reina Sofia, Carrillo (2018, 280–83), suggests that institutions should act as 'double agents', taking advantage of the fact that councils and urban governance may believe them to be on their side. This allows their radical actions to remain 'undetected' and enables them to 'plot' and 'conspire' with urban communities for whom they wish to be allies. *Edgware Road* was an arguable example of conspiratorial institutionality because, even at the risk of losing the support and funding of both urban and cultural institutions, its curators stood by locals, informing them of the plans disclosed in council meetings and using funds to support immigrants whose situations were made worse by displacement threats and border control.

Carrillo's (2018) experimental institutionalist idea of 'conspiring' with diasporic urban communities, demonstrated in *Edgware Road*, is potentially helpful in elucidating the strategies present in Jeanne Van Heeswijk's anti-gentrification project *Freehouse* (2008–Ongoing) (Fig. 2.2). This project 'conspired' with an immigrant community in Rotterdam, who were threatened with displacement, by operating within the cracks of urban revitalisation's metanarratives (Aikens et al. 2016, 298). Instead of protesting against the process, *Freehouse* was 'making-do' with the existing circumstances, conspiring with immigrant locals to locate openings or rather 'cracks' in the process from which they could benefit economically (Aikens et al. 2016, 298). This could also be described as 'minor urbanism'—urban activism and critical approaches (like experimental institutionalism) that occur within hegemonic institutions (Sandström 2019). Núria Güell's *Too Much Melanin* (2013), which took shape via Gothenburg International Biennial of Contemporary Art (GIBCA),[12] also conspired with immigrant communities to prevent displacement. *Too Much Melanin* saw Gothenburg Biennial and Güell enabling an immigrant to hide within an art project so that they would no longer have to hide in their everyday life. It could therefore be contended that *Too Much Melanin* was an example of what can be achieved via biennial programming—an 'urban negotiation of art institutional programming', which is today 'decentralising' the colonial rhetoric of its precursory world's fairs histories (Marchart 2013). However, unlike these experimental institutionalist examples, *Freehouse* forged concrete actions to prevent the displacement of urban diasporic communities. This project responded to the raced gentrification processes taking place in Afrikaanderwijk, Rotterdam.

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[12] Núria Güell's 'conspiratory' immigrant project was part of the seventh edition of GIBCA (2013) whose title was *PLAY! Recapturing the Radical Imagination* (GIBCA 2013). This edition of Gothenburg biennial was curated by Katerina Gregos and Ragnar Kjartansson in collaboration with Andjeas Ejiksson, Claire Tancons and Joanna Warsza.

A traditionally working-class district in the south of Rotterdam, Afrikaanderwijk is one of the first neighbourhoods in the Netherlands to have a majority of residents with an international background. Primarily comprised of Turks, Moroccans, Surinamese and Antilleans, 85% of Afrikaanderwijk residents are of a non-Dutch origin (Aikens et al. 2016, 298). In the 1970s and 1980s, the neighbourhood was the site of heated racial tensions between Dutch natives and so-called 'foreigners'. Tensions resulted in race riots and xenophobic confrontations from Dutch residents, in which they broke into immigrant-boarded houses, forcibly removing inhabitants and their belongings (Bell-Yank 2015, 144). Around the time of Van Heeswijk's collaboration with the neighbourhood, a significant 'revitalisation' was being planned by the City, which threatened to displace the immigrant community with the introduction of middle-class accommodation and raised living costs (Van Heeswijk 2019). The aim of *Freehouse* has therefore been to resist the racially biased gentrification of the area, establishing ways in which working-class immigrant residents can share the economic benefit of the planned 'revitalisation' (Aikens et al. 2016, 298). The project has initiated a number of communal, cooperative workspaces, creating skills-based jobs that enable immigrant residents to not only survive and overcome the revitalisation, but more vitally, economically thrive from the changes. The communal working spaces established by *Freehouse* include a kitchen, textiles workshop, neighbourhood store and meeting space (Aikens et al. 2016, 300–309). More importantly, the project has breathed new life into the area's treasured Afrikaandermarkt—a rich cultural, economic hub for immigrant residents. Van Heeswijk tapped into the already existing skills in the area. Therefore, she was not colonising through her practice, but rather, building upon the values and radicality already existing in an urban neighbourhood (Van Heeswijk 2019). The artist and Afrikaanderwijk Co-op went door-to-door to research and identify unrecognised skills and capabilities existing in the area and then started to facilitate opportunities to sell goods and showcase talent on the local market (Van Heeswijk 2019). Van Heeswijk's role has simply been to highlight and supplement the already existing potentials for urban agency that immigrant locals possess—to simply *release* and *activate* it.

Arguably, integral to the urban colonial processes[13] of racialised gentrification and displacement is a total indifference to the interests of ethnic and diasporic

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[13] As previously described, racialised gentrification and displacement can be viewed as contemporary colonial forms. Scholars such as Smith (1996), Atkinson and Smith (2005) and Danewid (2019) consider gentrification and displacement 'neo-colonial' because they often constitute new forms of racial segregation. Often poor, racialised communities can be displaced by wealthy middle-class whites that decide to 'conquest' space for residential or commercial reasons. The above scholars describe the frequent situation of white-middle class 'settlers' colonising urban spaces occupied by racialised poor/ethnic/diasporic communities.

communities. However, in the case of *Edgware Road*, resistance to racially biased gentrification processes highlighted and honoured the desires of said communities. Institutional experiments such as this have sought to involve ethnic/diasporic communities in the meta-narratives of urban planning, development and regeneration. *Edgware Road*, for instance, undertook 'possible studies' in which residents outlined their desires for the area making maps inclusive of their international native languages and promoting their cultures through the immigrant-owned businesses in the area (The Edgware Road Project 2016). This idea was also presented in *Freehouse*, as the project aimed to include immigrant residents in the ongoing revitalisation in a significant way, creating workspaces for them where they could celebrate and benefit from their already existing skills and passions (Van Heeswijk 2019). *Edgware Road* also appeared to indicate that an embedded, durational approach is required when resisting the neo-colonial processes of gentrification. Embedded, durational approaches curtail the risk of 'parachuting in'—of outsider, cultural agents coming into communities in an act of ostensible colonial superiority. This durational quality also enables cultural agents to be active *co-conspirators* (as mentioned above), as significant time is required to develop genuine relationships with the urban communities whose spatial urgencies are being resisted.

The experimental institutionalist idea of 'usership' is also potentially helpful in analysing urban social aesthetic approaches to racially biased spatial urgencies. Reflecting experimental institutionalism's rhetoric on 'use' and 'usership', *Freehouse* responded to the immediate needs of Afrikaanderwijk—the crucial need for a source of economic sustenance for immigrant residents within their developing urban economy. Curated by Alistair Hudson, Elinor Morgan, and Miguel Amado, MIMA's *If All Relations Were to Reach Equilibrium, Then This Building Would Dissolve* (2016), exemplifies how experimental institutionality combines its grand usership debate with concern for racially biased, urban spatial struggles.[14] This exhibition specifically responded to Middlesbrough's 'red door' scandal—an incident in which the doors of asylum seeker and refugee properties were marked in red paint (MIMA 2016). MIMA's exhibition provided a variety of free resources that responded to the immediate needs of said communities who were in the throws of racially biased housing struggles and displacement threats. Resources included a suite of computers with Internet access, a food bank, workshops and ESOL courses (MIMA 2016). By promoting anti-racist, 'useful art', which was responsive to the immediate needs of ethnic/diasporic communities, experimental institutionalism's approach to racialised gentrification and

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[14] See MIMA. 2016. "If all Relations Were to Reach Equilibrium, Then This Building Would Dissolve." Accessed December 9, 2020. https://visitmima.com/whats-on/single/if-all-relationships-were-to-reach-equilibrium-then-this-building-would-dissolve/.

displacement processes has arguably avoided 'aestheticising the plight' of immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees. In the urban context, traditional visual aesthetics have a very troubled relationship with ethnic minority/diasporic communities. A key catalyst in the Grenfell disaster was the 'aesthetic beautification' of the tower to support the vision of Kensington and Chelsea borough council and wealthy white residents (Architects for Social Housing 2017). As previously mentioned, this was also the case during the gentrification of Edgware Road (Graham 2017; Graham et al. 2015). As urban social aesthetics embraces the experimental institutionalist notion of 'use', it similarly counters the racist qualities of urban 'aestheticisation', which is often used as a means of displacing ethnic and diasporic communities.

Project Row Houses (1993–Ongoing), an initiative of artist, Rick Lowe, centres on the experimental institutionalist values of 'use' and 'usership' in its anti-colonial approach to raced regeneration urgencies.[15] This socially engaged art project, centred in a predominantly African-American neighbourhood, comprises five city blocks devoted to a variety of community-enriching initiatives, art programs and neighbourhood development activities (Project Row Houses 1998). In the 1990s, the artist purchased a row of abandoned houses in Houston, Texas' Northern third Ward district,[16] a low income African-American neighbourhood that was planned for gentrification. Lowe's project has restored the homes and community, offering low-income housing and cultural services. Much akin to experimental institutionalist approaches, *Project Row Houses* honours the cultural heritage of its ethnic community. Giving representation and visibility to the vibrant culture and heritage of a black community, *Project Row Houses* could be theoretically situated within institutional experiments such as *The Reno* (2019–20) at Manchester Whitworth.[17] Curated by Manchester playwright Linda Brogan, *The Reno* was an exhibition and socially engaged art project that centred on the culture and heritage of Manchester's mixed race community. For a year, a group of local residents who went to the Reno nightclub in Moss Side, Manchester, in the 1970s and 1980s, have occupied a space in the Whitworth. Initially using the space to reconnect socialise, and collaborate, the group eventually set-up their own exhibition of photographs and artifacts from the club's heyday. Born out of racial segregation in

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[15] See Project Row Houses. 1998. "Project Row Houses." January 8, 2020. https://projectrowhouses.org.

[16] Houston, Texas' 'Third Ward' is one the city's oldest African-American Neighborhoods. In the 1830s, Texas was divided into four wards. The Southeast of the city became the 'third ward' and, over time, has become an important hub of black culture. In recent years, there have been significant attempts to gentrify the area (Black Past 2019). However, via projects like *Project Row Housing* (1993–Ongoing), residents and community leaders have begun an effort to preserve, protect and celebrate the area's heritage

[17] See Whitworth. 2019. "The Reno at the Whitworth." Accessed January 10, 2020. https://www.whitworth.manchester.ac.uk/whats-on/exhibitions/upcomingexhibitions/therenoatthewhitworth/.

Manchester, the Reno was a space for young, mixed race Mancunians, which was demolished in 1987. The occupation of institutional space in this project and the presentation of Reno experiences, artifacts and stories, arguably resembled a symbolic reclamation of the culture and heritage demolished in the late eighties.

Like *The Reno* project*, Project Row Houses* addressed the issue of reclaiming the cultures and traditions that racialised gentrification and displacement processes frequently censor and ultimately erase. Often gentrification and displacement is about adhering to the aesthetics and culture of white middle-class communities (often referred to as 'white washing') (Atkinson and Bridge 2005, 2). As Atkinson and Bridge (2005, 2) claim, not only are contemporary "middle-class gentrifiers predominantly white but the aesthetic and cultural aspects of the process assert a white Anglo appropriation of urban space and urban history." *The Reno* and *Project Row Houses* are arguably countering this white Anglo appropriation of urban space with their strong upholding of black and mixed race cultural traditions—most vitally those that have emerged from and belong to specific urban neighbourhoods. The programmers of these projects, Linda Brogan (a black playwright from Manchester who attended the Reno club as a teenager) and Rick Lowe (an African-American artist from Houston, TX), came from, or nearby, the neighbourhoods whose culture and traditions they are trying to reclaim. Because they were coming from positions of embodied, situated knowledge, such artists were ideal facilitators of reinstating the values, culture and traditions of their projects' respective neighbourhoods. This is not to say, however, that artist 'outsiders' like Van Heeswijk in the *Freehouse* project cannot be effective as well when they, like her, embed themselves successfully in racialised/diasporic urban communities, taking time to *listen* and forge genuine solidarity.

Subjectivisation

Racial discrimination in urban spaces may also be challenged by 'subjectivisation'. Arguably, integral to experimental institutionalism's decolonising activities has been the creation of openings for immigrant, refugee and asylum seeker communities to enter empowering processes of subjectivisation. In fact, 'decolonisation' has been defined by cultural agents at MACBA as "a collective process of subjectivisation" (Close and Marín Cisneros 2018, 61). It would therefore appear that subjectivisation is a constituent action within experimental institutionality's ongoing decolonising project. The L'Internationale confederation of museums (Badovinac et al. 2018, 48) describes subjectivisation as a "process in which an individual affirms or chooses his or her role in society." In other words, subjectivisation is a socio-politically situated approach to

self-representation. In the context of capitalist urbanisation processes, said communities are often not offered a multiplicity of meanings—rather, they are unwillingly marked as 'dangerous' and 'to be displaced' (Smith 1996). In recent experimental institutionality, racist metanarratives within Western metropoles have been curtailed by promoting a multiplicity of diasporic subjectivities. Through its various activities centred on the horizontal, personal perspectives of London's diaspora, the Serpentine Gallery's *Edgware Road* enabled local immigrants to renounce the racist, essentialist stereotypes thrust onto them by gentrifying councils and white middle-class neighbours. The *Edgware Road* project produced a multi-channel platform for positive subjectivisation processes to occur. *Edgware Road* was arguably a platform for the self-representation of immigrants individually and collectively as a diasporic community of different races and cultures. The self-representation of immigrants in this project, however, appeared to be intricately connected to its site in Northwest London. In other words, the refusal of racist, essentialist pseudo-truths was connected to the subjectivising process of immigrants highlighting their desires for the area. The *Centre for Possible Studies* engaged with the subjectivisation of individual immigrants, as well as the collective, place-centred subjectivisation of the diaspora.

Produced in collaboration with the *New Mappings of Europe* project, MIMA's *Human Library* (2018) event, on the other hand, offered Middlesbrough diasporic community the ability to represent themselves in their own terms, challenging stereotypes and prejudices through dialogue (MIMA 2018b).[18] Immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers living in Middlesbrough were invited to share their stories and perspectives, discussing with locals and each other, their journeys, diasporic experiences and family histories (MIMA 2018b). Local participants were asked to bring objects into the institution to assist in telling these stories and to drive conversations. By focusing on discursive activity, rather than exhibition or displays, MIMA was able to create openings for subjectivisation processes to occur. Arguably, in the context of these institutional experiments, subjectivisation is not only a process in which the diasporic subject of Western urbanism "affirms or chooses his or her role in society" (Badovinac et al. 2018, 48). It also becomes a process in which they acquire the agency to make demands for their urban living conditions and to imagine urban futures. However, these subjectivisation projects do not paternalistically suggest liberating or emancipating their participating publics. Instead, these projects commence a vital and useful process in which diasporic subjects may define themselves in their own terms within an urban social sphere that lacks pluralistic perspectives on diasporic individuals and

[18] See MIMA. 2018b. "We Are All Migrants – Human Library." Accessed January 13, 2020. https://visitmima.com/whats-on/single/we-are-all-migrants-be-part-of-our-human-library/.

communities. Although institutional art spaces provided the context/site of representation in said projects, the collaborative/co-authored nature of these projects arguably meant that diasporic individuals still possessed fair agency in representing themselves. Whilst such spaces are by no means totally neutral frames, in said examples, they have provided vital and otherwise scare opportunities for diasporic subjects to self-represent in conflictual urban contexts.

These experimental institutionalist examples of urban diasporic subjectivisation arguably assist in examining urban social aesthetic works such as Krzysztof Wodiczko's *Alien Staff* (1992–93) (Fig. 2.3). *Alien Staff* was a portable means of public address equipment, as well as a performance/intervention on streets across the US and Europe. It was a storytelling tool for immigrants, which was supposed to help initiate dialogues with others and facilitate positive subjectivisation processes. Individual immigrants were given a staff-like instrument, with a small screen at the top, which played a pre-recorded video of them telling their story. Arguably, like *Edgware Road* and MIMA's subjectivisation projects, *Alien Staff* was about facilitating the positive socio-political self-representation of individual immigrants. It is well known that staffs/sticks convey authority in many cultures. It could therefore be contended that their inclusion in this project symbolised immigrants acquiring agency—radically undoing the unidirectional narratives of xenophobic urbanism with active self-production. Immigrants holding a staff signalled their acquisition of a 'voice'—of an agency to tell their story on their own terms. The immigrants in the project appeared to gain a 'double presence', as they were presented both in media form (on screen), and in real life (via the person holding the staff). This double presence was arguably symbolic of how we accept narratives of immigrants presented in media, rather than actively listening to their stories—their positive attempts of subjectivisation. However, it also enabled for personal accounts to be told and supplemented by the immigrant holding the staff, enhancing the subjectivisation processes taking place.

Laurence Payot's project *Angels* (2018) (Fig. 2.4) is a similar attempt to offer refugees and asylum seekers self-representation.[19] In this project, a mobile video booth on wheels has travelled around UK streets, inviting refugees and asylum seekers to engage in conversations about their struggles and hopes for the future (Payot 2018). These videos, once recorded, are projected onto walls of UK cities. Payot's video portraits aim to offer refugees and asylum seekers a platform to change perceptions and to share their hopes, aspirations and inspirational stories of resilience.

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[19] See Payot, Laurence. 2018. "Angels." *Accessed* January 13, 2020. http://www.laurencepayot.com/2018/11/angels-from-the-seas/.

Fig. 2.3 Krzysztof Wodiczko, *Alien Staff*. 1992–93. Various Sites.
Photo: © Krzysztof Wodiczko, Courtesy of Galerie Lelong & Co., New York.

Fig. 2.4 Laurence Payot, *Angels*, 2018–Ongoing. Various Sites.
Photo: © Robert Battersby.

Highlighting the resilience of the urban diaspora, this project ostensibly counters racist and xenophobic attitudes exacerbated by "post-Brexit" urbanism. The artist held collaborative workshops within which the participating asylum seekers and refugees could plan what they would say in the video projections (Payot 2018). A translator was on hand to ensure that participants could say everything they wanted to in the most

authentic way (Payot 2018). As in the experimental institutional examples addressed above, Payot and Wodiczko's projects arguably enabled diasporic subjects to self-represent socio-politically in an often-depreciating urban milieu. Much like *Edgware Road* and MIMA's subjectivisation activities, these urban social aesthetic projects embrace oral communication over the written account. The use of oral storytelling rejects the colonial practice of writing. Historically, writing helped create a sense of real or 'truth' as an ideological prop for imperial power (Rojinsky 1998, 63). Spoken-word, however, invokes the vibrant oral folk cultures of pre-colonial societies. As Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (2013, 136) clearly describe, "the dominance of writing in perpetuating European cultural assumptions and Eurocentric notions of civilisation, as well as the view of writing as the vehicle of authority and truth, led to an undervaluing of oral culture." This seemingly extends into an urban context too, as media and Internet narratives that are racist and xenophobic often influence the attitudes embedded within Western urbanism. By favouring oral communication, the said institutional experiments and urban social aesthetic projects highlight, criticise and arguably, *decolonise*, the written account's historical status as a false purveyor of 'truth'. I would suggest that facilitating oral accounts from diasporic communities challenges the false and condemning narratives that proliferate Western cities.

Radical Urban Pedagogy

I would contend that the decolonising project of experimental institutionalism has demonstrated a movement towards 'radical pedagogy'—pedagogical activities that also possess activist responses to the racist and neo-colonial processes of capitalist urbanisation. The examples of radical pedagogy discussed could be understood as decolonising knowledge production and exchange in art institutions via public art programming and 1:1 scale projects. Curator Janna Graham (quoted in Graham et al. 2005, 3), who is an advocate of 'radical pedagogy' in art and its institutions, claims that it is distinct from what has been called the 'educational turn' within contemporary art. As Janna Graham, Valeria Graziana and Susan Kelly (2016, 29) describe, around 2006, the art world developed a prolonged fascination with pedagogy and education. For Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson (2010, 12) this 'educational turn' in contemporary art is marked by a shift in art practice and curation towards educational models. Although it may have similar influences as in the 'radical education' histories and practices of Paulo Freire, John Dewey and Henry Giroux, the radical pedagogy of experimental institutionalism is arguably distinct to this educational turn in contemporary art because as Janna Graham (2015, 2) describes, it aims "to negotiate the hierarchal and author-orientated paradigms of the arts in relation to the interests of communities in struggle."

Arguably, as the examples discussed below demonstrate, experimental institutionalism's 'radical pedagogy' takes 'radical education' histories and practices and *activates* them through urban 1:1 scale programming and projects.

Jorge Ribalta (2008, 23), former head of programmes at Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), describes "a pedagogical method based on the assumption that learning is derived from immediate needs and takes place in a context of direct confrontation with real problems and protests." In other words, radical pedagogy infers projects in which cultural agents act as facilitators of social change as well as educators. By giving pedagogy political intent and making it serve the needs of struggling communities, radical pedagogy arguably problematises the colonial operations of traditional art museum education. What seemingly occurs is a *decolonisation* of knowledge transfer as a hegemonic process, both within the context of the art institution and the broader colonial urban landscape. Pedagogy is integral to the colonial histories of cultural institutions—their role as a site for education was central to its colonial claims of 'civilising' and 'elevating' (Kraft 2018). Pedagogy was also a tool used in imperial, colonial expansion (Kraft 2018, 2). Sarah Kraft (2018, 2) has spoken of the "conviction that the West was called to dominate non-Western countries as it had a duty to enlighten, educate and advance them." This so-called 'civilising mission', was often called 'the white man's burden', as the West felt their responsibility to share its social progress with non-Western nations rested upon their shoulders (Kraft 2018, 2). 'Empire' was disconcertingly justified as necessary *guardianship*. With its socio-political gravitas and intent to serve ethnic/diasporic communities, the radical pedagogy of experimental institutionalism arguably resists the colonial histories of museum education.

Paulo Freire's ideas around racial pedagogy supplement this idea and were likely a key inspiration for such urban-institutional pedagogy.[20] Freire was a Brazilian educational theorist. Considered one of the foundational pieces of literature on critical pedagogy, his text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* originally published in 1968, argued that students should be co-creators of knowledge and not passive recipients. In this Marxist, anti-colonial critique of pedagogy, Freire (1968/2017) argues that traditional educational

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[20] Freire's critical pedagogy appears to be a source of great influence within experimental institutionality—particularly its urban decolonising projects. Moderna Galerija's *Radical Education* (2006–14) project, for example, initiated by Bojana Piškur and Marjetica Potrc, was influenced by Freire's ideas (Železnik 2012, 36; Vilensky, 2007). Also Curator Janna Graham who curated the Serpentine's Gallery's *Edgware Road* project (2008–16) with Sally Tallant and Amal Khalaf admits that her work is largely influenced by Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Graham et al. 2015). In an interview for Frieze magazine, Tania Bruguera, initiator of Immigrant Movement International, has also described Freire's progressive pedagogical approach as an influence (Quoted in Noble 2012).

models implicitly reproduce colonial paternalisation of oppressed groups. Freire (1968/2017) suggests that a critical pedagogy, which is cooperatively produced with its students, can challenge oppressive conditions and create openings for agency. Freire's (1968/2017, 22) 'pedagogy of the oppressed' described a "a pedagogy, which must be forged *with* not *for*, the oppressed in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity." For Freire, "no pedagogy, which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as misfortunates" (Freire 1968/2017, 28). Inspired by Freire's progressive Marxist and anti-colonial approaches to education, it can be contended that the 'radical pedagogy' of experimental institutionality is not colonising, coming into urban communities to *show* and *tell,* or even worse, to *civilise* or *elevate*. Rather, it aims to *think* and *act with* communities within the immediate context of their distinct social struggles. Within this formulation, cultural agents of institutional experiments have seemingly aimed to be co-conspirators, educating in ways that are intertwined with the immediate urgencies of the racist urban landscape.

A stand out example of an urgent pedagogy in experimental institutionalist practice is arguably Tania Bruguera's *Immigrant Movement International* (*IMI Corona*) (2011–18)[21]—a community-led organisation that provided free education and support to the immigrant community of Corona, Queens.[22] It would be incorrect to define this project as a being principally pedagogical—as a project that was wholly centred on artistic pedagogy in the urban realm. This, of course, was not the case, as *IMI Corona* was also a community hub—a space where urgent services were offered to immigrants (health and legal). In recent years (2018–19), it has evolved into an independently run community centre. Nevertheless, in its institutional valorisation as *IMI Corona*, the project possessed a heavily pedagogical aspect. This was exemplified by its comprehensive education programme, which offered many courses and workshops for the immigrant residents of Corona to attend (Queens 2011; Kershaw 2015; Raicovich and Reddy 2016, 5). According to Prerana Reddy (2016), former director of public events at Queens, "the most locally relevant of all the activities that was happening at IMI was its functioning as a site for individual education…because a lot of the people who were utilising the space didn't have formal education." Former director of Queens, Laura Raicovich (2016), adds that *IMI Corona* was, for the most part, "a site of learning through the many workshops held at the space." *IMI Corona* arguably challenged the view that the pedagogy of art institutions is exclusively connected to art. The project

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[21] *IMI Corona* was the project's title as an expanded urban-institutional project initiated by Tania Bruguera and Queens Museum. The project, now existing as a community-led organisation, is called *Centro Corona*. I am referring to the 'institutional' phase of the project here.
[22] See Bruguera, Tania. 2011. "Immigrant Movement International." Accessed: January 17, 2020. http://immigrant-movement.us/wordpress/about/.

seemed to redirect convictions about art institution education having nothing to do with political agendas. Consequently, a real synergy between art institution pedagogy and urban social activism seemed to be formulated at *IMI Corona*—that is, during its existence as an institutional valorisation with urban 1:1 scale elements.

IMI Corona was an example of 'radical pedagogy', as it provided a pedagogy, which was rooted in the immediate needs of urban immigrant life—language classes, jobs and legal help. Queens Museum enabled Bruguera, as the project's initiating artist, to live in the same conditions as the immigrant individuals for whom she was caring, supporting, and learning (Dolnik 2011).[23] Not only did this arguably prevent the project's pedagogy from being colonial-reaffirming and paternalistic, it also meant that Bruguera could get a real sense of what urgencies she needed to focus on (Dolnik 2011). Living vulnerably amongst immigrants, and in the very same conditions, she stepped into their shoes, developing a genuine understanding of their everyday struggles and precarity within urban sites. Bruguera's vulnerability in the project became an opening towards understanding what knowledge is essential to the immigrant community of Corona and how it could be best transferred (Dolnik 2011). It could therefore be contended that Bruguera was an active co-conspirator, locating legal loopholes that could benefit the project's immigrant users. Bruguera and Queens Museum therefore operated as *co-conspirators* as well as *educators*.[24]

I would contend that arguable urban social aesthetic projects like *Talking Hands*[25] could be theoretically situated within this experimental institutionalist approach to 'radical pedagogy'. Initiated by artist, designer and activist, Fabrizio Urettini, the *Talking Hands* project helps refugees and asylum seekers living in the Italian city of Treviso to develop their already existing handicraft skills and talents in order to find employment and a stable income in an increasingly xenophobic landscape (Bizzarri 2017). In addition to offering a dedicated space for refugees and asylum seekers to create and

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[23] In an interview with Sam Dolnik (2011), it is said that Bruguera was "sharing a tiny apartment in Corona, Queens, with five illegal immigrants and six children, including a newborn, while scrapping by on the minimum wage without health insurance" (Dolnik 2011).

[24] Another of Bruguera's acclaimed projects—*Association of Arte Útil*, also appears to be a site for 'urgent pedagogy'. Its ancillary project, *Broadcasting the Archive* (2015–16), initiated by curators Gemma Medina and Alessandra Saviotti, also explores the progressive interstice between museum education and anti-racist urban activism. Through pedagogical activities, this project explores how entries from Bruguera's *Arte Útil* archive could be 'activated' in everyday life (Saviotti and Medina 2018). In 2015, the project had a residency in St. Louis, Missouri, where archive entries were taught that could help overcome the city's racially centred gentrification. However, this project is a less explicit example of 'radical (urban) pedagogy', as (unlike *IMI Corona*) it is not embedded in specific communities; its curator-pedagogues share temporal relationships with their learner-participants.

[25] See Urettini, Fabrizio. 2016. "Talking Hands." Accessed January 17, 2020. https://talking-hands.it/en/partecipants/.

sell furniture, clothes and embroidery, artists and designers such as the project's initiator, Fabrizio Urettini, have also offered them professional training and basic literacy education (Bizzarri 2017). Therefore, again like *IMI Corona*, *Talking Hands* was not primarily pedagogical, but this was, at the same time, a major aspect. The pedagogy present in *Talking Hands*, however, appears to simply supplement and facilitate the employment and income opportunities the project offers. *Talking Hands* does not train Treviso's refugees and asylum seekers in order to help them become *what they are not*. Rather, it simply enhances the skills and qualities already possessed by said individuals in order to support their economic survival in the racist, neo-colonial urban landscape.

Like Bruguera and Queens Museum's 'urban-institutional' experiments in art museum education, *Talking Hands* appears to firmly situate its pedagogy within the context of Treviso and the immediate, socio-economic needs of its refugees and asylum seekers. Like *IMI Corona*, *Talking Hands* brings to life Ribalta's (2008, 23) demand for "a pedagogical method based on the assumption that learning is derived from immediate needs." Seemingly, the learning content in these projects is determined by what the urban diasporic community need—by what is the essence of their everyday urban experience. *IMI Corona* offered workshops in subjects representative of the immediate needs of Corona's immigrant residents (i.e. nutrition, childcare, English language, immigration law and counselling for women who are victims of domestic violence). Similarly, *Talking Hands* responded to the urgent need for asylum and refugee employment in Treviso (Queens 2011; Bizzarri 2017). The radical pedagogy encompassed in these projects is seemingly centred on what *already* exists—it is an *embedded* and *situation-specific* approach. The immediate needs of an urban diasporic community are responded to in all of their specificity.

Talking Hands also takes place against the backdrop of an increasingly xenophobic and racist government in Italy. In 2018, Italy's new populist government devised a campaign to deport thousands of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers (Colonnelli 2019). The right-wing Lega party[26] was the driving force behind this anti-immigration rhetoric and the significant government cuts that made it difficult for diasporic groups to acquire employment and a stable income (Arte Útil 2016).[27] *Talking Hands* has, therefore, not only educated refugees and asylum seekers, it has also conspired with

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[26] The Lega party is a right-wing government in Italy lead by Matteo Salvini. There have been claims of far right extremism being normalised in Italy due to this party's emergence and influence (Colonnelli 2019).
[27] See Association of Arte Útil. 2016. "Talking Hands." Accessed January 21, 2020. https://www.arte-util.org/projects/talking-hands/.

them, developing their industry and language skills so that they can survive and thrive financially within an increasingly disapproving and xenophobic culture. Furthermore, refugees and asylum seekers were able to sustain their citizenship in Italy by operating within the bounds of the project (Bizzarri 2017). Arguably, like *IMI Corona*, this project not only operated as an institution of pedagogy in the urban realm, but also as a 'conspiratory institution' as Jesús Carrillo (2018) might say—meaning that it 'conspired with' a diasporic community as a genuine agent and ally. As Carrillo (2018, 282) argues, 'conspiracy' means cultural agents and urban communities 'breathing' (*conspiratio*) or 'plotting' together. The radical pedagogy in *Talking Hands* is arguably centred in conspiracy because its artist-pedagogues work tactically with urban diasporic groups, 'plotting' incisive ways of overcoming the obstacles presented by institutional racism in Italy. Art institutional pedagogy and urban activism (which counters the conditions of racist/xenophobic urbanism) are deeply interwoven in *IMI Corona* and *Talking Hands* alike.

Radical Inclusivity

I would suggest that 'revanchist urbanism' is another aspect of the racist urban logic, which experimental institutionalism has sought to challenge though its decolonising project. As Neil Smith (1996, 211) describes, revanchist urbanism "represents a reaction against the supposed 'theft' of the city, a desperate defence of challenged phalanx of privileges cloaked in the populist language of civil morality." Most pertinently, however, the revanchist city expresses a race terror "felt by middle and ruling class whites" (Smith 1996, 211). Racial minorities and diasporic communities are subjected to a vicious reaction from the rest of the (mostly white) population, viewed as the source of urban unrest—of crime, drugs, violence, and threats to safety (Smith 1996, 211). Revanchist urbanism is ostensibly part of racial capitalism's extension into the urban environment. This is because the contemporary colonial processes of gentrification are often spurred on by the racist ideas of revanchist urbanism (Smith 1996, 211). The term comes from the nineteenth century 'revanchists' in France who initiated a revengeful campaign against the French people (Smith 1996, 211). Essentially, the phrase translates into 'revenge'—a revengeful approach to urbanism, that ruling classes or racial groups feel is justified because of perceived threats to morality and safety. In reality, however, revanchist urbanism infers racist, xenophobic attitudes (Smith 1996). I would argue that, in response to revanchist urbanism, experimental institutionality has created openings for what I will call 'radical inclusivity'—that is, aesthetic situations that unite people in spite of cultural differences and tensions.

'Radical inclusivity' could be defined as an attempt to forge social unity, cohesion, and solidarity against the backdrop of racially centred conflicts. Radical inclusivity arguably indicates experimental institutionalism's demonstrated investment in creating both physical and discursive spaces for uniting urban subjects in spite of racially centred tensions and conflicts. This is not to say, however, that the following examples manage, or even aim, to completely dissolve all conflicts and tensions. As artist and curator, Rasheed Araeen (2010, 17) argues, "diversity of cultures and diversity within art" must be recognised as two different things, and "diversity in art should not be considered necessarily a mirror image of cultural diversity." Arguably, radical inclusivity in experimental institutionalism does not make some utopian claim of resolving all conflict, but rather, creates temporary spaces for sociability and conviviality that may inspire the long journey towards uniting those separated by the racial tensions of revanchist urbanism. Within these temporary assemblages, conflicts may be addressed, debated and discussed. I would also contend that radical inclusivity does not unite different parties (who are in racially centred tensions) in a colonial-reaffirming fashion. Modernism, for example, incorporated different cultures as 'exotic otherness' within a colonial frame (Araeen 2010, 19). Non-Western cultures were assimilated into Western configurations in which white Eurocentric cultures reinstated their assumed superiority (Araeen 2010, 21). However, the following examples arguably avoid this sort of formulation, as they are collaborative urban art initiatives.

Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (MIMA) has arguably been a marked site for radical inclusivity. Middlesbrough has one of the highest proportions of asylum seekers in the UK but voted 'leave' in the Brexit vote.[28] The town has become an unfortunate emblem of what could constitute revanchist, post-Brexit urbanism in the UK due to its 'red door' scandal, in which homes of asylum seekers had their doors painted red by urban developers.[29] Occupants of these homes were left open to racist, xenophobic abuse and vandalism. MIMA appears to demonstrate radical inclusivity through its various ongoing urban-centred projects such as its 'community day' that brings locals together regardless of their ethnicity or culture, to socialise over a free communal meal (Morgan 2018, 51). Curated and run by artists Emily Hesse and James Beighton, MIMA project *New Linthorpe: The Coffee House* (2014–Ongoing) (Fig. 2.5) has brought Middlesbrough's diverse urban community together to create pottery.

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[28] Almost 70% of Middlesbrough residents voted 'leave' in the 'Brexit' vote (BBC 2016).
[29] Properties in Middlesbrough where asylum seekers had been housed by urban regeneration firm, Jomast, had their doors painted red. These properties became the target of racist and xenophobic abuse. Doors of these homes were hit with eggs, stones and vandalised with offensive graffiti. The scandal occurred during 2016, the year of the Brexit vote in which Middlesbrough voted 'leave' (BBC 2016).

Fig. 2.5 Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (MIMA), Emily Hesse and
James Beighton, *New Linthorpe: Coffee House*, 2014–Ongoing. Middlesbrough.
Photo: © Michelle Maddison.

Fig. 2.6 Suzanne Lacy, Annice Jacoby and Chris Johnson, *The Roof is on Fire*,
1993–94. From the Oakland Projects, 1991–2001; Performance June 4, 1994.
City Centre West Garage, Oakland, San Francisco. Photo: © Nathan Bennett,
Courtesy of Suzanne Lacy.

As a development of the long term MIMA project *New Linthorpe* (2014–Ongoing), *New Linthorpe: The Coffee House* makes use of the pottery made in workshops as ceremonial vessels in a coffee ceremony inspired by participating local African immigrants (MIMA 2014b). The project has also simply encouraged Middlesbrough

natives to simply 'listen' to their diasporic neighbours, as listening can arguably be an effective opening towards understanding and empathy. Through engaging in a creative act and also a ritual of local immigrants, participants are welcomed into a space and perspective from which they can better understand and relate than they perhaps did previously. Through *New Linthorpe: The Coffee House*, Middlesbrough's historical Linthorpe pottery is revived and brought into focus with local immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers (MIMA 2014b). This method of 'creolising', of bringing diverse cultural elements together, appears to be both a literal and symbolic indicator of the social cohesion that is temporarily formed during the activity. Arguably, it is not the case in this project, that 'creolising' reaffirms Modernism's colonising incorporation of different cultures to simply prioritise Middlesbrough's Northern British culture. Rather, the project seemingly combines local histories with immigrant cultures and traditions in equal balance—most vitally, in a way that both groups are represented and can benefit. MIMA has seemingly used creative production as a means of establishing a common interest between all participants, in spite of the separating forces of revanchist urbanism. Everyday creative labour (or craft) seems to be used as a tactic for social cohesion in the midst of Middlesbrough's racialised conflicts. This idea of radical inclusivity could be repurposed to examine instances of urban social aesthetics that forge social unity in the spaces of revanchist urbanism.

Like MIMA, Michael Rakowitz's New York and Chicago based project, *Enemy Kitchen* (2003–Ongoing),[30] has also appeared to use creative production's openings for radical inclusivity. *Enemy Kitchen* has worked towards racial inclusivity against the backdrop of post-9/11 xenophobic urban tension (Rakowitz 2019). Rakowitz, who is of Iraqi descent, has held workshops with youngsters at the Hudson Guild Community Centre in New York (Rakowitz 2003). During these workshops, Rakowitz teaches youngsters how to cook Iraqi dishes whilst having conversations with them about racial tensions (post-9/11 and Iraq war) (Rakowitz 2003). The project has arguably opened up a more positive route through which urban racial tensions can be confronted. Much like *New Linthorpe: Coffee House*, creative production seemingly forges a space for sociability and conviviality in the midst of urban racial tensions. The food produced in Rakowitz's workshops is arguably an emblem of the radical inclusivity that his project temporarily produces. Like the pottery created in *Coffee House*, the food produced in *Enemy Kitchen* arguably produces a common, shared experience and represents the social cohesion that has been formed. Also in this project, Rakowitz created a mobile food truck in Chicago in which Iraq war veterans would cook for the public. To consume the

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[30] See Rakowitz, Michael. 2003. "Enemy Kitchen." Accessed January 22, 2020.
http://www.michaelrakowitz.com/enemy-kitchen-gallery.

food of 'the other', of the 'enemy', again appears to promote the idea of 'performing the other'—that is, getting under the skin of the so-called 'enemy' in order to reach some degree of understanding. Like MIMA's institutional experiments, *Enemy Kitchen* seems to advocate the idea of consuming *authentic* culture from an actual person, rather than passively consuming negative stereotypes and stories from the urban-media nexus.

Negative stereotypes of the urban-media nexus, which contribute to revanchist urbanism, were also approached in Suzanne Lacy, Annice Jacoby, and Chris Johnson's *The Roof is on Fire* (1993–94) (Fig. 2.6).[31] In this urban art initiative, Lacy, Jacoby, and Johnson collaborated with African-American high school students in Oakland, California—a place renowned for its race-centred tensions, gentrification and segregation, and thus arguably an example of revanchist urbanism (Levin 2018).[32] African-American high school students were asked to sit in cars on a building rooftop and to share conversations around their experiences and lives in Oakland (Lacy 2001). Members of the public were invited to listen to the conversations, but not join in—only listen. These conversations intended to dispel and challenge some of the racist stereotypes affecting their urban living conditions in Oakland (Lacy 2001). Similarly to the previous examples, white participants were required to simply 'listen'—to submit to the *radical inclusivity* of the situation. As in the MIMA example, the job of the cultural agents in *The Roof is on Fire* was simply to provide 'listening' platforms—accessible and engaging spatio-temporalities that encouraged the public to listen to Oakland's African-American teens. In another Oakland-based project, *Code 33: Emergency Clear the Air!* (1997–99), Suzanne Lacy, Unique Holland and Julio Morales sought to address the conflicts between African-American youngsters and the local police force (Lacy 2001). There was three phases in this project; phase one involved a workshop with youngsters and police; in the second phase, conversations between teens and police took place in a rooftop car park, and members of the public were invited to listen; in the final phase, the public who previously listened to conversations could join in (Lacy 2001). In this project, artistic mediation arguably became a radical breaker of the negative racial relations that come from the urban-media nexus.

In the initial workshops leading up to the main rooftop performance/intervention, youths and police were engaged into a therapeutic drama activity in which they were asked to

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[31] See Lacy, Suzanne. 2001. "The Oakland Projects (1999–2001)." Accessed January 22, 2020. https://www.suzannelacy.com/the-oakland-projects/.
[32] Whilst the neo-colonial processes of gentrification have displaced some African-Americans in Oakland, others who remain there are treated like 'criminals', subjected to harassment from white residents (Levin 2018). In 2018, Oakland made headlines when a white woman harassed and called the police on a group of black residents harmlessly barbecuing on Lake Merritt. This incident went viral on the Internet and became a symbol of the harassment black residents are subjected to in Oakland by white Americans and police (Levin 2018).

perform as one another in order to understand each other's perspectives (Lacy 2001).
This humorous, playful activity arguably revealed a similar tactic to that of experimental
institutionalism—that is, getting individuals in revanchist cities to 'perform' as each
other—to enter into the perspective of those whom they consider to be the 'enemy'. As
in the experimental institutionalist examples of MIMA, through engaging in creative acts
or rituals of so-called 'enemy', one is welcomed into a space/perspective from which
they can better understand them. I would ultimately contend that 'radical inclusivity' is
about temporarily getting under the skin of others so that racially diverse communities,
living in the context of revanchist urbanism, can realise they have more in common
than initially thought and begin the long journey towards greater social cohesion.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that experimental institutionalism's decolonising project aims to
resist the racialised urgencies of capitalist urbanisation just as much as its aspires to
counter the colonial histories of cultural institutions. I have contended in this chapter
that the decolonising debates and praxis of experimental institutionalism could
contribute analysis to urban social aesthetic works shaped by capitalist-urbanism's
racist/neo-colonial conditions. The research presented in this chapter has
comprehensively connected contemporary art's urban Marxism to the racist and neo-
colonial aspects of capitalist urbanisation. Revealing urban social aesthetic practice's
connection to recent major events such as Grenfell Tower Fire and the BLM protests of
2020, this chapter has demonstrated said practice's enormous contemporary
significance. This chapter also touched upon the difficulty of social cohesion in
capitalistic urban sites, but only in a racially centred context. The following chapter will
focus more broadly on urbanism's relational crisis as an extension of sociality's
degradation under capitalist production.

Institutional Experiments in Urban Relationality

Sociality, Conviviality and Collaboration

In this chapter, I discuss experimental institutionalism's attempts to reconfigure the art institution as a site for *relationality*[1] in the socially fragmented urban landscape. I will argue that the themes of sociality, conviviality and collaboration, present in the debates, praxis and programming of experimental institutionalism, could contribute to the analysis of relational urban social aesthetic works.

The underlying contention of this chapter is that there is a *social* fracture at the heart of Western urbanism. This relational crisis, it would appear, is an urban-spatial extension of sociality's general degradation and economic capture under capitalist production. As Jodi Dean (2013, 71) recounts, since the emergence of capital, our basic sociality has served "as a primary means of capitalist expropriation." This capture and breakdown of the social bond under capitalism has perceivably extended into the urban environment, producing broad conditions of isolation and toxic irresponsibility. Arguably, within this formulation, experimental institutionalism has attempted to reconfigure art institutions as a site for sociality, conviviality and collaboration.[2] Experimental institutionalism's recent notion of a 'constituent museum', for example, has aimed to reimagine the art museum as being defined by social relationships rather than a physical architecture (Byrne et al. 2018). The constituent museum "operates as a network of practices, affinities and encounters rather than as a building" (Arlandis 2018, 84). In its recent publication, *The Constituent Museum* (Byrne et al. 2018), the L'Internationale confederation has asked, "what would happen if museums put relationships at the centre of their operations?" The art institution is reinterpreted as a social hub—as a place for popular sociability, connection and 'co-labour' in the urban landscape (Byrne et al. 2018). This is not simply conjectural, however, as there have been many examples, which this chapter will address, of institutional experiments formulating dynamic openings in the urban realm, for social exchange, dialogue, care and collaboration. These discernable connections between experimental institutionality and

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[1] Relationality is the state or condition of being relational or engaging in social relationships. I will use this term to point to how institutional experiments and urban social aesthetics have centred on the quality of social relations in an urban context.

[2] This chapter is not concerned with artistic institutionality in general—it is only concerned with contemporary art institutions engaged in the debate, praxis and programming of 'experimental institutionalism', which are also distinctly invested in urban relationality.

Western urbanism's social fracture, arguably begs the questions—can such institutional experiments (and their corresponding debates) assist in interrogating and giving further clarification to the relational project of urban social aesthetics?

This chapter will theoretically situate urban social aesthetic practice within the 'relational' activities and debates of experimental institutionality. It will contend that the themes of sociality, conviviality and collaboration, present in recent institutional experiments, could contribute to the examination of urban social aesthetics' relational project. As many institutional experiments in relationality have and continue to be conducted within the context of Western urbanism, there is arguably no reason why they could not assist in contributing illuminating analyses to relational urban social aesthetic works. In a world stricken by the effects of the Covid pandemic (after months of national and worldwide lockdowns, social distancing and technological mediation of our sociality), spaces in the urban realm for relationality are seemingly more vital than ever. As a result of the present situation, developing qualified analysis of contemporary art practice that seeks to ameliorate urbanism's social fracture is arguably necessary.

The other contemporary art debate repurposed in this thesis towards the examination of urban social aesthetic practice—that of the Situationist international—does offer sufficient discussion of social fragmentation in the context of late capitalist-urbanism. For example, Guy Debord (1967/2014, 10) described late capitalism[3] as a "vicious circle of isolation", that is "constantly reinforcing the technologies that engender lonely crowds." However, Situationism is arguably unqualified for examining the works in this chapter, as its relational themes are deeply interwoven with and thus inseparable from its more dominant spatial ideas such as unitary urbanism. Discussing Situationism in the context of this chapter would potentially lead to a repetition of the ideas already discussed in chapter one. Experimental institutionalism, on the other hand, appears to deal with relational matters separately from Western urbanism's extremely dominant spatial and architectural aspects.

Another Relationality

'Relational aesthetics'—one of the most major contemporary art concepts of the last few decades, has dominated analyses of sociability-centred arts practice. However, for the reasons outlined below, institutional experiments in urban relationality arguably constitute a more effective frame within which to examine the urban social aesthetic

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[3] Late capitalism is a 'third stage' or 'moment' in the evolution of capitalism, characterised by the dominance of multinational corporations, flows of capital, globalisation and mass consumption (Mandel 1975).

examples I will address in this chapter. *Relational Aesthetics* was a term produced by curator Nicholas Bourriaud in the late 1990s to describe the increasing inclination in contemporary art towards relationality. Bourriaud's (1998/2009) text, originally published in 1998, was an ambitious attempt to characterise artistic practice of the 1990s, asserting its 'relational' inclinations. *Relational Aesthetics* (1998/2009) was crucial in defining the tendencies of 1990s contemporary art because, as Claire Bishop (2004, 53) has highlighted, discussion at the time was centred enormously on the British Young Artists (YBA) phenomenon. Furthermore, British and American academics at the time were "reluctant to move on from the politicised and intellectual battles of 1980s art" (Bishop 2004, 53). Bourriaud (1998/2009, 14) defines 'relational aesthetics' as "an art taking as its theoretical horizon, the realm of human interactions and its social context." Relational art therefore infers contemporary art practice that creates spaces or opportunities for connections, meetings and encounters.

Relational artworks were characterised as being both socially *constituted* and socially *constituting*. Audiences were not only "envisaged as a community" within such works, but were also given the ability to create a community (Bishop 2004, 54). Relational artworks aimed to establish social encounters in which meaning would be elaborated *collectively* rather than *individually* (as in the privatised spaces of consumption) (Bourriaud 1998/2009, 18). As Bourriaud (2002, 8) more clearly highlighted in *Postproduction*, relational aesthetic works sought to reorient artistic practice away from traditional artisanal expertise and object production, towards processes of social exchange. Referencing Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1967/2014), Bourriaud (1998/2009, 9) attributed the rise in relational art practice to capitalism's fragmentation of the social bond via its insidious processes of commodity fetishism. According to Bourriaud (1998/2009, 9), in a global, socio-economic context in which "the social bond has turned into a standardised artefact", contemporary art's relational tendencies seemed to offer a way of connecting with others that was unmediated by capital.

Relational aesthetics was not simply intended as a theory of 'interactive art'. Instead, Bourriaud (1998/2009) considered it a means of locating and situating contemporary art within the broader cultural and socio-political context (Bishop 2004, 54). Relational art was understood as a direct response to capitalism's shift from a 'goods' to a 'service-based' economy (Bourriaud 1998/2009, 8–9). It was also theorised as being a response to the virtual relationships of the Internet and globalisation, which have supposedly generated a deep, collective longing for more unmediated, face-to-face social interactions (Bourriaud 2002, 8; Bishop 2004, 54). Relational aesthetics would assumedly form these unmediated, authentic social situations that are missing from the

techno-centric, globalised 'society of the spectacle' stage of late capitalism. However, unlike the anti-capitalistic agendas of work from previous generations, such as 1960s avant-garde movements, relational aesthetic works did not possess a 'utopian' agenda, looking towards the future. Rather, in relational works, artists sought to find solutions in the here and now, setting up functioning 'microtopias' in the present (Bourriaud 1998/2009, 13). As Bourriaud (1998/2009, 45) asserted, "it seems more pressing to invent possible relations with our neighbours in the present than to bet on happier tomorrows." This DIY, 'microtopian' philosophy is what Bourriaud (1998/2009) felt was the primary political schema of relational aesthetics—not an antagonistic political agenda, which Bishop (2004) would later come to criticise. Bourriaud's (1998/2009) theorisations have, nevertheless, been vigorously criticised and these criticisms highlight some of the reasons why this debate will not be used to examine the urban social aesthetic works addressed in this chapter.

The immediate issue of relational aesthetic theory is that some of its basic terms and conditions were not substantively unpacked, and therefore remain nebulous. As Grant Kester (2011, 30) contends, Bourriaud (1998/2009) "provides few substantive readings of specific projects. As a result, it is difficult to determine what, precisely, constitutes the aesthetic content of a given relational work." Furthermore, as Claire Bishop (2004, 65) asserts in her article "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics", "The *quality* of the relationships in "relational aesthetics" are never examined or called into question…if relational art produces human relationships, then the next logical question to ask is what types of relations are being produced, for whom, and why?" Experimental institutionalism's urban relational engagements, on the other hand, arguably bring to light the 'convivial' (i.e. The Whitworth) or 'conflictual' (i.e. MACBA's *Las Agencias* (2001) project) qualities of the relationships that are constituted. As Bishop (2004, 66) distinctively highlighted, there was no space for antagonism (conflict) within Bourriaud's (1998/2009) idea of relational aesthetics. Bishop (2004, 66) questioned Bourriaud's (1998/2009) support for an art of pure conviviality, which seemed to promote a naively harmonistic conception of the social that was not directly critical of society. Without any antagonistic, conflictual elements, relational aesthetics problematically produced a non-political dialogue—it appeared to be the aesthetic equivalent of regressive, consensus-building politics. In light of this point, experimental institutionalism offers a more effective framework for this chapter's analysis of relational urban social aesthetic works, as it possesses both 'conflictual/critical' and 'convivial/care aspects' (see sections *Collaboration (Co-Labour)* and *Politics of Care*). Stewart Martin (2007), however, highlighted Bourriaud's (1998/2009; 2002) fatal error—his belief that art escapes reification through creating 'social situations' rather than 'objects'. For Martin

(2007), Bourriaud's (1998/2009; 2002) assumption that value lies in the art object was highly problematic in a Marxian sense. Martin (2007, 378) vitally reminds us that:

> "Capitalist exchange value is not constituted at the level of the objects, but of social labour as a measure of abstract labour. It is the commodification of labour that constitutes the value of 'objective' commodities. To think that the source of value is in the object-commodity is precisely the error that Marx calls fetishism."

Bourriaud's (1998/2009; 2002) theory therefore reiterated fetishism in a Marxian sense. As will be illustrated in the *Collaboration (Co-Labour)* section of this chapter, experimental institutionalism does not wrongly assume like *Relational Aesthetics* (1998/2009) that the object is the problematic site of capitalist exchange-value. Discussing MIMA/Isabel Lima's project *Gresham Wooden Horse* (2017), the research will focus on the social use-values (rather than exchange-values) of object production. As James Voorhies (2016, 31) has highlighted, a lot of practice that Bourriaud aligned with relational aesthetics has a "definitive connection with the exhibition form" and its activity is situated "solidly within the realm of art." In other words, whilst inferring an art form centred on everyday human interactions, relational aesthetics was largely situated within the context of the gallery space, exhibitions and a far-too-*internally*-reflexive art sphere. Relational aesthetics also arguably lacked 'political density', as it offered a far too 'soft' approach to society's relational crisis under capitalist production (Ribalta 2008, 251). During their *Another Relationally* (2005–2006) seminars, curators at MACBA aimed to "rescue the relational debate from the aristocratic ghetto of relational aesthetics", as it was offering, "a soft pseudo-organisation of artistic and social phenomena…a simulacrum of participation based on the trivialisation and spectacularisation of the concept of antagonism as a constituent part of the social space" (Ribalta 2008, 251). MACBA, amongst other experimental institutionalist museums in Europe, has aimed to reinstate 'political density' to relational contemporary art production by forming activity and debate that creates genuine openings for sociability, conviviality and collaboration in the urban social milieu. Furthermore, in *Relational Aesthetics* (1998/2009, 15), Bourriaud attributed the rise of relational practice to the rise of a global urban culture—a growing "urbanisation of the artistic experiment." However, he then proceeded to give several gallery-based examples such as the work of Rirkrit Tiravanija, Vanessa Beecroft and Félix González-Torres—artists who, surely by no coincidence, featured in his seminal *Traffic* (1993) exhibition at CAPC Bordeaux (Bishop 2004, 54). Meanwhile, his non-gallery based examples were discussed within the context of some vague and broad notion of everyday 'public' space/life.

As Michael Birchall (2017, 61) crucially highlights, Relational Aesthetics (1998/2009) has a "gallery-based ethos" that overlooks "community arts, activism and public art." For Birchall (2017, 61) "Bourriaud's curatorial theory relates to activity happening inside the white cube, as in the work of Rirkrit Tiravanija." Bourriaud's (1998/2009, 15) clear attribution of a relational aesthetic to a rise in a global urban culture is seemingly forgotten throughout his text, creating a crucial theoretical omission. Bourriaud's (1998/2009) failure to commit to the idea that relational art has a crucial connection to urban experience attests to why 'relational aesthetics' is perhaps not the best theory/debate within which to examine the urban social aesthetic works addressed in this chapter. Through both on-site and off-site exhibitions, programming and projects, urban relationality has appeared to be a key focus of experimental institutionalism. This will be demonstrated through the many themes discussed in this chapter—'social space', 'dialogue', 'politics of care' and 'collaboration'. It is the contention of this chapter that, unlike Bourriaud's (1998/2009) 'relational aesthetics', the connection between relational art practice and late capitalist-urbanism is directly interrogated by experimental institutionalism.

Urbanism's Relational Crisis

Capitalist production has always been detrimental to humanity's basic need for sociality. Although continuously changing throughout capitalism's various phases of development, a socially fragmenting commodity fetishism process has always been at the heart of its operations (Dean 2013, 71). Karl Marx (1867/1990, 166) famously declared that under capitalism, social relations between people become "material relations between persons and social relations between things." Similarly, capitalist production's inherent characteristics of competition and private ownership, have further inflamed the fragmentation of the social bond. As highlighted by Guy Debord (1967/2014), Maurizio Lazzarato (1996) and Antonio Negri/Michael Hardt (2001), in 'late capitalism' or 'spectacle/informational capitalism', social relations are fractured even more violently, as commodity fetishism processes become more abstract, mediated by images, cultural values/ideas and information. As Post-Operaist debates argue, in its late stages, capitalism begins to capture and instrumentalise sociability, communication and affect for its own purposes (Lazzarato, 1996; Negri and Hardt, 2001). Dean (2013, 71) similarly suggests that contemporary capitalism has become 'communicative'. She suggests, "whether of affects, images, anxieties, or ideas, communication is the means of capitalist subsumption, the vehicle for its intensification and expansion" (Dean 2013, 71). In contemporary times, capitalism captures and instrumentalises our basic need for sociability.

As a demonstrable spatial extension of late capitalist production, urbanism has naturally continued its characteristic degradation of sociability (Debord 1967/2014; Harvey 2001). Although the urban environment, in its former role as an industrial politico-economic zone initially showed promise of countering capitalism's degradation of the social, the hegemonic forces of urbanism aptly dealt with this threat (Debord 1967/2014, 91). According to Debord (1967/2014, 91), within industrial capitalist societies, people were "dangerously brought together by urban conditions of production." During the industrial stage of capitalism, people were brought into cities to work, but through this, they were brought "dangerously close together" (Debord 1967/2014, 91). The urban working classes could have potentially started a revolution in their then novel positions of close living and labour proximities. To deal with this new threatening possibility, capitalism was required to produce urban conditions conducive to separation, isolation and, ultimately, social fragmentation (Debord 1967/2014, 91).

Urban geographer David Harvey (2001) has described capitalism as a "factory of fragmentation" that thrives on the "production of difference" (Harvey 2001, 121). Arguably, urbanism as a spatial extension of capitalism, reiterates its tendency towards fragmentation and difference, as it separates and divides urban space in order to market it in various ways (Harvey 2001, 121). The 'urban commons'—that is, the spaces where social encounters and interactions occur, are also constantly at threat in late capitalism. In fact, in Harvey's (2012, 80) opinion, 'urbanisation' is a process fundamentally characterised by the urban commons' "perpetual appropriation and destruction by private interests." Spaces for 'commoning', social encounter and cohesion, are destroyed by capitalism's endless quest for profit and need to have its surpluses absorbed by the urban built environment (Harvey 2012, 80). For Harvey (2012, 74) urban planning has destroyed the street's former existence as a "place of popular sociability." Furthermore, urban planning is largely centred around flows of traffic "at the expense of the parks, public plazas and common spaces where people naturally congregate" (Samuel 2015). In our current stage of informational capitalism,[4] the 'space of flows' or 'cyberspace' overlays and integrates with physical urban space, making the relations within it abstract (mediated by data, 'signs' and images etc.). According to Manuel Castells (1989/1991), in the 'informational city', elite people and socially dominant processes occupy the 'space of flows', rendering physical urban space ('space of places') the site of isolated and powerless populations.

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[4] Informational capitalism was a restructuring of the capitalist system in the 1980s, which arose due to a rise in microelectronics-based information and communication technologies. It suggests a techno-economy and was linked to "the expansion and rejuvenation of capitalism" (Castells 1989/1991, 19).

Social Spaces (Unmediated By Capital)

During late capitalism, when our basic sociality is captured and instrumentalised, a multitude of "communication zones" are created and imposed on us, and the social exchange, which occurs in these spaces, is insidiously mediated by capital (Bourriaud 1998/2009, 16). In the late 1990s, Bourriaud (1998/2009, 9) theorised that, "before long, it will not be possible to maintain relationships between people outside these trading areas." He stressed—"you are looking for shared warmth, and the comforting feeling of well being for two? So try our coffee…The space of current relations is thus the space most severely affected by general reification" (Bourriaud 1998/2009, 9). Unlike these capitalistic, 'pseudo-social-spaces' that Bourriaud (1998/2009, 16) describes, institutional experiments have arguably developed both 'temporary assemblages' of sociability, and permanent, long-term spaces for authentic, unmediated[5] social exchange in the urban landscape.

Central to experimental institutionalism's quest towards a museology of social responsibility and usership is the notion of the museum becoming a 'social hub'—a space for social exchange and encounter. Experiments in institutionality have required the museum to become, according to curator Charles Esche (2005, 122), "part community-centre." Furthermore, as Laura Raicovich (quoted in Krause Knight and Senie 2018, xix), former executive director of Queens Museum, has suggested, the future of the cultural institution may be as "a commons"—as a site in which "public space and public resources productively coalesce." The recently proposed idea of a 'constituent museum' is also pertinent to said formulations. The constituent museum imagines the art institution as a site in the urban landscape that places social relations at the centre of its operation (Byrne et al. 2018). The ultimate implication here is that the cultural institution is defined, no longer by precarious physical urban architecture, but by dynamic and 'encountered' social relationships. The museum is theorised as a 'social space' in the Western metropolis, which does not organise social activity into veritable "communication zones" (Bourriaud 1998/2009, 16). This idea of the art institution becoming an urban social hub for common use is not merely conjectural— there are many examples of this being practiced.

During Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona's (MACBA) 2000–2008 period, the institution transformed itself into a vital hub for social activity (unmediated by capital) in the city of Barcelona (Ribalta 2008). During this period, MACBA was a vital site for

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[5] When using the term 'unmediated', I am referring to opportunities for social exchange that are *unmediated* by capital—social spaces that are unmediated by economics.

'commoning' in a way that was decidedly against the type of sociability that was being promoted by Barcelona's World Bank meeting in 2001 and Barcelona Forum 2004[6]—that is, a sociability mediated by touristic spectacle and, more broadly, flows of urban capital. As demonstrated by *Another Relationality* (2005–6), the museum at this time was aiming to counter the "soft pseudo-organisation of artistic and social phenomena" (presented by relational aesthetics) with a more politically dense site for urban social activity (Ribalta 2008). Jorge Ribalta, former head of public programs at MACBA, even suggested the term 'relational institutionalism' to indicate the direction that the museum was going in its early millennial phase, and to stress the capacity of the museum's spaces for relational activity (Kolb and Flückiger 2014a, 19). These activities of MACBA, however, were arguably only 'temporary assemblages'—they operated only as temporary sites for relationality that did not transform the Spanish institution into a fixed, permanent social space in the fragmented urban landscape. Whilst said projects are temporary assemblages, many art institutions associated with experimental institutionality have appeared to form successful, long-term sites for social encounter.

Fig. 3.1 Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), *Social Gatherings Outside MACBA*, 2020. Plaça dels Àngels Square, Barcelona.
Photo: © Amy Melia.

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[6] Barcelona 2004 Forum of Cultures was a 141-day international event. It was "a corporate-sponsored municipal extravaganza of debate and multicultural entertainment, widely perceived by locals as a manipulation of the Social Forum movement for the ends of political consensus-building, real-estate speculation and boosterism of the tourist economy" (Holmes 2013, 286). This international event aimed to promote Barcelona's thriving tourist industry in the wake of the 1993 Olympic games (Matteo and Zardini 2004). MACBA's dispersed, expanded exhibition *How Do We Want to Be Governed*? (2004), established a collaboration network with 'anti-forum 2004' movements that would counter the touristic, globalising intent of the Forum.

Although MACBA produced many temporary assemblages for sociability during its 2000–2008 period, such as urban activist projects *How Do We Want to Be Governed?* (2004) and *Las Agencias* (2001), the institution's immediate urban surrounds (the square of Plaça dels Àngels) is arguably a long-term site of free, unmediated sociality (Fig. 3.1). Students, skate boarders, bohemians, and a whole host of other Barcelonans, gather outside the museum every day of the week in its urban square. Did MACBA's temporary relational projects contribute to the construction of this dynamic urban social hub?—this is unknown. However, the museum's interior architectures have appeared, since the ending of the 2000–2008 period, to largely return to being spaces for neo-Kantian disinterested spectatorship, where social exchange is mediated by art objects.

The ongoing 'museum 3.0' developments of The Whitworth in Manchester have arguably contributed to its ever-increasing status as a permanent site for free sociability in the city. In a recent interview, curator Poppy Bowers (2020) asserted that, "there really are not many other places (in fact, I can barely think of any other places in Manchester) where you can go to meet others and socialise, that is free, sheltered and a nice environment." She continues, "absolutely, I think that is why the Whitworth is as busy as it is—because of the erosion of any kind of common space in the city" (Bowers 2020). A significant amount of visitor's comments have suggested that The Whitworth's provision of a free social space is one of the main reasons why people visit (Bowers 2020). When visitors were increasingly using the Whitworth's south gallery for meeting and socialising, curators chose to use the space for programming centred around social activity. Bowers (2020) describes how, in the 1960s, the museum's south gallery was built specifically to show large contemporary painting and works. However, "this has been increasingly difficult to programme because this space is being used more and more for social activity…so we decided that we will not show any work there, and we will just use that space for programming" (Bowers 2020). Along with its ongoing transformation into a 'useful museum', The Whitworth also offers a range of social spaces for individuals who have experienced addiction and domestic abuse (Bowers 2020). Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art's (MIMA) institutional experiments have also formulated permanent, unmediated spaces for social exchange in the city. This has been vital in Middlesbrough's urban context of economic austerity and post-Brexit-fuelled racial conflicts. As part of its intensive public programme, MIMA holds a 'community day' each Thursday, which enables all Middlesbrough locals, regardless of their ethnicity or culture, to unite and socialise over a free communal meal (Morgan 2018, 51). As curator Elinor Morgan (2018, 51) describes, MIMA also has an urban garden, where Middlesbrough residents can meet and socialise via weekly workshops.

'Tate Exchange',[7] a participatory model of curatorial practice and dedicated space for 'alternative exchanges in the museum', has also offered social space in the urban locales of Liverpool and London (Tate 2016a). Established in 2016 at Tate Liverpool and Tate Modern, it is intended as a programme and space through which the 'role of art in society' can be questioned—as a site "where art and society meet" (Tate 2016a). As a result of this socially responsible ethos, it arguably constitutes an example of experimental institutionality. For its director, Cara Courage (2019), Tate Exchange's model of practice is majorly about social encounter—it is less about the display of art objects, and more so the themes of process, exchange and conversation in the contemporary art institution. Through these themes, it becomes a kind of 'microcosm' of the urban social milieu (Courage 2019). Michael Birchall (2020, 114), former curator of public practice at Tate Liverpool, correspondingly highlights how, "programming inside Tate Exchange would require that whatever project manifests in the space must have an exchange with audiences, through activities, workshops and sharing events." As a result of this highly collaborative curatorial model, the project and its dedicated spaces in London and Liverpool, offer spaces for free, unmediated social exchange. An excellent example of Tate Exchange's success as a functioning urban-institutional social space was arguably, *State of the Nation: Exchanges on Homelessness*—a week long event of projects, installations, workshops and talks, which took place at Tate Liverpool in 2018.[8] Programmed and curated in association with the Museum of Homelessness,[9] Tate Exchange provided a space at Tate Liverpool for social interaction with formerly homeless individuals and professionals who work with the issue, as well as artists, academics and members of the public. What was remarkable was that an urban-institutional social space was formed that not only brought diverse communities together, but also allowed for the discussion of one of the most urgent urban urgencies of our contemporary moment—homelessness.

There is therefore a common tendency within experimental institutionalism, towards the formulation of 'social spaces' (unmediated by capital)—be it for social cohesion, community organising and political solidarity or agonistic discursive activity. This offering up of a social space can arguably be repurposed to examine contemporary works that aspire towards a more relational urbanism, imaging spaces in the city for

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[7] See Tate. 2016a. "Tate Exchange." Accessed February 14, 2020. https://www.tate.org.uk/tate-exchange.
[8] See Tate. 2018. "State of the Nation." Accessed February 14, 2020. https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-liverpool/workshop/state-nation.
[9] Founded in 2015, Museum of Homelessness is a "community driven social justice museum". Individuals with direct experience of homelessness run this project, which tackles homelessness and housing inequality through events, research, campaigns and art exhibitions. See Museum of Homelessness. 2015. "MOH: Museum of Homelessness." Accessed, February 15, 2020. https://museumofhomelessness.org.

social exchange and cohesion. Laurence Payot's *Coincidence* (2011) (Fig. 3.2) appeared to constitute a 1:1 scale attempt of formulating an urban social space unmediated by capital. For fourteen consecutive days, a network of people in Liverpool and Runcorn received daily text messages inviting them to carry out small tasks in their everyday lives (Payot 2011).[10] As these tasks were carried out, minor changes *coincidentally* occurred in participant's everyday routines and opportunities for social interaction arose (Payot 2011). Small instructions from the artist led to a genuine amelioration of the community's social bonds. One of the participant testimonials featured on the project's website reads, "it made me feel good, as if I was part of something: I've made some friends and hope they will keep in touch" (Payot 2011). Much akin to the above institutional experiments, *Coincidence* created a temporary 'social space' in which social exchange and encounter could occur without the mediation of capital. Like The Whitworth's activities, however, this temporary assemblage, was catalyst for more permanent sociality in the urban landscape.

Arguably, the Space Hijacker's *Whitechapel Knees-Up Against Starbucks* (2007) (Fig. 3.3) is an even more marked example of an urban social aesthetic work, which created space for unmediated sociality.[11] The art collective were unhappy to discover that a Starbucks Coffee branch was set to open in their local neighbourhood of Whitechapel in East London, as not only would it homogenise and gentrify the otherwise ethnically diverse, culturally rich area, it would also fragment the community (Space Hijackers 2007). In retaliation, the Space Hijackers set-up a small stall outside the newly opening Starbucks, where they handed out free food and refreshments, creating a social space unmediated by capital. The Space Hijackers distributed flyers, which advertised their 'Whitechapel knees up' to local cafés and bars, and the event was well attended. The coffee store, at the centre of this anti-capitalist protest, seemed to represent, for the Space Hijackers, a space where communications were excessively mediated by capital. It is therefore feasible to suggest that Space Hijackers were providing an alternate social space outside unmediated by capital. Just like cultural agents in experimental institutional formulations, Payot and the Space Hijacker's were "context providers" rather than "content providers" (Kester 2004, 1). In other terms, once urban users are brought together in social spaces created by the artist/s or cultural agent/s, the latter party steps away, allowing authentic social engagements to play out.

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[10] See Payot, Laurence. 2011. "Coincidence." Accessed February 14, 2020. http://www.laurencepayot.com/work/coincidence/.
[11] See Space Hijackers. 2007. "Space Hijackers East End Knees Up." Accessed February 14, 2020. https://www.spacehijackers.org/html/projects/whitechapelstar/kneesup.html.

Fig. 3.2 Laurence Payot, *Coincidence (Video Still)*, 2011.
Liverpool and Runcorn. Photo: © Sam Meech.

Fig. 3.3 Space Hijackers, *Whitechapel Knees-up Against Starbucks*,
2007. Whitechapel, London. Photo: © Mike Urban (Urban75.com).

Seemingly, there is a necessary process of 'letting go' on the part of the artist/cultural
agent, as this enables the spontaneity of everyday social relations to take place. For
example, in *Coincidence*, the artist simply sent out a text message to participants,
allowing social relationships to form 'coincidentally' as the project's title infers. The
Space Hijackers, however, simply invited their local urban community to a hospitable,
sociable site—they did not strictly mediate conversations, or the encounters and
actions that took place. The slight displacement of the artists in these works arguably
enabled authentic social relationships and bonds to form. A strong, authoritative

presence of the artist might possibly entrap such a work within the internal communication of the artistic sphere, as participants would be overly aware of its constructed, aesthetic elements.

I would suggest that, within its creation of social spaces uncoopted by capitalism's excessive reification practices, experimental institutionalism has imagined alternative social economies. Arguably, if social relations are to be unmediated by capital (i.e. exchange-values/sign-values) in the urban social milieu, an alternative economy centred on social values is also required—an economy that is conductive to, and supportive of, genuine social relations. The institutions mentioned above have, arguably, via their formulation of urban social spaces, mediated social relations via an *economy of use*. In Stephen Wright's *Lexicon of Usership* (2016), 'use' is configured as a socially-centred, alternative economy, as usership possess a markedly 'social dimension'. Because its counters notions of private ownership, Wright (2016) suggests that 'use' possesses an inherently collective, sociable nature. The said urban social aesthetic examples have disputably created *gift economies* rather than economies of *use*. Nevertheless, the 'gift economy' notion of 'reciprocity' is cited as being a "key issue" of the 'constituent museum' (Byrne et al. 2018, 9). Reciprocity is said to refer to a set of relationships "whereby all parties benefit through acts of trust, friendship, kindness, and sharing" (Byrne et al. 2018, 9). In addition to this, the 'constituent museum' is described as "a site for giving" (Arlandis 2018, 85). Unlike a capitalist economy, which is exploitive and unidirectional (favouring the capitalist class), the alternative economies of *use* and *gift*, formulated by the social spaces of institutional and urban social aesthetic practice, are rooted in *reciprocity*—a social economy in which both parties involved benefit. Such reciprocal, social economies arguably present a valid way for repairing Western urbanism's fragmental social milieu.

A *gift economy* or 'symbolic exchange' was arguably present in *Coincidence,* as a local, place-based economy of fulfilling social encounters was constituted in this project. No material worth was generated only immaterial social value and this is the very principal of symbolic exchange (Bantjes 2007, 74). According to Rod Bantjes (2007, 74) symbolic exchange, the 'gift economy' or the 'potlatch' creates an unequal exchange in which one sacrifices material value in order to create and strengthen social bonds. The gift creates unequal exchange—one sacrifices material value in order to improve social bonds (Bantjes 2007, 74). One does not *give* to acquire equivalent returns, but to enhance social relations (Sansi 2014, 105; Bantjes 2007, 74). Exchange under capitalism is always based on equivalence (Sansi 2014, 105). Generous giving has become incongruence because of the proliferation of exchange-

value, which requires us to always *give to receive*. Arguably, this has not been to the advantage of our basic sociality. Giving based on sacrifice, represented by the gift, therefore seemingly assails capitalistic economics of equivalence and returns.

Situated in New York's SoHo neighbourhood, Gordon Matta-Clark's acclaimed socially engaged art project, *FOOD* (1971), was an arguable example of an urban social space mediated by a gift (potlatch) economy. Unlike its marked successor, Rirkrit Tiravanija's *Untitled (Free)* (1992), *FOOD* operated in everyday urban life. As a result, it arguably constituted a provisional model for how symbolic exchange could be rendered a real, operating actuality as opposed to a quasi-theatrical 'happening' in a gallery space. Food appeared an ideal instrument with which Matta-Clark could implement a gift economy. Food is an extremely effective potlatch (gift) because, whilst it must be consumed, it cannot be recirculated—it creates true wastage for the giver and 'social debt' to the receiver (Dietler and Hayden 2001, 73). This act of food consumption represents a total dissolution of material worth, meaning that relational values can succeed. As Michael Dietler and Brian Hayden (2001, 73) state, "food is destroyed in the act of commensal consumption at a feast and, moreover, destroyed by ingesting it into the body." Therefore, 'food as potlatch' represents *pure giving*—it perfectly embodies the *sacrificial* nature of symbolic exchange. I would contend that Matta-Clark's use of 'food as potlatch' is similar to MIMA's 'community day' in which sociality is mediated by free food consumption.

Matta-Clark's apparent interest in alchemy is also indicative of his use of symbolic exchange (Lloyd-Thomas 2007, 51). Alchemy, a mystical process of transmuting one thing into another, is present throughout Matta-Clark's oeuvre (Lloyd-Thomas 2007, 51). Take, for instance his experiments with base materials in works such as *Photo Fry* (1969), *Agar* (1969–70) and his renowned international series *Building Cuts* (c.1974–77). According to Pierre Bourdieu (1972/1977, 192), the potlatch was a form of alchemy as one thing is destroyed in order to create another. Within symbolic exchange, material value is destroyed to create social value (Bourdieu 1972/1977, 192). As foodstuff (which was Matta-Clark's potlatch in *FOOD*) was consumed, it was seemingly 'transmuted' into a social experience. This process was arguably 'alchemical', as the base materiality of food was transformed into something far greater—*pure* sociability. Although it was a functioning, cooperative business, Matta-Clark gave away a large amount of free food (Matta-Clark and Godden 1972/2009, 42). *FOOD* was therefore largely still a space for social exchange unmediated by capital. An advertisement for *FOOD*, which appeared in *Avalanche Magazine* (1972) reads: "free dinners given: 3,072" (Matta-Clark and Godden 1972/2009, 42). Money was not

driven by the same self-serving, profit motive present within capitalism. It was merely a means of preserving the 'social space' for symbolic exchange and sociability. Therefore, Matta-Clark appeared to offer food as potlatch, using profit to simply preserve 'the stage' for this.

Matta-Clark seemingly transformed symbolic exchange into a feasible scheme for everyday life, co-opting capitalism's profit incentive towards a socially altruistic model. Cooking/eating (as potlatch) are shown to provide a potential opening for social exchange in fragmented late capitalist-urbanism. I would contend that *FOOD* was emblematising the shift from 'goods' to 'service economy'. Bourriaud (1998/2009, 3) claimed that this form of economy has been influential to the rise of relational works, which provide useful services of some form; he suggested that, "through these little services rendered, the artist fills in the cracks in the social bond." Correspondingly, in *FOOD*, Matta-Clark cultivated an *experience* as opposed to merely manufacturing a *product*. However, unlike a capitalistic 'service', Matta-Clark's eatery seemed to constitute a space for genuine, unmediated sociability. Service is also largely synonymous with a "pre-capitalist economy of prestige" such as Feudalism, which was a society founded on a military hierarchy in which service was given to higher echelons in exchange for land (Read 2003, 126). Jason Read (2003, 126) has claimed that:

> "Since capitalism is by definition the replacement of personal relations of dependence such as those that exist between master and lord, with impersonal and abstract relations of dependence, there is no place, or only a marginal place, it would seem, for relations of service."

Although capitalism has largely transformed into a service economy, it is no longer founded on personal relations of dependence, but on impersonal and abstract relations. It is theorised to be a society in which social relations are abstractly mediated by images (Debord 1967/2014). In *FOOD*, the artist places himself in a personal relation of dependence with SoHo residents, and therefore, arguably reclaims the lost intimacy of Feudal dependence, but without its oppressive hegemonic forces. The Space Hijacker's London-based intervention, *Whitechapel Knees-Up Against Starbucks*, also used symbolic-exchange to promote unmediated urban sociality. As previously described, in this project, the Space Hijacker's set up a small stall outside a new Starbucks branch and provided an alternative social space where refreshments and communication were free (Space Hijackers 2007). The group appeared to have formed a social space for symbolic exchange—for the free consumption of food, drink and conversation. Food, drink and conversation were sacrificially given like a 'gift'. The exchange-value of the food and drink was seemingly dissolved in favour of strengthening the community's social bonds. This project was, conceivably, a

manifestation of symbolic exchange in which material goods were "dissolved in order to create and strengthen social bonds" (Bantjes 2007, 74). I would suggest that, the Space Hijackers formed a radically different social commerce to that of the contested coffee shop, whose interactions were less conductive to the strengthening of social bonds than capital.

Dialogue as Urban Activism

As *Whitechapel Knees-Up Against Starbucks* demonstrated, dialogue and conversation appear to be an integral aspect of urban social aesthetic practice's relational project. Dialogue, however, is arguably not only necessary in terms of reconciling urbanism's relational crisis, it is also an important tool through which activism can occur. Experimental institutionalism's pronounced shift towards discursivity, within the context of urban urgencies, could be useful in addressing urban social aesthetic practice's employment of dialogue.

Although it may appear natural to address art historian, Grant Kester's (2004) seminal writings on 'dialogical art', I would argue that they did not consider dialogically centred art practice within a decidedly urban context.[12] Unlike Kester's (2004) theorisations, experimental institutionalism has specifically addressed dialogical aesthetic activity within a specifically urban context. Through expanded exhibitions, programming and projects, it has also seemingly addressed the notion of mobilising dialogue as a form of urban activism. In light of these crucial aspects, it arguably becomes a more appropriate frame within which to theoretically situate dialogical urban social aesthetic practice. As social relationships become vital to the art institution's physical and symbolic ontology, there is also a general shift away from object and display, towards the 'discursive' or 'dialogical' (Marstine 2017, 171). Although he problematically conflates new institutionalism and recent institutional experiments, Alex Farquharson (2006) highlights how, "discussion events are rarely at the service of exhibitions"—but rather, discussion events can take the form of autonomous programming streams and exhibitions can be highly dialogic. Placing social relationships at the centre of museological activity, dialogue and conversation take centre stage, not to 'build publics' as Janet Marstine (2017) suggests, but rather to connect the art institution to immediate urban social urgencies. The activities of the institution become citizen

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[12] Grant Kester's idea of 'dialogical aesthetics' was introduced in *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (2004). This text suggests that avant-garde practices in the twentieth century were mistrustful of dialogue as a communicational model and therefore resorted to various anti-discursive forms such as shock and abstraction. Kester (2004) argues that contemporary art may better contribute to social change if the avant-garde's 'politics of negation' is replaced with dialogue and conversation.

activating 'discursive platforms'—lively and inclusive conversational spaces for dialogues to occur—which not only counter the relational crisis of Western urbanism, but also allow for strategising against urban meta-narratives and urgencies (Byrne et al. 2018; Birchall 2020). Dialogue arguably becomes a form of institutional-urban activism rather than a way to experiment with the exhibition model and 'build publics'.

Discursivity is not solidly within the realm of art as it was within new institutionalism and relational aesthetics (Voorhies 2016, 31). As Marstine (2017, 171) suggests, although the discursive characteristics of experimental institutional may have originated in the activities and debates of new institutionalism, the former appears to be "a corrective to the facet of new institutionalism that was sometimes so internally reflexive and focused on micro-scale projects, that it neglected external, particularly local needs and desires." New institutionalism incorporated discursive projects into museum programming for 'internally reflexive' purposes—to fulfill a 'high art' agenda (Marstine 2017, 171). Arguably, the 'discursive biennial' possessed the same problem—it possessed a primarily 'high art' agenda, and was far too internally self-reflexive (Kompatsiaris 2017, 40; Ferguson and Hoegsberg 2010, 361). Institutional experiments today function as a corrective to these discursive activities of new institutionalism and discursive biennials, as they have urban social agendas at their core, meaning they are not primarily *building publics* for the museum, but *serving* and *activating* urban communities. By the same token, they are not only countering social fragmentation, but also creating a conversational space within which to collectively strategise against the urgencies of capitalist-urbanism. Dialogical activity is no longer an internally reflexive art world activity, or a focus group situation for building museum clientele (Marstine 2017, 171). Rather, it becomes a means for a combined project of relationality and urban activism.

During its 2000–2008 period, when it aimed to connect its artistic institutionality to the city of Barcelona, MACBA held many seminars centred on dialogues between urban activists (Ribalta 2008). It is apparent that these dialogues were centred on urban social urgencies and not exclusive, high art issues. Similarly, initiated by curator Bojana Piškur and architect Marjetica Potrc, Moderna Galerija's *Radical Education* (2006–14) project was presented as a series of dialogue-centred workshops and seminars in Ljubljana (Piškur 2018, 175). Whilst MACBA initiated and mediated dialogue between locals that would counter the urban spectacle discourse of the Barcelona Forum 2004, *Radical Education* facilitated discussions regarding Ljubljana's urban social urgencies such as immigration and employment. Arguably, urban social aesthetic practice has also responded to urbanism's social urgencies, using dialogue as a form of urban activism. In *Whitechapel Knees-Up Against Starbucks*, for instance,

the Space Hijackers art collective appeared to use dialogue as a means to unite against urban gentrification processes in Whitechapel, London. Artists, activists and members of the local community held conversations (unmediated by capital) outside a newly opened Starbucks branch to protest against its homogenisation and gentrification of their neighbourhood. Dialogue was set in motion to counter the 'captured' and 'reified' conversations that were being mediated inside Starbucks. Similarly, Suzanne Lacy's 1990s projects in Oakland, California, such as *The Roof is on Fire* (1993–94) and *Code 33* (1998–99), employed dialogue to counter the racist narratives of capitalist-urbanism.[13] Arguably, in both institutional and urban social aesthetic examples, direct, face-to-face dialogue, counters informational capitalism's urban-cyber nexus, which mediates dialogue through technology and data streams. Furthermore, dialogue in said examples was not mediated by capital, as is often the case in the capitalist-urban landscape—instead, it is mediated by a common social interest and centred around improving urban living conditions.

MACBA and Moderna Galerija's dialogical activities start with smaller groups, and then expand significantly, including more representatives of the everyday urban social sphere. Such an approach arguably mirrors 'conversation-based activism'. According to sociologist Nancy Naples (1998, 111), conversation-based activism begins with locating existing conversations amongst communities, and then gradually widens the base of participants sharing the same social concerns. This means that private conversations about shared problems can take on a more public character, thereby increasingly not only knowledge, but also solidarity and the capacity for social change. By starting conversations amongst smaller urban groups, and then adding more voices, MACBA and Moderna Galerija firstly enabled lesser-heard voices in the urban realm to come to the surface (i.e. urban dissidents, immigrants and financially disadvantaged individuals). As a result, these urban-institutional projects were able to centre dialogue on very local, subjective experiences of urban social issues. These conversations could then be broadcasted and shared more publically, so they could make more of an impact. A similar approach was taken in Lacy's 1990's Oakland-based work—specifically, *Code 33* (1998–99). Similar to recent institutional experiments, in this project's earlier stages, small workshops were held between African-American teenagers and police officers so that tensions could be dealt with more directly and personally (Lacy, Jacoby and Johnson 2001). Latterly, a public event was held that all Oakland residents could attend and possibly contribute to the project's already initiated conversations on youth and racism (Lacy, Jacoby and Johnson 2001).

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[13] See Lacy, Suzanne, Annice Jacoby, and Chris Johnson. 2001. "The Oakland Projects (1999–2001)." Accessed January 22, 2020. https://www.suzannelacy.com/the-oakland-projects/.

This approach of starting small scale, and then adding more voices to the conversation, seemingly enabled greater sociability and conviviality to be forged in the community. The slow and gradual process of starting from small-scale conversation and then expanding was arguably a practical means of confronting and resolving some of Oakland's racial tensions.

Experimental institutionalism has also apparently referenced discursive activism's distinction between the horizontal micro-dialogues of urban users, and the powerful meta-discourse of capitalism. As Jason Hackworth (2007) has described, discursive activism is rooted in the idea that capitalism is itself a powerful discourse, which is often blindly followed. MACBA diametrically opposed its horizontal urban dialogues with the capital-centred meta-discourse of the Barcelona Forum 2004 (Ribalta 2008, 243–46). In other words, similar to discursive activism, MACBA treated capitalist-urbanism as a unidirectional meta-discourse that is often not challenged with dialogue. Through its workshops and seminars, the institution placed urban micro-dialogues against the meta-discourses of capitalist urban governance. I would contend that the Space Hijackers and Lacy's 1990s Oakland projects, also took this 'discursive activism' approach, forging ground-level dialogues in order to counter the meta-discourse of urban hegemony. Instead of a governing and oppressive discourse, which merely delivers information in a unilateral stream, the dialogues of said projects created reciprocal exchanges that countered urban meta-narratives. In order to create reciprocal dialogues that responded to urban social needs, the projects above also necessitated active *listening*—something with which the unilateral discourses of capitalist-urbanism often fail. Listening, however, is arguably not possible without first establishing an intent to *care* for urban communities.

Politics of Care

It is my contention, that a 'politics of care' has been integral to experimental institutionalism's response to the social fracture of Western urbanism. With social relationships at the centre of its operations, the experimental institutionalist notion of a constituent museum arguably signals a shift from *looking after objects* to *looking after subjects* (Byrne et al. 2018). Within this shift, the role of the curator appears to be less about the custodianship of objects than the care of an urban community—actively fostering its welfare in the context of its immediate social urgencies. This has become particularly pertinent in the Whitworth and Van Abbemuseum where the role of 'constituent curator' has arisen—a curatorial role dedicated specifically to putting community relationships at the centre of institutional activity (Whitworth/LJMU Summit

2020).[14] Speaking about the recently rebranded Whitworth in Manchester, curator Poppy Bowers (2020) suggests that, "care is a massive part what we do…It is essential to the culture of somewhere like the Whitworth. I always think of my role as a curator as supportive and facilitating." As architect Alberto Altés Arlandis (2018, 84) argues, inhabiting the constituent museum "requires attention and care…it is a practice of exposure, vulnerability, fragility and care." I would suggest that this institutional shift has a great significance within the broader context of what Feminist scholar Nancy Fraser (2016) has called capitalism's 'crisis of care'.

With its facets of competition and self-interest, it would appear that there is no place for care within the logic of capitalism (Fraser 2016). As Ha-Joon Chang (2010, 252) suggests, free-market ideology "is built on the belief that people won't do anything 'good' unless they are paid for it or punished for not doing it." In the past, caring for others was viewed as 'women's work' and was confined to the domestic, private space, as it did not adhere to capitalist logic (Folbre 2001; Fraser 2016). In late capitalism, however, care or 'affective labour' has been captured by capitalist production (Hardt 1999, 90). As Michael Hardt (1999, 90) argues, although care (or 'affective labour') has long since been an incongruent activity within capitalism, in late capitalism, it is captured and absorbed into its operations. Similarly, Fraser (2016, 32) suggests that financialised capitalism is increasingly commodifying care and affective labour. Notwithstanding, it could be argued that care still has an air of radicality in neoliberal, 'financialised' capitalism. This is because admitting our dependency on each other and on the wider societal collective, still boldly dismantles neoliberalism's logic of competition, self-interest and 'self-help'. As artist, Johanna Hedva (2016) contends:

> "The most anti-capitalist protest is to care for another and to care for yourself. To take on the historically feminised and therefore invisible practice of nursing, nurturing, caring. To take seriously each other's vulnerability and fragility and precarity, and to support it, honour it, empower it. To protect each other, to enact and practice community. A radical kinship, an interdependent sociality, a politics of care."

Capitalism's 'crisis of care', or rather, its shameful culture of toxic irresponsibility, naturally extends into the urban environment—it is arguably a key aspect of Western urbanism's social fracture. The current contemporary urban context of neoliberal privatisation cuts, deregulation and gentrification has constructed an enormously uncaring environment of toxic irresponsibility (Hodkinson 2019). Stuart Hodkinson's

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[14] On January 21, 2020, the Whitworth held a summit for LJMU staff and post-graduate students. During this summit, we got the chance to meet the Whitworth's new 'constituent curator' Denise Bowler.

(2019) recent investigations into Private Finance Initiative (PFI)[15] public housing regeneration programmes, reveals the enormous toxic irresponsibility that prevails in the capitalist-urbanism nexus towards vulnerable groups such as the elderly and disabled. In the London boroughs of Islington and Camden, PFI schemes have demonstrated a shocking lack of care, 'refurbishing' homes only to leave them with faults and extremely poor levels of health and safety in favour of cost cutting (Hodkinson 2019). Hodkinson (2019) documents how vulnerable people, including severely mentally disabled youngsters and deprived single mothers, are subjected to such a terrible lack of care within capitalist urbanisation's processes of regeneration and gentrification. From installing loud music in bus shelters, to fitting metal bars across public benches, UK cities are, in their design, increasingly demonstrating a marked lack of care of responsibility toward the homeless (BBC 2015a, 2015b, 2018). Disputably, urban hegemony has no interest in caring for vulnerable groups such as the elderly, the racialised poor and the homeless because it cannot mobilise their labour power and finds their presence detrimental to the marketability of urban spaces.

Within this capitalist 'crisis of care', which extends palpably into the urban environment, experimental institutionality has arguably formed sites of ethical agency. Arguably, within experimental institutionalism's 'constituent museum' formulation, art institutions are public institutions of human welfare that can offer both temporary assemblages and permanent sites of care in the urban landscape.[16] Tania Bruguera and Queens Museum's project *Immigrant Movement International* (*IMI Corona*) (2011–18) (Fig. 3.4) is a key example of an institutional experiment centred on a 'politics of care'.[17] Offering a range of services to Corona's immigrant community and responding to their immediate needs, the project seemingly embodies the constituent museum as a site for attention and care (Arlandis 2018, 84). This project has involved Bruguera and cultural agents from Queens museum, caring for Corona's immigrant community rather than a collection of inanimate cultural objects. This care for local immigrants takes the form of education in a large variety of subjects such as health services, legal advice and

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[15] Hodkinson (2019, 48) defines Private Finance Initiative (PFI) as "outsourcing on steroids." PFI involves many different corporate entities implementing a single building project to mask the fact that every penny invested comes from the public purse (Hodkinson 2019, 58).

[16] There have been impressive experimental institutional responses to COVID-19 in urban areas recently, which are centred in a 'politics of care'. The Reina Sofia's *Museo Situado* network has set up a training school for community health advocates (Museo Reina Sofia 2020). As a part of a project called *This Head, These Hands* (2020–Ongoing), Heart of Glass and Shelia Ghelani have created care packages and delivered these to young carers in St Helens throughout the pandemic (Heart of Glass 2021).

[17] See Bruguera, Tania. 2011. "Immigrant Movement International." Accessed January 17, 2020. http://immigrant-movement.us/wordpress/about/.

personal support (Queens Museum 2011). Shelia Ghelani's and Heart of Glass'[18] *Getting To Know You* (2017), on other hand, has worked with residents of two housing schemes in St Helens, encouraging them to reach out and get to know one another.[19] As both examples illustrate, the integration of a 'politics of care' into experimental institutionalist activity has opted for real ethical impact, as it seeks to forge affective labour with those most vulnerable or neglected in capitalist urban sites. Caring becomes an act of expanding the urban social sphere in terms of its inclusivity. Arguably, these projects forge an affective labour that resists economic capture, as it involves those who are most excluded in a capitalist society.

It could be contended that this institutional notion of a 'politics of care', enacted in a decidedly urban context, illuminates urban social aesthetic works such as Michael Rakowitz's *Para(SITE)* (1998–Ongoing) (Fig. 3.5). In this project, Rakowitz created inflatable shelters for homeless people living in US cities.[20] As the project's title suggests, Rakowitz's inflatable structures would rely on the HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning) system of buildings, existing 'parasitically' off an architectural system that has a 'toxic irresponsibility' for many vulnerable and deprived groups. It could also be contended that a 'politics of care' requires artists and cultural agents to *embrace vulnerability*. As Arlandis (2018, 85) suggests, "caring makes us vulnerable." Therefore, embracing vulnerability can be described as offering a crucial opening towards 'care'. In the *IMI Corona* project, Queens Museum enabled Bruguera, as its initiating artist, to live in the same conditions as the immigrants for whom she was caring (Dolnik 2011).[21] Living amongst immigrants, and in the very same conditions as them, she 'stepped into their shoes', developing a genuine understanding of their everyday struggles and precarious conditions within Western cities (Dolnik 2011). Bruguera therefore embraced vulnerability. Bruguera's own vulnerability seemingly aided her understanding of how to best care for the immigrant community of Corona.

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[18] Heart of Glass is a socially engaged arts commissioning agency based in St. Helens, Merseyside. It was founded through investment from Arts Council England's Creative People and Places programme. Heart of Glass aims to establish the town as a hub for social and collaborative arts practice. The agency occupies a curious position in this research as it has 1:1 scale elements, but these are situated administratively and financially within institutional arrangements. See Heart of Glass. 2014. Accessed February 5, 2020. http://www.heartofglass.org.uk.
[19] See Ghelani, Shelia. 2017. "Getting to Know You." Accessed February 5, 2020. http://www.heartofglass.org.uk/project/getting-to-know-you/.
[20] See Rakowitz, Michael. 2000. "Para(Site)." Accessed February 5, 2020. http://www.michaelrakowitz.com/parasite.
[21] Sam Dolnik's (2011) interview with Bruguera describes how the artist was "sharing a tiny apartment in Corona, Queens, with five illegal immigrants and six children, including a newborn, while scrapping by on the minimum wage without health insurance."

Fig. 3.4 Tania Bruguera and Queens Museum, *Immigrant Movement International (IMI Corona)*, 2011–18. "Plant Justice" workshop facilitated by artist Jason Gaspar, part of Tania Bruguera's Immigrant Movement International (2011–18) in Corona, Queens. Photo: © Courtesy of the Queens Museum, New York.

Fig. 3.5 Michael Rakowitz, *Para(SITE)*, 1998–Ongoing. Various Sites. Photo: © Michael Rakowitz, Courtesy of the Artist and Lombard-Fried Projects.

Like Bruguera, arguable urban social aesthetic artists such as Michael Rakowitz and Rick Lowe, have similarly been required to embrace vulnerability, as they respectively spent time a great deal of time on the streets engaging with the racialised poor and homeless. The vulnerable experience of directly engaging with the urban racialised poor and homeless, has arguably given these artists an insight into how best to care

for these social groups. In Rakowitz's case, vulnerability was definitely experienced, as the homeless people initially rejected him due to his former architectural training (Stillman 2005). Experiencing the same rejection and judgement as the homeless perhaps gave Rakowitz further insight into how to care for this social group.

Feminist scholar Fiona Robinson (1999) suggests that affect (the personal) and criticality (the political) do not negate one another, but are mutually reinforcing, and that social justice is best served by combining the two. Robinson (1999, 26) asserts that, "care and justice are no longer fixed in a dichotomous relationship." Rather, *politicising* care radicalises it—sets it into action. Correspondingly, institutional experiments appear to combine care with criticality in the context of urban social urgencies. They appear to involve a yin/yang balance as it were between 'care' and 'criticality'. *IMI Corona*, for example, combines its care for Corona's immigrant community with its more politically dense aims to fight for the justice of urban immigrants. This also seems to be the case in urban social aesthetic 'care' projects. *Para(SITE)* caringly provides provisional shelter for the urban homeless, whilst simultaneously making a critical comment on an urban architectural system, which treats housing as a commodity, rather than a basic human right. *Project Row Houses*, on the other hand, cares for a deprived African-American neighbourhood, offering affordable housing and a whole host of services, which show compassion and concern for the health and wellbeing of its residents. However, Lowe's project also situates itself within the area's ongoing battles against racially biased gentrification processes. Arguably, the toxic irresponsibility that characterises the contemporary urban condition in the West makes it the case that care absolutely *must* contain a politically dense aspect in order to properly affect circumstances. The lack of care in contemporary urbanism is in itself, something that needs to be antagonistically countered. Caring, however, is impossible without relating to others—indeed, it necessitates 'collaboration'.

Collaboration ('Co-Labour')

Within experimental institutionalism, there has been a distinct shift away from the idea of 'participation' towards 'collaboration' (Aikens et al. 2016; Byrne et al. 2018; Badovinac et al. 2018). This has occurred also within the broader field of socially engaged art (Beech 2010, 26–28). In the last few decades, alongside relational aesthetics, 'participatory' art was at the centre of many contemporary art discourses—most notably interrogated and discussed by art historian Claire Bishop (2006a, 2006b,

2012).[22] However, institutional experiments, operating within the context of urbanism's social fracture, have tended to be more *collaborative* than *participatory*. As Whitworth director and 'useful art' advocate Alistair Hudson (2017) argues, 'participation' implies an imbalance of power—it suggests the "museum 2.0 where you get people to participate in someone else's agenda." As artist Dave Beech (2010, 26–28) adds, 'collaborators' have authorial rights, whilst 'participants' do not.

In suggesting a more democratic, horizontal form of working with others, collaboration also signals the social dimension of labour (Byrne 2018, 27). 'Collaboration' offers a much more effective opening, within the context of urbanism's social fracture, for socially conducive forms of labour. As John Byrne (2018, 27) highlights, the etymological roots of 'collaboration' are 'co-labour'. Collaboration can therefore be said to touch upon the distinctly social dimensions of production processes. Former curator of public practice Michael Birchall (2017) has highlighted how Tate Liverpool's *Art Gym* (2016)[23] project was a site of collective production, where emphasis was placed on *process* rather than *outcomes*. Co-labour was arguably profuse in this project, as it was constituted through the curatorial collaboration between Assemble and Tate Collective, as well as the visiting public who could actively co-produce artisanal objects via the 'gym's' various 'stations' (or workshops). Birchall (2020) has also suggested that co-labour is a vital aspect of the institution's Tate Exchange initiative because it is a model in which artists, curators and audiences enter into the co-labour of participatory artistic projects. With its general movement towards social responsibility and agency in the urban landscape, experimental institutionalism has saw museums entering into collaborations with their constituencies, embracing the social dimensions and possibilities of labour (Byrne et al. 2018). In fact, such institutions are aiming to "radically rethink themselves as collaborations"—as organisations of ideas, which have radically resulted from collaborations between museums staff, artists, urban activists

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[22] In her text, *The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents* (2006a), Bishop discusses the surge of artistic interest in collaboration. However, unlike Bishop (2006a) I am interested in the *social* dimension of collaboration ('co-labour') in a decidedly urban context. Unlike Bishop (2006a), who has greater interest in what she felt was the overlooked 'aesthetic' content of collaborative art (overlooked in favour of the 'ethical'), I am solely concerned with collaborative art's subversion of productive urban labour processes. As Kester (2011) highlighted, Bishop (2006a) also problematically imposed a rigid boundary between 'aesthetic' projects ("provocative", "uncomfortable" and "multilayered") and 'activist' works ("predictable", "benevolent" and "ineffectual"). The collaborative art projects discussed here, however, combine agonistic urban activism with democratic and convivial attempts towards co-labour.
[23] *Art Gym* (2016) was an experimental institutional project led by artist collective, Assemble, and Tate Collective—a collective of 16-25 year olds based at Tate Liverpool since the 1990s. During the project, the gallery was transformed into a series of 'stations' resembling a fitness studio, which offered different art making activities to the public (Birchall 2020, 57–58). See Tate. 2016b. "Art Gym." Accessed February 6, 2020. https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-liverpool/display/art-gym.

and locals (Byrne et al. 2018, 27). In other words, the art institution is reimagined as a site that embodies the 'co-labour' of all its constituents.

Like many aspects of sociability, the social dimensions of labour have also been broken down and instrumentalised within capitalist society. Karl Marx (1867/1990, 444) implied that capitalism exploits our innate need and desire for sociability via the labour process. In a capitalist labour process, workers are brought together—whether this is side-by-side in accordance with a plan, in the same process, or in different but connected processes (Marx 1867/1990, 444). In Marxian terms, such a collaborative working situation is called 'co-operation'. Co-operation, however, merely implies economic capture of our basic need for sociability—it exploits this most integral human need in order to increase productivity levels and ultimately increase capital (Marx 1867/1990, 444). Marx (1867/1990, 444) observed that, "man is at all events a social animal" and therefore to work with others increases productivity and ultimately capital. Capitalist production has therefore only promoted collaboration/co-labour in so far that it may exploit humanity's basic need for sociability to fulfill its agendas. This degradation of labour's social dimensions seemingly extends into the urban environment were work is largely isolated, individualistic and competitive. However, labour's social dimensions can never be totally degraded or destroyed by capitalism (Arlandis 2018, 82). This is because social relationships are an *anterior* condition of labour (Arlandis 2018, 82). As Arlandis (2018, 82) contends:

> "There are no 'relata', no things, prior to relationships—things are constituted *in* relationships, they are interior or 'intra', to them…production is not owned but owed, things we create and learn through belong to others rather than to ourselves."

Institutional experiments have ostensibly aimed to reinstate labour's socially cohesive dimensions. MABCA's *Las Agencias (The Agencies)* (2001) is arguably a stand out example of experimental institutionalism's attempt to reinstate the social dimensions of labour. 'Agency'—the idea of socio-political empowerment, was imagined as a nexus, as a meeting point, between the production processes of the museum and radical urban practices (Ribalta 2008). The idea of agency therefore formed an opening towards a large-scale co-labour process. *Las Agencias* was a collaborative urban art project, which stemmed from various workshops carried out at MACBA in 2001, which was led by Jordi Claramonte (from the Madrid-based collective La Fiambrera Obrera/The Worker's Lunchbox) and Jorge Ribalta (MACBA's former head of public programmes). MACBA would collaborate in this project with artists, urban activists, dissidents and local Barcelonans, to form a counter-campaign against the World Bank meeting scheduled for June 2001

(Ribalta 2008, 235). This institutional project therefore mirrored 1:1 scale urban art practice's hostility towards corporate-backed cultural institutions. It demonstrated how experimental institutionalism has, in a Spanish context, directly aligned with the radical urban activisms of the likes of Yo Mango, Mapas and Flo6x8. MACBA was marrying working-class urban aesthetic activism and artistic institutionality in the same way that the Reina Sofia in Madrid has aligned its institutional experiments with the activism of its surrounding Lavapiés district.

A variety of different production processes were merged together in a common attempt to contribute to Barcelona's counter-summit protest against the World Bank meeting (Ribalta 2008, 235–36). This arguably meant that labour's social dimensions were being reinstated within a capitalist urban context. Different 'agencies' worked in MACBA on different aspects of Barcelona's counter-campaign (Ribalta 2008, 235–36). A graphic agency produced posters and printed matter; a photographic agency produced images and an archive; another agency, produced a variety of multi-purpose tools that could be used during counter-summit protests; a media agency published *Esta Tot Fatal* magazine (Everything is Terrible), which functioned as the mouthpiece of the counter-summit; finally, a fifth agency took over the running of the museum's bar, which became a radical, relational space (Ribalta 2008, 235–36). It could be contended that the multitude of different production processes here, underlines the highly collaborative and social nature of the project's labour. Furthermore, I would also argue that labour's social dimensions are reinstated in this project because all parties involved took part in a co-defined process. The focus here on skills-based work also increases the relationality of the labour process, as skills arguably require more intensive interactions with others.

Arguably, a vital aspect of *Las Agencias* was that it demonstrated how reinstating labour's social dimensions in a contentious urban context means accepting tensions and conflicts—it does not mean submitting to some false, utopian notion of untroubled social cohesion, but rather, requires tensions and conflicts to be confronted directly and worked through. As Alba Benavent (2013) and Emma Mahoney (2016) have highlighted, the attempted collaboration between MACBA and urban activist groups in *Las Agencias*, was fraught with conflict throughout. Urban activists involved in the project complained about the museum's lack of accommodation for them, whilst MACBA, on the other hand, got angry with its collaborators for not asking permission before copying and distributing keys to workshops, or manifesting a certain fear that computers and internet loaned out to collaborators could be used for activities potentially defined as illegal (Benavent 2013; Mahoney 2016). It would argue that these

conflicts came, not from a labour process that was socially fragmentary, but from one that successfully heightened the social aspects of labour to the extent that conflicts naturally arose and were confronted.

Chantal Mouffe (2013, 13) suggests that conflict is intrinsic to agonistic approaches (such as those of experimental institutionality) and should therefore not be understood as a negative experience, but as something productive—something that is indicative of pluralistic democracy. Agonism is about confronting conflicting points of view and making existing conflicts productive (Mouffe 2013). For Mouffe (2013, 13), conflict should not be eradicated, as "the specificity of pluralistic democracy is precisely the recognition and legitimation of conflict." Similarly, Rosalyn Deutshe (1986) contends that conflict, division and instability "do not ruin the democratic public sphere; they are conditions of its existence." *Las Agencias* arguably registered the irreducibility of social tension and conflict in the urban political sphere. It demonstrated how the relationships in relational art practice in the urban realm do not always have to possess a convivial quality but can be conflictual (in a positive, productive sense however). Emblematising the agonistic approach of experimental institutionalism, it accepted the inevitability of conflict. Through its invitation of urban dissidents into the art institution, it created democratic discussions through which conflicts could be confronted, worked through and made productive. I would therefore contend that the conflictual relationships that characterised *Las Agencias* did not make it a 'failure', as critiques of the project have implied (Benavent, 2013; Mahoney, 2016).

MIMA's and Isabel Lima's *Gresham Wooden Horse* (2017) (Fig. 3.6) was another institutional experiment, which appeared to effectively touch-upon the social dimensions of labour in an urban context.[24] This was a collaborative project between MIMA and the artist Isabel Lima, which brought Middlesbrough residents together to build a wooden horse sculpture. The project took inspiration from the Greek myth of the Trojan horse that was used to infiltrate the city of Troy (MIMA 2017). Lima apparently used this symbolism to reflect on the project's urban collaborative labour process (MIMA 2017). The irreverent nature of this task—building a giant wooden horse, suggests that the real purpose of the project was to bring the community together via a socially cohesive labour process (Lenette 2019, 45). The labour process was in itself 'a Trojan horse', as the creative labour used to build the massive wooden sculpture was really only a means through which to set-up an 'informal forum for cultural exchange'— to meet and exchange conversation on Middlesbrough's identity (Lenette 2019, 45).

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[24] See MIMA. 2017. "Isabel Lima Gresham Wooden Horse." Accessed February 10, 2020. https://visitmima.com/whats-on/single/isabel-lima-greshams-wooden-horse/.

Lima (quoted in Lenette 2019, 45) has, in fact, described how the project was an excuse to bring people from the community together.

Fig. 3.6 Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (MIMA) and Isabel Lima, *Gresham Wooden Horse*, 2017. Middlesbrough. Photo: © Michelle Maddison.

After the collaboratively built wooden horse was completed and paraded around Gresham in Middlesbrough, a number of further co-labour initiatives emerged in the city, including craft activities, a community kitchen and café (Lenette 2019, 45). *Gresham Wooden Horse* has, therefore, acted as a catalyst for the establishment of further co-labour processes in Middlesbrough. Similar to *Las Agencias*, this project seems to present skills-based work as a means of reinstating labour's social dimensions. I would also argue that by negotiating urban labour through creative labour forms, these MACBA and MIMA projects, were undoing the processes of commodity fetishism, which prevail in our cities, alienating us from one another and creating social fragmentation. By presenting human labour through artistic-institutional activity, "the very quality that makes the commodity 'magical' (human labour)" was made visible and therefore unalienated. (Child 2019, 106). By making the social relations integral to human work *visible* (no longer masked by 'things' or commodities) and thereby undoing the alienating effects of commodity fetishism, MACBA and MIMA's urban 1:1 scale projects highlighted, in a post-Marxian sense, the socially cohesive potentials of collaboration or 'co-labour'.

Arguably, the idea of reinstating the social dimensions of labour has also been addressed in urban social aesthetic projects such as Jeanne Van Heeswijk's

Freehouse (2008–Ongoing). *Freehouse* responds to the gentrification processes taking place in Afrikaanderwijk, Rotterdam, which have threatened to displace its working-class immigrant community. The aim of this project has been to resist the gentrification, establishing ways in which working-class, immigrant residents can share the economic benefit of the planned 'revitalisation' (Aikens et al. 2016, 298). The project has initiated different cooperative workspaces, creating skills-based jobs that enable residents to not just survive within the revitalisation, but also economically thrive from the changes. The project has formed a multitude of communal working sites such as a neighbourhood kitchen, textiles workshop, neighbourhood stores, and market (Aikens et al. 2016, 300–304). Like MACBA's *Las Agencias* project, *Freehouse* combines a variety of different production processes (food, craft, textiles etc.) (Aikens et al. 2016, 300–304). By combining different collaborative production processes, the project arguably increases the chance for socially cohesive labour.

The focus again on skills-based work, as we also saw in both MACBA and MIMA's collaborative projects, increases the relationality of the labour process, as skills arguably require more intensive interactions with others. It could be contended that skills-based work further taps into the social potentialities locked up in labour, which capitalism's continuous deskilling of labour has degraded. I would argue that *Freehouse* and the institutional experiments of MACBA and MIMA seem concerned with 'deskilling' in a purely productive labour context—not deskilling in artistic labour. As John Roberts (2007, 227) asserts, "deskilling is not the same across art and productive labour." He continues, "in productive labour deskilling is structural and systematic; in art it is grounded in the expansion of artistic skills into intellectual and immaterial labour" (Roberts 2007, 227). In art, deskilling describes the erosion of traditional artisanal skills in favour of new, more technical, intellectual and immaterial ones, and so it is really a 'deskilling-reskilling dialectic' (deskilling simply leads to reskilling in art). However, deskilling in capitalist production is arguably a more blatant erosion of skills. Arguably, the co-labour projects above are not using skills-based labour to ward off the craft-less decadence of contemporary art production, but rather to respond to capitalist deskilling and its detrimental effects on the urban social sphere. Skills-based work could be perceived as socially situated because it is reliant on mastery, which involves teaching and learning from others—it involves sharing resources and material in achieving a task. Skills-based labour can unite people in common interest and promote social exchange when it is being taught and learnt. As Jenni Sorkin (2018, 229) highlights, one of the things craft is good at as form of skills-based creative labour, is "offering a sense of community." However, what was arguably unique about *Freehouse* was that shared experiences of immigration could offer a

further opening to 'socialising' the project's labour. This is because the aim of the project was to merge together the labour of immigrants with the more visible, native labour forms in Afrikaanderwijk (Aikens et al. 2016, 298). As in *Las Agencias*, immigrant residents were encouraged to collaborate with Afrikaanderwijk natives in ways that did not avoid conflict, but rather, in ways that accepted it, viewing it as a vital aspect of a socially centred work process.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed experimental institutionalism's attempts to reconfigure the art institution as a site for *relationality* in the socially fragmented urban landscape. Crucially, however, I have presented the various ways in which experimental institutionality could assist in interrogating and giving further clarification to the relational project of urban social aesthetics. I would conclusively suggest that contemporary art's urban Marxism arguably moves beyond Nicholas Bourriaud's relational aesthetic theory. Although relational aesthetics has dominated analyses of social art practice, experimental institutionality arguably offers a greater frame within which to examine relational urban social aesthetic works. This chapter has touched upon the oppressive and socially fragmenting forces of capitalist-urbanism that exist today in an immaterial/informational form, governing urban subjects through flows of data and signs. Correspondingly, the following chapter will address 'urban spectacle'— a late capitalist urban model, centred on the dispersed, immaterial forces of semiology and imagery.

Urban Spectacle and Modes of Détournement
Subverting the Visual Within Capitalist-Urbanism

This chapter explores the Situationist International's urban-visual concepts of 'spectacle' and 'détournement'. It argues that these Situationist ideas may assist in examining contemporary art shaped by the conditions of urban spectacle.[1]

As Jean Baudrillard (1975/1993, 77) highlighted, Western urbanism is no longer a politico-industrial territory of production—it is now a vital spatial extension of late capitalist spectacle. In the post-industrial urban landscape, corporate imagery seemingly encroaches upon every available space. Billboards, electronic monitors, posters and signage display a multitude of marketing messages conducive to passive consumption and non-intervention. Western urbanism is no longer concentrated around the fixed site of the factory as it was in the nineteenth century. Rather, urban hegemony now largely assumes a dispersed visual form, operating via its so-called 'empire of signs' (Baudrillard 1975/1993). It is within the context of this shift in Western urbanism, that this chapter will examine instances of urban social aesthetic practice that contest the spectacle's 'economy of appearances' (Debord 1967/2014). This chapter aims to demonstrate that Situationist ideas of spectacle and détournement may lend to the examination of contemporary art's visual urban Marxism. Each section of this chapter will highlight a specific approach or 'mode of détournement' that contemporary art has employed in its reaction against urban spectacle. Via this *repurposing*[2] of Situationist theory and practice, I will ultimately address the image as having a dialectical status within capitalist-urbanism—as being a mediator of capitalist spectacle, yet also, at the same time, a potential site for bottom-up resistance.

Art historians such as Claire Bishop (2012, 11), Nicholas Bourriaud (1998/2009, 9) and Grant Kester (2004, 29) have highlighted how contemporary art has rejected the visual

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[1] 'Urban spectacle' refers to the capitalist spectacle economy's extension into urbanism. The urban spectacle is seemingly vital in a contemporary context, as it bridges physical urban space with the 'space of flows'. According to Manuel Castells (1996/2000, 459), "there follows a structural schizophrenia" between these two spatial logics. Bridging informational, semiotic operations with physical space, the urban spectacle appears to be a crucial merger of Western urbanism's most dominant spatial logics.

[2] In this chapter, 'repurposing Situationist debate', will mean *reusing* Situationist ideas of spectacle and détournement towards a different purpose—towards the examination of visual urban social aesthetic practice.

in favour of an 'aesthetics of action' through the likes of 'participatory', 'collaborative' or 'socially engaged art'. Such debates have seemingly fostered the assumption that visual, image-based art problematically imitates the spectacle economy's detrimental emphasis on appearances and passive spectatorship. I would argue, however, that this belief that art escapes reification through creating activated social situations (rather than images) is largely flawed. The above theorists have seemingly inferred that capitalistic value lies in the image itself. In the 'society of the spectacle', capitalistic value is not constituted by images themselves, but by *social relations* that are *mediated* by images (Debord 1967/2014, 2). To think that the source of value in capitalism lies purely in the image is exactly what Marx calls commodity fetishism or, more accurately, what Debord calls 'spectacle'. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how imagery is still a valid site for anti-capitalistic activism—how the visual is a tool for radicality within urban social aesthetics.

By repurposing Situationist debate, this chapter will demonstrate how, in the context of capitalist-urbanism, visual contemporary art can be a powerful tool for undermining and even problematising urban spectacle. Operating within the urban spectacle's very own territory and tactically subverting its semiotics operations, has arguably been a vital form of anti-capitalistic resistance in said art practice. When seeking to resist a hyper-visual economic system, a valid strategy may be to operate within its primary topography, using its operations and language against itself—'fighting fire with fire', as it were.[3] Jacques Rancière (2007) has suggested that imagining a non-passive model of spectatorship, which gives equal power to the producer and audience, could assist in forming 'counter-spectacle' visuality. This reconfiguration of spectatorship would involve a philosophical transmutation of *viewing* into *interpreting*, as "interpreting the world is already a means of transforming it, of reconfiguring it" (Rancière 2007, 277). However, this rejection of passive spectatorship may only ever exist as a philosophical attitude—as a transformed, yet precariously immaterial, intellectual perspective. Instead of simply *philosophically* reimagining visuality and spectatorship in art, as Rancière (2007, 2009) proposes, this chapter will examine how the visual is *pragmatically* established as radical apparatus in what I call urban social aesthetics.

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[3] Scholars such as Claire Bishop (2012, 83), Martin Jay (1993, 418) and Lawrence Kritzman (2006, 354) have described the Situationists as 'anti-visual'. However, Situationist détournement, graffiti and psychogeographic maps were visual and seemed to suggest that working with visual culture and its urban extensions may be a tactic of resistance.

Theoretical Background

The Situationist International's theory of a late capitalist spectacle economy was mainly explored in Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1967/2014).[4] Out of the multiple theses that Debord (1967/2014, 11) imparts in this text, his most illuminating was arguably—"the spectacle is capital accumulated to the point that it becomes images." Debord (1967/2014) contended that the spectacle is social life commodified to the point that it is reduced to a series of marketable images ('image commodities'). Rather than producing physical commodities, the spectacle economy creates "an ever-increasing multitude of image-objects" (Debord 1967/2014, 5). The 'spectacle' expresses the tendency in late capitalism for social life to be characterised by a passive reception of images that the media-economy alliance broadcasts to us in a unidirectional stream.

Most notably discussed by Post-Operaists[5] such as Maurizio Lazzarato (1996), Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt (2001), the idea of 'immaterial labour' also alludes to late capitalist production's hyper-visual inclinations. Lazzarato (1996, 133) defines 'immaterial labour' as "labour that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity." In Post-Operaist theorisations, consumption is "first of all a consumption of information" (Lazzarato 1996, 140). These formulations are similar to how, in the Situationist theory of the spectacle, labour produces 'image-commodities', and consumption is primarily oriented around images/sign-values. Both 'spectacle' and 'immaterial labour' centre on how, in late capitalism, there is a significant shift away from the production of material commodities (as was the case in industrial capitalism) towards the production of spectacular and immaterial ones (i.e. images and information). In both debates, commodities are not physical, material *vehicles* of value, but rather, *signifiers* of value. Post-Operaist theorisations have, therefore, delivered similar observations to Situationist spectacle. However, this chapter solely repurposes the Situationists' spectacle rhetoric, as it offers an urban-centric toolkit of artistic theory, which is missing from Post-Operaism's political-economic analyses. Situationist debate also offers the praxis of détournement as a means to resist late capitalism's hyper-visuality. Most vitally, however, this chapter is less concerned with labour than the hyper-visual consumption tendencies of late capitalist-urbanism. This chapter is not upholding the view that the Situationists have held the upper hand in twentieth and

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[4] This chapter will make continuous reference to Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1967), not as a theoretical omission, but due to the unavoidable fact that it constituted the Situationists' principal analysis of the spectacle economy. This chapter's analyses are not centred on Debord's writing. Theorisations on spectacle and détournement from other S.I. members and secondary source authors are also addressed.

[5] 'Post-Operaism', also known as 'Post-Workerist theory', is a political and cultural tradition that emphasizes the importance of the working-class. It can be traced back to political and theoretical practices in Italy in the early 1960s (Nigro 2018).

twenty-first century political economy. Rather, that the spectacle's consumer-centred discussion is the more appropriate theoretical framework within which to discuss the urban social aesthetic practice addressed.

Furthermore, experimental institutionalism, the second contemporary art debate repurposed in this thesis towards an urban social aesthetic, currently lacks activity and discourse conducive to a 'counter-spectacle' visuality. I would contend that, unlike Situationist debate, experimental institutionalism does not offer a framework or vocabulary for examining contemporary art that resists the urban spectacle. Arguably, the struggle for counter-spectacle museum visuality and society's broader resistance against urban spectacle, are profoundly linked. As the Situationists claimed, "today cities themselves are presented as lamentable spectacles, a supplement to the museums for tourists driven around in glassed-in buses" (S.I. 1959/1997, 84). Biennials, for example, clearly occupy this 'museum spectacle/urban spectacle' nexus. Many scholars and critics have highlighted the biennial's crucial role as an urban marketing instrument (Vogel 2010; Louise 2015; Voorhies 2017; Von Falkenhausen 2018). Biennials can be an "inexpensive and effective marketing instrument in disguise", which can establish a city as a primary node in the global capitalist economy (Vogel 2010, 107). In light of their significant role in urban marketing and image branding processes, biennials occupy a problematic position in terms of counter-spectacle urban art practice.

In spite of experimental institutionalism's ambitions towards radical and ethical institutionality, its efforts to develop a counter-spectacle museum visuality that could lend to the analysis of urban social aesthetic practice have been unsuccessful. There have been attempts, although solidly within the traditional gallery-exhibition context, to develop a counter spectacle museum visuality that refutes neo-Kantian disinterested spectatorship. The Van Abbemuseum's *DIY Archive: Make Your Own Exhibition* as part of *Collection Now* (2013–2017)[6] and Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art's (MIMA) *Middlesbrough Collection* (2017) both envisioned anti-spectacle museum visuality via collaborative activities and dialogues with the public. *DIY Archive: Make Your Own Exhibition* was an interactive space within the Van Abbemuseum's *Collection Now* exhibition where visitors were invited to create their own visual display out of prints, objects, posters, books and video works (Van Abbemuseum 2013).[7] MIMA's first ever-permanent collection display, *Middlesbrough Collection*, was curated

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[6] The Van Abbemuseum's *Collection Now* (2013–17) exhibition was curated by Christiane Berndes, Charles Esche, Diana Franssen and Galit Eilat.
[7] See Van Abbemuseum. 2013. "DIY Archive – Make Your Own Exhibition." Accessed March 18, 2020. https://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/programme/programme/diy-archive/.

through dialogues between the gallery's users, constituent groups, visitors and staff (MIMA 2018c).[8] Bringing collective dialogue and activity into the curation process, these projects temporarily problematised the spectacle's non-intervention and unilateral discourse with active co-production and collective authorship. However, once these collaborative and democratic curation processes were over, the displays resumed their role as objects for passive spectatorship. These specific experiments in institutional visuality only temporarily suspended the spectacle-reaffirming dynamics of conventional museum display. The active co-operation and dialogue that conceived these displays disappeared, leaving only arrangements of 'image-objects' for passive visual consumption.

Experimental institutionalism has also increasingly attempted to curtail the issue of spectacle-reaffirming museum display by negating 'spectatorship' in favour of 'usership'—forming displays that can be activated by museum users for social purposes. Stephen Wright (2016, 474) has suggested replacing Rancière's (2007, 2009) 'emancipated spectatorship' as a means of reconciling passive spectatorship models with 'usership'. Not only can this be construed as an attempt to swerve around the ongoing issue of spectacle-reaffirming museum displays, it also tends to be ineffectual in its application. For example, the *Museum of Arte Útil* (2013)[9] exhibition at the Van Abbemuseum attempted the difficult curatorial task of reconciling socially engaged art practice with the spectacle-reaffirming display models of Western museum architecture (Van Abbemuseum 2013).[10] Based on Tania Bruguera's *Association of Arte Útil* (AAÚ) project, an ongoing online/offline platform for highlighting art's use-values, the exhibition was constituted by displays of the project's online archive, artworks, makeshift structures and instructions for the public on 'what to use and how to use it'. When these displays were activated through discussions, workshops or performances, museological spectacle was successfully negotiated. However, when these displays were not being used, they returned to being "objectifications of invested artistic labour, whose latent surplus-value is waiting to be extracted" via disinterested spectatorship (Byrne 2018, 95). Situationist debate, on the other hand, with its idea of détournement, does not shy away from the issue of visuality, but arguably confronts it (in both an artistic and production context), subverting it into a counter-spectacle device. Like Situationist détournement, the visuality of the urban social aesthetic works

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[8] See MIMA. 2018c. "Middlesbrough Collection." Accessed March 18, 2020. https://visitmima.com/whats-on/single/middlesbrough-collection-2/.
[9] The *Museum of Arte Útil* (2013) exhibition was curated by Nick Aikens, Tania Bruguera, ConstructLab (with Alex Roemer, Bureau d'Études, Collective Works and others), Annette Eliëns, Charles Esche, Annie Fletcher, Gemma Medina and Alessandra Saviotti.
[10] See Van Abbemuseum. 2013. "Museum of Arte Útil." Accessed December 9, 2020. https://museumarteutil.net.

discussed in this chapter is, as Giorgio Agamben (2014) would say, purely 'destituent'. It is outside of the institution, or rather, is 'extra-institutional'—it perceivably exists as an antagonistic 'outside' to the visuality of art institutions, and more broadly, the institution of 'Urbanism' as a whole. The visual language of the 'institutional experiments' described above, however, is 'constituent'. In spite of their bottom-up, 'counter-spectacle' aspirations, they are still enormously attached to institutional visuality (artistic, museological and urban). It is arguably impossible to reconcile the constituent visual language of the above institutional experiments with the destituent visuality of urban social aesthetic works.

With this chapter's exclusive repurposing of Situationist visual discourse established, the research will resume defining the spectacle economy and the theoretical approaches taken in this chapter. An efficient way to clarify Situationist spectacle is to understand it as a historical update of Karl Marx's critique of nineteenth century industrial capitalism. Marx (1867/1990) identified the economy's first stage of domination as the pervasiveness of the commodity, declaring that, "the wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails presents itself as an immense accumulation of commodities" (Marx 1867/1990, 125). Situationist theory historically enhanced this statement, arguing that, in late capitalism social life is no longer defined by consumption or 'having', as it were, but by 'appearances' (Debord 1967/2014, 5). The Situationist idea of spectacle suggests that imagery is integral to the logic of late capitalism. With ideas around 'simulacra', semiology and 'immaterial labour', many political and cultural theorists have also identified the dominance of imagery in late capitalism (Baudrillard 1975/1993, 1968/2005; Venturi 1972; Lazzarato 1996; Jameson 1991).[11]

As an economic model in which consumption is based on *appearances*, the spectacle can also be understood as what Baudrillard (1968/2005) describes as the 'sign-value' phenomenon. In *Systems of Objects* (1968/2005), Baudrillard argues that, under late capitalism, commodities are mainly characterised by what they 'signify' rather than use-value and exchange-value, as was the case in Marx's (1867/1990) analysis

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[11] 'Late capitalism' is defined as a 'third stage' in the evolution of capitalism, characterised by the dominance of multinational corporations, flows of capital, globalisation and mass consumption (Mandel 1975). Fredric Jameson (1991) associates 'late capitalism' with a new multinational, 'informational' consumerist phase of capitalism. The term 'late capitalism' enables scholars to point to a 'third' phase of capitalism emerging out of the Second World War, differentiating this from its preceding imperial and industrial phases. There are conflicting views concerning the relevancy and credibility of 'late capitalism' as a term. I will nevertheless employ this term to address what has been characterised as late capitalism's hyper-visual production, consumption and socio-cultural logic. With the rise of the Internet and social media, imagery is more integral to our present than ever before. From this perspective, the hyper-visual logic of late capitalism has arguably been unsurpassed and use of this expression is therefore valid.

(Baudrillard 1968/2005, 67). Commodities under the reign of spectacle exude 'sign-values'—values that signify various social principles and goals such as beauty, class, wealth, status etc. Debord (1967/2014, 28) correspondingly described how, "the satisfaction that no longer comes from using the commodities produced in abundance is now sought through recognition of their value as commodities." 'Sign-value' is the significance attributed to a commodity because of its social prestige and the assumption that it will improve one's quality of life. In Marx's nineteenth century analysis, he identifies two aspects of the commodity—its 'use-value' (material, utilitarian function) and its 'exchange-value' (quantifiable, measurable value). In industrial capitalism, the 'exchange-value' of the commodity exceeded its use. Under late capitalist spectacle, however, the commodity's 'sign-value' or its 'meaning-value' becomes dominant (Baudrillard 1968/2005). In Debord's (1967/2014, 5) words, the commodity becomes an 'image-object', as its connotational social meanings surpass its material qualities.

Drawing together Baudrillard's (1968/2005) observations to elucidate Debordian (1967/2014) theory of the spectacle may be criticised. Baudrillard (1968/2005) was supposedly describing a more abstract economic order than the spectacle, inferring that the commodity's tangibility has dissolved entirely (Mahall and Serbest 2009, 187). This disparity cannot be denied, but regardless of whether there is a slight or total abstraction of the commodity, both theorists fundamentally describe the late capitalist tendency towards 'appearances'. Steven Best and Douglas Kellner (1999) have argued that, "sign-value and spectacle are integrated in the contemporary order" (Best and Kellner 1999, 137). Correspondent to this argument from Best and Kellner (1999), this chapter will demonstrate that the spectacle remains appropriate for contemporary analysis, and that semiology theoretically complements its debates. According to Debord (1967/2014, 3), 'signs' constitute the very language of the spectacle. Therefore, semiotics will be a supporting theoretical framework in this chapter's analyses. If the spectacle describes an economic inclination towards 'sign-values', the semiotic notion of the 'sign' is pertinent. In semiology, a 'sign' is any vehicle of meaning which significantly substitutes for something else, i.e. an image, word, sound etc. (Eco 1976, 7). In the 'society of the spectacle', the commodity becomes a 'sign' insofar that it primarily functions as a signifier of marketable ideas—more so, in fact, than as an item or service of practical and tangible use. The commodity becomes a visual signifier of consumptive values (arbitrary, socio-cultural meanings). Commodities under the reign of the spectacle are no longer primarily valued for their use-values, or even their exchange-values, but for the social values that they signify such as beauty, class, wealth, status etc. In other words, the commodity is characterised by 'sign-values'.

In *Society of the Spectacle* (1967/2014, 1), Debord indicates a relationship between the spectacle and semiology when he quotes Ludwig Feuerbach, "…but for the present age, which prefers the sign to the signified, the copy to the original, representation to reality, appearance to essence." Furthermore, Debord (1967/2014, 3) states that, "the language of the spectacle consists of signs of the dominant system of production—signs which are at the same time the ultimate end-products of that system." In other terms, 'signs' (i.e. images, words, etc.) that serve capitalism's operations and agendas, constitute the spectacle's language. In spite of the spectacle's apparent connection to sign-value, the relevancy of semiology to Situationist spectacle is obscure within existing scholarship. Nevertheless, Thomas Richards (1991, 13) has claimed that, "Debord brings to Marxist analysis the powerful tool of semiotics, which enables him to see the commodity as a dense locus of signification." However, Richards (1991) problematically characterises Debord's (1967/2014) spectacle theory as a mode of semiotic analysis. Although congruent with its ideas, unlike semiotics, the 'spectacle' is more than a theoretical method—it is a literal politico-economic worldview—a social relation of alienation, passivity and oppression under the forces of late capitalism. This chapter's debate will support the idea that 'social semiotics', such as Baudrillard's (1968/2005) notion of sign-value, provides a complementary mode of analysis for elucidating Debord's (1967/2014) notion of the spectacle as a 'theory of the image' in late capitalism.

One may argue that using the semiotic method in tandem with spectacle theory is problematic, as the Situationists contested structuralism, which is the broader intellectual movement from which said method originates. In *Society of the Spectacle* (1967/2014, 107), Debord criticises structuralism's 'anti-historical' thought that infers "the eternal presence of a system that was never created and that will never come to an end." However, the spectacle was a historical updating of Marx's theory of commodity fetishism, which was debatably proto-structuralist, as it went beneath the surface reality of commodity production and exchange to analyse a deep social structure. Debord (1967/2014, 14) claimed that, "the fetishism of the commodity…attains its ultimate fulfilment in the spectacle, where the perceptible world is replaced by a selection of images which is projected above it." Marx's (1867/1990) commodity fetishism theory recognises the observable social world as the phenomenon of an inner dynamic and this arguably renders it proto-structuralist. If the spectacle was a development of proto-structuralist commodity fetishism theory, Debord's (1967/2014) criticisms appear contradictory, and this chapter's debate is arguably justified in its use of the semiotic method. Acknowledging the spectacle's origins in proto-structuralist commodity fetishism, this chapter does not use the

semiotic method with a positivistic belief in a 'fixed' eternal structure. Rather, this chapter is concerned with the empirical conditions of symbolic structures that social life actively makes and recreates.

Urban Spectacle and Détournement

Arguably, the capitalist-urbanism nexus of the West is a most glaring manifestation of the spectacle, sign-value economy. The writings of Baudrillard (1975/1993) illustrate how urbanism has transmuted in direct relation to the spectacle's economy general emergence. According to Baudrillard (1975/1993, 77):

> "The city is no longer the politico-industrial zone that it was in the nineteenth century, it is the zone of signs…its truth no longer lies in its geographical situation as it did for the factory…its truth, enclosure in the sign form, lies all around us."

In alignment with the economy's general shift from 'having' to 'appearances', Western urbanism has correspondingly transformed from a site of industrial commodity production, to a late capitalist 'empire of signs' (Baudrillard 1975/1993, 77). The prominence of imagery in the late capitalist logic has also spread into urbanism— "today cities themselves are presented as lamentable spectacles" (S.I. 1959/1997, 84). Anne-Marie Broudehoux (2013, 274) has made similar observations, claiming that the "late capitalist urban condition" has been "characterised by a trend towards aestheticisation, were the primacy of the visual and the centrality of the image have reduced the city to a landscape of visual consumption, an object to be gazed upon or a spectacle." According to the Situationists, Western urbanism was, "comparable to the advertising about Coca-Cola—pure spectacular ideology" (Kotányi and Vaneigem 1961/2006, 86). In other words, late capitalist-urbanism is defined, not by material production, but by 'spectacular' consumption practices.

The Situationist activity of 'détournement' was intended as a tool with which the spectacle and its urban extension could be countered. Détournement can be defined as the tactical subversion of capitalist semiology. Capitalistic organisations of expression are turned against themselves, or have their significations negated altogether, so that new subversive meanings can be produced (Maxwell and Craib 2015, 288). As mentioned earlier in this thesis, the Situationists possessed a position of pure negativity ('antagonism') towards urbanism. Détournement was arguably emblematic of this approach, as it involved opposing urbanism's official signification processes, and doing so from a destituent position. This chapter will now proceed to analyse the various ways in which contemporary art has employed détournement-like

modes to subvert and negate capitalist urban semiology.[12] Like the Situationists, they reveal an oppositional, antagonistic approach to urbanism and its official visual/semiotic system.

Sign-Values and Pseudo-Needs

With its mass of social ideologies, packaged into attractive images, the urban spectacle appears to be a veritable shrine to late capitalist 'sign-value'. The research will commence by examining works that are potent détournements of the urban billboard. Deploying our deepest desires and needs for the agendas of capital, the urban billboard is a most evident site within which sign-values operate. Robert Montgomery's international project *Billboard Poems* (1994–Ongoing) is a clear assailment of the spectacle sign-value economy, blatantly directed at the urban billboard.[13] Via large black and white prints of poetic text, Montgomery's visual interventions shroud existing urban billboards, détourning their sign-value-infested-advertising, which mobilises desires for the purposes of consumer capitalism. Paragraphs of capitalised text offer melancholic poetry that laments the existential unrest that comes from social life's reduction to superficial imagery. One London-situated work in this series entitled *Spectacle Poem* (2010) (Fig. 4.1) reads, "the spectacle of advertising creates images of false beauty so suave and impossible to attain that you will hurt inside and never even know where the hurt comes from" (Montgomery, *Spectacle Poem* 2010). Montgomery denounces how, in spectacular urban sites, the desire to consume has become abstract and therefore insatiable. In other words, this work criticises urban advertising's soul-damaging effects. It confronts the urban spectacle's production of unobtainable desires—unobtainable because consumption has become an abstract process. In the 'society of the spectacle', "the desire to consume becomes abstract and therefore insatiable" (Taylor and Dürrschmidt 2007, 89). Correspondingly, the late capitalist spectacle indicated to Raoul Vaneigem (1967/1994, 26), a "shift from authoritarianism to seduction of the market." The urban billboard emblematises this shift away from authoritarian, industrial capitalist production, to a seduction-based, sign-value economy. This shift is criticised by the statement offered in *Spectacle Poem* (2010). Formally speaking, the bareness of Montgomery's pieces—their stark white on black text, arguably suggests that the billboard's seductive, quasi-mythic representations have had their subliminal vernacular brutally exposed.

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[12] The artworks addressed in this chapter are probably closer to what the S.I. called 'ultra-détournement', defined as the "tendencies for détournement to operate in everyday social life" (S.I. 1959/2006, 68). However, I will use the term 'détournement', as it is more recognised.

[13] Montgomery has made clear the enormous influence the Situationists and their theory of the spectacle have had on his practice (Battersby 2012).

Fig. 4.1 Robert Montgomery, *Spectacle Poem*, 2010. London.
Photo: Lenbuster Syftningsel, Flickr (CC BY-SA 2.0).

Fig. 4.2 Tania Mouraud, *City Performance N1* (Silkscreen 3x4m on 54
Billboards), 1977–78, Paris. Photo: Collection Frac Lorraine © Tania Mouraud.

Tania Mouraud's *City Performance N1* (1977–2015) (Fig. 4.2) also confronted the
urban billboard's status as a vital broadcaster of sign-values (Mouraud 2010).[14]

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[14] Mouraud, Tania. 2010. "City Performance N1." Accessed March 13, 2019.
https://www.taniamouraud.com/site/work-single?id=48.

Mouraud covered several billboards in Paris with an ambiguous sign that simply read—'NI', which in French, translates into 'neither', 'nor', 'nowhere'. Much akin to Montgomery's urban poetry, this piece was intended to be a disproval of how, in late capitalism, "consumerism rhymes with illusion" (Guenin and Stroecken 2015, 15). Such a claim mirrors Debord's statement that, in the 'society of the spectacle', the "real consumer has become a consumer of illusions" (Debord 1967/2014, 19). Mouraud was arguably addressing how urban advertisements trap us in their quasi-mythic realities—how they delude us into consumption practices, which, as 'NI' literally translates, lead us 'nowhere'. Although *City Performance N1* signified 'nothing', it explicitly highlighted its spatial context. The work's large, imposing black letters seemingly functioned to criticise their spatial surrounds. Under late capitalism, physical urban space falls into abstraction. It becomes 'advertising space', whose function is to promote the image-commodity and its sign-values. Mouraud's work seemingly aimed to draw awareness to its surrounding space as if to highlight its physical precariousness under a spectacle economy. As Robert Venturi's *Learning From Las Vegas* (1972) argued, in late capitalism, urban space is created and constituted by signs—remove the signs and it ceases to exist. Both Montgomery and Mouraud used a minimalistic aesthetic in their work. This was perhaps intended as a détournement of the often visually busy aesthetic that is required in urban advertising to effectively market products and services. In advertising, signs are as Roland Barthes (1964/1977, 270) described, "full, formed with a view to the optimum reading." Advertising must promote commodity sign-values effectively in a fast-paced urban matrix—messages must therefore be full, loud and clear. Via their minimal and monochromatic aesthetics, Montgomery and Mouraud's détournements of the urban billboard appear to contradict the semiotic pageantry that capitalist sign-values necessitate.

Montgomery and Mouraud's urban détournements also appear to attack the urban visual realm's adverse production of pseudo-needs. Capitalist urban advertising broadcasts signifiers of consumption based on false needs. In line with Marxism, the Situationists believed that capitalism was once a rational system that used to satisfy basic needs and develop individual freedom. Advanced capitalism, however, does not operate via this rational criterion (Debord 1967/2014, 20). As Debord (1967/2014, 22) described, in late capitalism, the "satisfaction of primary human needs is replaced by an uninterrupted fabrication of pseudo-needs." Now all our basic needs are relatively met in contemporary society, in order to sustain itself, capitalism must create false needs. Economic necessity no longer exists. It has been replaced "with a necessity for boundless economic development", which has meant "replacing the satisfaction of primary human needs (now scarcely met) with an incessant fabrication of pseudo-

needs" (Debord 1967/2014, 20). The ideology of the spectacle has a 'positivistic precision', as its ideas are considered facts. As a result, the pseudo-needs that the spectacle forcefully broadcasts in the urban environment therefore appear to be genuine needs (Debord 1967/2014, 114).

Jenny Holzer's *Protect Me from What I Want* (1986) criticised pseudo-needs and their ratification through capitalist-urbanism. This piece was displayed in the world's commercial epicentre, Times Square, New York—a shrine to sign-value and its sister conception of pseudo-needs, whose architecture of signs shares little congruency with authentic needs. Time Square is perceivably a site in which the architecture is itself a sign, or rather, an architectural conduit for sign-value. With its façades being primarily a surface for selling commodities through appearances, 'architecture as vehicle for spectacular ideology' presupposes its physical, utilitarian values. *Protect Me From What I Want* imparts a desperate scream—an emotionally charged expression that contradicts an area designed to falsely satisfy any desire. 'Protect' and 'want', if understood in a semiotic sense as 'signs', have connotational (culturally/socially derived) meanings that are incongruent in late capitalism and its correspondent city model. 'Protect' has connotations of potential danger, whilst 'want' infers consumptive longing. It is not feasible in capitalism's logic to foresee danger in consumptive desires, as we are called to embrace excess and chase satisfaction whatever the case. As Jon Stratton (1990, 297–98) explains, "unlike production-orientated capitalism, which catered to given and therefore limited needs and demands, consumer capitalism relies on providing for socially produced and therefore, in principle, limitless needs and wants." In late capitalism's logic of excess, abridging the connotational meanings of 'protect' and 'want' is an incongruous act. It is therefore connotational meaning that Holzer détourns—something on which urban advertisement heavily relies.

Non-Signs

Instead of subverting urban semiology, the following works disavow its basic operations. Unlike détournement that 'subverts', they negate signification/meaning production. Arguably, by negating signification all together, the works below are what I would call 'non-signs'.[15] Through rejecting signification processes, the artworks addressed here mirror détournement's basic principle. For the Situationists (1959/2006, 67), détournement was "first of all a negation of the value of the previous

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[15] This notion of the 'non-sign' has been inspired by Jean Baudrillard's 1975 essay *Kool Killer, or The Insurrection of Signs*. In this text, Baudrillard (1975/1993) claims that graffiti operates as a 'non-sign' in the urban context as it rejects signification processes. He theorises that this meaningless nature of graffiti is what gives it is radical, insurrectionary charge and has led to its conventional status as criminal activity.

organisation of expression." Détournement was therefore, essentially, a "technique of negation" (Moore 2002, 148). Contrasting to détournement's negation of meaning, commercial advertising, on the other hand, must convey meaning to persuade consumption. Therefore, the following works détourn urban semiotics through their total negation of meaning—by becoming 'non-signs'.

Fig. 4.3 Daniel Buren, *Photo Souvenir: Wild Posters (Affichages Sauvage). Work in Situ*, 1969. Paris. Photo: Jacques Caumont © DB-ADAGP Paris.

Daniel Buren's *Wild Posters* (1968–72) (Fig. 4.3) arguably actualised this notion of the 'non-sign'. Encroaching upon various advertising spaces in Paris, Buren's striped posters were deliberately banal, content free and meaningless. Buren (quoted in Parinaud 1968, 41–42) has stated, "my painting at the limit can only signify itself—what meaning, after all, can one ascribe to ready-made stripes repeated ad-infinitum?" To be a 'sign', visual media must 'signify'—it must convey meaning. Buren's meaningless stripes therefore collided at full force with the urban visual realm, which is contingent on meaning production conducive to consumption. In her text, *Performing the Frame* (2002), Charissa Terranova compares Buren to an 'iconoclast'—a destroyer of religious imagery. Like a modern iconoclast, Buren attacked capitalist imagery within its urban 'temple' of worship. With his meaningless stripe compositions, he iconoclastically attacks commercial urban imagery. Signs must always refer to 'something else'— commodities and their sign-values. Buren's iconic stripes, however, were profusely self-referential. As repetitive, meaningless stripes, they were only capable of signifying themselves. Due to their self-referential nature, they seemingly refused to be 'signs'.

This 'non-sign' approach appears again in *Seven Ballets in Manhattan* (1975), an urban performance in which Buren had individuals carry placards around Manhattan across seven days. These placards also featured his famous self-referential stripes. With their advertising full of ideologically charged signifiers, urban placards typically function as a semiotic capitalist tool. However, this object of capitalist semiology is co-opted by Buren's repetitive, meaningless stripes. By bringing Buren's 'non-sign' stripes into movement, this performance seemingly mirrored the diffuse nature of urban capitalist sign-values so that it could critique and disrupt their operations.

Jason Eppink's intervention series *Pixelator* (2003–Ongoing) is another example of a 'non-sign' (Eppink 2003).[16] Eppink temporarily hijacks LED screen advertisements positioned at New York subway entrances, transforming them into tiles of coloured light. Urban advertising is transformed into displays of incandescent squares. Eppink's work therefore arguably resists the signification processes of advertising in favour of a pure, content-free visual materiality. As colourful, blank compositions of incandescent squares, Eppink's works are radically devoid of meaning, as they can only ever signify themselves. Eppink provides instructions online so that users of urban space may actively co-produce his anti-capitalistic 'non-signs'. Inspiring the public to determine the visual transformation of cities, Eppink counteracts the unidirectional discourse of capitalist signs. Capitalist signs permeate urban sites without the consent and cooperation of urban users, rendering them a vital example of the spectacle's "communication without a response" (Debord 1967/2014, 117). Eppink's 'non-signs' counter the unilateral nature of the urban spectacle, as they can be recreated anywhere by anyone with the instructions featured on the artist's website. The piece therefore also attacks the capitalist urban 'sign' with its spectatorship model. Eppink reminds us that negating signification is also contingent on repudiating the unidirectional flow of information that corresponds to its spectatorship. Capitalistic signs are unidirectional; therefore, a 'non-sign' must necessitate active co-production or dialogue with its viewers—it must emancipate publics through their inclusion in the flow of urban visual information.

Buren and Eppink's self-referential 'non-signs' promote a 'sanitised seeing', which also facilitates their détournement of urban capitalistic semiology. When observing capitalist signs in the city, we engage in an ideologically charged process. To receive the connotational meanings (cultural meanings) of urban signs, we must first have prior developed knowledge as, "connotations depend on cultural knowledge and are thus coded" (Nöth 1990, 478). To read capitalist advertising and appease its capitalist-

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[16] See Eppink, Jason. 2003. "Pixelator." March 13, 2020. https://jasoneppink.com/pixelator/

consumer agendas, we must possess prior developed knowledge of cultural meanings and customs. Reduced to formal qualities, promoting a 'pure vision', as it were, Buren's stripes and Eppink's light-up grids contradict this dynamic. One is required to possess certain aspects of cultural knowledge when viewing coded, connotational urban capitalist signs. However, no prior developed knowledge is required to observe Buren or Eppink's 'non-signs'. The concept of the 'non-sign' demonstrates that contemporary art's visual urban Marxism can potentially promote urban visuality that is counter-spectacle. However, contemporary art has not just produced 'non-signs' to counter urban semio-capitalism. I would suggest that 'symbolic' visual language within the urban realm is another a détournement method in visual urban social aesthetic works.

Powers of the Symbol

It will be contended in this section, that Keith Haring's acclaimed New York *Subway Drawings* (1980–85) (Fig. 4.4) project, incorporated a 'symbolic' lexicon to détourn urban capitalist semiology.[17] In other words, Haring's work seemingly employed 'symbols' as a détournement tactic to oppose the capitalist 'sign'. It was arguably due to their inherent refusal to function as capitalist 'signs', that Haring's drawings acquired their reputation as a subversive, unauthorised activity. It is perhaps pertinent to highlight that just a few years before his creation of *Subway Drawings*, Haring was a student of semiotics at the School of Visual Arts in New York (Gruen 1992, 54). It could therefore be contended that Haring intentionally harnessed the 'symbol' as an antidote to capitalist semiology—as a method of urban détournement. According to theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet (1987/1995), there is a clear difference between 'symbol' and 'sign'. The 'sign' is associated with capitalist production and the 'symbol', with pre-capitalist, tribal societies. In other words, the 'symbol' and the 'sign' refer to different socio-economic orders. Unlike the 'sign', the function of the 'symbol' is not to refer to 'something else', but to unite the persons who produce and receive it within their socio-cultural context (Walters 2012, 71). Chauvet (1987/1995) claimed that the main function of the 'symbol' is to relate 'subjects' to other 'subjects'. Ultimately, unlike the 'sign', non-market notions of social cohesion define the 'symbol's' function.

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[17] Haring's *Subway Drawings* may have been influenced by the street culture of 1980s New York. However, this does not mean that these works imitated or comprised part of New York's 'spectacular' visual landscape. Rather, through his symbolic visual language, Haring was arguably embodying the non-spectacular, authentic aspects of 1980s New York street culture (i.e. its radical creative energies and its avenues for sociability, solidarity and pleasure). In other words, I would contend that *Subway Drawings* was influenced by 'street culture', but not 'spectacular', late capitalist urban culture.

Fig. 4.4 Keith Haring, *Photo of an Untitled Subway Drawing by Keith Haring*,
1982, New York City. Photo: Keith Haring Artwork © Keith Haring Foundation.

The 'sign' often equates to market values and therefore stands on the plane of value, measure and calculation, hence its association with capitalist production. The 'sign' can therefore be understood as indicating 'subject-object' relations. The sign is, in this sense, suggestive of commodity fetishism—how, under the reign of a capitalist economy, commodities and capital largely mediate social relations. The 'symbol', however, is described as mediating a pre-capitalist form of exchange, commonly known as 'symbolic exchange'. Symbolic exchange can be defined as an exchange that is based on gift giving or sacrifice, whose ultimate purpose is not profit or consumption, but to strengthen social bonds. Symbolic exchange was an important concept for the Situationists, namely the idea of the 'potlatch', as they considered it an effective anti-capitalistic practice and a powerful means of détournement (Vaneigem 1967/1994, 81). The 'potlatch' was an indigenous North American ritual whereby wealthy individuals gave away prized material possessions to form alliances with other tribes (Sansi 2014, 105). Therefore, the potlatch embodies the idea that "material goods were dissolved in order to create and strengthen social bonds" (Bantjes 2007,

74). Symbolic exchange, enacted through gift giving, represented a process by which the creation of social bonds obliterated the significance of material possession.

In light of Chauvet's (1987/1995) analysis, Haring's subway compositions can be retrospectively understood as employing the symbol's role as a sacrificial gift to 'détourn' urban spectacle. Haring's drawings arguably contained 'symbols', as they signified 'relations between subjects' rather than capitalistic 'subject-object' relations. With their universal, humanistic themes of community, love, childhood and death, Haring's drawings suggested a visual lexicon indicative of authentic, unmediated social exchange. This contrasted with the commodity fetishism of urban capitalist signs. These humanistic tropes present in Haring's work arguably contributed a visuality based on 'qualitative' experience, which encouraged urban pedestrians to foster authentic social relations, rather than have them mediated by the glaring image-commodities proliferating the subway walls. One of Haring's main symbols 'the radiant baby' was said to represent purity and perfection. Haring described this symbol as the purest, most positive experience of human existence. Again, qualitative, humanistic values were suggested here, as well as authentic social relations. Another key character in Haring's visual dictionary was the crowd. This symbol arguably indicated a powerful united front against oppression and therefore again, authentic relationships between subjects, unmediated by consumable objects or quantifiable values. Energized rays, emanating from various figures and objects, seemingly imply a special, divine strength. Humanity, with its cycles of birth, love and death (all represented in Haring's work) is suggested as being more real and therefore more powerful than the images of urban advertising, packed to the brink with superficial sign-values. In contrast to the sign, which involves a shift from the order of the 'real' to the illusionary realm of sign-value, Haring's work suggests that the symbol touches upon the authentic parts of reality—those rare aspects of life not yet relegated to economics.

On a more formalistic, stylistic level, the thick black lines and minimal quality of Haring's drawings invoked comparisons to African, Aztec and other traditional forms. This was possibly another reference to the 'symbolic', as symbolic economies derive from largely tribal/pre-capitalist societies. Similar to symbolic exchange, Haring's subway compositions were sacrificial, as they were offered to urban pedestrians without the demand for material reciprocation. After creating his subway drawings, Haring would normally be arrested, and the work later removed. Much like the process of symbolic exchange, material value was offered and wasted, as Haring's unauthorised visual media would be removed and thus lost forever. Like the offering of the gift, the artist was sacrificing material value. As Vaneigem (1967/1994) and the rest

of the Situationist group would have commended, Haring's subway works seemingly represented a process of 'pure giving'. For the Situationists, the potlatch was a supreme form of détournement, as it subverted capitalism's commodity exchange of equivalence by replacing it with an exchange based on non-equivalence'—one gives a gift and may not receive anything back, or receives something of perceivably more or less value (Sansi 2014, 105). Being based on equivalence and profit calculation, the capitalistic signs contained within the New York subway functioned opposite to Haring's symbols. These signs, of course, signified commodities and therefore assumed an expectation of material reciprocation in their viewers—that is, passive consumption behaviours. Therefore, by offering visual media based on notions of 'non-equivalence' and sociability, *Subway Drawings* radically subverted urban capitalist semiology, functioning as a form of détournement.

Because 'images'/'signs' are now the mediating force of all social life, so the argument goes in *Society of the Spectacle* (1967/2014), relations between people have become more abstract and dehumanised than ever before. Admittedly, just like signs, symbols also operate via mediation. However, as symbols mediate relations between subjects, they are not as the sign is, a vital apparatus of commodity fetishism in the spectacular urban landscape. The mediation that the sign necessitates, a meditation between people and commodities, is one which fragments the urban social sphere. 'Symbols', on the other hand, are, as previously described, understood as mediating non-market relations between subjects—as being grounded in authentic social interaction. Correspondingly, in photographic documentation of Haring producing his subway renderings, we see crowds of passers-by, gathering together, united in interested reception of his work. The socially cohesive powers of the symbol became an insurgent antidote to the separating forces of capitalist semiology.

Haring did not ascribe clear meanings to these works as he felt that he was creating a reality that was not complete until met with the ideas of others. This ambiguity of his symbols would assumedly bring people together in the subway to discuss and actively interpret. Therefore, Haring's *Subway Drawings* were arguably created with the intent to function as relational devices—as tools for uniting subjects in the city, dismantling the separating effects of sign-value's commodity fetishism processes. Ultimately, much like the methods of urban détournement previously addressed, the insurgent quality of Haring's symbols can be concluded as their insurgent resistance towards the 'commodity fetishism' of signs.

Contrary to most of the examples already addressed, there are instances of contemporary art that have signaled a shift towards urban détournements of more blatant socio-political gravitas. Such urban social aesthetic examples arguably represent the most politically serious 'method of urban détournement'. Debord and Wolman (1956/2006) imagined a 'collective détournement' of present conditions—that is, the appropriation and transformation of current socio-political affairs in a deliberate act. Détournement was not intended to be a purely 'aesthetic' device; it was intended to operate in everyday life as an opening towards genuine political agency and social change (Debord and Wolman 1956/2006). I would contend that Laurence Payot's *Angels* (2018–Ongoing),[18] an ongoing and multi-locational socially engaged art project, mirrors this grander aspiration of détournement. In this project, videos of refugees and asylum seekers telling their stories of struggle and resilience are projected onto the walls and architectures of UK cities.[19] *Angels* reflects the socio-political aspirations of détournement, as it hijacks the corporatised urban visual realm with powerful video projections of diasporic subjects (Payot 2018). The project reflects the social intent of détournement as it directly attacks urban spectacle's violent censoring of everyday social urgencies with glossy, sumptuous imagery and false, superficial sign-values. Often the urban spectacle masks and displaces urban social problems via its beautification and commodification of metropolitan spaces. In *Angels*, however, the dehumanising veneer of the spectacle no longer masks the experiences and opinions of diasporic communities. The social urgencies of refugees and asylum seekers enter into the stream of corporate images that pervade cities and towns. Payot's *Angel's* resists revanchist urbanism's dreadful integration into the urban spectacle.[20] It highlights the racialised and xenophobic ideology, which 'whitewashes' the urban visual realm. The urban spectacle is arguably a vital apparatus through which the

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[18] See Payot, Laurence. 2018. "Angels." Accessed January 13, 2020. http://www.laurencepayot.com/2018/11/angels-from-the-seas/.

[19] Payot's *Angels* is also arguably an example of 'co-produced visuality'. A majority of the works discussed previously have only *symbolically* inferred the notion of a co-produced urban visual realm, which could counter the spectacle's unidirectional rhetoric. However, instead of symbolically protesting against the exclusive production of the urban visual realm, *Angels* forges more literal and practical co-produced urban imagery. Essentially, the spectacle is a world projected onto people without their involvement (Debord 1967/2014, 4). However, the collaborative visuality of *Angels* radically dismantles the urban spectacle's endless monologue of self-praise. The imagery in *Angels* is collaborative because it includes the voices and stories of those excluded from the official stream of imagery in Western cities, and also comprises an extremely collaborative production process. Payot holds collaborative workshops within which ideas and content for the videos are formed in collaboration with the refugee and asylum seeker communities represented in the videos.

[20] 'Revanchist urbanism' is an approach to urbanism, which expresses a race terror "felt by middle and ruling class whites" (Smith 1996, 211). Racial minorities are subjected to a vicious reaction from the rest of the (mostly white) population, discriminately perceived as the source of urban unrest.

urban spectacle maintains colonial histories and exacerbates urban racial inequalities. However, Payot's projections celebrate the inspiring resilience of ethnic communities, refugees and asylum seekers.

Another example of politically activated urban imagery, Krzysztof Wodiczko's *Homeless Projection: A Proposal for the City of New York* (1986), was a subversive installation piece*,* which responded to the gentrification of Union Square Park in New York. This work aimed to rupture the superficial stream of urban imagery with 'real' and stark representations of homeless people. Like Payot, Wodiczko was aiming to undo the censorship of the urban spectacle. In this work, he was contesting the gentrification of Union Square Park in New York that was displacing homeless people in the area. The City and developers were capitalising on the attractive, neoliberal values and imagery of Union Square Park's historical civic art to project a marketable image of the area, as this would supposedly attract a more 'desirable' class of people (Deutshe 1996, 12). In response to the City's gentrifying and displacing imagery, Wodiczko projected images of the area's homeless onto the park's classical sculptures. Placing imagery of these people onto the sculptures of gloried historical figures meant radically disrupting the censoring, marketable imagery of spectacle-driven gentrification.

The existential themes present in Payot and Wodiczko's visual urban initiatives also dismantle the urban spectacle's false, illusionary reality. These works have seemingly harnessed 'authentic experience' against the urban spectacle's 'dead', abstract imagery. In a spectacle economy, the "image-commodity" replaces lived experience "with a series of spectral abstractions" (Gardiner 2000, 121). In other words, illusion "overtakes reality and images impose themselves as the tangible and are taken as the real: illusion is authenticated as more real than the real itself" (Thorns 2002, 145). In contrast to the capitalist sign, which entails a transposition from authentic reality to the illusionary realm of sign-value, Payot and Wodiczko's work reminds us of the real aspects of urban experience and of ourselves—those authentic, urgent aspects of Western urbanism that require our attention. The humanistic tropes present in these works contribute a visuality that is based on the qualitative, rather than quantitative. Ultimately, by representing social urgencies in the urban spectacle, the said projects mediate "subject-subject" relations as opposed to "subject-object" relations. Urban publics are encouraged to foster authentic social relations with one another, rather than have them mediated by the capitalist semiology that proliferates cities and towns. With their project's representations of authentic social issues, Payot and Wodiczko promote "non-market relations between subjects" that oppose the "subject-object" relations of urban signs (commodity fetishism/spectacle).

Wodiczko and Payot's activist imagery provides a means of visibility for diasporic communities and the politically oppressed. Because these works enable urban publics to better understand the experiences of diasporic communities, they also arguably facilitate social relations of conviviality and respect within the urban social sphere. Ultimately, this suggests a symbolic operation is occurring via these works rather than a semiotic one. 'Subject-subject' relationships are mediated as opposed to 'subject-object' relations of signs. Again the separating commodity fetishism of the sign is countered. Wodiczko and Payot have attacked here the key site of our alienation from one another in Western urbanism. The potential political agency and social use-value, which normally lays dormant in urban imagery, is radically activated in these works. Such an approach has also largely meant creating an urban imagery that serves those at ground level—the users of the city and even those exploited or displaced by it. Détournement was not a purely aesthetic device—it was intended to operate in everyday life as an opening towards genuine political agency and change (Debord and Wolman 1956/2006). The said works realise this ultimate ambition, for détournement to function as 'ultra-détournement'—imagery that operates as a dissenting yet empowering force in everyday social life.

Urban Linguistic Landscape

Until now, this chapter has solely focused on the image's visual prominence. However, within the urban spectacle, language is also a vital aspect. In an article titled *All the King's Men* (1963), the Situationists highlight 'powers stranglehold over language' as a crucial aspect of late capitalism. Power allegedly co-opts words, giving them with "falsified, official" meanings, which suit its purposes and ideological goals (S.I. 1963/2006, 149). This view strongly resonates with the urban spectacle as a site that is full of visual manifestations of language under the so-called 'stranglehold' of power. Language was also a key concern of détournement. As John Moore (2002, 152) highlights, détournement identifies "the refusal of words to remain obedient and controlled." In other words, détournement was concerned with the instability of language—how it was inherently malleable and thus retrievable from capitalist co-optation. In this final section, I will therefore examine how the urban linguistic landscape has been détourned by urban social aesthetic works.

Jenny Holzer's *Truisms* (1977–79) series was a collection of text-based installations placed around New York City that questioned the 'truths' or clichés held within the everyday collective consciousness. Placed amongst urban advertising, Holzer's text-based interventions exposed the 'pseudo-truths' of everyday language, which are passively consumed and accepted. From a Situationist perspective, language under

the stranglehold of power was "unanswerable communication" (Debord 1967/2014, 117). With their internal voice and existential statements designed to invoke a response, Holzer's interventions challenged the unidirectional nature of capitalist language, whose only response is a 'pseudo' response—submissive, consumerist behaviour. On a more strategic, linguistic level, Holzer's *Truisms* poached and subverted the brevity of advertising language—the short and snappy mode of expression often used in marketing. The linguistic technique of brevity was employed to dispense messages non-indicative of the market. In other words, the linguistic strategy used was that of the spectacle, but the message presented was not. 'Consumerist linguistic strategy' and 'anti-consumerist linguistic message' were coalesced to create an incongruent subversive détournement of language. The language of the spectacle was being détourned via its very own linguistic apparatus. As their statements encouraged active emotional responses, Holzer's works also challenged the unidirectional nature of urban advertising, whose only elicited response is the 'pseudo-response' of consumer behaviour. *Truisms* transmuted popular expressions of language, which usually do not allow for a response, into messages that encouraged public debate. Ultimately, the passive consumption of language was replaced with a demand for active interpretation.

With their existential, provocative statements, Montgomery's international *Billboard Poems* (1994–Ongoing) series has also operated against capitalism's unidirectional flow of language. What is most salient about Montgomery's use of language, and what makes it most evidently neo-Situationist, is that he heralds its function as poetry—as creative, metaphorical and fluid language that opposes the rigid, cold exchange of formulas, which power's co-option creates. As a vehicle for subjective creativity, poetry represents language, which has been given back to 'the people'—no longer the property of power (S.I. 1963/2006). Poetry also allows for a renunciation of individual subjectivity and creativity, which language stifled by power does not. Arguably, with its interior, poetic voice, Montgomery's poetry reclaims language's creative, subjective forces. Montgomery presents an interior voice through his poetic language, which evades the objective, dehumanised language that spectacular language encapsulates. The interior, subjective voice in Montgomery's work reflects the horizontal, democratic form of language that poetry represents. It is a language that comes from the 'liver' or 'user' of the city (the pedestrian) as opposed to the anonymous, dictatorial 'newspeak' of power. Poetry was deemed a 'free language' that was unshackled from the rigid significations that power's stranglehold produces (S.I. 1963/2006, 150). Poetic language is more ambiguous and open to a vast array of subjective significations. Language co-opted by the forces of capitalism in the city, however, may signify the

various meanings attached to commodities, but these are limited, rigid and unambiguous, as this is necessary to broadcast consumer messages. Montgomery's *Billboard Poems* therefore inserts an ambiguous stream of language amongst the rigid significations of urbanism's consumerist, linguistic landscape.

In Situationist debate, the act of replacing advertisements with poetry is seen in itself to constitute a détournement of the urban spectacle. This was because poetry, as a form of language, was perceived as an inherently inconsumable entity. According to the Situationists (1963/2006, 152):

> "Poetry is becoming more and more clearly the empty space, the anti-matter of consumer society, since it is not consumable (in terms of the modern criteria for a consumable object: an object that is of equivalent value for each of a mass of isolated consumers)."

Poetry is language that does not operate via 'equivalence', as its value is subjectively decided. The language that advertising utilises, in its broadcasting of a commodity's sign-value, is based on equivalence. The language of urban advertising provides a 'consumable' language, which requires us to reciprocate via consumptive behaviours. It is, in this sense, an equivalent exchange. Unlike the commodities sold through sign-form in the urban advertisement that are of equivalent value to all of the pedestrians that submit their gaze to it, the value of Montgomery's poetry shifts from person to person, and therefore operates as a 'non-consumable sign'. Inspiration for the Situationist understanding of poetry came from African art. As Vaneigem (1967/1994, 201) highlighted, "the African work of art—poem, music, sculpture or mask, is not considered complete until it has become a form of speech, a word in action, a creative element which functions." Poetry for the Situationists was therefore a language that was 'living', activated by social utility and use-value. Existing in the everyday urban sphere, accessible to anyone, Montgomery's poetic détournement of language operates akin to the African artwork (as the Situationists would have commended). The weight of Montgomery's détournement of language, however, is also located in his reinstating of its existential charge. According to the Situationists, language was understood as a living expression of creative communication, which is reduced, under the grips of hegemony, to "a quantitative and callous exchange of dull formulas and ready-made information" (Stracey 2014a, 80). It was understood that, "under the control of power, language always designates something other than authentic experience" (Situationist International 1963/2006, 150). No longer was language *lived*, but static and *dead*.

MOFUNGO

DON'T TALK DOWN TO ME. DON'T
BE POLITE TO ME. DON'T
TRY TO MAKE ME FEEL NICE.
DON'T RELAX. I'LL CUT THE
SMILE OFF YOUR FACE. YOU
THINK I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S
GOING ON. YOU THINK I'M
AFRAID TO REACT. THE JOKE'S
ON YOU. I'M BIDING MY TIME,
LOOKING FOR THE SPOT. YOU
THINK NO ONE CAN REACH YOU,
NO ONE CAN HAVE WHAT YOU
HAVE. I'VE BEEN PLANNING
WHILE YOU'RE PLAYING. I'VE
BEEN SAVING WHILE YOU'RE
SPENDING. THE GAME IS
ALMOST OVER SO IT'S
TIME YOU ACKNOWLEDGE ME.
DO YOU WANT TO FALL NOT
EVER KNOWING WHO TOOK YOU?

Fig. 4.5 Jenny Holzer, *Inflammatory Essays*, 1979–82. New York.
Photo: © Jenny Holzer. ARS, NY and DACS, London 2020.
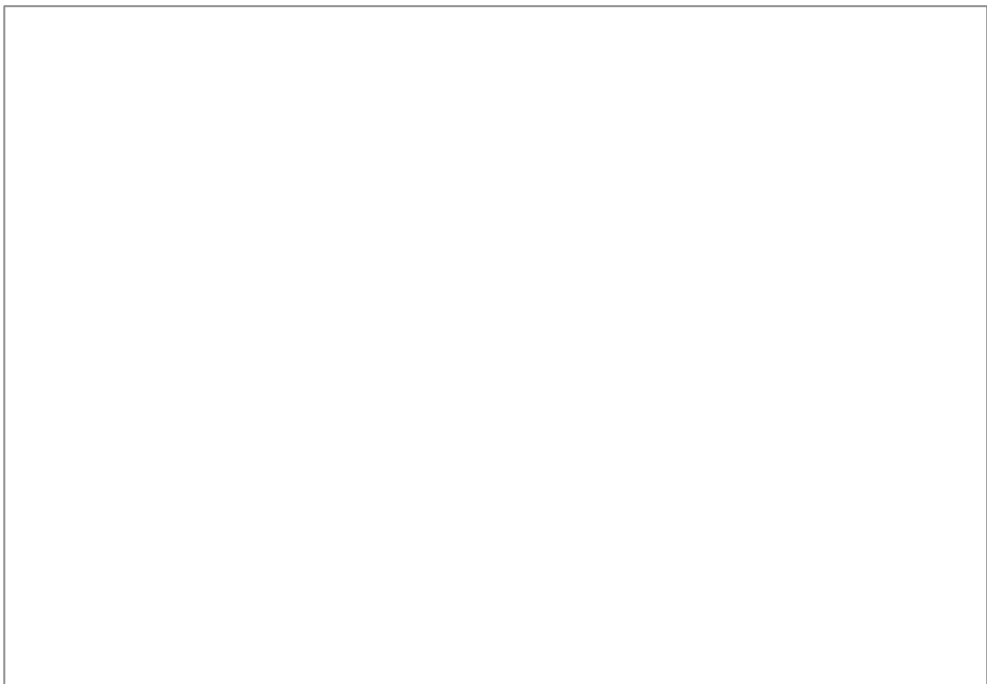
Fig. 4.6 Guy Debord and Asger Jorn, *Double Page Spread of Mémoires*, 1959,
Paris. Photo: © Courtesy of Situationist International: The John McCready
Archive at Liverpool John Moores University, Special Collections and Archives.

Montgomery opposes the *non-living* language of power, with passionate, emotionally
charged linguistic messages, which are also explicitly existential in content. Thus,
Montgomery reinstates a 'living language' in the urban milieu. Jenny Holzer's
Inflammatory Essays (1979–82) (Fig. 4.5) revealed a similar neo-Situationist attempt to

reinstate living language. Paragraphs of emotional, largely volatile language were printed onto coloured posters and pasted across walls in New York City. Their swear words and colloquial language invoked juvenile delinquents claiming the streets from below, which was a marked Situationist aim (Stracey 2014a, 77). Holzer's essays were comprised of a series of incongruent statements—a series of discontinuous and disjointed messages. Arguably, in this project, Holzer expressed the Situationist aim to promote the instability of language, which, as previously described, was a key aim of détournement (Moore 2002, 152). From a Situationist perspective, it was necessary to challenge fixed or universal definitions of words as, "the quest for unambiguous signals…is clearly linked with the existing power structure" (S.I. 1963/2006, 153). The fragments of détourned text that form the content of Situationist book *Mémoires* (1959) (Fig. 4.6) are, as David Banash (2000, 13) has described, "never content to carry on a single, intelligible meaning." Produced by Guy Debord and Asger Jorn, *Mémoires*, was a book-cum-'anti-archive', whose fragmented text chronicled everyday, horizontal perspectives of the city.[21] Its sandpaper cover was meant to damage the historical, spectacle-reaffirming pieces of literature it would be stored amongst (Stracey 2014b, 23). With its pages of jumbled and fragmented sections of text, this important piece of Situationist literature demonstrated the group's drive to resist the unambiguous signals of language co-opted by capitalist hegemony.

As each of Holzer's essays was full of ambiguity and vague points of reference, they therefore, like *Mémoires*, operated against the language of capitalist-urbanism, which is reliant on unambiguous signals. Urban linguistic messages must have clear meanings—they must be 'unambiguous', as clarity is integral to the advertising of products or services. *Inflammatory Essays* revealed the instability of language and words, exposing how their function and rationalism can be radically disrupted. By exposing the instability of words, Holzer's text-based interventions highlighted how urban pedestrians possess the ability to 'rewrite' the city's linguistic landscape. Holzer ultimately referenced détournements intended use as a "real means of proletariat artistic education"—as a radical artistic strategy available to anyone who wanted to achieve bottom-up resistance (Debord and Wolman 1956/2006, 18). By revealing openings for the co-production of the urban linguistic landscape, Holzer reinstated the horizontal and pluralistic values foundational to détournement.

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[21] *Mémoires* (1959) was studied in-person at the Special Archives and Collections of Liverpool John Moores University. It was illuminating and helpful to study the object in tandem with Frances Stracey's "Surviving History: A Situationist Archive", a chapter in her book *Constructed Situations: A New History of the Situationist International* (2014a).

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how Situationist concepts of 'spectacle' and 'détournement' may assist in examining instances of contemporary art shaped by the conditions of urban spectacle. It has highlighted and examined various 'methods of urban détournement'—that is, the various ways in which visual contemporary art has détourned the urban spectacle, undermining and problematising its semiotic/visual system. The research has demonstrated that, by repurposing Situationist debate, visual contemporary art operating within the context of capitalist-urbanism can function as a tool for resisting spectacle. In this chapter, I have demonstrated how urban social aesthetics can be visual and, at the same time, engaged in urban 1:1 scale, post-Marxian critique. The examples I have addressed and examined in this chapter have revealed the visual/semiotic dimensions of contemporary art's urban Marxism. The urban spectacle will also constitute the following chapter's conceptual point of departure. However, unlike this chapter, the following will shift attention away from countering the urban spectacle on its own terrain ('the visual'), instead focusing on its opposing force—'directly lived' authentic experience. Specifically speaking, the following chapter will examine how the Situationists' 'constructed situation' may assist in examining urban social aesthetic practice that reinstates authentic experience within the spectacular urban landscape.

Urban Situations and Radical Authenticity
Reinstating the 'Directly Lived' in the Spectacular Urban Landscape

In this closing chapter, I will contend that the Situationist International's theory of the 'constructed situation' could assist in illuminating and clarifying the post-Marxist, situation-constructing tendencies of urban social aesthetics. I close this thesis concerning a subject that lies at the heart of urban Marxism and its extension into contemporary art practice—constructing a life that is free from the alienating logic of a capitalist, consumer society. Reinstating authentic[1] experience in urban sites, the artworks addressed in this chapter arguably possess a pressing relevancy to our current worldwide situation (the Coronavirus pandemic) in which virtuality and technology have become prevalent, alienating forces, further inflaming the effects of a spectacle economy. The task of critically approaching the situation-constructing tendencies of urban social aesthetics is thus vital and necessary. In this chapter, I will propose that Situationism could support this task.

In the previous chapter, I addressed détournement as a socio-aesthetic device for countering urban spectacle.[2] This chapter approaches the 'constructed situation' as another counter-spectacle device in the Situationists' antagonistic urban project. The 'constructed situation', the ultimate origin of the 'Situationist' designation, can be defined as a moment of non-alienated life deliberately constructed in order to contest the socially numbing effects of the spectacle economy (S.I. 1958/2006a, 51). It was a concept,[3] central to the Situationist project, that championed authentic, directly lived experience in response to the spectacle's reduction of social life to "a separate pseudo world", which can only be observed and accepted from a disempowered position of socio-political passivity and non-intervention (Debord 1967/2014, 2). As it represented

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[1] In the context of artistic representation and scholarship on performance art, 'authentic' is a contentious and often problematised word, but what I want to point to in this chapter is those spaces in everyday urban social life, however small or latent, that are yet to be co-opted by the spectacle economy's *inauthenticity*. Taking a Situationist perspective in its repurposing of the constructed situation, this chapter is underpinned by the purview that not every granule of social life is co-opted and mediated by spectacle, but rather, that latent spaces do exist that are "not yet relegated to inauthenticity" (Vaneigem 1967/1994, 195).

[2] 'Urban spectacle' refers to the spectacle economy's extension into urbanism. As described previously, the 'spectacle' is a late capitalist economy in which social relations are mediated by images (Debord 1967/2014).

[3] The constructed situation arguably failed to develop into a fully formed practice. It has therefore remained a theoretical formulation—a socio-aesthetic concept.

a purely negative position towards the urban spectacle, the constructed situation was arguably representative of the Situationists' antagonistic approach to urbanism. This antagonistic ('political') approach would gain *visibility* and *form* in the urban realm through the constructed situation's staged and constructed aspects.

As described in the previous chapter, the 'image-commodity' of late capitalism[4] has replaced lived experience "with a series of spectral abstractions" (Gardiner 2000, 121). Guy Debord (1967/2014, 6) characterised the spectacle as a symptom or development of philosophical idealism as it attempts to "capture the real through a 'visionary' process of abstract conceptualisation" (Gardiner 2000, 110). With its signs, billboards, electronic monitors, posters and host of visual marketing messages, the spectacle has also perceivably extended its forces into urban experience, transforming it into a series of non-living, inauthentic representations in which the *real* is reduced to *ideology*. The fundamentally existential nature of the constructed situation therefore represented a means to reinstate authenticity within urban experience, rendering it again unmediated by the dehumanising veneer of the spectacle. As David Thorns (2002, 145) has described, within the spectacle economy, illusion "overtakes reality and images impose themselves as the tangible and are taken as the real: illusion is authenticated as more real than the real itself." If urban experience has become a spatial extension of an economic phrase in which social life has "receded into a representation", there is therefore a need to reinstate genuine, unmediated existentiality, and via this restoration of authentic experience, acquire ground-level agency. The works addressed in this chapter construct transient, spatio-temporal conditions in which the urban spectacle's disempowering operations can be defied. The 'situational'[5] project of urban social aesthetics can therefore be understood as a realisation of the constructed situation's aim to imagine an *active*, counter-spectacle art form. As a result, I will argue in this chapter that Situationist debate could lend to the examination of situation-constructing urban social aesthetic practice. I will commence by addressing other situational debates in contemporary art, making a case for why only Situationist debate will be *repurposed* [6] in this chapter's analyses.

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[4] 'Late capitalism' can be defined as the 'third stage' in capitalism's evolution (Mandel 1975). Many scholars have characterised it as being dominated by imagery (Debord 1967/2014; Baudrillard, 1976/1993, 1968/2005; Venturi, 1972; Lazzarato, 1996; Jameson, 1991). As in the previous chapter, this term will point to the hyper-visual nature of capitalism's third stage.

[5] When I say 'situational', I mean to say art praxis that is situation constructing.

[6] In this chapter, 'repurposing' Situationist debate will mean *reusing* the group's 'constructed situation' towards a new and different purpose—towards the examination of situational urban social aesthetic works.

Bristol-based curator Claire Doherty (2009, 2004) has written a great deal on the situational tendencies of contemporary art practice. In addition to this, since 2002, she has been the founder and director of public art commissioning programme *Situations*, which is dedicated to the commissioning and production of situational art projects around the world. In her 2009-edited volume *Situations*, she suggests that the current conditions of globalisation and their extension into the art world have encouraged a shift in contemporary art practice from the 'site-specific' to the 'situation-specific'.[7] Doherty (2009) argues that globalisation, mobility, techno-economics and (in the art world) the proliferation of international biennials, have brought about a post-millennial shift in contemporary art towards situational practice. Within this context, according to Doherty (2009), fixed, physical approaches to site are starting to be negated in favour of those that embrace mobility, flexibility and non-site-specific context. Doherty's (2009) analysis seems to be rooted in how globalisation's 'annihilation of space by time' (Marx 1939/1973, 538), or rather, capitalist postmodernity's 'time-space compression' (Harvey 1989b), has driven some contemporary art practice, curation and programming away from the site-specific, towards more temporal, mobile forms.[8]

I would suggest that Doherty's (2009, 2004) analyses are centred in how some contemporary art practice, curation and programming has been passively shaped by the latest round of capitalism's 'annihilation of space by time'—how the contemporary art world has absorbed the conditions of capitalist postmodernity. However, in this chapter, I am concerned with how contemporary art actively resists the operations of capital and its urban-spatial operations. This is perhaps the main indication that Doherty's (2009, 2004) analyses are not the most appropriate theoretical frame for examining the urban social aesthetic works addressed in this chapter. Whilst one could

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[7] It may also be worth nothing that some of the practices that Doherty (2009) delineates as 'situational', such as Gordon Matta-Clark's *FOOD* (1971–74) and *Flatbread Society* (2012–Ongoing), may be better described as 'durational'. Therefore, there is a basic disjuncture between the works Doherty (2009) broadly inducts into her analysis and the urban social aesthetic works I address in this chapter. Whilst Doherty's (2009) examples are occasionally durational, the instances of contemporary art addressed in this chapter adhere to a more conventional definition of the situational, as they comprise temporal, disruptive practices in the spectacular urban landscape.

[8] In *Grundrisse* (1939/1973, 538) Marx discusses how capitalism must 'annihilate space with time'—how, in other words, capitalism must overcome spatial barriers. In *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989b), David Harvey historically updates this idea, as he discusses how in the era of postmodernity and globalisation, capitalism's long-term 'annihilation of space by time' is further intensified. It is now better defined as a 'time-space compression', as spatial barriers are more dynamically overcome by globalisation and accelerated economic activities. Harvey (1989b) suggests that this latest phrase in capitalism's long-term annihilation of space is the condition of postmodernity. 'Postmodernity' here is essentially equated to late capitalism—the tertiary stage of capitalism's evolution.

argue that globalisation, capitalist postmodernity and their extension through art world biennialism, have encouraged contemporary art production to become 'situational', it is perhaps problematic to construct such a black-and-white dichotomy between the 'situation-specific' and the 'site-specific'. For example, the urban social aesthetic works addressed in this chapter do not fit into this rigid dichotomy, as they retain 'site-specificity'. Not only do they respond exclusively to the socio-spatial specifics of Western capitalist cities, they are, at the same time, 'situation-specific', as they deliberately construct temporal instants of intensively lived experience. Doherty's (2009, 2004) hypothesis is possibly indicative of the fact that non-gallery art debates tend to be dualistic in nature, which not only simplifies the interesting diversity of practice that exists, but reiterates outmoded Modernist thinking. Arguably, a framework that enables a much more pluralistic approach is needed. Many instances of contemporary art, whose production has been influenced by the conditions of the capitalist-urbanism nexus, occupy both categories of 'site-specific' and 'situation-specific'—one category is not anterior or superior to the other, but rather, they are intricately connected.

This chapter is concerned with both the spatial and temporal aspects of situational contemporary art. Space as a category is unavoidable in this chapter because it is concerned with urban art practice, and the 'urban' is fundamentally a set of 'spatially grounded social practices' (Harvey 2001, 350). Time is prioritised over space in Doherty's (2009) analysis because she is concerned with postmodernity's time-space compression and how, as a result of its emergence, some art production has moved away from site-specificity. As this chapter speaks to works that are both situation-constructing and urban 1:1 scale, space is an indispensible category. As David Howarth (1996, 49) argues, "politics must always have a spatial dimension." This is because space gives *form* to antagonistic, political forces—space *embodies* them, and without it, they would remain invisible.[9] Therefore, in order to examine the critical urban artworks addressed in this chapter, a debate that incorporates the 'spatial' is required. The Situationists' constructed situation is a more appropriate theoretical framework for this chapter than Doherty's (2009, 2004) work, as it bridges urban *space* ('politics') with the *temporal* (the 'political'/antagonism).

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[9] For Howarth (1996, 49), temporality is the category of the 'political' as pure negativity (antagonism), whilst 'politics' is a practice of spatialisation. He explains that "the character of temporality is indeterminate and undecidable: it is the condition for politics, not politics itself" (Howarth 1996, 49). As a result, space ('politics') is needed to give *form* to temporal 'political' action. As the artworks addressed in this chapter constitute critical art practice, they were reliant on a somewhat fixed, spatial aspect in order to attain visibility. Therefore, the situational artworks addressed in this chapter combine the spatial (politics) and the temporal (political). The prioritisation of the temporal over space in Doherty's (2009, 2004) analyses (because she is concerned with postmodernity's time-space compression) renders it an inappropriate debate for examining the works addressed in this chapter.

Furthermore, from an urban theory perspective, in a globalised, informational capitalist economy, the urgencies of fixed physical space are not entirely negated. Information-processing structures are still primarily oriented towards specific urban sites (Castells, 1996/2000, 169). As Manuel Castells (1996/2000, 459) highlighted, the urgencies of fixed, physical urban space are not negated by a "space of flows", but rather, these two spatial logics exist in a "schizophrenic tension" within capitalist-urbanism (Castells 1996/2000, 459). Correspondent to Castells' (1996/2000) insights, in Situationist debate, a situational aesthetic was combined with the co-creation of physical urban space. In the Situationists' theory of unitary urbanism and their utopian city model of *New Babylon* (1959–73),[10] urban sites would be constructed from a mixture of fixed and temporary architectures. In other words, cities would become *dynamic places*—sites that would combine the fixed qualities of urbanism with flexible and alterable structures, controlled at the whim of urban inhabitants/users. Doherty (2009, 2004) did not examine situational contemporary art practice within a decidedly urban context. I would contend that examining this practice within a specifically urban context is a necessary task. This is because situational practice has arguably been a key means though which contemporary artists have attempted to counter the urban spectacle—the crucial urban extension of late capitalism's oppressive hyper-visual logic. Doherty (2009, 2004) broadly addresses contemporary art's situational inclination in a variety of contexts, failing to highlight, as this chapter will, its role as a counter-spectacle device within capitalist-urbanism. In light of these inconsistencies between Doherty's (2009, 2004) analysis and this chapter's focus, I would argue that the Situationists' constructed situation is a far more appropriate debate to repurpose.

Other post-war avant-garde organisations and movements, such as Allan Kaprow's *Happenings*, also engaged with a disruptive, situational aesthetic within an urban context. However, again, they do not offer as qualified a framework as Situationist debate does for the works addressed in this chapter. It is worth noting Alexander Trocchi's criticism of the *Happenings*, cited in Jean-Jacques Lebel's *On the Necessity of Violation* (1968). Scottish Situationist, Trocchi (Lebel 1968, 103), argued that, "however determinant the political ambition of the happenings, their physical intent as 'interior communication' would remain primary." In other words, by bringing everyday life into the exclusive and *interior* sphere of the art world, the *Happenings* of the 1960s

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[10] *New Babylon* (1959–74) was a utopian city model designed by artist and Situationist comrade Constant Nieuwenhuys. This anti-capitalistic city would be built above the existing city, above the 'ruins of the spectacle'. Its horizontal design was meant to reflect the 'horizontal', anti-hierarchal society that would inhabit the city. Automated factories would be underground and the surface level would be for transport, whilst up above, a horizontal landscape for endless play would exist (Wark 2011/2015, 138). The inhabitants of this city would be 'homo-ludens'—that is, humans whose 'species-being' is 'play'.

and 1970s New York, were accused of quashing the political potency of a situational aesthetic practice (Bishop 2012, 101). Whilst the *Happenings* brought everyday life into the sphere of art, the constructed situation encouraged the opposite—the introduction of artistic energy into everyday life in order to prompt its radical transformation. Claire Bishop (2012, 101) highlights this discontinuity between the *Happenings* and the constructed situation:

> "If happenings artists sought to bring the everyday into the work of art ('we were presenting a piece of daily reality that is itself a spectacle'), then Debord and the S.I., by contrast, found it necessary to question the very category of art altogether, sublating art into a more intensely lived everyday life."

Ultimately, as they were clearly situated within the interiorised sphere of the art world, Kaprow's *Happenings* do not offer a qualified framework to repurpose towards the urban social aesthetic works addressed in this chapter. Furthermore, experimental institutionalism, the second contemporary art debate repurposed in this thesis towards an urban social aesthetic, currently lacks activity and discourse that could offer an appropriate frame for 'anti-spectacle' situational practice. For the most part, neo-Kantian, spectacle-reaffirming display dynamics have seemingly curtailed institutional experiments that have sought to incorporate a post-Marxist situational aesthetic. There have been notable efforts, in recent years, to incorporate a situational aesthetic into on-site museum programming. These efforts have appeared a constituent part of experimental institutionalism's broader failed ambitions to promote anti-spectacle museum visuality. I would argue that the Van Abbemuseum's *Play Van Abbe* (2009– 11)[11] exhibition encapsulated experimental institutionalism's failure to form a situational aesthetic in the restrictive context of traditional museum display. This exhibition/research project's fourth and final part, *The Pilgrim, the Tourist, the Flâneur (and the Worker)* (2011), aimed to counter the museum's traditional display and spectatorship models by transforming visitor experience into an immersive and existentially-reflexive situation (Van Abbemuseum 2011).[12]

On the surface, the exhibition was contributing an interesting notion of 'lived spectatorship' that would adequately challenge the spectacle-reaffirming logic of museum display. However, all of the roles offered to visitors (i.e. the pilgrim, tourist, flâneur, and worker) were closely associated with a late capitalist spectacle economy.

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[11] The Van Abbemuseum's *Play Van Abbe* (2009–11) exhibition was curated by Christiane Berndes, Charles Esche, Annie Fletcher, Diana Franssen, Galit Eilat and Steven ten Thije.
[12] See Van Abbemuseum. 2011. "The Pilgrim, The Tourist, The Flâneur (and the Worker) – Play Van Abbe." Accessed December 13, 2020. https://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/programme/programme/the-pilgrim-the-tourist-the-flaneur-and-the-worker/.

For example, the roles of 'tourist' and 'flâneur' are especially indicative of a spectacle economy and its urban extensions. The roles offered in the exhibition considered visitors as either passive consumers of culture (pilgrim/tourist/flâneur) or as workers; they did not position or consider visitors in their basic humanity as *livers* of human experience. Roles themselves are integral to a spectacle economy. As Raoul Vaneigem (1967/1994, 132) suggested, "the role is a consumption of power. It locates one in the representational hierarchy and hence in the spectacle." Through encouraging visitors to inhabit various roles indicative of a spectacle economy, *The Pilgrim, the Tourist, the Flâneur (and the Worker)* arguably fell short of constructing a situational aesthetic in the museum. Whilst actively playing or performing a role was seen to 'activate' visitors and make museum experience more 'situational', the nature of the roles performed meant that spectacle-reaffirming display and spectatorship models were hardly compromised. I would also contend that, in *Play Van Abbe*, the Van Abbemuseum was being too internally 'self-reflexive'. In other words, the institution was being self-reflexive to the point that it was merely *representing* itself, turning its institutional experiments themselves into a veritable *spectacle* for the passive observation of its visitors. Speaking of the *Play Van Abbe* exhibition, research curator Stephen Ten Thije admits, "we got overexcited in our self-reflexivity" (Marstine 2017, 184). In becoming "a museum of museums" via these projects, as director Charles Esche (Marstine 2017, 184) described, achieving a 'counter-spectacle' situational aesthetic was seemingly impossible. The Van Abbemuseum's enthusiasm for its own institutional experimentation became a representation itself during this show, mirroring the spectacle economy's endless monologue of self-praise.

Biennials as urban-institutional frameworks for contemporary art practice, have also demonstrated a tendency towards situational practice, curation and programming in capitalistic urban sites. However, even as urban negotiations of experimental institutionalism, their attempts to incorporate a situational aesthetic have been rendered questionable by spectacle-reaffirming dynamics, as well as their frequent tendency to favour image-branding over the social urgencies of cities. Doherty (2009, 13) argues that, in the post-millennial art world, many acclaimed Western biennials have "contested and frustrated the expectations of the art tourist, producing what we might term situation-specific, rather than site-specific projects." In other words, Doherty (2009, 13) suggests that the recent shift towards situation-specific artworks and biennial programming has seemingly counteracted the latter's conventional association with the 'grand tour' (or touristic urban spectacle). There is, however, evidence that situational biennial artworks, curation and programming have represented

unsuccessful attempts to negate the spectacular models of the grand tour and of capitalist-urbanism in general.

Tatzu Nishi's *Villa Victoria* (2002) project at the second edition of Liverpool biennial (*International 2002)* is a clear example.[13] In this project, Nishi constructed a temporary hotel underneath the Queen Victoria monument in Liverpool's Derby Square, where the public could stay-over for one night. Although it was outwardly countering spectacle through directly lived activity, the project ended up emblematising the biennial's status as an exercise in urban spectacle. First of all, this project was funded by the North West Development Agency for Liverpool's bid for *Capital of Culture* and the project was included in much of the publicity for the city's bid (Liverpool Biennial, LJMU *Special Collections and Archives,* September 24, 2018).[14] In correspondence documents, it is revealed that the Development Control Division of Liverpool City Council wrote to the project manager emphasising that scaffolding for the hotel had to be erected promptly in order to have the project open to the press, as this media coverage was to be crucial for the city's *Capital of Culture* bid (Liverpool Biennial, LJMU *Special Collections and Archives,* September 24, 2018). If *Villa Victoria* was key to Liverpool's *Capital of Culture* bid, this perhaps suggests that, in spite of its status as situational artwork, it nevertheless served urban tourism and city marketing agendas, reducing the city to a marketable image ('spectacle'). Furthermore, because the project did not correspond to Liverpool's social urgencies, this arguably suggested that it was favouring art's autonomy over its situation-mediated integration with lived experience.

Although most of the comments in *Villa Victoria's* visitor books are positive remarks from locals, there is also a distinct set of voices, which appear to be sceptical and critical of the project's existence. In the project's guestbook, one member of the public, critical of the project asserts, "we are not impressed, let's get down to the real world. For the inner city kids, not your arty farty art"; others say, "could have trained three nurses for this" and "how is this helping the city? Money is better spent on litter cleaning etc." (Liverpool Biennial, LJMU *Special Collections and Archives,* September 24, 2018). The large amount of mediation from various official organisations on top of the biennial meant that those behind the *Villa Victoria* project had certain expectations for how its participating public would behave. There were also so many different authoritative parties involved in both the project and its immediate urban public vicinity.

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[13] A team of six Liverpool-based curators (Lewis Biggs, Eddie Berg, Bryan Biggs, Catherine Gibson, Christoph Gruenberg and Jo McGonigal) curated *International 2002.*
[14] The following research on the *Villa Victoria* (2002) project comes from archival research conducted in LJMU's *Archives and Special Collections*. During visits to this archive, I consulted documents related to the commissioning and developments of *Villa Victoria*, correspondence (between the artist and biennial staff) and the project's guestbook.

This perhaps prevented the sort of unscripted, spontaneous actions that are expected of situational aesthetic activity. The project involved a project manager, Liverpool biennial staff, Bethall Construction Company, KKA Architects, Building Control, the local council, NWDA, electricity and water suppliers, security, legal and bureaucratic organisations, the monarchy (approval was needed due to it being a royal monument) and also service provided from Holiday Inn hotels. This exhaustive list of official, commercial, bureaucratic and hegemonic parties involved arguably stifled the project's ability to be a true enabler of authentic directly lived experience, as it was extremely mediated and overburdened by authoritative powers. I would thus suggest that art biennials have co-opted situational artworks and programming into 'urban events'— they have reduced them into blatant tools for urban tourism and image branding. In light of experimental institutionalism's inability to produce a radical 'situational' approach, this chapter only repurposes Situationism.

Theoretical Origins of the Constructed Situation

To acquire clarity on the constructed situation, it is beneficial to first consult its various historical precedents and theoretical influences such as 'Brechtian theatre', Henri Lefebvre's 'moment' and Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist writings on situations. Brechtian theatre[15] (the invention of German playwright, Bertolt Brecht) significantly influenced the Situationists' constructed situation. As a type of theatre that was supposed to "challenge the passivity of the audience", Brechtian theatre aimed to counter non-intervention and socio-political passivity, which was also the aim of the constructed situation (Brecht et al. 2018, 133). Similarly, as Simon Sadler (1999, 106) highlights, the "S.I. wanted to take the theatre beyond entertainment and into revolution." Brecht's 'gestus', a theatre technique that used gestures to execute social critiques, specifically exemplifies the constructed situation's connections to Brechtian theatre. From the late 1920s onwards, Brecht became interested in "gesture as socially encoded expression" (Mumford 2008, 53). 'Showing the gestus' in Brechtian theatre meant "to present artistically the mutable socio-economic and ideological construction of human behaviour and relations" (Mumford 2008, 54). Brechtian theatre therefore made a social constructivist critique, as through the use of theatrical gestures, it revealed how socio-economic forces influence human behaviour. This social

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[15] Brechtian theatre was the work of German playwright Bertolt Brecht. Encompassing a range of theatrical devices known as 'epic theatre', Brechtian theatre challenged the passivity encouraged by conventional theatre and instead encouraged its audience to adopt a more critical attitude to what was happening on stage and in society. Moving way from the traditions of dramatic and Aristotelian theatre, Brecht's theatre broke down the imaginary wall between actors and audience, which makes the latter passive observers. In Brechtian theatre, the audience is active participants, as they are challenged and kept thinking critically throughout.

constructivist outlook was also present in the constructed situation, as it suggested that urban users could *actively* construct dynamic situations in everyday life. Social class arguably influences the gestures an individual chooses. As Meg Mumford (2008, 53) explains, Brecht's 'gestus' spoke to the "moulded and sometimes subconscious body language of a person from a particular class"—for example, "the genteel manners of a group of diplomats as they stir their tea or the posture of a farmer just back from a day's labour in the field, who converses with tired hands resting on his knees."

By exposing the socially constructed nature of body gestures (how socio-economic forces shape how we physically express ourselves) the audience of the Brechtian performance would assumedly realise their potential to reprogramme their socially coded behaviours. 'Showing the gestus' was a catalyst for audiences to counter the oppression of the working class in a capitalist society, reminding them that, if our behaviours are socially constructed, we can easily reconstruct them in ways which are more empowering. Furthermore, encouraging performers to 'show the gestus' was supposed to "encourage all theatre players to become socially critical observers" (Mumford 2008, 60). It was, in other words, a way to bring class struggle to the attention of all 'theatre players', as this was a starting point for transforming them into active critics of an oppressive capitalist society. Rather than encouraging passive observation, as conventional theatre encourages, Brechtian theatre promoted participation, inviting the audience to actively question socio-economic issues. This negation of passivity also informed the constructed situation, which imagined an active art 'audience', who would assist in countering the spectacle economy's passive consumerism and obedience.

The Situationists applauded Brecht's destruction of the theatrical spectacle, as they, at times, needed to rely on the theatre to explain their nebulous concept of a constructed situation (Puchner 2005, 231). The Marxist theatre of Brecht provided an excellent theoretical foundation for the constructed situation as it reconciled the issue of 'theatrical spectacle'. Brecht and the Situationists had reimagined performance as a radical device that could create openings for social agency in everyday life. Like Brechtian theatre, the constructed situation seemed to locate a juncture in-between the seemingly irreconcilable categories of 'theatre' and 'everyday life'. The *constructed* aspect of the constructed situation pointed perhaps to the necessity of a *staged*, *performative* aspect. The political, antagonistic temporality of 'a situation' arguably needed a staged aspect in order to become visible. Indeed, as Oliver Marchart (2019, 55–56) contends, the political "must be staged in order to become visible at all." Without the *staged* aspect of the constructed situation, its antagonistic, political charge

and ideas would lack visibility. Brecht was also influenced by Marx's theory of alienation, which was the process by which the worker feels foreign to the products of their labour.[16] Brechtian theatre sought to "challenge a condition of alienation through a theatre of empowering observation" (Mumford 2008, 62). Brecht's technique of 'verfremdung' (also known as the 'V-effect' or 'alienation effect'), which can be translated into 'defamiliarisation', aimed to create a critical distance between the audience and the performance so that the former could become more perceptive observers. The critical distance that this theatrical method gave to an audience enabled them to locate a position of empowered spectatorship. This aim to create a more empowered, active audience informed the constructed situation's participatory nature—its ultimate incentive to transform art's viewers into 'livers', who no longer passively observed art, but intensively lived it and were integral to its creation.

Another vital historical precedent of the constructed situation was the Lefebvrian 'moment'. Henry Lefebvre's moment was "a fleeting, intensely euphoric sensation which appeared as a point of rupture which revealed the totality of possibilities of daily existence" (Leach 1997/2005, 132). In Lefebvre's (1961/2002, 348) own words, it was "the attempt to achieve the total realisation of a possibility." The moment is a *possibility* of everyday living (be it play, work or love etc.) that has been *realised*. Much akin to the constructed situation, the moment was informed by the empowering potential of lived experience. Lefebvre (1961/2002, 351) claimed that, "the moment is born of the everyday and within the everyday." Examples of 'moments' were love, play, rest, knowledge, etc. A full list could not be provided as, according to Lefebvre (1961/2002, 334), there was nothing, which could prevent the invention of new moments. Moments also represented the radical characteristics of non-linear time. As an intensely lived, unitary temporality, they opposed the linear nature of capitalist time, which mirrors production and accumulation.

As a temporal, unitary, spatio-temporality, the constructed situation also reflected this idea. According to the Situationists, however, Lefebvre's moments were far too closed. Although one could supposedly invent new moments, the Situationists argued that the term invoked a limited series of self-contained experiences. As Frances Stracey (2014a, 11) highlights, for the Situationists, Lefebvre's "prescriptive and somewhat programmatic list of self-contained moments, such as play, justice, rest,

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[16] Brecht's Verfremdung was also influenced by Walter Benjamin's idea of 'shock'. Brecht's long-lasting friendship with Benjamin had a profound impact on his theatre. Brecht's tendency to 'make the familiar strange' coincided with Benjamin's idea of 'shock'—of 'exploding things' from their ordinary commodified existence (Benjamin 1927/1999, 210). Both theorists viewed their respective ideas as a way to pull audiences out of their alienated state in a capitalist society.

etc." left little room for creative invention. Lefebvre was describing "absolute moments", or in other words, "types of self-enclosed modalities or ends in themselves" (Stracey 2014a, 11). The constructed situation, on the other hand, possessed no prescribed limits or ends. It was open to an infinitive variety of themes and contexts. Whilst the moment was solely temporal, the constructed situation was also "closely articulated to place; it was spatio-temporal" (Mumford 2008, 35). Constructed situations were therefore more spatial than 'the moment' and also urban in orientation. As Lefebvre (1961/2002, 350) described, "each moment can be characterised in the following ways: it is perceived, situated and distanced." The Situationists also criticised the moment as being too passively experienced (Leach 1997/2005, 132). As a result, the constructed situation was conceptualised as an experiential art form that was contingent on active construction/staging.

The constructed situation was also influenced, in part, by existentialist philosophy— namely Jean-Paul Sartre's idea of the 'situation', which was described in his seminal text *Being and Nothingness* (1943/2003). Sartre (1943/2003, 511) famously stated that, "there is freedom only in a situation, and there is a situation only through freedom." As Sadler (1999, 45) has described, "Sartre had argued that life is a series of given situations, which affect the individual's consciousness and will, and which must in turn be negotiated by that individual." Furthermore, "linked to his theories about freedom of choice and responsibility, Sartre's 'situation' described a sense of self-consciousness of existence within a particular environment or ambience" (Ford 2005, 50). As a conduit for freedom, and also a product of it, the situation was likely an attractive concept to the anti-authoritarian Situationists. However, the Situationists desired a more social constructivist approach to the 'situation', which could effectively distance it from the "given reality of a particular phenomenological, existential situation" (Stracey 2014a, 12). They took issue with how philosophers of existential phenomenology, such as Sartre, only offered *interpretations* of situations. The Situationists wanted to *actively* create situations and transform existing ones— especially situations representative of the capitalist economy and its urban extension. Their reconciliation of Sartre's existentialist philosophy was centred in opting for a much more active, socially constructivist approach. Furthermore, unlike existentialists such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger, the Situationists did not perceive alienation as an inherent and unshakable aspect of the human condition. Rather, they believed that alienation could be superseded "through acts of individual and collective self-realisation" (Gardiner 2000, 17). Situationism considered alienation something that was created by power and therefore believed that it could be negated by urban socio-aesthetic acts like the constructed situation.

The Constructed Situation

As Sadler (1999, 105) highlights, the Situationists provided "no clear notion of how situations would work or what they should look like." They nevertheless defined the constructed situation as "a moment of life concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organisation of a unitary ambience and game of events" (S.I. 1958/2006a, 51). This definition suggests a temporal, quasi-performance-based artwork that is to be *lived* rather than *observed*. In other terms, the passive, distanced state of reflection, which defines society's condition under late capitalist spectacle, is contested via an 'aesthetics of experience'. What is also suggested is that the constructed situation would comprise certain behaviours or actions that could possibly unite individuals ('unitary ambience') as a means of resisting capitalist separation. For Sadler (1999, 105), "the constructed situation is best thought of as a sort of Gesthamkunstwerk (total work of art)." This could certainly be contested, however, as the 'Gesthamkunstwerk' was a grand combination of different arts into a totality. Conversely, the constructed situation represented a radical departure from conventional art forms towards an aesthetics of lived experience.

Constant Nieuwenhuys (1958/1997, 79) argued that, "the shocking character the construction of ambiences calls for, excludes traditional arts like painting and literature…arts linked to a mystical and individualist attitude are useless to us." In other words, the Gesthamkunstwerk was the grand amalgamation of traditional arts, which, for the Situationists, problematically implied the over-mythologised artist and individualistic ideology. The constructed situation, however, was much more of a collectivist endeavour. The Gesthamkunstwerk existed in the interiorised sphere of art, whilst the constructed situation intended to exist in everyday life. The constructed situation might have been partially influenced by the Gesthamkunstwerk's 'unitary' aspects. However, whilst the Gesthamkunstwerk's unity meant a grand coherence of the arts (visual art, music, performance etc.), the constructed situation was invested in creating a "unitary ambience and game of events"—a spatio-temporal artwork, whose environment and activities would unite individuals, in order to resist capitalist separation (S.I. 1958/2006a, 51). Ultimately, the constructed situation was more different than similar to the Gesthamkunstwerk, as the latter was positioned within the artistic sphere with an aim to enhance art practice. The former, however, was centred in everyday life with a socio-aesthetic intent to counter late capitalism's socially numbing and fragmenting effects.

As Sadler (1999) has contended, we must not confuse the constructed situation with the *Happenings* produced by New York avant-garde artists. The Situationists characterised the *Happenings* as "spectacular avant-garde activities—the everyday recuperated" (Sadler 1999, 106). Whilst the constructed situation was opposed to the spectacle economy, the *Happenings*, through their production of sensational artistic 'events', were considered reaffirmations of the spectacle. In spite of being a 'lived' art form, their sensationalism and failure to truly move beyond the artistic sphere, meant that the *Happenings* could be conceived as reducing the 'directly lived' into inauthentic, spectacular experiences. There is a clear distinction indicated here between the socio-aesthetic notion of 'situation' and what we may call a spectacular 'event'. Although both are spatio-temporal formations contingent on an audience, who directly live a set of circumstances, the former can be characterised as counter-spectacle and the latter a sophisticated tool for reaffirming an 'economy of appearances'. 'Situations' would appear to be at the level of the everyday, yet to be relegated to the machinations of the economy, whereas 'events' seem to have been co-opted into an apparatus for the spectacle, masking authentic everyday life with a sensational array of images. 'Events' are arguably lived experience that has been marketed and packaged for consumption.

As Greg Richards and Robert Palmer (2010, 2) have stressed, "events have become vital to inter-urban competition—to such an extent that many cities have started to promote themselves as 'eventful' cities." Events play an important role in the late-capitalist urban spectacle, as they contribute to image-making and branding processes. Urbanism's transformation into an extension of late capitalist spectacle, as addressed in the previous chapter, has been connected to the rise of 'eventful cities' and the 'experience economy'. According to Richards and Palmer (2010, 10), "the increasing importance of image, ephemera and spectacle has given a new impetus to events." That the 'eventful city' is associated with urban spectacle, begs the question—has the events economy benefited from this degradation of the authentic urban experience? Urban events in late capitalism appear to falsely satisfy our genuine need for 'being there', or more broadly, for the authentic experiences that has are stifled by spectacle (Richards and Palmer 2010, 19). Urban events possibly constitute the spectacle's attempts to reap economic benefits from the destruction of the 'directly lived'. Urban events may be simply understood as the spectacle taking perverse advantage of its own general degradation of authentic social life. However, the urban event's association with spectacle may be considered historically specific. The urban event has not always been 'spectacular'—a tool for interurban competition and image branding. The medieval carnival, for example, represented a pre-capitalist urban event. Mikhail Bakhtin (1965/1984, 7) suggested that "carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people;

they live in it and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people." Just like the Situationists' constructed situation, the medieval carnival was intensely lived, anti-hierarchal and participatory. However, in late capitalism, the urban event is merely another means through which authentic experience is subjected to reification, reduced to a series of dead, marketable images. To summerise then, we should differentiate urban events and constructed situations—the former is the apparatus of spectacle and the latter are potentially counter-spectacle apparatus.

Urban Situations

Now the idea of the constructed situation has been introduced, it is important to consider how it specifically related to the urban matrix. The construction of situations was an integral part of the Situationists' urban project. Not only were they were they intended as "creatively lived moments in specific urban settings" as Peter Wollen (1989, 67) summarises, they were also considered vital to the destruction of the urban spectacle. The Situationists' urban critique known as 'unitary urbanism', and utopian city model *New Babylon* (1959–73) (Fig. 5.1 and Fig. 5.2), are clear examples of the organisation's unification of situations and urbanism. The constructed situation was key to unitary urbanism, as it would assist in countering the spectacle-affirming aspects of official urbanism. With its modifiable architectures and ambiences, which could be changed according to the whim of its inhabitants, *New Babylon* represented a perfect union between urban space and a situational aesthetic. As Ivan Chtcheglov (1953/2006, 3) described, *New Babylon's* "aspects will change totally or partially in accordance with the will of its inhabitants." *New Babylon* was, essentially, a city constituted by and constitutive of, dynamic, intensely lived situations—"every square mile of *New Babylon's* surface represents an unexhaustible field of new and unknown situations, because nothing will remain and everything is constantly changing" (Nieuwenhuys 1963/2015, 200).[17] I would therefore suggest that Situationism represents a merger of radical situational aesthetics and urban theory/practice. As a result, it provides a promising theoretical frame within which to examine this chapter's urban social aesthetic examples, which construct dynamic situations in the spectacular urban landscape.

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[17] The Situationists envisioned an urban architecture that was situational. Instead of a fixed architecture, they imagined one that would be constantly constructed and reconstructed by everyday urban users. Urban architecture would be malleable so it mirrored the constantly transforming nature of authentic human existence (Chtcheglov 1958/1997, 15). However, I will not be discussing 'situational architecture' in this chapter as I have already discussed concerns around urban architecture and the built environment in chapter one.

Fig. 5.1 *New Babylon* (Provo, No.4, New Babylon, 1965). Photo: © Courtesy of Situationist International: The John McCready Archive at Liverpool john Moores University, Special Collections and Archives.
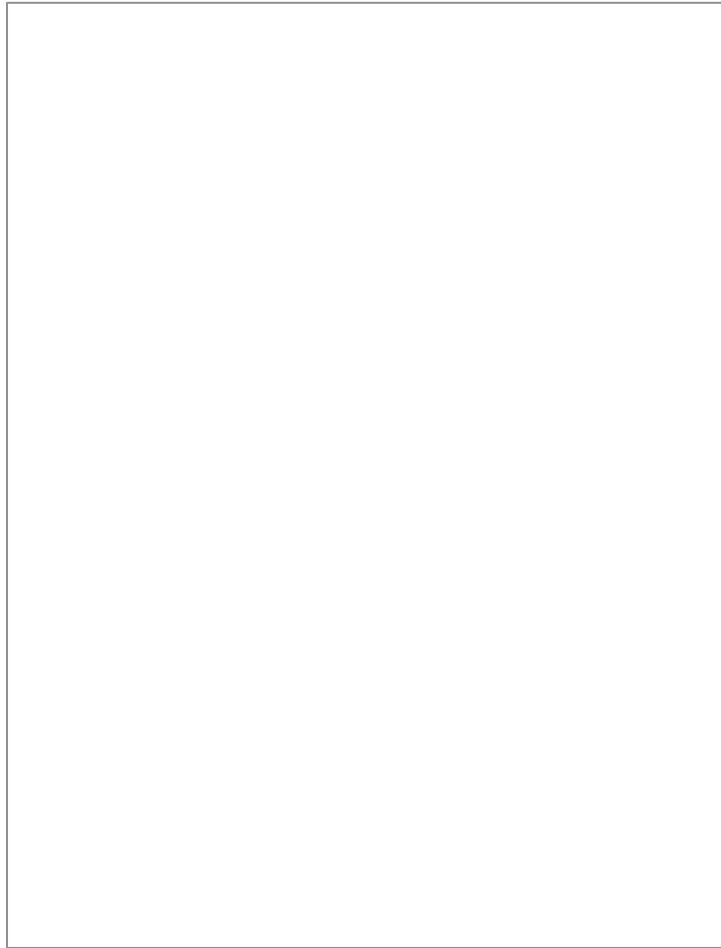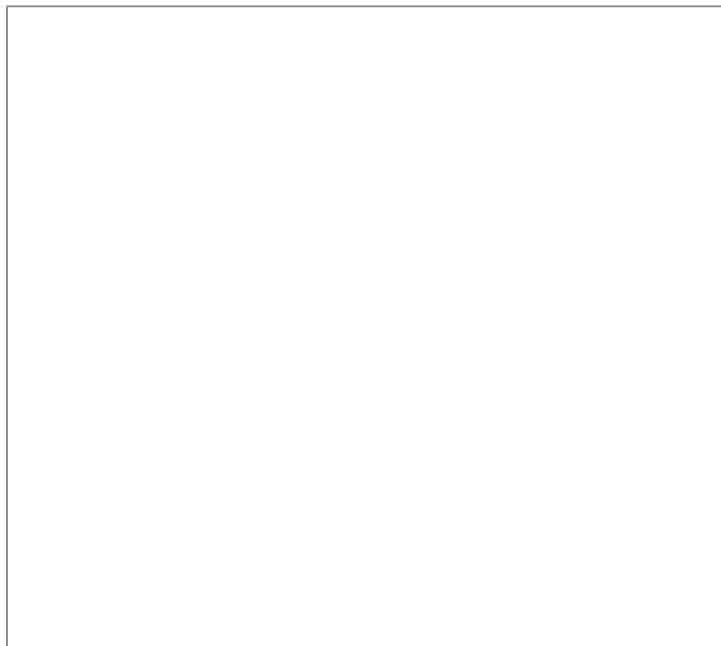

Fig. 5.2 *New Babylon* (Provo, No.4, New Babylon, 1965). Photo: © Courtesy of Situationist International: The John McCready Archive at Liverpool John Moores University, Special Collections and Archives.

Capitalist spectacle is "a concrete inversion of life, an autonomous moment of the non-living" (Debord 1967/2014, 2). It is "a visible negation of life—a negation that has taken on a visible form" (Debord 1967/2014, 4). As a social relation or worldview that has negated the *real* in favour of ideology, the spectacle is directly opposed to authentic lived experience. The spectacle has replaced 'being' with 'appearances' (Debord 1967/2014, 5). As described in the previous chapter, urbanism also (as a spatial extension of capitalist production) reflects this shift from being to appearances. Late capitalist-urbanism has mirrored the spectacle's consensus of reducing the 'real' to 'ideology'—the directly lived has been supplanted by images and their abstract values. Arguably, the Situationists' constructed situation mirrored Sartre's attempts, after the war, to interweave existentialism with Marxism (Wollen 1989, 72). Situationist artefacts such as Debord's psychogeographic map *The Naked City* (1957) encapsulate this ambition to coalesce existential philosophy with Marxist concerns. *The Naked City* depicts a city whose artificial, 'spectacular' veneer has been stripped away, placing the directly lived journey of its creator on full display. However, Situationism's existential Marxism arguably achieved its apex expression in the constructed situation, as it championed authentic experience to oppose the spectacle's artificial pseudo-world.

I would contend that Kate McLean's international project *Sensory Maps/Smellwalks* (2010–Ongoing) is a demonstrable example of how aesthetic situations can reinstate the directly lived within the urban spectacle (McLean 2010).[18] Since 2010, McLean has been conducting 'smellwalks'. These are collective walks in which the artist and members of the public walk around a city together and gather sensory data. This data is then used to produce sensory maps. McLean's aestheticised walking demonstrates that authentic urban experience can provide more fulfilling experiences than the inauthentic abstractions of urban spectacle. In an environment where capitalist sign-values summon us into a false world of appearances, McLean's work demands that we find wonder in authentic experience. During McLean's data collection walks, participants complete various activities such as 'smell catching', 'smell hunting' and 'smell comparison'. These activities, like the constructed situation, push focus on analysing the authentic ambiences of urban everyday life. Through these activities, participants are realigned with the authentic aspects of urban experience, which tend to be masked by the superficial veneer of spectacle. In other words, by walking 'nose-first'

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[18] See McLean, Kate. 2010. "Sensory Maps." Accessed March 19, 2020. https://sensorymaps.com.

and becoming aware of the sensory, empirical aspects of the urban landscape, one is realigned with the 'directly lived' dimension of a city or town.

Although this project makes clear reference to situationist psychogeography and dérive with its walking and mapping processes, 'smellwalks' can certainly be construed as constructed situations, which assist in reconnecting with authentic urban experience. Having experienced a 'smellwalk' myself whilst at the 2019 *Urban Creativity* conference in Lund, Sweden, what becomes immediately obvious is that participants are able to reconnect with authentic urban experience (Urban Creativity 2019). By focusing on sensory inputs, one is able to reconnect with the real experience of an urban site—no longer distracted by the mass of advertising and signs. After each activity is conducted during the walk, participants are brought together to discuss their findings and experiences. This arguably indicates the Situationist idea of 'radical subjectivity', which was theorised as a key aspect of the constructed situation. Radical subjectivity meant celebrating individual subjectivities, but not at the expense of equality and community (Vaneigem 1967/1994). In other words, it meant expressing subjectivities externally, sharing them amongst the collective. As Vaneigem (1967/1994, 245) contended, "the realisation of each subjectivity will either take place in collective form or it will not take place at all." Likewise, he also claimed that, "revolutionary equality will be inducibly individual and collective" (Vaneigem 1967/1994, 49). By celebrating individual experiences in a collective manner, authentic sensory experiences of urban sites are heightened.

Elin Wikström, a self-proclaimed producer of "activated situations", has been another significant creator of constructed situations in capitalistic urban sites (Moderna Museet 2000).[19] In *What Would Happen If Everyone Did This?* (1993) (Fig. 5.3), Wikström moved a bed into a grocery store in Malmö and lay in it silently every single day from opening until closing for three weeks. She installed an electric sign above her bed, which read (quoted in Thompson 2012, 247–48):

> "One day I woke up feeling sleepy, sluggish and sour. I drew the bedcovers over my head because I didn't want to get up, look around or talk to anyone. Under the covers I said to myself, I'll lie like this, completely still without saying a word, as long as I want. I'm not going to do anything, just close my eyes and let the thoughts come and go. Now what would happen if everyone did this?"

The performance attracted various responses from the local public: one lady read the bible to her, one man proceeded to read her poems, whilst another pinched her toe

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[19] See Modern Museet. 2000. "MMP: Elin Wikström." Accessed March 19, 2020. https://www.modernamuseet.se/stockholm/en/exhibitions/mmp-elin-wikstrom/.

asking, "is this real?" (Thompson 2012, 247–48). This piece therefore acted as a catalyst for encouraging authentic actions from the public in an environment that demonstrably supports spectacle (the urban shopping centre). The urban shopping centre is a primary site that mirrors the spectacle economy's insidious process of "inverting living values into purely abstract values" (Debord 1967/2014, 14). Wikström's performance/intervention reinstated *living* values in the urban spectacle via its evocation of existential issues to the urban public. This socially invested performance/intervention centred on questioning the conventions of our daily-lived experience: what if we all chose to not participate in the 'rat race', but simply surrendered? The members of the public encountering the work were invited, although perhaps unknowingly, to question their 'living values'. The abstract values of consumption, invoked by the urban shopping centre, were temporally negated in favour of 'living values'. Like McLean, Wikström arguably referenced the Brechtian influences of the constructed situation, as she made a familiar urban environment *strange*—she engaged in the constructed situation's détournement tactic of defamiliarisation. By making the familiar strange through their urban situations, McLean and Wikström seem to bring a critical awareness about in the public, which could lead to a newfound agency and movement out of the passivity and non-intervention of the spectacle.

Like *Sensory Maps/Smellwalks*, Wikström's performance/intervention seemed to have focused on drawing out immediate, spontaneous responses from the urban public, and this was a key component of its reinstating of the directly lived. Wikström's actions were simply a catalyst for immediate, spontaneous responses from the public, rendering the work largely unscripted. Immediacy/spontaneity was also integral to the constructed situation. The Situationists argued that, "the new artists of the future, constructors of situations to be lived, will undoubtedly have immediacy as their most succinct—though also their most radical—demand" (Vaneigem 1967/1994, 194). Furthermore, as Vaneigem (1967/1994, 195) argued, "spontaneity is immediate experience…not yet relegated to inauthenticity." Gardiner (2000, 122) has similarly contended that, "spontaneous creativity, which maintains an immediate connection to lived experience and the qualitative, is incapable of being totally co-opted or reified." The spontaneous reactions of the urban public to Wikström's intervention may therefore be characterised as anti-spectacular because they were too quick and immediate for economic capture. The same could also be said about the authentic sensory experiences in McLean's *Sensory Maps/Smellwalks*. The outcomes of these urban situation projects were far too immediate to be relegated to economic capture. Vaneigem (1967/1994) described immediacy as being a most valuable aspect of lived experience which was yet to be relegated to the dehumanising effects of the spectacle

economy. However, the constructed situation was inherently dialectical in the sense that it was constructed, yet also celebrated spontaneous, immediate experience. Similarly, the said contemporary works demonstrate this dialectical situation between rehearsed aspects and spontaneity.

Fig. 5.3 Elin Wikström, *What Would Happen If Everyone Did This?* 1993. Malmö. Photo: © Oscar Guermouche.

Fig. 5.4 *Radio Ballet*, 2003, Leipzig, Saxony. Photo: © Eiko Grimberg, Courtesy of Ligna.

Strategy and prior-organisation were important in McLean and Wikström's works because they aligned multiple subjectivities towards a common goal of using lived experience's serendipitous qualities towards radical intent. Some prior organisation or strategy is required—even in embracing spontaneity as "immediate experience not yet relegated to inauthenticity" (Vaneigem 1967/1994, 195). Preparation does not disarm radial spontaneity. Rather, it ensures the orientation of multiple subjectivities towards the effective disruption or détournement of existing conditions. McLean and Wikström's focus on acquiring immediate, unprompted responses in capitalist urban sites, therefore also appears to highlight strategy/preparation as being a key tool in reinstating the directly lived. Although it conversely gave its participant's instructions, deviating from the power of immediacy and spontaneity, Ligna's *Radio Ballet* (2002) (Fig. 5.4) in Leipzig, Germany, also constituted a constructed situation in the spectacular urban landscape. In this work, Ligna invited members of the public to enact gestures and actions, which were prohibited in Leipzig's main station—a former public space that was under the private control of a German railway company. Each participant was equipped with a headset tuned into the same radio program that would communicate to them permitted and forbidden gestures such as sitting, lying down on the floor and begging etc.

Surveillance comprises a large part of the urban spectacle. As the various private spaces of the Western capitalist city are closely monitored and controlled, the vast array of possible actions and behaviours that exist in authentic directly lived experience are largely stifled. *Radio Ballet* arguably focused on realising the real potentials of directly lived actions and behaviours that are violently censored in privatised spaces of capitalist-urbanism. The constructed situation was described as "a integrated ensemble of behaviour in time" (S.I. 1958/2006b, 49). *Radio Ballet's* unification of behaviours in a radical spatio-temporality, counteracted capitalist separation, which is replicated throughout urban space. However, more vitally, their unification of behaviours further amplified the work's demand for authentic lived experience to be uncensored. Ligna's work highlights that surveillance is a significant part of the urban spectacle. Surveillance is obviously image-centred and concentrated on the act of 'looking'. Consequently, it represents the hegemonic forces of the spectacle economy, which degrade authentic experience through excessive monitoring and control. Focusing on bodily movements and gestures, Ligna championed embodied, authentic experience over the image-centric ideology of urban surveillance. In other terms, the spectacle's

economy of passive, dehumanising *observation* was opposed by an expression of the unlimited body movements and behaviours that exist in authentic experience.[20]

Non-Intervention/Agency

Radio Ballet also demonstrates how reinstating the directly lived through the constructed situation ultimately forms an opening for the acquisition of socio-political agency—freely constructing one's own reality and fighting against the spectacle's logic of non-intervention.[21] In other terms, Ligna's situational intervention in the urban spectacle also indicates the availability of agency in immediate, authentic experience. The immediately lived aspect of the constructed situation was also intended as an instance of rupture—a disruptive interjection in existing conditions. In *Methods of Détournement* (1956/2006, 8–14), Debord and Wolman claim that the constructed situation's ultimate goal was anticipated to be the collective 'détournement' of present conditions—that is, the appropriation and transformation of current socio-political affairs in a deliberate act. Therefore, reinstating the directly lived is not just concerned with renouncing passivity of the spectacle, but also accessing authentic experience in order to locate socio-political agency and transform existing conditions. Accessing the directly lived through the constructed situation is demonstrated as being a potential gateway to reclaiming power, not just undoing the spectacle's superficial projection over authentic life.

In *Body Versus Capital* (2011), Flo6x8 also reiterated the constructed situation's ambition to achieve genuine political gravitas through a détourning/disruptive situational aesthetic. Spanish performance collective Flo6x8 staged a flamenco protest

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[20] One might suggest that my discussion here could be challenged by performance art debates regarding 'presence'—particularly those of art historian Amelia Jones (1997). I would argue, however, that Jones and I are speaking to this topic in fundamentally different contexts. In her article "Presence in Absentia" (1997), Jones problematises 'presence' or the privilege ascribed to *having-been-there* in relation to body and performance art practices. She contends that being present does not have a "privileged relationship to the historical 'truth' of the performance (Jones 1997, 11). Whilst Jones (1997) speaks to presence in a high art/autonomous art/performance art context, my analysis here of Kate McLean, Elin Wilkström and Ligna alludes to it from within the Situationist/post-Marxian context of the constructed situation and urban spectacle, pointing to those aspects of everyday social life, no matter how small or latent, that are yet to be captured by the spectacle economy's reduction of the 'real' to ideology (Vaneigem 1967/1994, 195). Jones and artist Catherine Elwes have also debated the issue of artistic mediation in performance art. Whilst for Elwes (1985) performance art can offer unmediated access to the artist's presence, for Jones (1997, 12), there is "no possibility of an unmediated relationship to any cultural product." However, the constructed situation and my contemporary examples in this section have a much more nuanced relationship to artistic mediation, as we observe in them the staged/constructed and mediated frame of 'art' offering openings towards reconnecting with parts of everyday social life yet to be relegated to inauthenticity.

[21] The Situationists (Debord 1957/2006, 40) characterised 'non-intervention' as the "very principle of the spectacle." Non-intervention can be defined as social and political passivity. Its antithesis, 'agency', is the capacity to act and engage in social change.

in a bank in the Spanish city of Seville to contest its fiscal mismanagement (Brown 2018). Flo6x8 were using body and song to protest against the $23 billion bailout of Spain's third biggest bank—*Bankia*. Their performance highlighted the common contempt, which led to the economic crisis. Like the constructed situation, they were détourning existing political conditions in the urban sphere through immediate and embodied experience. Flo6x8 arguably engaged with what Jill Lane (2013) has called a 'situated freedom' through which performers create a "temporary space through embodied practice that both claims and enacts an alternative social economy." Flo6x8 therefore activated the constructed situation's ambition to ultimately reconstruct conditions against the backdrop of capitalist oppression and exploitation. Flo6x8 use dance as a means to access the immediately lived, and from here, are able to imagine a radically different reality to the fiscal, quantitative spaces of urbanism. Angela Dimitrakaki and Kirsten Lloyd's (2013, 102–103) analysis of Flo6x8 further reinforces this idea that their work accessed the 'directly lived' in order to locate agency in urban spectacle. According to Dimitrakaki and Lloyd (2013, 102–103), Flo6x8 oppose, through dance, "the wonderful materiality of the body (its sheer power of presence, the inevitability of its needs)" to the "imaginary sums of finance." By embracing the body's materiality through dance, Flo6x8 performers could reconnect with the authentic dimension of everyday urbanism from which real political agency can be accessed. The *artifice* of finance, in the broader *artifice* of urban spectacle, was opposed in this performance by the *real* experience of bodily materiality. By the same token, the *agency* of the body was opposed to the *non-intervention* of unmitigated financial abstraction in the urban environment.

Flamenco is a dance that has significant historical associations with protest and bottom-up political agency. It emerged in the nineteenth century as a dance genre, which represented the struggles of Andalusia's culturally marginalised and oppressed (Dumas 2015, 531). It is a dance that is "tied to the struggles of real people" (Hayes 2009, 2). Therefore, spectacular passivity is not only negated via dance, but rather, the all-together lack of political agency that the urban spectacle necessitates is contested. Like Ligna, Flo6x8 contrasts a focus on the body, or embodied materiality, with the abstract, quantitative values of urban space. A member of Flo6x8 has described how, "the body is an element that we all have, its what makes us human. But capitalism, on the other hand, is totally the opposite, it's an arbitrary construction, one that's so far from anything that makes us human" (quoted in Kassam 2013). Again, what emerges in Flo6x8's work is a balance between *preparation* and the *spontaneity* of uncoopted, immediately lived experience. Flamenco is, in fact, an improvisation-based art form in which performers constantly react to their surroundings (Brown 2018, 243).

Nevertheless, Flo6x8 balance spontaneity with preparation—they imbue their work with flamenco's traditional spontaneous nature, even when they have rehearsed choreography for days or weeks on end. Therefore, like the constructed situation, a pre-organisation stage is a vital springboard for ensuring the political efficiency of the work's spontaneous rupture—its effective détournement of existing circumstances.

Ligna and Flo6x8's projects, however, seem to perfectly embody the union between 'performance' and authentic 'everyday' action that is also embodied in the constructed situation. The constructed situation almost suggested a nexus or meeting point in-between the worlds of theatre (as suggested by its Brechtian influence) and everyday urban intervention. The constructed, performative aspect of the constructed situation and Ligna/Flo6x8's projects gives visibility to an otherwise invisible, antagonistic political energy. The political "must be staged in order to become visible at all" (Marchart 2019, 55–56). Like the constructed situation, *staged*, *constructed*, or *performative* aspects, are what gave form and visibility to Ligna and Flo6x8's anti-capitalistic, antagonistic ('political') sensibilities.

Myth and Unity

Another key condition of constructing situations was forging an authentic social unity, which resisted the separating forces of the spectacle's illusionary reality. In the 'society of the spectacle', the forces of separation prevail. Capitalist separation has taken the form of specialised activities, class division, fractured social bonds and fragmented city designs. As Debord (1967/2014, 8) stated, "separation is the alpha and omega of the spectacle." The Situationists intended the constructed situation to constitute a means of restoring unity in a society fragmented by capitalist separation. The constructed situation was, in fact, "a means for unitary urbanism", meaning it would assist in creating a unified milieu, which could repair the fragmented social bond in late capitalism (Debord and Nieuwenhuys 1958/1997, 80). The constructed situation could therefore be characterised as promoting an 'urbanism of unity' that would counter capitalist urban planning's logic of fragmentation and separation. It is not only planning that engenders a fragmented and divided urbanism. It is also, to a large extent, 'ideology'. In late capitalist-urbanism (the urban spectacle), false ideas and illusions (literally 'urban myths') emanate from the mass of corporate advertising, signage, billboards and general host of visual marketing messages.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the urban spectacle creates a variety of myths to encourage consumption, which could also be described as 'false needs'. Now all our basic needs are relatively met in post-industrial society, in order to sustain itself at this

stage, capitalism must therefore imbue individuals with false needs. As Debord (1967/2014, 20) claimed, the "satisfaction of primary human needs is replaced by an uninterrupted fabrication of pseudo-needs." The urban spectacle has been a significant stage for this development of false needs. This 'empire of signs' entangles us in its mythic realities, disseminated through advertising, posters, billboards and the like. Although myth is instrumentalised by capitalism, as it forms myths around consumption and production to encourage our participation in its quest for eternal economic growth, myth is largely suppressed under capitalism. Mark Fisher (2009, 4) claimed, "capitalism is what is left when beliefs have collapsed at the level of ritual or symbolic elaboration and all that is left is the consumer-spectator, trudging through the ruins and relics." Although the Situationists contested the myths of the spectacle economy, they located value in pre-capitalist conceptions of myth. Although pre-capitalist, myth-driven societies were still hierarchal and oppressive, they nevertheless existed as much more unitary societies because they possessed socially unifying belief systems. As Vaneigem (1967/1994, 224) suggests, "myth has the power to bridge separations and make a unitary life possible. Such a life is inauthentic, it is true, but at least this inauthenticity is one, and unanimously accepted by a coherent community." In other words, the Situationists celebrated pre-capitalist myth because it appeared to be a means of unifying individuals or creating a unitary ambience/spatio-temporality. Nevertheless, pre-capitalist myth's unitary components had to be removed from their hierarchal context, so they could be transmuted into a real unity (free from hegemonic forces). As Vaneigem (1967/1994, 102) stated:

> "The end of separation means the end of the bourgeoisie along with all hierarchal power. This is why no ruling class or caste finds it possible to effect the transformation of feudal unity into real unity, into genuine social participation."

Through their construction of Situations, the following works create urban myths to unite people in cities and towns. Whilst the myths of spectacle tear us away from authentic experience, the following artworks create urban myths, which contrastingly reinstate the 'directly lived'. Therefore, I would argue that the examples addressed in this section co-opt myth's position as an apparatus of urban capitalist spectacle—its use as a means to remove individuals from authentic experience. This is arguably similar to how the works addressed in the previous chapter only utilised the visual in order to attack a hyper-visual capitalist site. These situational contemporary artworks arguably form myths in order to operate on the same level of the urban spectacle, ultimately problematising its destruction of authentic experience.

Laurence Payot's *The Man Who Was Everywhere* (2010) (Fig. 5.5) was an urban performance/intervention, which took place in the city of Fribourg, Switzerland. In this work, the artist created a rumour around a hooded man who kept reappearing around the city (Payot 2010). [22] The artist invited twenty-three local men to perform the same mysterious character. This pretend character was meant to become a myth in the community of Fribourg, which would unify the city's locals via an entertaining collective experience. The mysterious 'man who was everywhere' was essentially a male dressed in a purple hooded top and jeans, carrying a white plastic bag. In spite of this being a rather modest costume and the performance's short duration of just one day, the character's frequent reappearance in the city (due to being performed by different people) ultimately led to him becoming an extremely intriguing figure to locals. Locals began to ask, "who is this man?" Some locals were so curious and mystified, that they even started following him around the town. Very quickly, the 'man who was everywhere' became a source of great intrigue amongst Fribourg's locals—many were eager to ascertain his purpose. It is therefore fair to summarise that 'the man who was everywhere' became an urban myth. Was he significant, or just another part of everyday life made interesting by wandering imaginations? By creating an interesting occurrence in the urban everyday, I would contend that Payot's mythic constructed situation reinstated the 'directly lived'. Locals were drawn into the immediately lived present, and the alienating forces of urban spectacle were temporarily negated. Direct experience temporarily drew the attention of people over the false images of urban spectacle. Paradoxically, the inauthenticity of urban myth reinstated authentic experience, as it drew locals into the 'here and now'. Like pre-capitalist myth, Payot's urban myth created a sense of unity. Fribourg locals came together within the engaging, unitary ambience formed by urban myth.

In *The Man Who Was Everywhere*, a cyclical structure was used that arguably countered capitalism's linearity. It may be pertinent to highlight that the death of myth was related to the death of cyclical time. According to Vaneigem (1967/1994, 225), in capitalist society, where the unitary power of myth has been lost, time is "no longer the circumference of a circle, but rather a finite and infinite straight line." Under capitalism, time becomes linear, reflecting the process of accumulation. In pre-capitalist society, however, when myth prevailed, time was cyclical, reflecting the patterns in nature. The death of myth therefore corresponds with the death of cyclical time. It is notable then that Payot's urban myth had a cyclical temporality, as the 'man who was everywhere' repeatedly appeared around Fribourg. This cyclical nature arguably drew urban

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[22] See Payot, Laurence. 2010. "The Man Who Was Everywhere." Accessed March 19, 2020. http://www.laurencepayot.com/work/the-man-who-was-everywhere/.

pedestrians into the present, as they waited with heightened awareness of their direct reality in anticipation of the mysterious character's return. This rejection of linear time may also be understood as a rejection of progress, central to capitalist ideology. Payot's situation brought its 'livers' into an anti-progressive cycle in which a reoccurring 'present' prevailed, or rather, a series of intensely lived instances, whose only purpose was merely to invoke heightened awareness of urban existentiality. In this sense, the rejection of linear temporality in this work does appear to suggest both a symbolic and real negation of productivity.

The time in Payot's situational performance can also be described as a 'unitary time', as people were made to exist within a spatio-temporal circumstance together. The use of myth helped to construct a unitary ambience, which could counteract the fragmenting characteristics of urbanism as an extension of capitalism's general degradation of sociability. I would argue that Payot answers the Situationists' demand to ameliorate the unifying forces of myth by transmuting it into something, which is no longer attached to hierarchy and power as it was within pre-capitalist societies i.e. God/mortal and lord/serfs. This is because she endowed myth with a participatory nature (several local men performed the 'man who was everywhere' and the urban community of Fribourg were able to engage thoroughly). Pre-capitalist religious myth was just as unidirectional as the myths of the spectacle economy. However, by virtue of its enigmatic nature, Payot's urban myth enabled active interpretation and participation from those who encountered it.

Fig. 5.5 Laurence Payot, *The Man Who Was Everywhere*, 2010,
Fribourg. Photo: © Nicolas Brodard.

The New York Times Special Edition (2008) by artist-activists, The Yes Men[23] and Steve Lambert, is yet another instance of contemporary art's production of urban myth through a constructed situation, which ultimately harnessed the radical powers of the 'directly lived' in the Western capitalist city. In this intervention piece, the artist-activists distributed a newspaper in New York City containing fake news, and on its front page, a headline that read, "Iraq war ends" (The Yes Men and Steve Lambert 2008).[24] Over eighty thousand copies of the fake newspaper were distributed free of charge to commuters in various North American cities. Inside, the newspaper featured fourteen pages of best-case scenarios news that described what the world could be like if it was not for the adversities caused by powers that be. By making people think about the present and how it could be ameliorated, this urban myth arguably brought them into the 'directly lived'. As Lambert (2008) has described, "the project brought together dozens of activists in a collaborative vision of what could be possible, or just on the edge of possible, in a world where we've won every battle."[25] It was also generative of a unifying ambience because it presented news, which everyone wanted to hear/believe. Therefore, this myth also unified urban publics in their collective hope for social justice. The newspaper, as a form of mass media or capitalist semiotics widely distributed in cities, arguably functions as an inconspicuous yet constituent part of the urban spectacle that reduces urban life to its petrified image. *New York Times Special Edition* arguably détourned this media form's contribution to the urban spectacle. Via urban myth, it seemingly transformed the spectacle's technology of separation into a means of social unification.

In this work, the medium of the newspaper helped create a large-scale, dispersed situation. The spectacle of the West was "diffuse" according to Debord (1967/2014). The 'diffuse spectacle' was the consumer-driven side of the spectacle economy, whose technologies operated in a scattered way like media content. This was contrasted with the "concentrated spectacle", which described the concentrated operations of totalitarian, centralised power in the East.[26] Therefore, the dispersed nature of The *New York Times Special Edition* (2008) is arguably a détournement of the newspaper's position as a tool of diffuse spectacle. The work co-opted the spectacle's unification of

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[23] The Yes Men are artist-activist duo Jacques Servin and Igor Vamos. Since 1996, they have used humorous interventions to disrupt society's corporate takeover (Yes Men 2000).
[24] See The Yes Men and Steve Lambert. 2008. "New York Times Special Edition*."* Accessed March 23, 2020. https://theyesmen.org/nyt.
[25] See Lambert, Steve. 2008. "The New York Times Special Edition." Accessed March 23, 2020. https://visitsteve.com/made/the-ny-times-special-edition/.
[26] Debord expands on the difference between 'diffuse' and 'concentrated' spectacle in *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* (1988/1998). Debord (1988/1998) also introduces a third form ('integrated spectacle'), which comprises a combination of diffuse and concentrated elements. He concludes that the 'integrated spectacle' has permeated all of our social reality.

people via separating ideology, replacing it with a genuinely unifying socio-aesthetic situation. According to Vaneigem (1967/1994, 88), "myth is based on quality, ideology on quantity." Myth centres on the value of our existence and experiences. Ideology, however, has replaced this with a focus on quantitative, measurable exchanges. Although founded in falsity, myth effectively assists in generating qualitative time, which is now a rarity, as the economy has masked all of social life. The above examples of situational urban social aesthetics arguably generate qualitative time via their construction of myth, as this form of time is on the decline in contemporary urban sites. Payot's situational, mythic intervention reinstated qualitative time by highlighting to pedestrians the mystery and wonder in urban everyday life. Furthermore, this intervention created a spatio-temporality, which qualitatively ameliorated social relations, as urban pedestrians could bond over the shared experience of the mysterious phenomena they witnessed. Likewise, *The New York Times Special Edition* (2008) produced qualitative time through its unification of people in US cities through their shared desire for utopic social change. On the subject of time, in the following section I will examine urban social aesthetic works that re-establish *qualitative time* in their general quest to undo the alienating effects of urban spectacle.

Qualitative Time

The Situationists described how time in a capitalist economy becomes experienced as *linear*. Time becomes 'irreversible time'—a forever forward-moving temporality that mirrors the linearity of capitalist production and accumulation processes (1967/2014, 78). As Debord (1967/2014, 78) suggests, "the triumph of irreversible time is also its metamorphosis into a time of things, because its victory was brought about by the mass production of objects." In other words, the 'irreversible time of production' has essentially modelled all time in its image (Debord 1967/2014, 80). Pre-capitalist time, on the other hand, was *cyclical* in order to reflect the "agrarian mode of production, governed by the rhythm of seasons" (Debord 1967/2014, 69). In late capitalism, cyclical time does exist, but this can only be characterised as 'pseudo-cyclical' because it is based on the inauthentic 'cycles of consumption'. As Debord (1967/2014, 82) explains, however, "this pseudo-cyclical time is in fact merely a consumable disguise of the production system's commodified time." Both 'irreversible time' and 'pseudo-cyclical time', which dominate in the era of late capitalism (or the 'society of the spectacle'), are characterised by the "suppression of any qualitative dimension" (Debord 1967/2014, 82). To summerise then, late capitalism is characterised by 'quantitative time' (time of accumulation and exchange) taking precedence over 'qualitative time' (quality time). Both of the dominant temporalities of capitalism (irreversible time and pseudo-cyclical time) are characterised by the lack of a

qualitative dimension—a lack of authenticity and fulfilment of genuine social desires/needs. What is most remarkable, however, is that capitalism actually benefits from this qualitative degradation of time to quantitative values and consumable images (Debord 1967/2014, 83). Capitalism commodifies time, decreasing its authentic quality; it then sells 'blocks of time' that mobilise and exploit this neglected basic human need for qualitative experience (Debord 1967/2014, 83). Ultimately, quantitative time can be construed as the time of capitalism. Qualitative time, however, is authentic, pre-capitalist time, yet to be relegated to oppressive economic forces.

I would contend that the Situationists intended the constructed situation (as an intensely lived, socio-aesthetic experience) to be a means of reinstating qualitative time in capitalism. Seemingly continuing this legacy of the constructed situation, the radical situations of the Space Hijackers, aimed to reinstate qualitative time in the capitalist global city of London. Indeed, I would suggest that the various urban interventions of the Space Hijackers could be retrospectively understood as blatant attempts to reinstate a qualitative temporality in the spectacular urban landscape. In *Whitechapel Knees Up Against Starbucks* (2007), the collective set up a small stall outside of a new Starbucks branch and gave away free drinks, food and conversation (Space Hijackers 2007).[27] If Starbucks was a spatio-temporality dominated by quantitative time (the time of consumption), the Space Hijackers created one that reinstated qualitative time as it enabled authentic and 'quality' social exchange to take place (unmediated by capital). The 'pseudo-community' that capitalist spatio-temporalities offer was also replaced in this work by a real ('quality') space for social connectivity and cohesion. Starbucks arguably represents the tendency for transnational eateries in capitalist cities and towns to create 'total environments' that take advantage of capitalism's degradation of qualitative time (Jayne 2006, 77). The construction of a sumptuous, authentic American coffee shop represents Starbuck's attempts to form an artificial 'total environment' that masks the dehumanising nature of capitalist time with a fake 'quality time' of real, culturally-enriching experience. As Debord (1967/2014, 83) highlighted, such "fully equipped blocks of time" sell primarily because of "the increasing impoverishment of the realities they parody." The Space Hijackers' co-option of the 'total environment' of Starbucks therefore represented an attempt to exposes its pretence of promoting a quality consumer experience. By creating an urban spatio-temporality governed by *real* qualitative time, the art-activist group seemed intent on revealing that, in reality, Starbucks is actually dedicated to capitalist quantitative time above all else.

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[27] See Space Hijackers. 2007. "Space Hijackers East End Knees Up." Accessed February 14, 2020. https://www.spacehijackers.org/html/projects/whitechapelstar/kneesup.html.

Fig. 5.6 Reclaim the Streets, *M41*, 1996. Shepherd's Bush, London.
Photo: © Nick Cobbing.

As the free exchange of food and drink indicated a potlatch economy of exchange in which social relations are enhanced, this intervention favoured qualitative time over quantitative time. The potlatch was about developing social bonds not accumulating capital (Sansi 2014, 105; Bantjes 2007, 74). Therefore, the performance of this alternative economic form in *Whitechapel Knees Up Against Starbucks* could also have indicated the formation of a qualitative spatio-temporality over a quantitative one. In *Mobile Street Disco* (2003), the collective set up a CD player, played music and danced outside key sites in London's capitalist-urbanism matrix such as the Bank of England and McDonalds (Space Hijackers 2003).[28] Dancing and having a good time, they arguably replaced the quantitative time of these sites with qualitative time. Both *Whitechapel Knees Up Against Starbucks* and *Mobile Street Disco* arguably invoke the anti-productive nature of qualitative time in a capitalist society. Creating urban spatio-temporalities of non-productive saturnalia, pleasure and festivity, the Space Hijackers détourned the productive, quantitative temporalities of London. Ultimately, the productive, irreversible time of capitalism was trumped by the purposely unprofitable saturnalia of intensely lived moments. These works arguably represent urban temporal forms of a potlatch economy, as they promote a qualitative temporality of wastefulness and sacrifice, which invokes the counterproductive, anti-quantitative logic of gift giving.

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[28] See Space Hijackers. 2003. "The Lords & Ladies of Misrule Street Disco for Freedom." Accessed March 27, 2020. https://www.spacehijackers.org/html/projects/mayday03/report.html.

If the sites co-opted by the Space Hijackers represented the irreversible time of production and the pseudo-cyclical time of consumption, which favour dehumanising, quantitative values, said works celebrated a qualitative, directly lived present. The general consensus of a Space Hijacker work was thus arguably to reject quantitative time in favour of fun-loving, intensely lived urban moments.

Arguably, Reclaim the Streets' protest-party *M41* (1996) (Fig. 5.6) is another example of an urban social aesthetic work that aimed to reinstate (with urban Marxist intent) qualitative time on the streets. In Shepard's Bush, London, on June 8th 1996, artist-activists Reclaim the Streets took over the M41 motorway with a non-violent, anti-traffic street party. They were, in a sense, mirroring Situationism's critique of urban traffic as a tool for proliferating capitalism's quantitative-driven temporality (Debord 1967/2014, 82). As Julia Ramírez-Blanco (2018, 46) describes, *M41* was about reclaiming public space as an inclusive urban common, as it is increasingly being used for the private, exclusive use of automobiles. Reclaim the Streets and its supporting urban dissidents pervaded the road and streets with techno/rave sound systems, drummers, dancers, jugglers, clowns and children (Ferrell 2002, 136). Hanging banners, painting and chalking sidewalk art, these diverse participants seemingly overturned the "arid aesthetics of the automobile corridor" (Ferrell 2002, 136). I would argue that Reclaim the Streets had harnessed the qualitative time of play (another key Situationist value) and festivalism against the quantitative, productive time of urban traffic. One of the most striking aspects of this work was arguably the towering, twenty-five foot-high carnival figures that were parading around. Underneath their massive, tent-like hooped skirts, activists were drilling into the tarmac and planting sapling trees into the motorway (McCormick, M. Schiller and S. Schiller 2010, 192). Via this détournement of urban space, Reclaim the Streets was arguably reinstating the qualitative, creative time of planting and of being 'one with nature'. The authentic reality of nature and growing plants was pitted against the spectacular, 'pseudo-productive' time of urban traffic.

This promotion of urban greening (eco-activism) could also be viewed as an attempt to reinstate use-value in the exchange-value-dominated time of capitalist urban space. *M41* was arguably symptomatic of 1990s activist groups who brought qualitative time into spaces of urban protest, converting "protests into celebrations" as Ramírez-Blanco (2013) describes. With its lurid festivalism, *M41* conceivably reflected the 'carnivalesque'—the pre-capitalistic saturnalia of the medieval carnival. As Bakhtin (1965/1984, 7) suggested, the medieval carnival was not a spectacle experienced passively by the people (like the contemporary 'urban event'), it was participatory, and most importantly, it was centred in intensely lived, authentic experience. Mirroring the

spirit of the medieval carnival, *M41* perceivably promoted the authentic, qualitative time of intensely lived revelry against the pseudo-practical, quantitative time often associated with urban traffic and transportation. Reclaim the Streets had brought back to life the sensuous and spirited pre-capitalist time of the medieval carnival, which offered an alternative to the 'spectacular time' of the contemporary 'urban event' (Richards and Palmer 2010). Ultimately, like the Situationists' constructed situation, the temporal urban 1:1 scale works of the Space Hijackers and Reclaim the Streets combined theatre/staged elements with authentic, qualitative experience, proposing a socially invested, urban Marxist street theatre.

Conclusion

In this closing chapter, I have contended that Situationism's idea of a constructed situation and its connected theoretical tropes (existentiality, agency, unity and time) could help examine the post-Marxist, situation-constructing tendencies of urban social aesthetics. This chapter has outlined the various ways that the 'situation-constructing' project of urban social aesthetics has challenged urban spectacle (i.e. by reinstating the 'directly lived', socio-political agency, unity and qualitative time). Vitally, this chapter has highlighted the role of theatre/performance in urban Marxist contemporary art. A major finding of this chapter was that contemporary art's urban Marxism (urban social aesthetics) has used theatrical elements and performativity as tools for anti-capitalistic urban activism. Contrary to the belief that theatre and performance are spectacle-reaffirming devices ('theatrical spectacle'), the works addressed in this chapter suggest that they can help promote a counter-spectacle authenticity in urban sites. Drawing on the legacy of the Situationists' constructed situation, this chapter attests to the fact that urban social aesthetic work can possess staged/constructed/performative aspects that are socially invested and respond to urban urgencies on a 1:1 scale. Much akin to the constructed situation, in urban social aesthetic practice, staging and constructed aspects appear to give *form* and *visibility* to the their otherwise invisible, antagonistic political forces. Theatre and performance are thus revealed to be valid tools for urban activism. Developing on from the urban Marxist formulations of Brechtian theatre and the Situationists' constructed situation, the works addressed in this chapter are what we could call 'activated' or 'socially invested' performance. Highlighting the value of theatre and performance in contemporary art's urban Marxism, we see again that this practice urgently needs to be individuated from other urban art productions and given its own discursive space.

Conclusion: Individuating Urban Social Aesthetics

As I have argued throughout this thesis, individuating urban social aesthetics from the wealth of other urban art productions and approaches is a necessary task. This practice is a specific urban tendency within contemporary art, which has existed across several decades and within various urban sites—from large global cities to smaller urban centres and post-industrial towns. As I have contended, 'urban social aesthetics' is an urban Marxist tendency in contemporary art, characterised by 1:1 scale engagement with urban social urgencies as a means for anti-capitalist agency and resistance. This practice comprises both 'practical' and 'symbolic' expressions—that is, its urban Marxist drives manifest equally into two categories—what I call 'practical instruments' and 'symbolic protest' works. Whilst some urban social aesthetic artworks are pragmatic, social instruments within the urban realm, others revolve around *critique* (symbolic or performative protest). In all cases, however, what we observe is an artistic extension of urban Marxism—a commitment to the social dimension of urban sites as an aesthetic form of post-Marxist activism.

Individuating urban social aesthetics is also essential because, unlike some other urban art productions that are *exclusively* object-based and representational or non-socially-responsive (i.e. murals and public art monuments), it is committed to the social urgencies of urban sites. Urban social aesthetics rejects representation and artistic autonomy for socially engaged, 1:1 scale activity. It is therefore crucial to demarcate urban social aesthetics from representational and non-socially-responsive urban art practices. Furthermore, this practice uniquely indicates urban Marxism's extension into contemporary art production—from the spatial 'right to the city' debates of Henry Lefebvre and David Harvey (see chapter one), to the urban 'détournement' tactics of the Situationist International (see chapters one, four and five) (Lefebvre 1970/2004, 1972/2016; Harvey 1989a, 2012; Debord 1967/2014). Throughout the thesis chapters, I have established that art practitioners have engaged with the social dimensions of urban sites in ways that indicate urban Marxism's general extension into contemporary art. Some artists/art collectives have repeatedly emerged throughout this thesis—for example, Gordon Matta-Clark (chapters one and three), Jeanne Van Heeswijk (chapters one, two and three), Krzysztof Wodiczko (chapters one, two and four), Laurence Payot (chapters two, three, four and five) and the Space Hijackers (chapters three and five). Clearly, from a practitioner point of view, there is significant interest in

an urban Marxist approach to contemporary art. A theoretical and discursive counterpart to this interest of art practitioners is therefore reasonable and necessary.

However, as each thesis chapter highlighted, distinguishing urban social aesthetics from the mass of other urban art productions is an important task because it responds to the most pressing social urgencies of our contemporary urban moment (i.e. gentrification, housing, neo-colonial spatial agendas, social fragmentation and late capitalist spectacle). Is it critically adequate for art theoreticians and scholars to allow the subsumption of such socio-politically pertinent practice into some homogenised category of 'non-gallery-based-urban'? Confronting and engaging with contemporary urgencies, urban social aesthetics demands its own discursive space and critical language. As I have attested throughout this thesis, this urban Marxist tendency also exists within the histories, debates and praxis of the Situationist International and experimental institutionalism. Ultimately, as a result of completing this research, I would recommend that contemporary art's urban Marxist tendency is individuated from other urban art productions and assigned the independent discursive space that such socially pertinent practice requires.

I have argued in this thesis that the discourses and practices of 'Situationism' and 'experimental institutionalism' could contribute to this task of pinpointing and individuating urban social aesthetics from other urban art forms. I contend that Situationism and experimental institutionalism can contribute to said task because their specific ideas, theories, debates and praxis effectively highlight and underline the urban Marxist aspirations of urban social aesthetics—whether it be reclaiming urban space from the grips of gentrification, resisting urbanism's social fracture or subverting capitalist semiology ('urban spectacle'). Situationism and experimental institutionality also highlight urban social aesthetics' commitment to the social dimensions of urban sites, which, I argue, fundamentally characterises this practice and differentiates it from other urban art forms—particularly ones that are entirely object-based and representational or non-socially-responsive. I have demonstrated throughout this thesis that *repurposing* the debates/praxis of the Situationist International and experimental institutionalism contributes new, dynamic analyses to contemporary art's urban Marxist inclinations that could assist its individuation. However, I have also shown how 'repurposing' (as a method and creative intellectual tool) is, in itself, an effective means for knowledge production. Repurposing was a successful method/tool in this research project because it corresponded to the Marxist values of the art production and institutionality that I have examined and discussed. Indeed, repurposing arguably resists capitalism's neo-extractivism (its extraction/expropriations of value). Unlike

capitalist extractivism, repurposing does not infer a unilateral process of *extracting* value (Wright 2020). Centred in usership, repurposing implies a process in which the value of the repurposed idea/thing is celebrated.

In this research project, I used a multi-method design, as making such novel and experimental contributions to urban contemporary art theory required multiple and diverse conduits for data gathering. Although I would contend that all of the methods used were appropriate and effective, the 'comparative method' has particularly stood out. I would suggest that this thesis attests to the fact that comparison is an effective form of knowledge production. By comparing Situationist/experimental institutionalist ideas with urban social aesthetics, new and dynamic analyses have emerged that could contribute to interrogations around urban Marxism's extension through artistic practice. Within the theoretical dynamics of this research, comparison has enabled new analyses of contemporary art's urban Marxism to emerge—novel, illuminating examinations of this practice's engagements with urban space, racial inequality, relationality and spectacle. Comparison has also enabled this research to engage in what Marxist philosopher Walter Benjamin (1940/2003, 389–400) called 'historical montage'. Benjamin (1940/2003, 389–400) understood historical montage, or 'constelling history', as an effective anti-capitalistic practice. Benjamin (1940/2003, 389–400) felt that historical montage was anti-capitalistic because it problematises the linear perspective of time that often serves to ideologically-mirror capitalist production. In this thesis, I have negated traditional historical linearity in favour of the theoretical insight that comes from constelling different moments within contemporary art's urban Marxist tendency.

In each chapter of this thesis, I identified and examined a key modality of urban social aesthetics, comparing it to Situationism and/or experimental institutionalism. Each chapter revealed how both Situationism and experimental institutionalism help to illuminate and critically unpack a multitude of urban social aesthetic tropes, ideas and artistic/socio-political concerns. Chapter one revealed how contemporary art's urban Marxism speaks to the most pressing socio-spatial urgencies of capitalist-urbanism such as gentrification and the housing crisis. I would argue that this data point signals directly to why this practice demands independent analysis, away from other types of urban art production. In chapter one, I concluded that both Situationism and experimental institutionality could contribute new and illuminating analysis to urban social aesthetic works that approach urban space as a critical site for anti-capitalist resistance. However, I concluded that 'Situationist space'—the Situationists' renowned toolkit of urban-spatial ideas and practices—more consistently offered relevant and

effective analyses. I concluded that the antagonistic, oppositional approach to urban spatiality that 'Situationist space' offers, corresponds more with the bottom-up, dissenting spirit embodied in much spatial urban social aesthetic practice. I also concluded that 'Situationist space' permits the analysis of works that resemble 'symbolic protests' in urban space because it is itself centred in *critique*. I would argue that the more 'symbolic' artworks addressed in chapter one (i.e. works by artists such as Gordon Matta-Clark, Sophie Calle, Paul Harfleet, Adrian Piper and William Pope.L) better align with the theoretical/critique-centred nature of Situationism than they do experimental institutionality's 'useful art' demand for pragmatic ('practical instrument') socio-aesthetic approaches to urban space.

Repurposing the debates/praxis of experimental institutionality, chapter one nevertheless highlighted that urban spatial activism can occur in or emerge from institutions of art. As I outlined in the section *Institutional Experiments in Urban Space*, there are many impressive examples of experimental institutionality's emergent union of institutional and urban space—for example: Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art's (MIMA) various urban regeneration initiatives; the Whitworth Gallery's upcoming *Ruskin Road* urban park project; Liverpool Biennial and Jeanne Van Heeswijk's *2up2down* (2010-Ongoing); Reina Sofia's involvement in the prevention of *La Casa Invisible's* eviction (2011). I would argue that a reductive consensus exists in the arts in which anti-capitalistic urban-spatial practice is always considered to be destituent or 'extra-institutional'. Therefore, chapter two's examination of how art institutions can engage in urban Marxist spatiality is arguably a significant contribution to knowledge. I would suggest that more research is required into this nuanced 'critical juncture' that is currently being imagined between art institutionality and urban space.

In chapter two, I addressed how urban social aesthetics responds to the racialised urgencies of capitalist-urbanism such as contemporary forms of racial segregation, neo-colonial spatial agendas and 'revanchist urbanism'. The contemporary pertinence of urban social aesthetics was demonstrated again, as I evidenced this practice's relevancy to recent racialised urban tragedies and events such as Grenfell Tower Fire, Black Lives Matter and post-9/11/post-Brexit xenophobia. Crucially, this chapter revealed how urban Marxism's racial/colonial concerns have also manifested within urban social aesthetics. In this chapter, I concluded that experimental institutionalism's decolonising debates and praxis could help to clarify urban social aesthetics, as they similarly speak to the racial inequalities of capitalist urbanisation. Chapter two also established that the 'decolonising' project of experimental institutionality is much more 'urban' in nature than is currently recognised in the contemporary art world. In other

words, this chapter established how 'decolonising the art institution' and 'decolonising urbanism' are joined projects within the context of experimental institutionalism. I evidenced this arguably 'urban' characteristic of experimental institutionalism's decolonising project with examples such as Tania Bruguera and Queens Museum's *Immigrant Movement International* (2011–18), Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art's (MIMA) immigrant, refugee, and asylum seeker work, and the Serpentine Gallery's *Edgware Road* (2008–16). I would argue that experimental institutionality should be more recognising of the urban/public/expanded nature of its decolonising project. This could not only help distinguish it from other museum decolonising projects in existence today, but also could enrich its development, and connect it to contemporary race-centred activism in the urban realm (i.e. Black Lives Matter, resistance to colonial monuments and post-Grenfell housing and gentrification).

Chapter three focused on the relational project of urban social aesthetics. Here I addressed works that respond to urbanism's social fracture through the themes of sociality, conviviality and collaboration. My contribution to knowledge in this chapter was demonstrating that institutional experiments in urban relationality could assist in interrogating and giving further clarification to the relational project of urban social aesthetics. Remarkably, yet unforeseeably, the contents of chapter three have recently acquired a whole new degree of contemporary resonance. For example, the recent Coronavirus pandemic has brought concerns around sociality, conviviality, collaboration and care to the forefront of our collective political and social imaginations. The isolating and alienating effects of Western urbanism have been exacerbated by this crisis that has separated us from each other and highlighted more boldly than ever our need for sociality and connection. The significance of a relational art within the capitalist urban landscape has therefore increased exponentially. This chapter's *Politics of Care* section is now an even more significant contribution to knowledge in our current social and political zeitgeist, which is validating the importance of a socialist care system unlike ever before. Again, the social significance of contemporary art's urban Marxism demonstrates the need for more attention and discourse in this field, autonomous from other urban art productions.

A major finding of chapter three was that contemporary art's urban Marxism arguably exceeds Nicholas Bourriaud's seminal theory of 'relational aesthetics'. Whilst relational aesthetics embodied a high art, participation-centred approach to relationality, which was enacted from within the exclusive spaces of the art world, today's institutional experiments arguably connect the space of the art institution to everyday urban sociality. Although relational aesthetics has long since dominated analyses of sociality-

centred arts practice, I concluded in chapter three that experimental institutionality offers an arguably greater frame within which to examine relational urban social aesthetic practice. I gave multiple examples in chapter three of experimental institutionality's successful union of the art institution with the urban social sphere—i.e. projects from MACBA's 2000–2008 period like *Las Agencias*, The Whitworth's ongoing existence as a local social hub, and ideas like the 'constituent museum'. However, I would conclusively contend that the theoretical framework offered in Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* (1998/2009) is challenged and surpassed by contemporary art's urban Marxism. As a result, I would suggest that theoreticians, scholars and practitioners in this field need to move on from the high-art, 'participation' centred rhetoric of relational aesthetics. As I highlighted in chapter three, works by the likes of Laurence Payot, the Space Hijackers, Gordon Matta-Clark, Suzanne Lacy and Jeanne Van Heeswijk demand a quite different kind of relational art analysis than the one that Bourriaud formulated some twenty years ago.

In chapter four, I revealed how the Situationist concepts of 'spectacle' and 'détournement' can assist in examining urban social aesthetic works shaped by the conditions of urban spectacle. This chapter was a contribution to knowledge as it explained how, contrary to popular belief in contemporary art scholarship, the visual does not have to be 'spectacle-reaffirming'—rather, it can be a tool for urban, anti-capitalistic resistance. By repurposing Situationist debate in this chapter, I demonstrated how, in the context of capitalist-urbanism, visual contemporary art can be a powerful tool for resisting urban spectacle. I articulated in this chapter how urban social aesthetics can be visual and, at the same time, engage in an urban 1:1 scale, post-Marxist critique. The works I discussed in chapter four, such as Robert Montgomery's *Spectacle Poem* (2010) and Daniel Buren's *Wild Posters* (1968–72), are visual in nature, but reject *representation*, as on a 1:1 scale, they resist the social semiotics of capitalist urban sites. Engaging directly with the urban social milieu and not *representing* it, the urban social aesthetic works examined in chapter four were visual but non-representational. Ultimately, these works revealed the visual/semiotic dimensions of contemporary art's urban Marxism.

Chapter four also raised important questions around the visual in urban socially engaged art practice. A significant implication here is that more research is needed on the radicalisation of the visual within urban socially engaged art. Liverpool-based urban art initiatives such as *Granby Four Streets* (1998–Ongoing) and *2Up 2Down* (2010–Ongoing) (now known as *Homebaked*), for example, clearly possess visual, traditionally 'aesthetic' aspects. However, in contemporary art scholarship, projects

such as these are frequently characterised as 'non-visual' works centred in social *action*. What were the artist and community's intents behind choosing such visual aesthetics? Were the aesthetics used gentrifying, promoting a so-called 'hipster aesthetic', or did radical, local/working-class interests and design histories inform them? As chapter four of this thesis argued, visual art is not antithetical to urban socially engaged art. Within urban social aesthetics, visuality can function as a radical 'counter-spectacle' device—as a socio-aesthetic tool for dismantling the operations and effects of the late capitalist spectacle economy. Conclusively, I would contend that art theoreticians and art history scholars are overlooking visuality's important position in contemporary art's urban Marxism. These nebulous visual aspects of urban socially engaged art practice demand further research.

In chapter five, I examined 'situational' examples of urban social aesthetic practice. In this closing chapter, I argued that the Situationists' 'constructed situation' and its connected theoretical tropes (existentiality, agency, myth/unity, and qualitative time) could assist the examination of said practice. Reinstating authentic experience in urban sites, the situational works addressed in chapter five are extremely significant in our current Coronavirus-stricken world in which we have found ourselves *observing* life from a position of dehumanising passivity. With the increased movement towards the virtual and technologically mediated communications (that exacerbate the spectacle's alienating forces), the urban social aesthetic works addressed in chapter five crucially highlighted the possibility of reinstating dynamic, authentic urban experience.

A major finding in chapter five was that theatre and performance play a significant role in contemporary art's urban Marxism. Contrary to the belief that theatre and performance are spectacle-reaffirming devices, the works addressed in this chapter by artists such as Laurence Payot, Ligna and Flo6x8, suggest that they can help promote a counter-spectacle authenticity in urban sites. Drawing on the legacy of the Situationists' constructed situation and its Brechtian theatre roots, this chapter attested to the fact that urban social aesthetic works can have staged/constructed/performative aspects that are socially invested and respond to urban urgencies on a 1:1 scale. Much akin to the constructed situation, in urban social aesthetic practice, staging and constructed aspects appear to give *form* and *visibility* to their otherwise invisible, antagonistic political forces. Theatre and performance were therefore revealed in this chapter to be valid tools for aesthetic approaches to urban Marxist activism. Combining performativity with urban 1:1 scale activity, the works addressed in chapter five pointed to a subcategory of urban social aesthetics we could call 'activated' or 'socially invested' performance. In today's contemporary art world, the more 'pragmatic'

formations of socially engaged art and 'useful art' seemingly dominate. However, I would argue that chapter five of this thesis reveals how further research is required on theatre/performance's ability to give radical aesthetic form and visibility to otherwise invisible, post-Marxian political antagonisms in urban public space.

Ultimately, in each chapter, I have demonstrated how Situationism and experimental institutionality can contribute to our analysis and understanding of urban social aesthetics. Each chapter has established that the ideas and socio-political concerns central to Situationism and experimental institutionality are also present and active in urban social aesthetics. An urban Marxist approach to contemporary art is what connected all of the main components of this thesis ('urban social aesthetics', 'Situationism' and 'experimental institutionalism'). A major finding of this thesis was that the urban everyday remains a major and valid site for activism in spite of the prevalence of informational capitalism, technocracy and the virtual/digital in today's 'society of the spectacle' COVID-19 world. Whilst conducting this research, I have observed that there is also a tendency for urban social aesthetics to continue critical theory's engagement with the radical, working-class possibilities of 'the everyday'. Urban social aesthetics appears to tease out the proletarian possibilities that lay dormant within everyday urbanism, continuing critical theory's connection of working-class agency with everyday life. Such practice suggests that, within the vestiges of quotidian urban experience, there are distinct openings for working-class agency and anti-capitalistic resistance. I contend that this *quotidian* project of urban social aesthetics would be a fruitful line of enquiry for further research.

As I highlighted in the thesis introduction, this thesis has examined urban social aesthetics within a Western socio-geographic context, exploring examples situated in largely urbanised sites in developed capitalist regions of the UK, Europe and North America. This is because the fields of praxis/debate repurposed in this thesis (Situationism and experimental institutionalism) possess a Eurocentric and/or Western bias. To neatly transfer the ideas and theoretical frameworks of Situationism and experimental institutionality onto non-Western examples would have been, in my opinion, critically inadequate, as it would mean censoring and overlooking the crucial, nuanced differences that exist between capitalist urbanisation in the West and places outside this socio-geographic context. In future research, if the notion of an 'urban social aesthetic' is explored in isolation and not through the lens of Situationism and/or experimental institutionalism, non-Western examples will be approached. However, if such examples are examined, tremendous care will need to be taken. First of all, caution will need to be taken with urban Marxism itself, a field of scholarship that is, of

course, integral to urban social aesthetics. Like traditional Marxism, urban Marxism possesses a clear Western bias with its typically British, European and North American proponents exploring capitalist urbanisation's conditions within a predominantly Western frame. Urban Marxism's omissions here will need to be fully acknowledged and not negligently overlooked. Furthermore, in light of 'dependency theory' discussed by urbanists like Saskia Sassen (2010), if urban social aesthetics is explored outside of a Western context in future research, it will be a requirement that capitalist urbanisation's uneven geographical development is addressed and significant acknowledgment is given to how urban experience differs in and outside of the West.

A vital contribution/implication of this research is that Situationism and experimental institutionalism can both be reapproached as key moments in art's urban Marxist tendency. I would argue that they both have recuperable values that can contribute effectively to the examination of urban social aesthetics. I would also suggest that both of these debates/fields of praxis offer equally credible approaches to art's urban Marxism. It is my contention that both debates/fields of praxis effectively assist in highlighting the key modalities and ideas of urban social aesthetics. Subsequently, their critical 'repurposing' in this research has even produced a lexicon or glossary of terms for approaching urban social aesthetics that may be of use to practitioners in the field.[1] A key finding was that, when one of these fields expressed omission, the other would excel. For example, whilst Situationism continues traditional Marxism's racial omissions, experimental institutionalism offers a rich range of debates and praxis surrounding racism, neo-colonial spatial forms and urbanism. Similarly, as I established in chapter four, whilst institutional experiments have been unsuccessful in resisting spectacle, Situationist détournement suggests the possibility of a 'counter-spectacle' urban visuality. These two debates/fields of praxis were compelling to situate side-by-side, as they express diametrically opposing approaches to urban Marxism. Whilst the Situationists embodied an *oppositional* approach, intending to replace urbanism and its institutions with a new leftist urbanism, experimental institutionality contrastingly opts for a 'criticality from within' approach. Discussing Situationism's antagonistic urban approach in tandem with experimental institutionalism's 'minor urbanism', made this thesis 'dialectical'. Indeed, two contrasting approaches to aesthetic urban Marxist activism were placed into a nuanced and dialectical dynamic.

The research findings show that both the debates/activities of the Situationists and experimental institutionalism are capable of contributing novel and dynamic analyses to

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[1] The lexicon that has arisen out this research's creative repurposing of Situationist and experimental institutional debate can be found in the 'list of terms' at the front of this thesis.

urban social aesthetic practice. However, I would suggest that Situationist debate is slightly more effective because its oppositional, antagonistic approach is more compatible with urban social aesthetics. Situationism also allows for the analysis of works that resemble 'symbolic protests', as it is itself mostly centred in *critique*. Because urban social aesthetics is largely characterised by bottom-up dissent and purely antagonistic relations to capitalist-urbanism, the oppositional critiques of the Situationist International have tended to be more effective to repurpose. However, I would nevertheless argue that this thesis was not about deciding which debate/field of praxis was 'better' to repurpose towards an examination of urban social aesthetics. Arguably, this thesis has constituted a much more nuanced exploration. Retrospectively, I would describe this thesis as a *dialectical* exploration of contemporary art's urban Marxism, which holds within it the intention and potential of bringing to light this practice's contradictions and co-existing oppositional approaches. By repurposing Situationism/experimental institutionalism and placing them together in a dialectical dynamic, I have learnt that urban social aesthetics is inherently dialectical—it has destituent, antagonistic expressions (i.e. the Space Hijackers, Park Fiction and Reclaim the Streets) and, at the same time, agonistic, institutional manifestations (i.e. the work of Jeanne Van Heeswijk and *Granby Four Streets*). In other words, contemporary art's urban Marxist tendency ('urban social aesthetics') possesses both destituent (oppositional/antagonistic) and constituent expressions (agonistic/'criticality from within'/minor urbanism).

Discovering the agonistic, institutional aspects of urban social aesthetics has been a compelling finding and, I would argue, a significant contribution to knowledge. It is common to characterise *all* types of urban art production as being exclusively extra-institutional/destituent or even anti-institutional (Sholette 2017; McCormick, M. Schiller, and S. Schiller 2010). I have demonstrated in this thesis that this is not necessarily true. Urban social aesthetic initiatives like *Homebaked* (2013–Ongoing) and *Centro Corona* (2018–Ongoing) evolved out the experimental institutionalist projects *2Up2Down* (Liverpool Biennial 2010–13) and *IMI Corona* (Queens Museum 2011–18). I would argue that this finding (that urban social aesthetics can be both destituent and constituent) gives further credence to my argument that contemporary art's urban Marxism needs to be demarcated from other urban art productions and treated to more nuanced and intensive critical attention. Furthermore, the relationship between contemporary art's urban Marxism and artistic institutionality is also complex and requires further study.

The more destituent aspects of this thesis, however, have emerged out of my repurposing of the Situationist International—a radical avant-garde collective who aimed to dismantle capitalism and transform urban experience. The Situationists' approach to capitalist-urbanism was antagonistic and oppositional—it was purely destituent, rejecting any form of institutional engagement. With their debates on unitary urbanism, psychogeography, détournement, spectacle and the like, I would conclude that the Situationists constitute a key moment in contemporary art's urban Marxism, and contribute an illuminating analysis of what I have called 'urban social aesthetics'. In the wake of their disintegration in 1972, the Situationists left behind a rich repository of urban-centric art debate that is invaluable to contemporary practice. I would argue that it is not only Situationist ideas 'served on a platter' so to speak that can help examine urban social aesthetics (i.e. unitary urbanism, détournement, psychogeography, and the dérive). I have also found it possible to identify valuable, repurposable ideas from their literature and artefacts.

As a result of conducting this research, I would recommend that future scholarship concerning the Situationist International should further build upon the idea that this radical organisation left behind ideas on urbanism, aesthetics and anti-capitalist resistance that have enormous contemporary theoretical value. The Situationists are often viewed retrospectively as an obsolete avant-garde group, and as intellectuals who failed to realise their complex and ambitious theorisations (Sadler 1999, 105, 106; Banash 2000, 6). Some writers and critics have also criticised them for failing to move beyond traditional Marxism's racial and gender omissions (Gibbons 2015; Stracey 2014a). Despite their perceived or tangible shortcomings as an urban Marxist avant-garde group, I would argue that the Situationist International still have an enormous amount of recuperable value within the context of contemporary art's urban Marxist tendency. As a result of conducting this research, I would also suggest that writers, theorists and scholars should produce more creative approaches to Situationism, as this may alleviate the mass of existing descriptive accounts. The existing secondary source literature on the Situationists has revealed a tendency towards describing the group's origins, history and main ideas (Wark 2008, 2011/2015, 2013; Stracey 2014a; Ford 2005; Home 1988; Sadler 1999; McDonough 2009; Wollen 1989). However, in this thesis, I have shown that it is possible to take more creative and theoretically driven approaches towards Situationism—that we can repurpose it towards an analysis of contemporary art's urban Marxism.

Conferring with the L'Internationale confederation (via LJMU's established research partnership), I also contended in this thesis that experimental institutionalism could

contribute relevant and illuminating analyses to urban social aesthetic practice. Throughout this research project, I have identified and examined a growing interconnection between urban experience and experimental institutionalism. I argued in the thesis introduction and chapters one–three that experimental institutionalism constitutes a progressive, socially responsible type of art institutionality that possesses an *urban* focus. A significant implication of this research is that contemporary art institutions, engaged in forms of experimental institutionality, can play a valuable role in post-Marxist approaches to urbanism—that anti-capitalistic, urban activism can take place from *within* art institutions (physically and symbolically). This thesis has therefore raised important and necessary questions regarding the role of art institutions in urbanism—their *social* (and perhaps urban Marxist) function in Western cities and towns. My overarching conclusion regarding this aspect of the research is that art institutions should not be immediately disarmed and disregarded as uncritical, *bureaucratic* organisations that are complicit in capitalist/neoliberal agendas, within both urbanism and society by and large.

As I contended in the thesis introduction, experimental institutionalism could be understood as comprising 'minor urbanism'. Minor urbanism is defined as "the professional production of the city that affects the major practices of urban planning from within the institutions themselves" (Sandström 2019, 100–1). It has come to my attention in this project, however, that the distinctly 'urban' leanings of experimental institutionality remain an overlooked subject. Whilst the urban Marxist tendency of current institutional experiments clearly exists, cultural agents and theorists are not discriminately identifying this tendency. Institutional actors seem to define experimental institutionalism debate/praxis generally as engagements with the 'social', overlooking its clearly urban themes. As it was outlined in the introduction, this omission is exemplified significantly by the field's literature. As a result of implementing this research, I would recommend that cultural agents and theorists involved with experimental institutionalism should more openly identify and discuss the field's increasingly urban engagements. I conclusively recommend that there needs to be more admittance that the shift towards an institutionality of greater social responsibility ('museum 3.0') often plays out in an urban context. Specifically speaking, as the findings of this thesis attest, there should be admission that experimental institutionality is founded on an explicit response to the urgencies of capitalist urbanisation.

Institutional experiments within urbanism are not always 'successful' in a literal, restrictive sense of this word. As I described in chapter two, the Serpentine Gallery's *Edgware Road* (2009–11) project highlighted issues of funding and co-optation, and in

Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona's (MACBA) *Las Agencias* (2001) addressed in chapter three, there was conflict between institutional actors and urban activists. Furthermore, as highlighted in chapter three's *Social Spaces (Unmediated by Capital)* section, some urban-institutional projects, like those from MACBA's 2000–2008 period, are 'temporary assemblages' that do not permanently transform an art institution into a dynamic, urban 'civic centre'. Also, as outlined in chapter one, projects like Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art's (MIMA) *Middlesbrough Settlement* (2018–2020) can have ethical issues. Focusing on food and nutrition in deprived urban working-class areas could be viewed as reinstating gentrification's paternalistic and neoliberalism's 'self-help' ideology. However, I would argue that such 'failures' do not mean that valuable ideas cannot emerge from experimental institutionalism that contribute to contemporary's art urban Marxism. After all, it was not my concern in this thesis to speculate the ethics or 'success' of institutional experiments, but rather, to repurpose their ideas/approaches towards an examination of urban social aesthetics.

Identifying the urban threads of experimental institutionalism was an original contribution of this research. Teasing out this clearly existing urban thread was quite an arduous task, however, because cultural agents involved with experimental institutionalism tend to make the sweeping suggestion that they are engaging with the 'social'. However, I would contend that they are not engaged broadly with the 'social', but rather, with the social urgencies of urban sites through a post-Marxian frame. Even in the interviews and meetings I attended for this thesis (with actors and theorists from the L'Internationale confederation), the prospect of a decidedly urban focus seemed new and unusual. Arguably, if experimental institutionalism was more recognising of its urban aspects, this would place it in a better position to access urban theory/studies and borrow ideas from this field of scholarship to assist its ongoing development. Curator Jonas Ekeberg (2003) poached the term 'new institutionalism' from the social sciences to elucidate and build-upon institutional self-reflexivity in the 1990s and early 2000s. Thus, cultural agents engaged with experimental institutionalism could potentially enhance and promote its development (discursively and pragmatically) by turning towards urban studies more explicitly.

I would also contend that the research in this thesis contributes to the debates and praxis of experimental institutionalism, as it highlights the socio-aesthetic legitimacy of urban art practice that is more symbolic and performative. With its museum 3.0 advocacy of 'useful art', experimental institutionality arguably overlooks the significance of what I have called 'symbolic protest' works. In this thesis, particularly in chapters one, four and five, I discovered the importance of urban Marxist art practice that is

centred in critique and performance such as Gordon Matta-Clark's *Building Cuts* (1972–78) series, or the work of the Space Hijackers, William Pope. L, Laurence Payot and Flo6x8. I have found that such artists promote social justice in the urban realm through 'activated', 'socially invested' performances and symbolic gestures disruptive to capitalist urbanisation. As I discovered in chapter four's *Powers of the Symbol* section, 'symbolic' culture offers an alternative language to capitalism's language of 'signs' (Chauvet 1987/1995). Whilst the 'sign' is associated with capitalist production, the 'symbol' connects to non-market notions of social cohesion (Chauvet 1987/1995; Walters 2012, 71). Arguably, if experimental institutionalism continues to overlook the importance of symbolic socio-aesthetic activity, it risks losing a potent, anti-capitalistic language. I would argue that cultural agents and theorists engaged with experimental institutionality should recognise the critical efficacy of 'symbolic protest' works and how they vitally contradict the restrictive formulations of 'useful art'.

Biennials, documentas, festivals, public art programmes and commissioning agencies have occupied a curious position within this research, as they have at times constituted examples of urban social aesthetic *practice* and, on other occasions, have been considered examples of experimental *institutionality*. This complex, hybrid status arguably comes from the fact that these entities are 'urban negotiations' of institutional programming. Their complex status, however, is perhaps not a dilemma per se, but instead, points to the fact that contemporary art's urban Marxist tendency ('urban social aesthetics') encompasses both art practices and urban-institutional iterations and that the line between these things has been blurred. It might be productive for contemporary art scholars and theorists to examine the nuances of biennials, documentas, festivals and the like—to interrogate them further and make better sense of their curious position in-between the urban 1:1 scale and institutionality. What are the manifold implications of occupying such a position? Does this position benefit or curtail their occasional attempts to exercise anti-capitalistic approaches to urbanism? These urban negotiations of institutional programming are also indicative of the clear connection between art institutionality and urban activism that demands further attention. I end this thesis, not with a definitive conclusion regarding these 'urban negotiations', but with a call for more work to be undertaken regarding their nuanced position in-between urban 1:1 scale practice and art institutionality. Validating the urban-institutional nexus identified in this research is also critical in the sense that experimental institutionalism may play a key role in rebuilding and transforming urban experience in a socialist way after the Coronavirus pandemic. Being forced to focus more on the 'social', or more specifically, the 'urban' as a result of the pandemic, will assumedly solidify the fact that we are witnessing a new era of progressive

institutionality that is distinct from what we have long since called 'new institutionalism'. I would speculate that our current urban landscape of pandemic-inflamed social urgencies might mean that now is the exact time when L'Internationale institutions and forms of experimental institutionality come into their own as attempts to establish socially responsible art institutions.

As this research project draws to a close, it is also vital to underline what is at stake for practitioners working within the purview of contemporary art's urban Marxism. Perhaps the most crucial thing institutional practitioners can take from this research is that art institutions can function as efficient sites of urban Marxist activism—as agonistic architectures in which the urgencies of capitalist urbanisation can be approached. This thesis has mapped out a variety of ways in which practitioners within the remit of institutions, curation, producing and organising can effectively incorporate an urban Marxist approach into their practice. This thesis has, for example, revealed how to formulate an embedded, durational method when working with urban communities and how to mobilise the prestige and hegemonic influence of art institutions to 'smuggle in' activist approaches. In chapter two, I demonstrated how practitioners can expand their decolonising practices into the urban environment and, in chapter three, how they can create spaces for sociality, care and collaboration within the context of urbanism's relational crisis. Another crucial takeaway for institutional practitioners is that experimental institutionalism's development of socially responsible art institutions needs to be holistic, touching all aspects rather than just programming. We saw this in chapter two with the Serpentine Gallery's *Edgware Road* project, which got co-opted by the Westminster council and superiors at the Serpentine, eventually losing its funding. Consequently, what is at stake for practitioners within experimental institutionalism is that they will only be able to achieve their goal to form socialistic art museums if they address *all* areas of activity from programming and education to funding, management and administration.

On the other hand, artist practitioners working within the field of urban social aesthetics can take from this research the potential of art institutions to be sites of urban Marxist aesthetic activism. Indeed, as I have previously highlighted, a reductive consensus exists in the arts that suggests anti-capitalistic urban aesthetics can only ever be destituent or 'extra-institutional'. The artist practitioner readership of this thesis may therefore take away the idea that art institutions do not have to be immediately disarmed as bureaucratic organisations, assimilated into the logic of neoliberal capitalism, which are entirely separate to post-Marxist engagements with urbanism. Artists can gain from this research the crucial insight that art institutions and

contemporary art's urban Marxist tendencies coalesce in multiple and nuanced ways. Further, as demonstrated in chapters one and two with Jesús Carrillo's (2018, 281) idea of 'conspiratory institutions', the prestige and influence of art institutions can mask activist practices, helping to 'smuggle' them into urban communities like a Trojan horse of sorts. Also at stake for artists in the field is this research's novel confrontation with socially engaged art's most cornerstone ideas and debates. In chapter three, I discussed how urban social aesthetics arguably supersedes the ideas presented in relational aesthetics and, in chapter four, I challenged socially engaged art's negation of visual aesthetics. Most vitally, however, each chapter of this thesis has demonstrated ways of enacting urban Marxist art practice and has offered artist practitioners concrete tactics and strategies. It has, for instance, shown how artists may effectively engage in community-led urban planning processes, decolonise racialised urbanism, create spaces for relationality and détourn urban spectacle.

Remarkably, some of the urban social urgencies I have addressed in this thesis have recently acquired a pressing actuality. The urban racial debates that arose in chapter two of this thesis, have suddenly acquired an intense urgency following the murder of George Floyd in the US and the subsequent international Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests. Urbanism's social fragmentation (addressed in chapter three) has become a more inflamed reality during international lockdowns. Furthermore, the issue of spectacle discussed in chapters four and five has been exacerbated by the shift towards the virtual and technology during the pandemic. This research project has come to its fruition during the Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19). Esteemed urban Marxist David Harvey has recently speculated the impact of the pandemic on urban experience and its social movements.[2] During his webinar with Urban Front (2020), Harvey highlighted the urban Marxist implications of the pandemic, stressing that, when this crisis began the question immediately arose of "who will keep the city moving?" The answer to this question was, of course, "the working-class" (Urban Front 2020). The pandemic has therefore boldly underlined class difference. Because the pandemic has urban Marxist implications, and has inflamed the already critical urgencies of capitalist-urbanism, it will be necessary for future research to address its effects on what I have called urban social aesthetics.

The pandemic is also a largely 'urban' problem in itself—the term 'urban Covid hotspots' has recently emerged as a term in the media. In light of the enormous strain that the pandemic has placed on housing and rent, will there be more urban social

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[2] This was a live webinar with Urban Front on May 1, 2020. Co-founded by professor David Harvey and associate professor Miguel Robles-Durán, Urban Front is a transnational urban consultancy group dedicated to making cities worldwide more equitable (Urban Front 2020).

aesthetic works centred on these concerns? Will there be more 'practical instruments' and less 'symbolic protests' in attempts to respond more palpably to urban capitalism-formed crises? Will there be more practice similar to the examples given in chapter three that are centred on relationality and care? The current crisis has, of course, exacerbated the social fracture of urbanism and highlighted the importance of affective labour. Harvey (Urban Front 2020) predicts a greater demand for food supply to be organised on a 'use-value' basis. He suggests that, because the pandemic has made some working-class people choose between food and rent, there will soon be a demand for a socialist takeover of the food supply system (Urban Front 2020). If this occurs, there may also be a rise in urban social aesthetic practice driven by socialist forms of food distribution. If there was to be a marked rise in urban social aesthetics as a result of the pandemic, this would potentially further attest this thesis' argument for more qualified, explicit analyses of this practice. Although, as I have illustrated in this thesis, urban social aesthetics has existed across several decades since the late 1960s, it has acquired a political and social magnitude in recent years, as it has responded to the most pressing urgencies of our contemporary urban moment. Responding to gentrification, housing, racial inequality and assumedly, in the future, the implications of the pandemic, contemporary art's urban Marxist tendency boldly demands its own dedicated discursive space and attention.

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