ART ACTIVISM AND MUSEUMS
How to make museums more ethical institutions

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ABSTRACT

During the experience of Occupy Wall Street - a protest movement against social and economic inequality that began in September 2011 in New York and spread worldwide - political actions and participatory art practices performed together, proving the lack of substance in the democratic arena. Since then, Western society has witnessed the upsurge of movements supporting the struggle of Indigenous peoples, black liberation, ecology/climate change, the struggle of the cross-border migrant workers, workers/students' rights, and much more. At the same time, artists are increasingly becoming more politically organized, embedding their practices in such organizations while developing creative and radical cultural movements through new strategies. Today, art collectives and their performance-based interventions continue to engage civic participation in the socio-political sphere that is so prevalent of our time.

But, what happens when the cultural institutional sphere is under attack?

This thesis will investigate the relationship between museums and art activism. Beginning with the selection of two different case studies, this thesis seeks to present the strategies and practices of the art collectives Liberate TATE and Gulf Labor Coalition (+ G.U.L.F.), which both protested against two museums known worldwide: Tate and Guggenheim.

By contextualizing two different relationships that have occurred among art activism and museums, the argument moves toward the definition of art activism and why/how it is different from other activist practices, this research is particularly focused on the practices that are directly connected to the institutional art world. While most activist practices usually take place outside the art-system, in many cases they also involve museums as arenas of action, thus exceeding the traditional boundaries of institutional critique.

In considering art activism a radical form of "institutional critique" it will analyze its role in an ethical-philosophical domain, where the question of how to make these institutions more ethical seems compelling, but at the same time difficult to realize. Traditions, knowledge, and common sense are produced, narrated and displayed by museums, which are considered trusted institutions in society. However, the actual growth of protests and actions (partially identified by the mentioned case studies) shows how museums still have a long way to go in order to fulfill their ethical responsibilities.

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INTRODUCTION

Today, we are witnessing a widespread democratic crisis in the Western world; the majority of the population experiences an increasing infringement of their rights and freedom. Global neoliberal economies have produced the highest level of poverty in recent history. In Europe, the "nation-state" model lost its legitimacy and previous types of the welfare model are no longer sustained. Simultaneously, in the United States of America, the neoliberal model has imposed itself as the unchallenged political and economic solution. For these reasons, we are facing an anti-democratic distribution of powers and resources and an eradication of communities and the model of social co-participation.

In the aftermath of Occupy Wall Street, the site of activism has fundamentally changed. Two of the most reputable museums in the world, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and Tate Gallery, have become the center of tempestuous controversy while acting as the stomping grounds for art activists' protests and performances.

Liberate Tate and Gulf Labor Coalition + G.U.L.F are two art-affiliated collectives that have targeted these powerful institutions. Fighting in the name of global wageworkers and climate change these groups have, in various ways, pushed museums into taking responsibility for the people they serve rather than their financial sustainers. These collectives have one common objective: they demand that Tate and the Guggenheim Museums and Foundations publicly commit to be more responsible cultural representatives.

From an activist perspective, museums have the potential to encourage progress and transformation in our society: they can become platforms for discussion and debate, they can foster a sense of community and belonging, and generate new social bonds. However, more often than not, museums use their resources to reshape the common sense according to capitalistic

values. Consequently, art activists single out museums as the starting point for the redistribution of communal capital, which is not only financial but also cultural.[1]

I investigate the interaction between art activism and museums, and the way art activism tries to improve and reshape the role of these cultural institutions in society. This thesis aims to show how art activism, by targeting museums, tries to foster social change through action, participation, and solidarity. This analysis is structured in three chapters starting with a descriptive and critical analysis of two relevant case studies: Liberate Tate from London, and Gulf Labor Coalition + G.U.L.F. from New York City.

As the result of almost four months of direct observation and participation at Decolonize This Place - the project/movement held at Artists Space in New York during the fall of 2016 - I had the opportunity to connect with members of the aforementioned collectives, and to examine their goals, activities, tactics and strategies, and most importantly, the pivotal role played by art and the artists' own creativity. Nevertheless, the diverse actions of these two collectives show how controversial, and is some case prejudicial - for the cause and for the collective itself - protest art in relation to museums can become. The scope of this analysis can be interpreted as an attempt to show two different approaches of art political movements in the context of a radical "institutional critique."

This chapter will be followed by a definition and a historical contextualization of art activism. What is art activism? Where it is rooted? Why is it so crucial in today's cultural and political arenas? To answers these questions, I will review the history of activist practices and identify their most common characteristics. In this section, an important distinction will be made between art activism, participatory and social practices, and institutional critique. This distinction is

fundamental in order to understand why and where more "active" practices seem necessary today. In this context, a new figure will be reintroduced: the "artist as organizer" that first emerged during the experience of Occupy Wall Street and more in the specific context of the Western democratic crisis. Considering works of Claire Bishop, Grant Kester, Lucy Lippard, Nina Felshin, Yates McKee, and the philosophical theories of Jacques Rancière as principal sources, I will attempt to trace why politics and democracy have become more prominent in recent artistic discourses and practices.

The question that emerges from the democratic crisis of the *left* is: what can art do?

Art activists consider the idea of an effective art as a strategic tool to renegotiate the cultural capital. This approach leads me to the analysis of how the interventions by art collectives protesting famous cultural institutions can benefit museums in perfecting their leading role in society. By protesting against museums, art activists raise substantial issues concerning the ethical behavior of these institutions.

Therefore, in the third and last chapter, through a comparison between the codes of ethics of museums and a philosophical framework of their educational and public character, I will underline how actual museums' ethics and behaviors are often limited and self-referential. Museums cannot limit themselves to providing storage for our cultures and their relics because they have the historical role of cultural guides and gatekeepers, helping us in understanding the present by reflecting and inspecting our past. Nevertheless, they legitimize old, conservative, and imperious ideologies; in many cases, they tend to be bound by private interests of funders and donors instead of transparently and purely serving the communities within which they are located.

Art activists want to "liberate" museums; to treat them as sites of insurgency and ideological

struggle; with their protests they maintain a sustained pressure - a commitment to a long-term struggle - against the *status quo* represented by these cultural institutions.

It is true that museums should become better guides for our society, re-invigorating values of solidarity, tolerance and reciprocal respect. However, are these collectives fighting museums in the right way? If a right way does exist, which way is it? Is it necessary to "fight" against them? What kind of results or side effects will these movements produce on the actual struggles over the long run?

In a society that is constantly in flux, museums and their collections should be collectively revised in order to transform these institutions into active forces for the construction of new common senses, values and ideals.

But, should museums turn themselves into institutions that foster the formation and the reinforcement of multicultural communities (on local and global bases)? Should they advocate for social change, becoming platforms for productive and creative collective dimensions?

In the concluding remarks this thesis will try to delineate which ethical conducts museums should consider and show how art activism can be considered the starting point for a small, but real, transformation of perspectives.

Chapter One

CREATIVE INTERVENTIONS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE.

Actions and Protests in Museums.

1. 1. Two representative case studies

Today, we observe art activists incite museums into actively taking up their public and educational roles, as they become advocates for social change and social justice. In building communities of action art activists make us reflect on which kind of museums we want for the future, ergo what kind of society we want to be.

By debunking the false myth of the museum as a neutral and objective entity, art activists disclose the highly politicized nature of such institutions and how political and economic interests influence their agendas. They highlight the impact of their management, governance, and their everyday working practices in methods of actions, organizations, and curatorship of their collections. Museums preserve culture, but they also produce and promote it; in this way, museums become a part of a system of production that is unequivocally capitalistic: museums are and produce cultural capital (art as commodity). Like the art objects themselves, the museum and its cultural capital become commodities that can be traded on global markets and become subject to ultra-luxury speculation.

Especially in the context where museums are financially sustained by a private system of funding and sponsorship, the aim of such protests against the museum becomes even clearer:[2]

Liberate Tate and Gulf Labor Coalition represent two substantial examples of art activists' campaign directed against museums. What is interesting is to see how each group is tailoring its practice to have more of an impact, effect, and coherence with the institution they are

challenging. By using different vocabularies and adapting similar strategies these two art collectives use their creativity and their critical thinking to denounce museums' unethical behaviors and to promote, even if only slightly, a societal change.

However, the accomplishments obtained by these art collectives do not necessarily produce positive effects. The controversial side of art activism is an important element that has to be considered in order to evaluate both efficacy and value of these practices. By using Liberate Tate and Gulf Labor Coalition as case studies one can, more concretely, identify the strengths, weaknesses, and controversies of this art practice.

1. 2. Liberate Tate: "Artwash" and climate change

Liberate Tate is an art collective founded during a workshop on art activism (titled *Disobedience Makes History*) organized by the Tate Modern in 2010. When Tate curators realized that the artists were organizing interventions against the museum's sponsors, they unsuccessfully tried to censor them. The workshop's participants decided to continue their work together by creating the art collective Liberate Tate[3] - with the goal to divest art from sponsorships by oil industry - using Tate as the first site of activism.

The first performance/intervention organized by the group took place in the Tate Modern's Turbine Hall in January 2010. Since then, Liberate Tate has organized more than fifteen performances at Tate Britain and Tate Modern. On the one hand, they denounce the art institution for accepting sponsorship from British Petroleum - a corporation that is causing irreversible damage on Earth and its inhabitants - while on the other hand, they accuse BP of "Artwash", of using cultural institutions to clean its dirty money, as well as of buying the company a social legitimacy through its association with cultural institutions.

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Most of their actions took the form of unsanctioned iconic performances in the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern and in the galleries of Tate Britain. A frequent element of their aesthetic strategy is to pour, spill, squash and squeeze a substance resembling oil in the museum's halls and galleries.[4] Another fundamental factor of their actions and performances is the co-operation of Tate security staff, which was always informed in advance about the collective's actions, and has helped and supported Liberate Tate every time. By situating its practice within the tradition of institutional critique, the art collective considers itself as the bearer of visual aesthetic and identity of the targeted institution.[5]

Since the beginning of its campaign, Liberate Tate has received both appreciation and criticism from the media and the art world.

Why should museums be concerned about the activities of their sponsors? This is the question posed by many cultural commentators. In the United Kingdom, many people still associate the free entry to museums with the existence of private sponsorships from corporations such as BP, even if that is not true. In fact, art institutions are free and open to the public (with the exception of temporary exhibitions) because the government imposes it as a prerequisite of the public funding that these institutions receive annually. Museums Boards of Trustees are the legal entity responsible for running these cultural institutions. They are required by law to acts as gatekeepers of the public interest, because of the national nature of these museums. However, museums are also charities, and the charitable status in the United Kingdom allows museums to raise funds from private sponsorships.[6] The funding agreement between the government and Tate makes no prescriptions on how Tate should supplement the money it receives publicly through other sources such as private sponsorships.

This hybrid nature of cultural funding in the United Kingdom, which is partially private and

partially public, causes ethical dilemmas around the appropriateness of sponsors. Government cuts to the arts make institutions vulnerable to market forces, for example as tobacco companies and oil companies. The need for financial sponsorship puts the integrity of art institutions at risk.[7]

Sponsorship by oil companies has been one of the most frequent ethical dilemmas facing the museum sector in recent years. Liberate Tate believes that TATE Gallery should reject companies responsible for climate change and damage to the environment, while "*Artwashing*" their reputation by being associated with cultural institutions. They believe that museums should choose their sponsors pragmatically, in order to pursue their activities, especially when government cuts funding for the arts.

In paragraph 3.6, the Code of Ethics issued by the (UK) Museum Association states that museums should "carefully consider offer of financial support from commercial organizations and other sources in the United Kingdom and internationally and seek support from organizations whose ethical values are consistent with those of the museum." In order to maintain public trust and integrity, museums should attentively examine the ethical standards of their commercial partners.

Tate started the sponsorship with BP in 1990. The last decision to extend BP's sponsorship until 2012 was taken in 2006. Despite the ecological disaster of the *Deepwater Horizon oil spill -* in May 2010 in the Gulf of Mexico and caused by BP - the Tate Ethics Committee confirmed that there was no evidence that the relationship with BP would significantly damage the effective operation of Tate. Moreover, Tate Trustees allowed for the sponsorship contract with BP to be confidential, prohibiting both the parties from releasing details of the agreement. It seemed that without BP as sponsor, Tate was unable to financially sustain its activities and serve its public,

which was actually untrue, since the estimated sponsorship income from BP was only 0,4% - 0,3% of the total budget.

By staging creative performances and protests for almost six years, Liberate Tate has informed the public and their actions have put pressure on Tate's Ethical Fundraising Policy. In March 2015, BP announced that its 26-year-long sponsorship of Tate has come to an end. Tate is now free from oil sponsorship. In fighting for climate change, Liberate Tate - in collaboration with other cultural activists organizations such as *Platform*[8] and *Art No Oil*[9]- wanted to first free Tate from BP sponsorship, and subsequently work towards liberating other British cultural institutions (such as the British Museum, the National Portrait Gallery, the National Theatre and the Royal Opera House) from the same unethical fiscal sponsorship.

However, by fighting against BP sponsorship, Liberate Tate has raised an important public debate about the nature of museums and art funding. The cause of climate change has shed light onto another, larger problem: the way in which museums and public art institutions are funded in the United Kingdom, as collective corporate sponsorships underline museums' need to continually reexamine their foundation for ethical standards.[10] For the collective corporate sponsorships underline the necessity by museums to constantly reexamine their ethical standards' foundation. For example, from the 1980s to the 1990s sponsorship from the tobacco industry seemed crucial for the economic survival of art institutions and sport organizations wouldn't have survived economically. The stop to tobacco sponsorships has shown that this was untrue. In the same way, the end to oil sponsorship of the arts would not entail the end of the arts.

Why has tobacco sponsorship been almost completely banned by the artworld while oil companies have not? This is because vast sums of money and profits are always involved with

both political and economic powers and interests. These powers are not easy to overcome, in fact, a new troublesome sponsor was announced for Tate: the clothing company Uniqlo.

Uniqlo has an ongoing labor issue in China, which has deep implications with workers rights in the fashion industry. It seems that after an unacceptable sponsor there is immediately a new one, ready to replace the previous one, as a chain that never ends. This shows how the entire system of funding, which depends on private money, can be considered the origin of the problem. But how do we change that? How can we break this chain? Every time, the appearance of a new sponsorship seems to correspond to the need for a new activist campaign.

In fighting against BP, Liberate Tate has shown how private sponsorship should be considered within an ethical framework, because it can have a huge impact on the role institutions like museums play and the public they serve.

Museums are central to preserving cultural heritage and, at the same time, they are laboratories where common sense, knowledge, solidarity and a sense of reciprocal respect towards others and toward the environment we shared are produced and shaped.[11]

The campaign against BP has become an important case, because it has shown that museums have an educational responsibility to the public, which must take precedence over the economic profits of both museums and multinational corporations: museums' code of ethics should take shape around this responsibility. A museum's scope and mission should cohere with the managerial and administrative choices it makes.

Images from the performances

Liberate Tate, "License to Spill" (2010).
Photo by Immo Klink, courtesy Liberate Tate

Liberate Tate, "Human Cost" (2011).
Photo by Amy Scaife, courtesy Liberate Tate

Liberate Tate, "The Gift"[12] (2012).
Photo by Martin LeSanto-Smith

Liberate Tate, "Hidden Figures"[13] (2014).
Photo by Martin LeSanto-Smith, courtesy Liberate Tate

Liberate Tate, "Time Piece"[14] (2015).
Photo by Martin LeSanto-Smith, courtesy Liberate Tate

Liberate Tate, "Birthmark"[15](2015).
Photo by Martin LeSanto-Smith, courtesy Liberate Tate

1. 3. Gulf Labor Coalition and G.U.L.F: slavery in the twenty-first century[16]

Gulf Labor Artist Coalition, also known as Gulf Labor, is a coalition of artists and activists founded in 2011 and based in New York City, which aims at bringing awareness to the living and working conditions of migrant laborers in the United Arab Emirates, and in particular to those laborers who are involved in the construction of the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi along with other buildings including the Louvre Abu Dhabi, the NYU Abu Dhabi campus, the Abu Dhabi Performing Arts Center and the Sheikh Zayed Palace Museum. All these new architectural colossuses are located in the desert area of Abu Dhabi's Saadiyat Island, which is becoming a Western Mecca in the United Arab Emirates. Designed by "star-architects", such as Frank Gehry, Jean Nouvel, Zaha Hadid and Norman Foster, the museums and university campus have required more than two million workers coming from third-world countries (Nepal, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka etc.).

Gulf Labor Coalition represents one of the most worldwide expanded art activists collective protesting against museums. This coalition is made up of an extremely rich and diverse group of people (artists and writers), who foster a variety of viewpoints regarding the issue of workers' rights. Moreover, they work with Human Rights Watch[17] and cooperate with other NGOs and art collectives making their case unique. Having built a multi-dimensional model of activism to pressure institutions they have gained a huge resonance not restricted to the art world, demonstrating how art activist practices can be strategic and effective.

The wealth of the Gulf States comes from the extensive petroleum-reservoirs and the shining cityscape of Abu Dhabi, Doha and Bahrain, which have been built on the exploitation of migrant employees by the *kafala*[18]sponsorship system.[19] Because of its inhumanity, the *kafala* system has become an international cause.[20] "The opulent lifestyle of a minority - composed of citizens and

corporate expats - is maintained by a vast majority (up to 90 percent in the United Arab Emirates and Qatar) that functions as a servant class, with no rights and very little mobility, and whose compliant labor is secured through the fear of abuse and deportation."[21]

The origin of Gulf Labor Coalition[22] can be situated between the investigations of Human Rights Watch and other human rights non-governmental organizations in the Saadiyat Island and the activities of NYU Coalition for Fair Labor[23] in New York.

By choosing the Guggenheim as a target to demand higher labor standards and workers' rights, Gulf Labor Coalition did not simply want to attack the museums, but denounce an entire system rooted in colonialism and human slavery. The Guggenheim was chosen because of its cultural brand, because it represented the perfect "ground zero": a cultural corporate known worldwide, which aims - with its four museums - to address "a broad, diverse audience so as to contribute to the knowledge and enjoyment of art and the values that it represents."[24]

The Guggenheim Museum in New York is a member of the American Alliance of Museums,[25] which entails observing specific criteria and guidelines, as well as employing a declared code of ethics. That being said, the Guggenheim in Bilbao and in Abu Dhabi haven't violated this code of ethics by not adhering to the criteria and guidelines regarding its employees; however they have repeatedly violated workers' rights regarding both their employees in Bilbao and the overseas workers hired for the construction of the Abu-Dhabi museum.[26]

In 2010, forty-three artists decided to sign and send a letter to the Guggenheim to impede the museum from purchasing their artworks. Almost a year later, at the Sharjah Biennial, Gulf Labor Coalition decided to make this letter public and announce a formal museum boycott: "no one should be asked to exhibit or perform in a building that has been constructed and maintained on the backs of exploited employees."[27] The boycott petition had a huge impact on the artworld, and

more than two thousand artists, curators and writers have joined forces. The boycott went public reaching the resonance of the Arab Spring. As a counter response, the UAE often militarily repressed workers' protests and insurrection, deported or denied entry to investigative journalists, art activists and NYU professors (such as Andrew Ross a Gulf Labor organizer).

In October 2013, at the Venice Biennale, Gulf Labor started the *52 weeks* project. Every week an artist, writer or activist was asked to submit a work, a text or an action, which would be published on the website of Gulf Labor Coalition.[28] For week *number 10* of this yearlong campaign, Andrew Ross and MTL[29] (Natasha Dillon and Amin Husain) published *No debt is an Island*,[30] a contribution that connects the debt of migrant workers in the UAE and the debt of students and artists in the US. This contribution included a call for action for February 2014, which became the origin of a offshoot of Gulf Labor called G.U.L.F. (Global Ultra Luxury Faction), devoted to direct action and to escalate the pressures on the museum.

G.U.L.F.'s first demonstrations took place in New York in February 2014: the first one took place at New York University, while the second at the Guggenheim. Both saw the coming together of activists from New York University's coalition for Fair Labor, Occupy Museums, and Gulf Labor Coalition. The second demonstration was the first of four "occupations" that occurred in the Guggenheim New York over the course of 2014. Similarly to Liberate Tate, the activists creatively developed each occupation by planning to imitate the style and the aesthetic of the exhibition on view at that time. The first three demonstrations were structured as performances in line with the museum's show about Italian Futurism.[31] The fourth one was designed to align with the new phase of Gulf Labor's campaign, called "Countdown," with the museum's exhibition of that time: "Zero. Countdown to Tomorrow. 1950's - 60's."

In March 2015, Gulf Labor sent a new set of proposals to the museum's leadership to improve

the workers' living conditions in Abu Dhabi.[32] The museum corporation, instead of meeting these requests, declared that they were not responsible for the Employment Practices Policy (EPP) on Saadiyat Island. In response to this statement, G.U.L.F. organized its most ambitious occupation on May Day. Once again, the action was synchronized with the aesthetic of the current exhibition showcasing On Kawara's works.[33] One week later, Gulf Labor - which was an official participant at the Venice Biennale - collaborated with G.U.L.F. and other local organizations (such as s.a.l.e. Docks) in a boat occupation of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection on the Canal Grande. The four performances/actions organized in the museums resonated strongly with the public, and proved that art is a powerful communication and information tool.

Since Gulf Labor officially started its campaign against the Guggenheim in 2010, its dialogue with the museum has been intermittent but ongoing. Through investigations, reports, signatories and boycotts, Gulf Labor Coalition - in collaboration with the other organizations and groups - was able to put the spotlight on the role played by the Guggenheim - as well as many other museums - "in showcasing, laundering and magnifying wealth accumulation among ultra-luxury class whose gravitational pull exerts more and more influence over the artworld."[34]

Gulf Labor Coalition has developed its own creative and communicative set of strategies to advance dialogue with both the Guggenheim and the workers' organization in Abu Dhabi (mainly with TDIC: Tourism Development & Investment Company), about fundamental demands (living wages, recruitment debts and worker representation) in order to build this "global" museum on Saadiyat Island. The museum has been used to target an entire economical and political system, which is corrupt and based on the supremacy of Western culture and capitalism. By demanding that the museum behave more ethically, these activists have much bigger concerns and goals, which go beyond the boundaries of the artworld. Gulf Labor

Coalition has demonstrated how the power of art - and especially artists - does not only come from creativity, but is based on the concepts of prestige and reputation. For example, some of GLC members such Walid Raad, Hans Haacke, Gregory Sholette and Michael Rakowitz are all well-known artists, collected and represented by major art institutions, and for these reasons they have discrete outreach that allows them to take a position against a prestigious museum such as the Guggenheim. Their voices are louder because they are widely recognizable, but not every artist has this privilege.

Moreover, the ongoing negotiations with the Guggenheim were concluded with a complete shutdown of the construction of the Guggenheim in Abu Dhabi. This is a perfect example of a counter-effect generated by art activists and their collectives. While it is true that with their campaign, GLC ended up revealing the massive exploitation of migrant workers in the UAE, at the same time, there are millions of workers ended up losing work, in addition to the many millions of families whom this affected. GLC's campaign succinctly represents one of these cases where a privileged group of people, from a privileged position, fights for the human rights of the oppressed, without considering the serious risks and consequences of their actions. GLC's campaign resulted in damaging the migrant workers' conditions instead of improving their situation.

Images from Abu-Dhabi sites: rendering and labor camps

Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, project's rendering.

FAR FROM HOME: GUEST WORKERS IN THE GULF: A dozen Indian migrant workers share this room,

sleeping on the floor without mattresses to save space and costs.
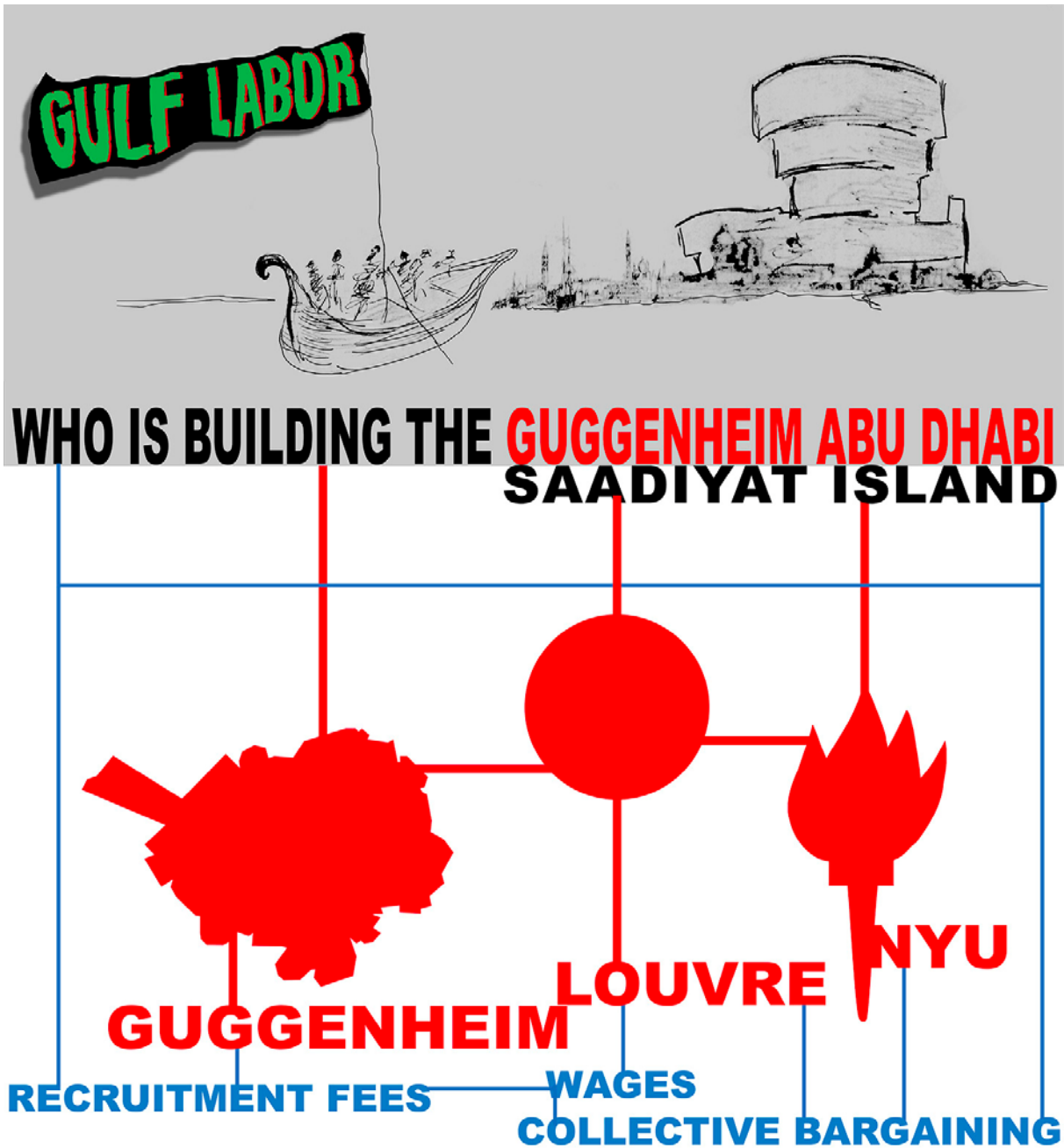
Photo by Jonas Bendiksen

Workers camp on Saadiyat Island in 2011. Courtesy Hans Haacke.

Guggenheim - Abu Dhabi's construction camp. Courtesy Gulf Labor Coalition.

Images from the protests and the *52 weeks* project:

Gulf Labor Coalition at the 56th Venice Biennale.

Courtesy G.U.L.F.

Protesters at Guggenheim in May 2015. Credit Hiroko Masuike/The New York Times

a.

b.

c.   d.

Guggenheim petro-dollars rain down (March 2014). Credit: G.U.L.F.

A, b, c and d Photos by Zoe Schlanger

The dirty currency of artworld (March 2014). Credit: Noah Fischer,

Courtesy of the Global Ultra Luxury Faction (G.U.L.F.)

November 5 G.U.L.F. action at the Guggenheim. Photo by Mostafa Heddaya.

Gulf Labor protesters outside the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice.

Photo by Lucia Pizzani.

One of the projections featured the words "May Day" in six different languages used by migrant workers in the GCC, including (from top left) Hindi, Telgu, English, Punjabi, Arabic, and Bengali. (Courtesy G.U.L.F.).

GULF and the Illuminator, action at the Guggenheim Museum (2016) photo by Carey Dunne.

Chapter Two

HOW ART INFLUENCES REALITY

Participation, Art Activism or the Art of Repair.

2. 1. The artist as "organizer": art activism today.

Today, discussions about contemporary art are frequently centered on a phenomenon called art activism or activist art - which by now has claimed a permanent presence in the art world. As the case studies of Liberate Tate and Gulf Labor Coalition have demonstrated, art activism is therefore intended to offer the ability for art to intervene in the socio-political sphere, functioning both as an alternative arena and as a medium for political and social change.[35]

As Boris Groys[36] claimed, the main purpose of these practices is neither to simply criticize the art world, its system and its set of rules, nor is it to criticize specific social or political conditions. It strives to change cultural, social, and political conditions. Besides being art, art activism is a true form of activism. Art activists, like the Gulf Labor Coalition + G.U.L.F. and Liberate Tate, want to change the living conditions of developing countries, improve the quality of life of disadvantaged peoples, fight for workers, immigrants, and other minorities' civil rights, promote gender and racial equality, and fight climate change. Generally speaking, they want to change the world by making it a better place.

How can art activism be distinguished from general political activism? What does it mean to make political action and protest art? How do we judge these experiences? What kind of efficacy do activists seek?

Seen through the lens of art criticism, these questions demonstrate the need for art activism to be defined within an appropriate theoretical, aesthetic, and political interpretative framework, within which this art practice can be located. However, in the sphere of praxis - where art activism is mainly located - the questions that circulate around the definition of art activism are

due to its hybrid nature of being situated at the intersection between aesthetics and politics.

A first distinctive element that differentiates art activism from militant activism concerns the fact that the agents or organizers who promote and encourage these actions are often artists. Activist artists often operate in groups and collaborate with other people and/or local organizations, but they never dismiss their original artistic and creative roles.

What does being an art activist mean in terms of artistic production?

Activist artists do not address the audience as a collective but as individuals, as their intention is not to make propagandistic art.[37] Through imagination, creativity and critical thinking, these artists seek to stimulate discussion with the audience. The dialogical and democratic process - which resembles the dialogical-emancipative perspective of democracy presented by the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas[38] - engages the public in exploring potential socio-political alternatives and takes action towards shared problems. The dynamic between artist and participant changes the rules of the traditional conception of the artist's imaginative and creative power.[39] Art activism's primary intention is not the production of objects. This distinguishes art activism from other forms of political art, which are produced by the individual's creative mind - the artist - and made entirely of objects. In activist practices, objects take on a functional role in order to pursue political aims, spreading specific messages, so that they become the medium and message at the same time.[40] Moreover, the production of these "disobedient"[41] objects involves collaborative and consultative processes.[42]

In the modern tradition, the artist has assumed different roles: from the role of *producer,* proposed by the philosopher Walter Benjamin[43] in his famous work "The Artist as a Producer," to the role of *ethnographer* offered by the art historian Hal Foster in "The Return of the Real."[44] Today, in contemporary circumstances, where neoliberal economies largely dominate the artistic

production and the political agenda, within the context of art activist practices the artist emerges in a new role: that of organizer. [45]

This definition of "artist as organizer" highlights key elements that are crucial in the analysis of art activism as art practice, which allow for the contextualization of this practice into a historical and aesthetic-philosophical background.

Therefore art activism:

● Is a collective practice. It is participatory, and involves artists and non-artists

● Develops in contexts of social and political crises

● Is taking place in real/daily life

● Underlines the need for developing interpersonal relationships and engaging in conversations

● Is conceived as aesthetic research that "comes together in the creation of a *new public space*"

● Involves the use of imagination as a main instrument, affecting our understanding of reality.

2. 2. Activism and/or Participation?

Theoretical framework, aesthetic categories.

Art activism shares certain aspects and characteristics with all art forms that directly engage the audience in the creative process and are considered to be under the expanded field of participatory practices. Participatory art,[46] relational art/aesthetic,[47] social practice,[48] socially engaged practice, dialogical art,[49] new genre public art, community-based art and art activism are all practices that seem to often overlap their vocabulary in showing a substantial interest in the

activation of the role of spectatorship. Often assuming the form of "project" - instead of the actual production of physical artworks - most of these practices has an unclear beginning and/or end. They offer temporary common grounds for collaboration and co-authorship, de-emphasizing the prominent role of the artist as the sole creator. They desire to build a common terrain which envisioning spectators to become active participants, playing a pivotal role in the creative process with the aim of conquering a certain degree of awareness and self-determination.[50] These practices focused on building stronger social bonds through communal activities to co-generate processes of meaning. Participatory art is situated in a general reconfiguration of aesthetic values, where the inclination towards a social component of these projects suggests that contemporary art practices aim to obtain more concrete and substantial goals.[51]

The main element that distinguishes art activism from any other form of participatory art is its dimension of the action - the dimension of the *praxis*. Art activism is understood as a set of practical activities that are in opposition to theoretical or speculative activities. The domain within which art activism operates corresponds to that of the political arena. In locating art activism in the philosophy of praxis it becomes associated with Marxist theory, according to which, human activities are able to transform the real and produce history. The aim of art activism is to create art that is a form of political or social currency, actively addressing cultural power structures rather than representing them or simply describing them. Art activism thus is conceived to directly affect the socio-political realm.[52]

Contemporary art practices constantly challenge the boundaries and conventions of artistic production, expanding media and strategies. Nevertheless, participatory practices often remain confined to the traditional artistic criticism that operates according to the notion of artistic quality. Albeit not necessarily using the category of "beauty," a *Je ne sais quoi*[53] that makes the

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artwork intriguing and "pleasant" is identified - while art activism seems not to respond to any of those aesthetic prerequisites nor finds interest in them. The aesthetic framework where art activism is situated is wider: it is not circumscribed by the conditions of the existence of art, but it extends over different perspectives through the spheres of feeling and perceiving reality.

History and art history have already demonstrated that art and aesthetic categories, and the way of thinking about the making of art, are flexible and can change over the time. Some points of resistance especially concerning the "purity" of art intermingled with the "corruption"[54] of the social and of politics, have been particularly difficult to overcome. The emergence of critical and theoretical expanses of the political and the aesthetic has been the subject of recent debates between art historians. A general assumption delineates that these practices often coincide with historical periods characterized by social and political crisis. What kind of progressive change is possible in the current artistic and political climate? Are artists able to facilitate potential changes? And if so, how?

In order to theoretically frame art activism in its double nature of art practice and activism, the work of the French philosopher Jacques Rancière[55] is particularly helpful. Starting in the late 1990's, Rancière theorized the relation between aesthetics and politics[56]. This intersection of the aesthetic and the political spheres is originally based on a re-definition of the term "aesthetic." Which returns to concern the *aisthesis* (from the ancient Greek αἴσθησις), whose literal translation is the mode of sensible perception of the artworks themselves, but also of reality. Consequently, "the aesthetic experience implies a questioning of how the world is organized, and therefore the possibility of changing or redistributing that same world."[57]

Rancière's most celebrated theory in recent philosophical and aesthetic debates concerns the *le partage du sensible*[58] or partition/division of the sensitive, which is not only a declaration of

an aesthetic regime, but extends to the concept of democracy and subsequently to a political and equal redistribution.[59] Artists and audience equally share - *partage* - the space and the time of reality. Space and time are the coordinates within which the collective and the individual life forms are built, where processes of meaning and experiences are shaped by political actions and artistic productions. *Le partage du sensible* is based on a distribution of spaces, times and activities that determine the development of common sense and the communal participation of it. These ideas offer a perfect theoretical framework within which to analyzing art activism, because the artistic production is included in a political, collective, and inclusive process as it is sustained by common aims and desires.[60]

In order to situate art activism within a philosophical framework, Grant Kester stated a connection with Kantian philosophy and in general with the aesthetic theories of the eighteenth century.[61] Kester identified aspects that are crucial for the analysis of art activism within the aesthetics. Thanks to the encounter between the intellect and the imagination, aesthetics can offer ideals of social and political life, which include moral and ethical concerns; they also have the power to comprehend a larger totality of reality in analyzing the human experience.

Common sense, participation, and sense of community are elements that merge and re-emerge in an attempt to position these practices on the part of art criticism. In more or less utopian forms, art activism is situated at the intersection between aesthetics and politics, where "the relationship between artist and participant is a continual play of mutual tension"[62] that represent the effort to improve the actual situation.

2. 3. Art activism: a brief history.

Art activism has many origins, but it is most strongly rooted in performance and feminist art. Originally, it combined elements of conceptual art and political protest from the 1960s.[63] During the Seventies and the Eighties the demand for sociopolitical relevance in art translated into action in several ways: artists attempted to deal with social ills at the local level such as homelessness, domestic violence, AIDS[64], social justice, industrial pollution, alienation, gentrification and decaying neighborhoods. These decades showed how art could be free from the materiality of the object after abandoning mimesis, abstraction and the question of form. Happenings, Fluxus and performances opened the door to new forms of (political) action with the potential to transform living conditions and fight against social injustices. The fall of the traditional media's supremacy - such as painting and sculpture - is now followed by the emergence of videos, installations, and other non-traditional forms of art. Furthermore, instead of producing "objects" for sale in galleries or displays in museums, artists begin to produce interventions involving the local communities and the groups affected by social injustice. For example, Martha Rosler's project *If You Lived Here*, was realized by the self-organized group of homeless people called Homeward Bound, at Dia Art Foundation in New York, 1989.

In 1984, Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, Donald Kuspit, Lucy Lippard, Nilda Peraza and Lowery Sims organize an exhibition at the New Museum in New York City titled *Art & Ideology* presenting a radical politicization in the art practice of the time. "It is understood by now," Lippard says, "that all art is ideological and all art is used politically by the right or the left, with the conscious and unconscious assent of the artist."[65] In the catalogue of the show a definition of art activism is given by the art critic Lucy Lippard, who describes activist art as a practice where "Some element of art takes place in the 'outside world,' including some teaching and media practice as well as community and labor organizing, public political work, and organizing within

the artist's community."[66]

Artists and communities started to collaborate producing block organizations, organizing sit-ins, designing billboards, cleaning up neighborhoods, or occupying public spaces in response to specific community problems. Consequently, these art practices radically forced a renegotiation of the conventional aesthetic categories applied to artworks. Expanding media and techniques, and consequently the traditional criticism, all activism or protest artworks demand the public and the critic to fundamentally rethink the nature of the artwork and art experience in general.

Nevertheless, according to Gregory Sholette, "today the question is not which 'transgressive' artistic strategy might work against a system that actively mimics its opponents, but how to re-frame a critical art practice once again within a larger political and social agenda. Understanding the implications and legacy of political activism is one means of initiating this critical repossession."[67]

Today, themes such as race, civil rights, the environment, inequality, corporate scandals and general political issues are prevalent in the artistic practice of many groups and art collectives. New strategies, also accompanied by new technologies, have been developed in the field of art activism: advertising, Internet, newsletters, several social media, and more general online to offline connections. Moreover, the historical development of political art and art activism offer a rich tradition of techniques and strategies from which to draw inspiration.[68]

Due to where these practices usually take place, it is clear that art activism is in opposition to galleries and museums, which sustain the art market, and consequently the financial and political systems that supports it. Art collectives such as the Guerrilla Girls, Liberate Tate, Gulf Labor Coalition (and G.U.L.F.), and more recently the project Decolonize this Place[69], have targeted powerful cultural institutions, and in particular museums, on the basis of feminism and women's

rights, climate change, workers' rights and indigenous struggle. These groups of artist activists have revealed in diverse ways how in the most trusted cultural and public institutions consistent paradoxes persist.

Can activist practice be considered an alternative and active form of institutional critique? To answer this question it is important to understand the relationship between art activism and cultural institution. Institutional critique is an artistic practice, which is based on the act of critiquing cultural institutions, such as museums or art galleries. Developed in the late 1960's from Minimalism and Conceptual art, institutional criticism has become a creative response and an instrument for many artists[70] who analyze structures, limits, paradoxes and ethical behaviors of the institutions that buy and exhibit their work. In the last thirty years, institutional critique has assumed different forms and has targeted different aspects of the institutionalized art world. Many critical perspectives have been undertaken; as well as different methods of spatial and political criticism have been applied. Institutional critique has been extremely helpful for museums and galleries to question their roles, behaviors and internal mechanisms and in acquiring a certain degree of awareness. However, it remains confined within the boundaries of the institutions and consequently "institutionalized."

Institutional critique thus takes on many forms, such as artistic works and interventions, critical writing, and politically charged art, but it cannot be considered a form of activism.

Institutional critique often remains the result of an agreement between artist and the commissioning institution, while art activism clashes with museums and cultural institutions so that it may effect radical changes and concrete results. Institutional critique pushes the institutions to reflect on their roles and behaviors, but the sphere of action is missing entirely and the role of the viewer remains confined within the spectatorship.

Today, the reason why art collectives are targeting museums and cultural institutions is because these institutions fulfill a pivotal role in contemporary society. Museums preserve history and traditions and through their collections and exhibitions they generate knowledge. Knowledge and power, as Foucault[71] analyzed, are not independent entities, but inextricably related - power is constituted through accepted forms of knowledge, scientific understanding and "truth."

Politics and regimes of power ("regimes of truth") are the result of scientific discourse and traditions that are reinforced and redefined constantly through institutions (schools, museums, media), which retain traditions, generate knowledge and produce culture sustaining dominant political and economic ideologies - the so called *status quo*.

According to art activists, the only way to overthrow the *status quo* is a subversion of the institutions, which sustain and perpetuate it. The *Short Twentieth Century*[72] declared the triumph of the democratic institutions: the fall of the Berlin Wall in addition to the collapse of the ex-Soviet Union have generated in Western cultures the formation of the representative democratic model, all over celebrated as a guarantee of freedom, plurality and progress. However these premises have been often disregarded. Today we are facing an extended crisis of the democratic system, which amongst others caused by the unregulated economic powers (finance, capital market managed, multinational corporations) that deeply influence the political agenda.

In this context, art activism is not simply an art practice, it does not use the protest as a form of expression or as a performative tool but it becomes an attempt to *repair* a system, which it perceived as corrupted and damaged.[73] The mounting pressure upon specific museums, such as the Tate and the Guggenheim Museums and Foundation represents a new strategy of socio-political protest. Art collectives that are making actions and protests against these cultural

institutions demand changes in the existing power structures that perpetuate unethical *status quos*, where racism, colonialism and chauvinism are still present and evident.

At the same time, these protests point to significant inadequacies in museums' of ethics and behaviors. Art activism can therefore be considered a form of "radical institutional critique', which questions current museological practices.

Chapter Three

MUSEUM AND ETHICS

How to make museums more ethical institutions

3. 1. What does Ethics of Public Institutions mean?

By definition, museums consider themselves public institutions,[74] and they exist for the public benefit. In order to fulfill this public role all museums' operations should reflect that obligation. Collecting, preserving, displaying, educational programming, studying and researching are actions that have to be executed with a public consciousness. Any organization, which operates in the public interest, must to be ethically and socially driven.

Before looking at museum ethics in greater detail, it is necessary to define ethics and how ethics of public institutions fits within this broader field.

Broadly speaking, ethics (from the ancient Greek ἦθος, "character", or "behavior") is the branch of philosophy that comprehends every form of human behavior: political, juridical and moral. More strictly speaking, ethics is distinguished from politics and law, as the branch of philosophy that identifies with the realm of actions, both good and bad. Traditionally, in ethical doctrines, philosophers have tried to keep both branches together. On the one hand, they have investigated and recommended the most adequate of human values; on the other hand, they have speculated about moral human behavior in all its darkness - not much for the provision of purposes, as for the research of the causes. However, over the course of the twentieth century, a clear distinction between these two directions begins to determine the prevailing of a practical ethics, centered on more practical issues. In the face of concrete dilemmas, it becomes necessary to revise philosophical principles. Since life and its events are contingent, more flexible theoretical approaches and consequent decisions are needed. The member of a museum's board of trustees, for example, may behave morally in his/her personal life, for example, but might not see the immoral issues in his professional activities. To better understand the different shades of

moral life it is necessary to apply practical ethics. Combined with the moral sphere of psychology, sociology, economics, and political science, ethics becomes a practical matter in facing professional decisions.

Professional codes of ethics serve as generic guidelines. They are sets of conduct principles, which are based on adequate particular criteria determined by a specific cultural, social or professional context. The definition of "code of ethics" calls upon a complex and ancient moral issue regarding the existence of universal principles and human behavior. Even though codes of ethics have become necessary in contemporary times, it is important to remember that ethical decision-making depends on context and time.[75] The duty of serving the public good, the legitimacy of professional authority and the accountability of professional figures are elements strictly connected with professional ethics but also with the concept of the institution as a whole. The representative of a professional and/or practical ethics takes on the role of the institution as opposed to its prior role of single subjects.

In talking about *Ethics of Public Institutions* we do not refer to specific ethical norms of behavior of administrators and employees or of citizens who benefit from these institutions. We do not refer to the personal and professional ethics of the subjects, which belong to the institutions (even if they can singularly play an important role in them). What the idea of "Ethics of Public Institutions" evokes is the intrinsic moral value of the institutions, their scope, and what makes them influential, authoritative, distinguished, and respected.

We live in a complex and multilayered society, which is influenced and determined by institutions - schools, hospitals, courts, museums, cultural institutions, media organizations etc. In a society, the foundation of every ethical rule, as well as every juridical norm that dictates determined behaviors, is grounded into the original concept of a "social contract".[76] This

"common agreement" between individuals and the government power, aims at guiding the action of the individual and of the collectivity.

From a European standpoint, society is considered a "big family" to which citizens belong. Citizens are children of this family, while the authoritative figures, "the parents", are personified by those institutions which exercise power through/by the law. The same deference and esteem that is reserved for public institutions - which are founded to promote the common good - are also historically used to refer to cultural institutions. In this context, museums are considered temples, a stately and intimidating gatekeeper of our histories, values and traditions. Museums have the power of producing knowledge and shaping our society.

In the United States, on the contrary, single individuals or groups - helped by favorable tax laws - have founded museums as non-profit organizations. Museums are mainly supported by private donors – an element that can theoretically contradict or affect a "pure" intention of serving public interests instead of the private ones.

Nevertheless - in the US as well as in Europe - museums define themselves as any other public institution, whose aim it is to pursue public interest. As we can read in most of museums' mission statements, their scope is to serve and educate their public - comprised of local and global communities.

"Common good" and "public interest" constitute the main criteria of public ethics, on which all public institutions are grounded. Consequently, museums and museum professionals have adopted their own code of ethics, because, as public institutions, they carry heavy ethical responsibilities. Museums ethics does not consist in the imposition of external values on museums, but in the understanding of the foundations and the development of museum practices and activities.

In 1977, the Museum Association[77]of the United Kingdom established the first Codes of Practice and Conduct, and in 1986, the ICOM[78] Code of Ethics was adopted. In 1991, the American Alliance of Museums[79] promulgated its own. The Association of Art Museum Directors[80] also decreed its own code of ethics in 1966, as well as the Association of Art Museum Curators, the Alliance of Professional Networks along with many others. All these ethics codes and guidelines define appropriate behaviors, establish responsibilities and offer means for self-assessment.[81]

All these codes have been subsequently and constantly amended, improved and implemented, because the nature of ethics - as aforementioned - is contingent. Ethical values are culturally constructed and universally recognized through "a dialectic process and democratic consensus."[82] Nevertheless, many contradictions and incongruities emerge from museum ethics codes and can have significant negative impact on museums today. The main problem is that these codes need to be consistently revitalized and reinvigorated by contemporary ethical issues and debates. They have to be changed because museums have to serve a society that constantly transforms. In the twenty-first-century, museum ethics should not only focus on the institution's responsibility towards objects, but also consider a "new" pivotal element: the public. The role played by the audience is crucial, because what distinguishes the museum from other institutions as a container of valuable objects, such as banks and private collections, is its agency, its public accountability, as well as being a resource for society's needs.

3. 2. The Contingent Nature of Museum Ethics[83]

The "Codes of Ethics for Museums" aforementioned: the AAM, the MA, the ICOM, the

AAMD, and the AAMC are established in order to offer ethical guidelines and standards of excellence,[84] within which museums and museum professionals should operate for public accountability, public trust and public service.

Even though these codes provide a broad framework of practices and issues about how museums should operate and achieve better results, they are often stereotyped and antiquated, as is the traditional literature concerning professional ethics in museums.[85]

Prominent elements in museums ethics are still related to the ethics of acquiring and managing collections, caring for and conserving this collection, ethical dilemmas of deaccessioning, and many more. Moreover, the more contentious topics, such as operational and management problems, problems related to fundraising and other-income-producing activities, controversy around censorship, repatriation and restitution and finally ethical issues concerning diversity and access, are not spelled out in detail. Concerning some of these problems, museums codes of ethics demonstrate their fallacy and inefficiency, which has physical adverse impacts on museum operations. The museum ethics as a contingent discourse, able to consider the importance of a practical and applied ethics, is almost completely absent.

Museum ethics should be more than a code of ethics; it should be primarily about self-understanding, and it should also be about responsible stewardship and transparency.

It becomes necessary to critically re-conceptualize museum ethics into a multidisciplinary field, because social, political, economic and technological factors are all elements that influence museum ethics and recognize their variability.[86] External disciplines (such as philosophy, educational psychology and environmental studies) offer insight into what can inspire the ethical behavior of museums toward visitors, and more generally towards the society that they are supposedly serving.

Many authors, such as Richard Sandell[87], Hilde Hein[88] and Peter H. Welsh[89] have considered the potential of museums as agents of change: they promote social inclusion, social justice, equality and human rights. Museums have been identified as having ethical agency or "institutional morality"[90] where the contemporary institutional context is considered able to change as the needs of society change. Consequently, both museum ethics and museum practice suggest a forward looking agenda which opens up new relationships with the public, non-hierarchical approaches, inclusivity, participation, and a general shift from a perspective that is object-focused to an experiential one.

"Democratic pluralism, shared authority and social justice are distinct but convergent areas of policy and practice that together define the socially responsible museum,"[91]claimed Janet Marstine, Program Director of Art Museums and Gallery at the University of Leicester. In fostering socially inclusive discourse, museums reconfigure their role of social responsibility. In the name of a community ownership, museums strive to improve their role as effective agents for social inclusion, by changing their working practices and taking advantage of new technologies.

This begs the question of how museums create trusted relationships with their audiences. Museums try to renegotiate their power relations with the audiences they serve, fostering a sense of mutual relationship. Under the concept of "reciprocity", museums do not give up their guiding role or their responsibilities; they start conversations but do not dominate them, and they generate vocabulary to maintain the flow of open dialogue. Sandell describes the new social justice agenda of museums in terms of social inclusion: "At a community level, museums can act as catalyst for social regeneration, empowering communities to increase their self determination and develop the confidence and skills to take greater control over their lives and the development of the neighborhoods in which they live."[92]

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Today, museums present themselves as the ideal laboratory to foster social change in our individualistic Western society. However, their structures, administrations and ways in which they produce knowledge persist in maintaining controversial assets, as the current codes of ethics are a clear consequence of this. Flexibility, innovation, and new operational and practical approaches are only partially developed. Museums are mostly anchored in the more traditional museological practices, and for this reason they are facing several problems concerning their identity in confronting a multi-layered society and complex reality.[93]

Moreover, in light of the ongoing economic crisis, museums find themselves more frequently conditioned by their financial needs. Two polarizing realities exist: appealing yet highly expensive blockbuster exhibitions are staffed by underpaid security guards;[94] while increasing its service to the public through public programs and online interfaces, misrepresentation of indigenous cultures and underrepresentation of other cultures and ethnicities persist.

Museology, or museum studies, has always tried to improve and reformulate museum practices through scholarly perspectives and critical positions (new museology, post-critical museology, radical museology[95] have been theorized). Additionally, the art world and its main players have traditionally questioned museum actions and their overall functions. Nevertheless, critical thinking is not always translated into concrete practice.

Marstine considered institutional critique as a "useful touchstone by which to grapple with the multi-faceted and contingent nature of museum ethics today."[96] It is certainly true that institutional critique, by definition, offers a systematic and critical inquiry into museums practices and their social function. However, this artistic practice remains circumscribed within the institutional framework and is often limited by the "production" of artworks commissioned by the institution itself. For these reasons, diverse and more active forms of protest have

increased outside of museum walls: art activism and its forms of reactions have become a new phenomenon in the museum field. Today, art activism has a bigger impact on public opinion, because it uses more and diverse media[97] and it's able to offer a direct critical scenario and radical positions against museum activities and operations.

3. 3. *Why is Art Activism important for museums ethics?*

Art activism, like its sibling art practice, has existed since the 1960s. Only in recent times, by making museums its main target, has it become a central phenomenon for rethinking the relationships between museums, their agendas, their audiences, and their roles in society. Contemporary historical and political conditions have encouraged the emergence and need for these practices in the institutional art world. Compared to other forms of critical art, art activism represents a step forward. In aiming to make waves in both the art world and the greater world itself, many art activist collectives[98] have revealed the unethical activities[99] of most of the art world's respectable institutions.

Their actions deem it necessary for museums to claim radical transparency if they wish to continue to be perceived as trusted institutions and sources of communal knowledge in our society. We trust museums because in part they are the gatekeeper of our histories and traditions - without these we would not have our identities, we could not look to the future. Even more, we trust museums because they offer different ways of understanding and appreciating their collections and we think they are acting transparently in doing their job. But are they really transparent?

Transparency has become the hobbyhorse of the twenty-first-century museum ethics. Social

responsibility cannot thrive if museums do not show explicitly the "how's" and "why's" of their decisions and operations. Codes of ethics are predicted for museums' unethical behaviors (for example, in the US the most serious petition can include the museum's expulsion from the American Alliance of Museums). Despite the norms and regulations previously discussed, it is still rationally inexplicable how it may be possible for

1)   The Guggenheim, The British Museum and The Louvre to be erecting exorbitant museums in Abu Dhabi on the slavery (and death) of thousands of migrant workers (low-skilled and even lower paid) coming from all the South-East Asia.

2)   Tate, British Museum and Natural History Museum in London, Metropolitan Museum of Art of New York, Smithsonian Museum of Natural History in D.C. to be funded by oil corporations as BP, Shell and Koch Industries; when our planet is dramatically endangered and threatened by climate change (mostly caused by the use of fossil fuels as well as by certain techniques of oil spilling and refining).

   Through years of protest and negotiations, the two case studies presented in the previous chapter - as well as many others - have raised important issues about museums, their role and their administration policies. By articulating original and creative strategies, art activist collectives highlight crucial problems, demanding space in the public debate.

   But why should museums become those platforms for public discussions? Why should they advocate for social change?

   The case studies analyzed show how museums - in UK and in the US - are deeply integrated in reinforcing systems of capitalism, imperialism, colonialism, exploitation of human labor and natural resources. The myth of museums as neutral and objective institutions has been debunked.

They are highly politicized in their agendas, and in their management and governance. Actions and tactics of Liberate Tate and Gulf Labor Coalition mark museums as starting point for improving our society. Their interventions have ethics on their core - they want to transform existing conditions, they want to question the cultural-capital system, and underlying the pivotal role of museums as educators.

To maintain and perpetuate their power, ideologies need cultural knowledge, symbols and social practices, which are all framed by institutions. Museums, as well as the artworld, are part of a system, which is governed by political and economical interests. In contemporary society museums and their collections are part of cultural capital, because besides preserving culture, they are also producers and promoters of it.

Museums - as other public institutions - are resources for shaping common sense, but they often act according to neoliberal and capitalist values. For these reasons they become targets for artists and activists, because as major cultural institutions they can exert large-scale cultural, political and economic influence. From the activists' point of view, protests and actions against museums seem to be the only way to solicit a change that starts from culture production and extends to the rest of our structured society. If museums are the institutions that will educate the public today and tomorrow, they must publicly commit to socially responsible policies and positions: honoring values such as equality, cultural diversity and reciprocal respect. Hence museums ethics becomes the key issue once again.

Therefore, it is necessary to determine how these forms of resistance against museums open up new solutions and to create opportunity of reconciliation among museums and their publics, museums and their workers or museums and activists.

It seems that activists consider conflict as the only possible way to engage in dialogue with

the institutions; however, by creating a contention between two blocs, two factions, it becomes much easier for each side to dismiss the other without reaching compromises or creating an area of dialogue. Then why the activists choose to be re-active instead of pro-active?

Janet Marstine - in her last publication about museums and critical practice[100] - considers the combination of institutional critique and socially engage practices as a new strategy that can influence reconciliation between museums and their publics. Marstine becomes sustainer of a necessary a genuine dialogue between the two parts: "Reconciliation requires a commitment to difficult conversation among the parties involved."[101] She wants to demonstrate that these ideas of dialogue and reconciliation are powerful enough to "reinvent"[102] the museum, where new-shared worldviews can be formulated. However, the examples that she uses in augmenting this thesis of "reconciliation" are unfortunately relegated to a niche, which is prerogative of a few "insiders."

By raising ethical issues, art activists demand changes that start from the museums and extend to the rest of society. They use mass media and public opinion to put museums under pressure, questioning their unethical actions and behavior. Institutional critique and critical practices have extraordinary potential in urging art institutions to question their structure, their work and their relationship with the public, but their resonance remains circumscribed within the boundaries of the artworld. On the contrary, art activism involves museums by transforming them into a platform for raising social, economic and political issues.

Maybe these actions, performances and protests will not change the world, but at least - by targeting institutions that pride themselves in being strong cultural entities - they prepare the ground for a new round of local and global commitments to tackle global warming, workers' rights, and cultural colonialism and appropriation.

What should be changed in the ethical attitudes and in museums' codes of ethics to prevent art activists' protests/interventions?

It becomes necessary to reframe museum ethics outside of the traditional and institutionalized canons. At least it can be agreed that more ethical museums should:

● Respect the visitors cultural differences and cultural diversity

● Reduce the cultural differences sharing knowledge and offering to anybody the possibility to learn and to freely access knowledge

● Respect the collections, their different meanings, and how and where these objects are displayed based on their origins of provenance

● Respect the museum's workers and employees

● Be truly transparent

● Avoid conflict of interest

● Chose carefully the provenience of their funding

● Be coherent with their mission and vocation

For example, in the United Kingdom, Ethics Committees both internal and external to the institutions exist as common organs that are in charge of verifying the institutions' ethical behavior, and help them in case of need, while offering ethical guidance and support. In order to avoid unethical conducts it might become necessary to tangibly constitute similar competent overarching bodies for each museum. By institutionalizing groups of experts in museums studies and ethics, who are able to supervise museums' actions and their efficiency on a case-by-case basis, it becomes possible to better investigate the grey areas of ethics, which are not covered by the "Codes," and to potentially avoid controversies that can damage the image, the status and the role of these institutions.

CONCLUSION

In teleological terms, museums seek to educate and to offer a social service for the community. When we have groups of activists and artist who target museums it means that there is a social response, which also means that there is a flaw in the ethical system itself.

In purely philosophical terms, if you set an objective you have to construct an entire system able to conduct you to the realization of it. "The end justifies the means" is an outdated concept. The end is licit only if the means to obtaining itself are.

By following Hans Jonas' theories about the "imperative of responsibility",[103] or the ones of Hannah Arendt's about "the action" in *Vita Activa*,[104] it emerges that all those ethical and/or political systems, that have as main axioms "equality" and "liberty", can't have as field of action (or as ethics) "the end justifies the means". The opportunity of using an absolute decisional power runs counter to the freedom and the autonomy of the other individuals.

Museums are institutions of power, and from that power descends responsibility. As Jonas stated, if anybody holds a power towards others, he/she must also have an obligation towards them. Hence, if anybody benefits from a power without fulfilling his/her own duties he/she will consequently be irresponsible. Shifting this assumption to museums, since they detain power and establish as their teleological aim the education of the public, every time they act unethically they contradict their own purpose of existence.

Like parents who are responsible for their children, governments and public institutions are responsible for their citizens; similarly, museums are responsible towards their audiences and the societies they serve. When the responsibility is dismissed or neglected in favor of other (private) interests, the relationship between the two parts is compromised because there is a loss of trust.

Despite all of this, how can we still trust museums?

In recognizing human fallibility and the burden of a rooted politico-economic system, we can understand ethical lacks and deficits in museums activities. However, our understanding must be followed by small but concrete actions: firstly, as museum professionals, but also as artists, as citizens and activists. We should protest against museums if they behave wrongly; we should renegotiate with them their policies and activities; we must help them in reconfiguring their role in society in order to let them substantiate our needs. The starting point of this process takes place in the field of ethics, where the responsibilities of each one are displayed. Here, we should constantly improve and supervise museums codes of ethics, ensuring that they are concretely observed. But it is most important to try to adapt and shape the contingent nature of life and its events to the series of normative prescriptions and professional rules of conduct that already exist.

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Contract, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/contractarianism-contemporary/.

Decolonize This Place, http://www.decolonizethisplace.org/.

Guerilla Girls, http://www.guerrillagirls.com/.

Guggenheim Bilbao, Human Resources. http://www.guggenheim-bilbao-corp.eus/en/hhrr/.

Gulf Labor Coalition, http://gulflabor.org/.

Human Rights Watch, https://www.hrw.org/.

The Illuminator, http://theilluminator.org/.

Liberate Tate, http://www.liberatetate.org.uk/.

MTL Collective, http://mtlcollective.org/MTL/home.html.

Occupy Museums, http://www.occupymuseums.org/.

Platform, https://platformlondon.org/.

<u>*Codes of Ethics*</u>

American Alliance of Museum. Code of Ethics for Museums

www.aam-us.org/.

American Association of Museum Directors

www.aamd.org.

Museum Association. Code of Ethics for Museum

www.museumsassociation.org/ethics/code-of-ethics.

ICOM. Code of Ethics for Museum

www.archives.icom.museum/ethics.html.

NOTES

[1] In this thesis the sense of "cultural capital" does not follow only the definition given by Pierre Bourdieu "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction" (Bourdieu, P. "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction" in Karabel, Jerome and Halsey, Albert Henry. *Power and Ideology in Education.* ed. by J. Karabel and A. H. Halsey. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. pp. 487-511. Bourdieu, Pierre and Passeron, Jean Claude. *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture.* Beverly Hills: Sage, 1977 and B), and further developed in the essay "The Forms of Capital" (Bourdieu, Pierre. "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. by J. C. Richardson. New York: Greenwood Press, 1985) and in the book "The Field of Cultural Production"(Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production.* ed. by R. Johnson. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); but it refers also directly to a capitalistic system, where art and cultural productions are embedded in the economical structure.

[2] "Museums must publicly commit to socially responsible policies and positions. As the art world is pulled further into the realm of ultra-luxury speculation, the social and ecological costs that this bears are distributed unevenly. In this moment of crisis and rupture worldwide there is no space for museums and cultural institutions to claim neutrality. Institutions, whether public or private, should not be [still chauvinist and sexist], trading on low wages and free labor or taking money from the oil industry." Press release from the event of *Decolonize this Museum*, hold at 55 Walker Street (Artists Space), October 11, 2016. Decolonizethisplace.org. [The parenthesis is mine].

[3] "We formed in January 2010 when Tate tried to censor a workshop on art and activism because of its sponsorship programme. They failed and we formed in direct resistance to this attempt to limit freedom of expression. Working creatively together, we are dedicated to taking creative disobedience against Tate until it drops its oil company funding" - it's how Liberate Tate presented itself at the end of the publication *Not if but when. Culture Beyond Oil.* ed. by Art No Oil, Liberate Tate and Platform. Lipman-Miliband Trust and Artists Project Earth: London, 2011. p. 86.

[4] The first intervention, *Dead in the Water*, took place in May 2010, during Tate Modern's 10th anniversary celebration *No Soul for Sale*. As the *Deepwater Horizon spill* was taking place in the Gulf of Mexico, dead fish and birds attached to black helium balloons were released into the Tate's Turbine Hall. The second performance, *License to Spill*, took place at Tate Summer Party the following June, when Tate was celebrating 20 years of their partnership with BP. This performance represented a symbolic act designed to create maximum disruption to the "celebration" and to focus the attention on the horrors of the Gulf of Mexico. "Liberate Tate spilled liters of molasses at the entrance to Tate Britain and two elegantly dressed ladies -members of the collective - inside the gallery [...] released another oil spill from beneath their bouffant dresses". In September 2010, *Sunflower*, took place in the Turbine Hall: "a oil painting squeezed from tubes of black paint, commenting on the greenwash behind BP's green and yellow sunflower logo and anticipated Ai Wei Wei's *Sunflower Seeds* installation that was to follow in the same location [...]." *Not If But When. Culture Beyond Oil.* ed. by Art No Oil, Liberate Tate and Platform. Lipman-Miliband Trust and Artists Project Earth: London, 2011. p. 45.
Among the numerous actions, there is also *Human Cost*, which happened in April 2011 in the Tate Britain, in occasion of the anniversary of the Gulf of Mexico disaster. In this performance a naked man lays on the ground while two members of the collective - dressed in black and with the face veiled - cover him with an oil-like substance.

[5] "[...] We do [...] embrace the visual identity of Tate, and that's because we do want to embrace the parts of Tate that we do love, the parts of Tate that we want to support and protect, which are around the publicness and the openness to debate that's potentially there in that public space. When we reinforce Tate's visual Identity by using its fonts and adapting its logos to ours, or just applying its logo guidelines to ours, then we reinforce the thing that we are trying to protect, and that's the public and the art, and all those things that we are preserving." said Mel Evans, one of the founder of the art collective, in an interview with for the magazine *Hyperallergic*, and her colleague Kevin Smith added after: "Apart from using the Tate aesthetic, the Tate logo, and those other aspects of Tate, there's also the cooptation of the Tate buildings themselves, because they are physically really incredible spaces, and they've just been really rich and giving to us in terms of different locations and different possibilities for us to engage with aspects of those different spaces with pop-up performances. [...] We do want to embrace the parts of Tate that we do love, the parts of Tate that we do want to support and protect, which are around the publicness and the openness to debate that's potentially there in that public space". Benjamin Sutton, "Liberate Tate Activist Look Back on Six Years of Fighting BP Sponsorship." in *Hyperallergic*, Interviews, April 4, 2016.
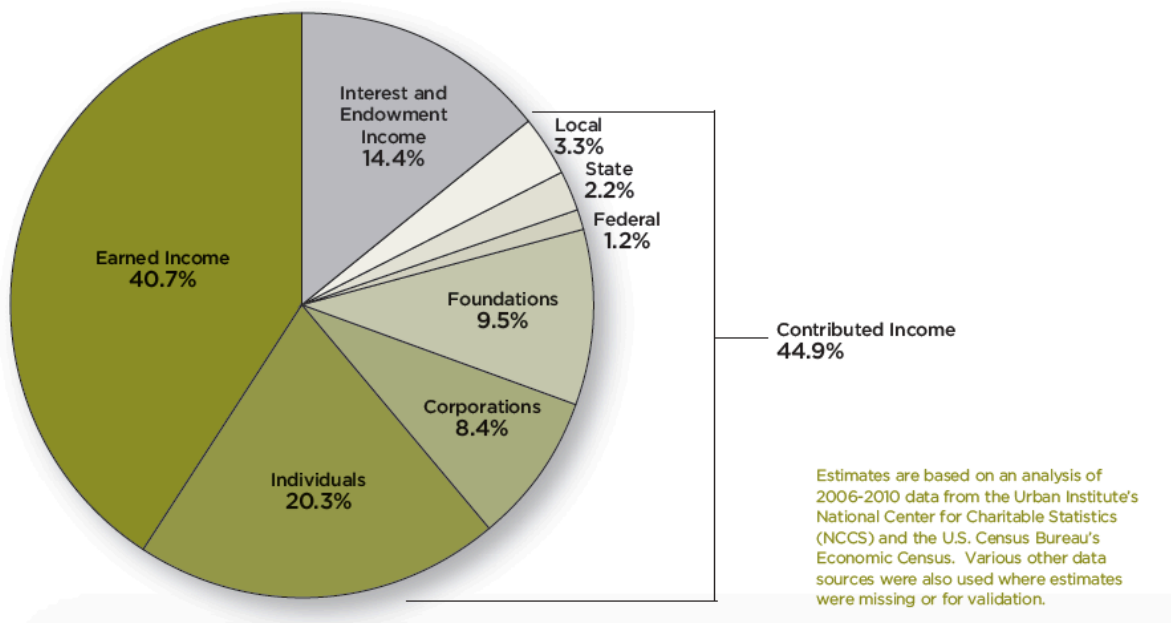http://hyperallergic.com/288254/liberate-tate-activists-look-back-on-six-years-of-fighting-bp-sponsorship/.

[6] "Through the Museums & Galleries Act 1992, and as set out in the Charities Act, Tate is an 'exempt charity'

regulated by statute and by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), a department of the UK government, not a the Charity Commission. Tate is a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB), funded in part by DCMS. A NDPB is a body, which, as Tate states: 'carries out functions on behalf of the government department that sponsors it, but is administered independently. It is therefore able to focus entirely on its own objectives and make unbiased recommendations and decisions'. *Not If But When. Culture Beyond Oil.* ed. by Art No Oil, Liberate Tate and Platform. Lipman-Miliband Trust and Artists Project Earth: London, 2011. p.31

[7] The infrastructure for art and culture in the United States of America is based on three broad categories of art funding: direct public funding (NEA, state, regional, and local arts agencies), other public funding direct and indirect (various federal departments and agencies), private sector contributions (individuals; foundations; corporations). The pie chart below shows how these funding are distributed:

Revenue Sources of Not-For-Profit Performing Arts Groups and Museums in the U.S.

Interest and Endowment Income 14.4%
Local 3.3%
State 2.2%
Federal 1.2%
Earned Income 40.7%
Foundations 9.5%
Contributed Income 44.9%
Corporations 8.4%
Individuals 20.3%

Estimates are based on an analysis of 2006-2010 data from the Urban Institute's National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS) and the U.S. Census Bureau's Economic Census. Various other data sources were also used where estimates were missing or for validation.

As the graphic shows, the arts institutions and museums receive a minimum percentage of resources from government funding. This underlines how the European state-led system differs completely from the American system, which is largely driven by private funding. This means that, in moments of crisis for the art world where the government in charge does not and cannot financially support cultural institutions, museums, and the like (such as the current Trump administration's planned cut to the National Endowment for the Arts), the role played by the private sector and taxpayers' money become vital interests.

That being said, Liberate Tate, as well as many other collectives, protest against private sponsorships and government cuts because they make a distinction between where the money is coming from. It is always important to ask where the money comes from, because this question is the origin of every ethical concern.

Kaplan, Isaac. "Who Stands to Lose the Most if the NEA is Eliminated?" in *Artsy Editorial*, January 31st, 2017.https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-stands-lose-nea-eliminated. Kaplan, Isaac. "What NEA Supporters Can Learn from the Republicans Who Tried to Destroy It'" in *Artsy Editorial*, February 22, 2017. https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-nea-supporters-learn-republicans-destroy.

[8] *Platform* is a team of environmentalists, artists, human rights campaigners, educationalists and community activists. They create projects driven by the need for social and ecological justice. "Platform was formed in 1983 as a place for artists and activists to act together on social and environmental issues. While the group has evolved we continue to hold to our original purpose. We have experimented with new methods and tactics and engaged in artistic and political movements over the many years, to deepen the expression of our core values." http://platformlondon.org/about-us/history/.

"Since 1995, a substantial portion of our work has focused on UK oil and gas companies and their catastrophic impacts on communities and ecosystems around the world. Projects looking at wider issue around social and ecological justice have been established in parallel." *Not If But When. Culture Beyond Oil.* ed. by Art No Oil, Liberate Tate and Platform. Lipman-Miliband Trust and Artists Project Earth: London, 2011. p. 44.

[9] "*Art No Oil* is a project of activist group Rising Tide UK. It aims to encourage artists [...] to create work that explores the damage that companies like BP and Shell are doing to the planet, and the role art can play in counteracting that damage. Since 2004 it has collected the work of hundreds of artists to form the Art Not Oil and Shell's Wild Lie collections, exhibited in galleries all around the UK. It also produced the Art No Oil Diary." *Not If But When. Culture Beyond Oil.* ed. by Art No Oil, Liberate Tate and Platform. Lipman-Miliband Trust and Artists Project Earth: London, 2011. p. 44.
http://www.artnotoil.org.uk.

[10] "This may have been how it was in the Renaissance, but is it something we want to emulate now? Contemporary artists and arts organizations have the choice of a plethora of patronage options and ethics or constraints that go with each of them, and are able to make informed choices about the best way preserve the integrity of their practice." Bayley, Stephen. "Ignore the protests against BP at the Tate. Oil and art get along fine. [Anti-BP protesters at the Tate Britain failed to see that industrial riches have always been partner to artistic endeavor.]" in *The Telegraph*, July 2nd, 2010.
http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/7867302/Ignore-the-protests-against-BP-at-the-Tate.-Oil-and-art-get-along-fine.html.

[11] "Museum have a responsibility as place where the community of humankind can meet, reinforce their values, find recognition of their past accomplishments, and envision their future." Edson, G. Museum Ethics in Practice". Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2017. p. 25.

[12] "On 7 July 2012 Liberate Tate installed a 16.5 meters, one and a half tonne wind turbine blade in Tate Modern's Turbine Hall in a guerrilla performance by over 100 members of the art collective. The artwork, called *The Gift*, was submitted to be part of Tate's permanent collection as a gift to the nation 'given for the benefit of the public' under the provisions of the Museums and Galleries Act 1992, the Act from which Tate's mission is drawn."
http://www.liberatetate.org.uk/performances/the-gift/.

[13] "*Hidden Figures* was a porous, unrehearsed performance open to everyone. Explore the black square and embody your opposition to BP's sponsorship of Tate by manifesting a hidden figure. Join a team to plot your move. We can't help but look at Malevich's Black Square with the knowledge that Russia was on the verge of revolution when this eerie object was created. It is an image full of foreboding and menace, as if something mighty is about to happen – as if a world is about to end. Malevich's Black Square was a blank slate, beyond representations of nature. Hidden Figures symbolizes the black stain oil sponsorship makes on cultural institutions; the thick black redaction over the BP sum that Tate won't reveal; the veil that Liberate Tate performers have worn; the figurative shapes these performers are making with their bodies. *Hidden Figures* made reference to Tate's refusal to disclose information about its controversial sponsorship relationship with BP. In April 2014, the UK's Information Commissioner ruled that Tate was breaking information law by refusing to remove a series of black squares redacting information about the sponsorship deal in meeting minutes of Tate's Ethics Committee and Board of Trustees. Tate appeared before the Information Tribunal on 18 September to appeal the ruling that it must remove redactions from its governing body minutes. To mark the occasion, on 6 September, Liberate Tate reinterpreted Kazimir Malevich's iconic 'Black Square' painting, which was on display at the time as part of the Malevich exhibition at Tate Modern."
http://www.liberatetate.org.uk/performances/hidden-figures-2014/.

[14] "*Time Piece* is a durational performance using words, bodies, charcoal and sustenance. The performance takes place from High Tide on 13.06.15 (11:53am) until High Tide on 14.06.15 (12:55 pm). A textual intervention, Time Piece is a tide of stories and narratives flowing in waves up the slope of Tate Modern's Turbine Hall. The texts are fictional and factual responses to art, activism, climate change and the oil industry. The performance explores lunar time, tidal time, ecological time, geological time and all the ways in which we are running out of time: from climate change to gallery opening hours; from the anthropocene to the beginning of the end of oil sponsorship of the arts. Liberate Tate creates unsanctioned live art inside Tate spaces to free Tate from BP. In 2015, it was revealed that BP sponsorship is worth less than half a percentage of Tate annual spending, and is around forty times less than the sum donated by Tate Members last year. BP's oil spills are ecological iconoclasms. The company's presence in galleries and museums is a stain on our culture. When will BP's time be up at Tate? As the age of oil draws to a close and the world looks towards the Paris Climate Summit to tackle climate change, Tate must step into the future and drop

BP."
http://www.liberatetate.org.uk/performances/time-piece/.

[15] "Climate change is permanent; so are tattoos. This piece explores lasting damage, scarring, and healing. Numbers are written on the body, brands are written on the gallery and, as carbon is released into the atmosphere, damage is written on the planet. This is an unsanctioned performance by Liberate Tate in defiance of BP's sponsorship of Tate. The performers receive tattoos in the form of a number – the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere expressed as parts per million (ppm), in the year of their birth. A performer born in 1962 (318 ppm) compares the changes they've seen with a performer born in 1993 (357 ppm). Being born in the same year has a new meaning – living through the same increase in carbon dioxide. In response to climate change, this performance embodies the revisions being inscribed on our planet in an intimate, personal way. Each tattoo echoes the engraving act by the oil sponsor in transforming the body of the gallery. There is a rich history of tattoos in art and protest, but protest tattoos as performance intervention in a gallery space is unprecedented. In the run up to the international climate talks in Paris, the artists invite Tate to reconsider their sponsorship deal with BP, and to begin to erase this scar from their skin." http://www.liberatetate.org.uk/birthmark/.

[16] http://gulflabor.org/.

[17] "Human Rights Watch is a nonprofit, nongovernmental human rights organization. [...] Its staff consists of human rights professionals including country experts, lawyers, journalists, and academics of diverse backgrounds and nationalities. Established in 1978, Human Rights Watch is known for its accurate fact-finding, impartial reporting, effective use of media, and targeted advocacy, often in partnership with local human rights groups. Each year, Human Rights Watch publishes more than 100 reports and briefings on human rights conditions in some 90 countries, generating extensive coverage in local and international media. With the leverage this brings, Human Rights Watch meets with governments, the United Nations, regional groups like the African Union and the European Union, financial institutions, and corporations to press for changes in policy and practice that promote human rights and justice around the world." https://www.hrw.org/.

[18] The *kafala* system is a system to monitor migrant-workers. The system requires unskilled laborers to have an in-country sponsor, usually the construction companies which are responsible for their visa and legal status. This practice is considered the "modern-day slavery." Most of the migrants come from South or Southeast Asia; they arrive in debt due to recruitment and transit fees in order to reach their "Gulf dream," the promise of a job that can allow them to sustain their families in their home countries.

[19] Typically, the sponsoring employers attract workers with promises of job, but when the migrants arrive, they take their passports, place them in substandard labor camps, force them to terrible working and living conditions, pay them less that what they have promised, and punish and deport them in instances of protest or rebellion.

[20] Priyanka Motaparthy, "Understanding Kafala: An Archaic Law at Cross Purposes with Modern Development," in *Migrant-rights.org*, March 11, 2015, http://tinyurl.com/lqjytvf.

[21] Ross, Andrew. *The Gulf: High Culture/Hard Labor*. ed. by A. Ross. New York and London: OR Books, 2015. pp. 11-12.

[22] "The Idea of the Gulf Labor Coalition emerged from a 2010 conference (*Home Works Forum 5*) hosted by Ashkal Alwan, the Lebanese Association for Plastic Arts. The New York-based Lebanese artist and educator Walid Raad organized a panel to discuss Saadiyat Island, where Abu Dhabi's Tourism and Development Corporation (TDIC) was planning the mother of all luxury property developments. [...] Raad had invited me to speak on his Home Works panel about my experience at New York University (NYU), where through the faculty-student Coalition for Fair Labor, we had been pressing our administration to ensure fair labor standards in the construction of the Abu Dhabi Campus (NYUAD) in Saadiyat Island. [...]. When NYU, Guggenheim, and Louvre plans were announced, Human Rights Watch had written to the leaders of each institution, advising them to take steps to guarantee improvements in worker conditions on their constructions projects. None of the three responded. [...] After Saadiyat panel took place in Beirut, a few of attendees (Walid Raad, Emily Jacir, Rene Gabri, Ayreen Anastas, Beth Stryker, and myself) decided to test the waters for a Guggenheim campaign. As with NYU, the goal would be to raise labor standards and practices by putting public pressure on an high profile brand name. [...] The museum had already approached galleries with a view of acquiring works for its collection, and so the opportunity raises the issue by blocking permission for the sales. Several artists agree to do so [...].A letter signed by 43 artist was sent to the Guggenheim in June 2010." Ross, Andrew. *The Gulf: High Culture/Hard Labor*. ed. by A. Ross. New York and London: OR Books, 2015. pp. 13-17.

Members of the Gulf Labor Coalition's organizing committee include Haig Aivazian, Ayreen Anastas, Doug

Ashford, Doris Bittar, Sam Durant, Rene Gabri, Hans Haacke, Guy Mannes-Abbott, Michael Rakowitz, Walid Raad, Andrew Ross, Gregory Sholette, Ashok Sukumaran, Shaina Anand, Mariam Ghani, Naeem Mohaiemen, Tania Bruguera, Rene Gabri, Nitasha Dhillon, Amin Husain, Paula Chakravartty, and Noah Fischer. Gulf Labor includes affiliated offshoot groups including G.U.L.F. (Gulf Ultra Luxury Faction), Occupy Museums, and Who Builds Your Museum?

[23] The NYU Fair Labor Coalition is a faculty-student alliance that advocates high labor standards for employees of NYU and promotes solidarity between workers. Founded when NYU announced the opening of a new campus in Abu Dhabi, the Coalition has played a pivotal role in pushing for labor standards in the construction on NYUAD. Human Rights Watch, The Guardian, and Gulf Labor Coalition have done subsequent independent investigations.

[24] From the Mission of Statement written for the Bilbao's site. "To collect, preserve, and research modern and contemporary art, and to present it from multiple perspectives within the context of the History of Art, addressing a broad, diverse audience, so as to contribute to the knowledge and enjoyment of art and the values that it represents, within a unique architectural landmark, as an essential part of the Guggenheim network, and a symbol of the vitality of the Basque Country." *Mission of Statement*, Guggenheim Bilbao Corporate.
http://www.guggenheim-bilbao-corp.eus/en/bilbao-guggenheim/mission-vision-values/.

[25] In the American Alliance of Museums' website is it possible to find a definition of "what are Ethics" and a "Code of Ethics for Museums" adopted in 1991 and amended in 2000. http://www.aam-us.org/resources/ethics-standards-and-best-practices/ethics, http://aam-us.org/resources/ethics-standards-and-best-practices/code-of-ethics. Since a museum becomes member of the American Alliance of Museums, if it does not respect the ethical standards required, it may be expelled from the professional organization for having violated ethical principles. However, this is rather a threat than a real action, and it has often a little influence on the offending institution. Edson, G. *Museum Ethics in Practice*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2017.

[26] Viñas, S. R. "Comienza la huelga de los educatores del Guggenheim," in *El Mundo*, September 8, 2016. http://www.elmundo.es/pais-vasco/2016/08/09/57a9c2cb468aebb7308b458b.html.
Domingo-Aldama, F. "Huelga y colas en el Guggenheim. La afluencia de turistas coincide con el premier día de huelga de los educadores," in *El Pais*, August 9, 2016.
http://ccaa.elpais.com/ccaa/2016/08/09/paisvasco/1470742139_699618.html.

[27] Ross, A. *The Gulf: High Culture/Hard Labor*. New York and London: OR Books, 2015. p. 17.

[28] All these artworks, written texts and actions were published in the volume edited by Andrew Ross.
Ross, A. *The Gulf: High Culture/Hard Labor*. ed. by . Ross. New York and London: OR Books, 2015. pp. 188-304.

[29] MTL (Movement of Territorial Liberation) collective is a collaboration that combines research, aesthetics and organizing in its practice. Founded by Nitasha Dhillon and Amin Husain, MTL spread through video, publication and other media histories and reports of oppression and liberation. "MTL talks to people about life, liberation and their realities, documenting the roads and geographies that lead to conversation."
http://mtlcollective.org/MTL/about.html.

[30] Week #10. *NO DEBT IS AN ISLAND*. Andrew Ross and MTL (Nitasha Dhillon and Amin Husain):
"A high school graduate with an offer from a prestigious art institute dreams of artworld renown and takes out loans that will burden her for decades. Her brother is enrolled at NYU, national leader in student debt–the university is a growth machine, feeding off tuition and cheap credit to expand at home and overseas. In Bangladesh, the eldest son of a heavily indebted family dreams of Gulf riches, and borrows money to pay his recruitment and transit fees for passage to the UAE. There, on the "Island of Happiness," Abu Dhabi's showpiece real estate venture, his bonded labor is now linked to the "indenture" of the American students. Their respective financial obligations are connected to, and amplified by, Abu Dhabi's over-leveraged boom economy, which rests on an ever-growing carbon debt. No Debt Is An Island traces the chain of debt that sustains the fortunes of the international art market, the global aspirations of Anglophone higher education, and the ascent of the Gulf petroleum states. BREAK THE CHAINS: Make the links. Follow the money. Do the research. Walk the talk. Pressure the brands. Raise the bar. Break the chain (and keep the oil in the soil). From NYU to the Guggenheim – February 17 – 21st."
http://gulflabor.org/2013/week-10-no-debt-is-an-island-andrew-ross-and-mtl-nitasha-dhillon-and-amin-husain/.

[31] The second occupation included a spectacular drop of thousands of petro-dollar, while

[32] The new set of proposal included "the establishment of a Bonus and Debt Settlement Fund to give each Guggenheim Abu Dhabi worker an additional 2,000 USD, the average amount of the recruitment debt burden in the UAE; a living wage for workers in Abu Dhabi to help to compensate for severe wage depression and pay inequalities; and freedom to associate and collectively address grievances, to help protect against the growing cycle

of intimidation, imprisonment, and deportation." Ross, A. (2015) p. 22.

[33] Since Liberate Tate has shown that co-working with the museum's staff is a good strategy that allows activists of better accomplish their goals, "solidarity messages were prepared specifically for the security guards, who were being paid a mere $11 an hour, and thousand of pamphlets were circulated for the purpose of public education."

[34] Ross. A. (2015). p. 23.

[35] There is a common terminological confusion between activist art and political art. Clearly, activist and political art are both engaged with political issues and concerns, but their definitions differ as well as the domain of the activist action and of the political action. In the catalogue for the 1984 exhibition titled *Art & Ideology*, held at the New Museum in New York, the feminist art critic/curator Lucy Lippard, states that: "'Political' art tends to be socially concerned and "activist" art tends to be socially involved." (Lippard, L. R., " Give and Take: Ideology in the Art of Suzanne Lacy and Jerry Kearns" in the catalog for the exhibition: *Art & Ideology* - New York, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 198 - p. 29.) Political art designates art that explores a political subject matter, often resulting in the production of "objects/artifacts," and is not made in order to involve political actions. Moreover, political artwork reflects the perspective and the creativity of an individual artist, while art activism is the result of a collaborative process. Political art has an institutional appropriateness; it is usually shown, displayed and collected by art institutions. Art activism is essentially ephemeral, based on the "here and now": actions, performances, sit-ins, dialogues and debates constitute it. Only recently have museums started to display and show protest art.

[36] Groys, B., "On Art Activism," in *e-flux journal*, June (2014).

[37] With their actions and interventions, art activists aim to inform the people and to raise their awareness about specific topics or issues in order to generate a widespread and well-informed consensus. By contrast, propaganda is an action that tends to influence public opinion. Propaganda is an attempt to systematically and deliberately shape perceptions, to manipulate consciousness and to direct people's behaviors in order to obtain certain results. While propaganda is traditionally associated with totalitarian regimes or demagogic governments that use art as tool of mass communication and political legitimacy, art activism use art, imagination, and creativity to keep the people informed and active. For this reason, art activism talks to individuals and not to the masses, because it doesn't want to subjugate, but aims instead to create dynamic and spontaneous participation.

[38] Jürgen Habermas theorized the "discourse ethics" (Diskursethik) where the structure of ethics of an ideal dialogic situation becomes the foundation for the preliminary condition of the "discourse." During the *Linguistic Turn* that had characterized the 70's, the subject paradigm is transformed into a intersubjective paradigm (the communication consciousness): it is the shift from a solitary subject to the idea of a public subject, which is an interpersonal linguistic subject. He then conceives the public sphere as the social realm in which public opinion can be formed and made accessible to all. The engagement within the public sphere does not depend on class positions and the connections between the people but is formed through a mutual will to take part in matters that have a general interest. The public sphere, according to Habermas*, is a product of democracy.* The public discourse becomes the model of the communicative action (Habermas, Jürgen. *The Theory of Communicative Action.* trans. by Thomas McCharty. Cambridge, UK: Beacon Press, 1984) that Habermas considers in opposition of the instrumetalized action. The communicative action identifies the possibility of a social cohesion, which is not coercive, but based on the mutual intersubjective recognition. Subsequently, Habermas develops the idea of deliberative democracy, which is a democratic process where the citizens' will is expressed directly, - through a deliberative process - instead of being mediated by the election of delegates or spokesmen. (Habermas, Jürgen. *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy.* trans. by William Rehg. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).

[39] To some extent, this can be seen as the passing over of the Kantian notion of "genius". For Kant, artistic inspiration and the creative act come to individuals, not to groups. Kant, I. *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, Volumer 5, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1902. [Italian translation: *Critica del giudizio*, a cura di A. Bosi, Torino, Utet, ed. 1993, §§ 44-46, 49, pp. 278-281; 286-288.]

[40] Translating Marshall McLuhan's famous statement "The medium is the message", meaning that the forms of the medium itself embeds the message it wants to transmit or communicate, creating a symbiotic relationship by which the medium influence how the message is perceived. McLuhan, Marshall. *The Medium is the Message*. London: Penguin Books, 1967.

[41] In reference to the exhibition entitled "Disobedient Objects, held at the Victoria and Albert Museum of London in 2014, and curated by Catherine Flood and Gavin Grindon.

[42] Nevertheless, throughout history, art activism has shown a range of different practices and strategies that do not

necessarily imply the renunciation of the artist's individualistic autonomy, nor do they emphasize the artist as a main and recognized character in the creative process. There are cases of feminist artists who have realized performances in public spaces, such as Adrian Piper with the series *Catalysis* (1970-71) or Suzanne Lacy and Leslie Labowitz with *Three Weeks in May* (1977) where their personalities are clear and evident. There are cases, such that of Martha Rosler who, behind the scenes, transformed Dia Art Foundation in New York into a base for allowing homeless people to create their own organization, or the Guerrilla Girls who still continue to work as an anonymous collective.

[43] In "The Author as Producer" (1934) Walter Benjamin broadly presents a diagnosis of the relation between artistic production and politics. He argues that there is a necessary connection between the techniques used in the production of a work of art and its political orientation and, therefore, he sustains the impossibility of a disinterested, autonomous or non-political artwork. Benjamin, W., "The author as a producer," (1934) in *New Left Review*, issue 62, July-August 1970.

[44] Guided by the aforementioned works of Benjamin, Hal Foster makes his analysis of the relationship between art and politics. He claims that the site of political action and political transformation is always situated elsewhere, into the "other", which is usually a repressed subject (modern artist>proletariat, post-modern artist> postcolonial/the subaltern). This perception is distorted, because the artist positions himself/herself always in a condition of superiority. He/she observes the "other" with an ethnographic eye. However, he concludes his argument recognizing a certain value in the collaboration between artist and communities, because this collaboration can show suppressed elements and histories. Foster, Hal. "The artist as an Ethnographer," in *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, Cambridge (MA): MIT Press, 1996. p. 171-204.

[45] In a pamphlet published and distributed by the art activist collective MTL, under the entry "the artist as organizer" it states: "*We are meeting regularly*. In light of the global economic disaster, we know we have the chance to push things further in the United States. The crisis has produced an opportunity. We are privileged to be in New York. We carry our cameras and our notebooks to document things, but we end up participating. *The art we had imagined making for so long is starting to happen in real life*. We do not have time to agonize about representation. We are making images, writing texts, having conversations, and developing relationships out of necessity and urgency. *Aesthetics, research*, *organizing—it is all coming together in the creation of a new public space* in the heart of the empire. *It embodies imagination with implications on the ground.*" Pamphlet distributed at Artists Space, Walker 55, NYC, for the three month residency called *Decolonize this Place*. #Occupywallst. The pamphlet has been published and distributed by the art collective MTL+. [The italics are mine]

[46] Participatory art has its origins in the Futurist and Dada performances of the early twentieth century, which were designed to provoke and scandalize the public. In the late 1950s the artist Allan Kaprow devised performances called *Happenings*, in which he would coerce the audience into participating in the experience. Recently, different authors have situated the origins of these participatory practices in diverse contexts: Bishop (Bishop, C. *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. London: Verso, 2012) in the European and Latin American avant-gardes, Tom Finkelpearl (Finkelpearl, T. *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2013) in the context of feminism and the civil rights movement of the Sixties, Kester (2011) in a more global context, Nicolas Bourriaud (Bourriaud, N. *Relational Aesthetics*. Dijon, France: Presses du Réel, 2002) in a group of artists, and Shannon Jackson (Jackson, S. *Social Works. Performing art, Supporting Publics*, 2011) in relation to performance and theatre innovations of the twentieth-century.

[47] In the 1990s participatory practices have been represented by a new generation of artists identified under the heading of relational art or *Relational Aesthetics*. Relational Aesthetics is a term coined by the French curator Nicolas Bourriaud to describe a series of open-ended art practices, concerned with the network of human relations and the social context in which such relations develop. Relational art has also stressed the notion of artworks as gifts, taking multiple forms, such as meals, meetings, parties, games, discussion platforms and other types of social events. In this context the emphasis is on the use of the artwork. Art is seen as information exchanged between the artist and the viewer, and relies on the responses of the viewer to make it relational. Relational aesthetics risks remaining closed into the logic of an elitist exchange that happens only between the artist and a limited number of spectators, where the artwork is simply used as a medium or as device that promotes and/or establishes this relationship. Bourriaud, N. *Relational Aesthetics*. Dijon, France: Presses du Réel, 2002. pp. 11-47.

[48] *Social practice,* or *socially engaged practice,* can be considered as a stream of participatory art that tends to display a strong sociological, and sometimes political, bent. These practices often draw attention to social ills and

conditions, or they realize projects that are meant to incite empowerment or change in a specific community. Social practice can include any art form, which involves people and communities in debate, collaboration or social interaction. This can often be organized as the result of an outreach or education program, but many independent artists also use it within their work. The term new genre public art, coined by Suzanne Lacy, is also a form of socially engaged practice. Lacy, S. (1996).

The participatory element of socially engaged practice is key, with the artworks created often holding equal or less importance to the collaborative act of creating them. As Tom Finkelpearl outlines in his book *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation,* social practice is 'art that's socially engaged, where the social interaction is at some level the art. Finkelpearl, T. (2013).

[49] *Dialogical art* is a term used by the art critic Grant Kester to describe the active role of the dialogue in such socially engaged art. They can also involve collaboration with non-art agencies, such as social-inclusion organizations, local authorities, and community development groups. Kester, G., Conversation Pieces: The Role of Dialogue in Socially Engaged Art." in Z. Kocur and S. Leung. *Theory in Contemporary Art Since 1985*. ed. by Zoya Kocur and Simon Leung. Oxford: Blackwell, 2005. pp. 76-100.

[50] "This desire to activate the audience in participatory art is at the same time a drive to emancipate it from a state of alienation induced by the dominant ideological order - be this consumer capitalism, totalitarian socialism, or military dictatorship." Bishop, C. (2012) p. 275.

[51] However, these art projects cannot be compared to actual social projects that take place externally from the art realm because they do not necessarily affect the socio-political realm. Usually, these projects remain confined within the boundaries of the art world. Bishop, C. (2012).

[52] The interest in collectivity, collaboration, and direct engagement with the communities has been circumscribed in the term *social turn*, coined by Bishop in her essay *The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents* – later published as the first chapter of the book *Artificial Hells* (2012). Art that operates under the macro-category of *social turn* is usually site-specific because it locates itself in the context of preexisting communities, where the aim is to establish an interdisciplinary network of its own.

These practices tend to happen outside museums and galleries, because most of the art produced is collaborative and focused on constructive social change, therefore it is rarely commerciable/commodifiable. They largely take place outside of institutional sites because the actions are intentionally situated at the intersection of ethics and aesthetics. Although this relation between ethics and aesthetics represents a common ground for art activism, activist practices include a third sphere which plays a crucial role: politics.

[53] "I don't know what", is an intangible quality, that makes something distinctive and attractive. Related to an artworks is that pleasant aesthetic quality that it is hard to describe. D'angelo, P. and Velotti, S., *Il non so che. Storia di una estetica*, (1997).

[54] The position promoted during the 1940s-1960s by the art historian Clement Greenberg, argues that art is independent of any specific function except to be art. Greenberg claimed that art is an autonomous entity, divorced from external context and criteria, and it should be experienced before questioning its relationship with its context, history or ethics. Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting,' in *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 4, *Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1969*. Edited by John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

[55] Jacques Rancière is a French philosopher who became prominent as a structuralist Marxist (*Lire Le Capital* (1967) - *Reading the Capital*). The central theme in Rancière's educational and political theories is radical equality (*Le Maître ignorant: cinq leçons sur l'émancipation intellectuelle* (1987) - *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*). Since the 1990's his work has increasingly focused on aesthetics. In the early 2000's, he becomes a crucial point of reference for art criticism, because of his original theories about the *aesthetic* dimension of politics and the *political* dimension of aesthetics. His theories are extremely relevant to the discussion about activist practice, because the overlapping of aesthetics and politics introduces concepts of political and social change in the artistic sphere. (*Partage du sensible: esthétique et politique* (2000) - *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, and *Le Spectateur émancipé* (2008) - *The Emancipated Spectator*).

[56] "Rather than considering the *work of art* to be autonomous, he [Rancière] draws attention to the autonomy of our experience in relation to art." Bishop, C. (2012). p. 27.

[57] Bishop, C. (2012). p. 27.

[58] "The distribution of the sensible reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed. [...] It defines what are both visible and not in a common space, endowed with a common language, etc. There is thus an 'aesthetics' at the core of politics

that has nothing to do with Benjamin's discussion of the 'aestheticization of politics' specific to the 'age of the masses' [...]. It is a delimitation of space and time, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise that simultaneously determine the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time." Rancière, J. *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, translated by Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004). pp. 12-13.

[59] Rancière insists on a "community of equals", because "Equality is actually the condition required for being able to think politics." Rancière, J. (2004), p. 52. The concept of equality holds important implications for understanding and acting in both spheres, the aesthetic and the political, and it is strictly connected with the equal relationship between artist and audience. Rancière's conclusion appear to echo Joseph Beuys's famous utopian proclamation: "Jedermann ist ein Künstler"(Everyone is an artist), when he claims that "We can thus dream of a society of the emancipated that would be a society of artists." Rancière, J. *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lesson in Intellectual Emancipation*, translated by Kirstin Ross (Stanford, Cal.: University of Stanford, 1991). p. 65.

[60] The aesthetic experience is seen as human struggle because it is a process of emancipation. This emancipation passes naturally through a process of self-determination - individual and collective at the same time - that happens within the political sphere. Consequently, the politics becomes the place where a collective subject takes shape sharing common space and common sense.

[61] "In the writing of Kant, Schiller, Hutcheson, and Shaftesbury, aesthetics is linked with the social and the political through its function as a mediating discourse between subject and object, between the somatic and the rational, and between the individual and the social (e.g. Shaftesbury's *sensus communis* or Kant's *Gemeinsinn*)." Kester, G. (1998). p. 8.

[62] Bishop, C. (2012). p. 279.

[63] "In this sense activist art appeared caught in a paradox between a desire to integrate art practice back into society without regard to the claims of art discourse or history, and a contradictory need to claim the inheritance of the most rigorous modernist art movements of the Twentieth Century." Sholette, G., "News From Nowhere: Activist Art and After, a Report from New York City." in *Third Text*, Vol 13, 1998, issue 45, pp. 45-62.

[64] In 1987 a group of artists and activists joined together forming the so-called AIDS coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP), to take on the AIDS issue. Through group events, demonstrations and a massive use of advertising strategies, ACT UP wanted to raise awareness about the epidemic diffusion and the lack of interest by the U.S government. ACT UP has carried acts of civil disobedience using media that were able to catch the attention of the masses. Successively, others groups called Gran Fury and the Silence=Death joined ACT UP disseminating the message with posters and stickers.

[65] Art and Ideology, Exhibition at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York City. February 4 March 18, 1984. New Museum Digital Archive.
http://archive.newmuseum.org/index.php/Detail/Occurrence/Show/occurrence_id/77.

[66] Lippard, L. R. (1984).

[67] Sholette, G. (1998). p. 61.

[68] "Banner drops, giant puppets, street stencils, agitation graphics, protest posters, cardboard signs, demonstration flags and pendants, comic book zones, anti-capitalist graffiti and public performances: the world got a solid glimpse of social movement culture during mainstream media coverage of the so-called 1999 Battle for Seattle and subsequent anti-globalization demonstrations, and then again in 2003 during unprecedented world-wide anti-Iraq war demonstrations, which were followed of course by the 2011 Occupy Movement, the 2014 People's Climate March, and continues today with Black Lives Matter." Sholette, G., "Merciless Aesthetic: Activist Art as the Return of Institutional Critique. A Response to Boris Groys." in *Field*, issue # 04.
http://field-journal.com/issue-4/merciless-aesthetic-activist-art-as-the-return-of-institutional-critique-a-response-to-boris-groys.

[69] Decolonize This Place is a project that developed in the fall of 2016 at Artists Space, a non-profit organization located at 55 Walker Street, New York. This project has been defined as a platform action-oriented around indigenous struggle, black liberation, Free Palestine, global wage workers and de-gentrification. On October 10th, 2016 the artists activist from Decolonize This Place in collaboration with a number of community groups, including NYC Stands with Standing Rock, organized an Anti- Columbus Day tour at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York, to highlight the history of white supremacy and colonialism in the institution's history and displays. Art activists demanded three major changes from the museum and the City of New York:

modify exhibits related to indigenous peoples, return various indigenous artifacts to the descendants, remove the Roosevelt Statue, and rename Columbus Day as Indigenous Day. The tour was directly followed by an action around the Theodore Roosevelt statue - located in front of the museum's main entrance - that was covered by the activists with a military parachute. According to a statement issued by Decolonize This Place, the Roosevelt statue (which represents the American president on horseback, with a Native American man and a black man on either side) is a perfect representation of white supremacy and imperialism, which Theodore Roosevelt himself espoused and promoted and this is disrespectful to all African and Native Americans who pass it on entering the museum.

[70] Artists associated with institutional critique since the 1960s included Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke, Michael Asher, John Knight (artist), Christopher D'Arcangelo, Robert Smithson, Dan Graham, Mierle Laderman Ukeles and Martha Rosler. A second generation of artists active since the 1980s includes Andrea Fraser, Louise Lawler, Antoni Muntadas, Fred Wilson, Renée Green, Christian Philipp Müller, Aaron Flint Jamison, and Mark Dion. This second wave of institutional critique expanded its framework including also the artist's role (the subject performing the critique) as institutionalized, as well as an investigation into other institutional spaces (and practices) besides the art space. More recently, Matthieu Laurette, Graham Harwood, Carey Young, Tameka Norris may considered a third way of institutional critique. During the 1990s it became a fashion for institutional criticisms to be held by curators and directors, within art galleries and museums, thereby changing the perspective of the critic itself, making the institution not only the problem but also the solution.

[71] Foucault, Michel. T*he Order of Things: An Archaeology of Human Sciences*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.

[72] *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century*, *1914–1991* is a book by Eric Hobsbawm, published in 1994. Hobsbawm, Eric. *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991*. London: Penguin Books, 1994.

[73] "We are witnessing an international explosion of direct social art interventions seeking to improve the actual material conditions of laborers, migrants, stateless people, prisoners, people of color, the homeless, interns and unpaid art laborers, as well as efforts to protect the natural environment against ruin. Few of these concerns are directly relevant to high culture's own institutional problems." Sholette, G., in *Field*. (2016).

[74] " Museums in the United States are grounded in the tradition of public service. They are organized as public trusts, holding their collections and information as a benefit for those they were established to serve. Members of their governing authority, employees and volunteers are committed to the interests of these beneficiaries." http://www.aam-us.org/resources/ethics-standards-and-best-practices/code-of-ethics.

[75] The growing demand of rules and deontological codes, able to determine limits and conditions of human action in specific contexts, has substituted weakened traditional powers (such as political, philosophical and religious ideologies that dictated the social norms before). Consequently, the spread of deontological codes demonstrates how moral education in the professions has become more frequent and in certain cases strictly necessary (for example, in legal or medical professions). However, it is important to recognize that human nature is variable and its moral values are contingent; for this reason practical ethics can offer a theoretical synthesis and a practical solution between the idea of a universal moral behavior and the specificity of each particular situation.

[76] The social or political contract is a philosophical and political concept that addresses the origin of the society and the legitimacy of the State over the individuals. The modern contract has been theorized in the XVII and XVIII century under the "school of Natural Law." Through this contract individuals have consented to exit from the "state of nature" - where they are all equals and free, but without any sort of guarantee - and to form a "civil society" voluntary submitting themselves to the authority of government (whether monarchy or parliamentary). For Thomas Hobbes (Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. London: 1651) the renunciation of freedom must be almost total (it excludes only the right to life), because only an absolute power allows men, who are all dominated by antisocial passions (longing of power, riches and honor), to cohabit in peace. For John Locke (Locke, John. *Two Treatises of Government*. London, 1689), who has a less pessimistic vision of human nature, it is possible to preserve almost all the natural rights: in this way a liberal State arises, which pledges a wide sphere of individual freedoms.

For Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Rousseau, Jean-Jaques. *The Social Contract, or Of the Social Contract*, or Principles of Political Right - French: *Du contrat social ou Principes du droit politique*. Paris, 1762), with the social contract, the individuals renounce to the totality of their rights, but to retake them back as citizens, as completely equal members of the popular sovereignty. With Rousseau the model of a Democratic State arises; where the power is expressed by a collective will. In Immanuel Kant, the social contract is not an historical fact, but a regulative ideal. When the sovereign makes the laws, he has to make them "as is" they should come from a common consensus of the citizens.

In Kant, as well as in Locke, the State power encounters precise limits in individual rights. In the XX century the contractual theory has been reformulated by John Rawls (neo-contractualism), as scheme for finding equal solutions in democratic mass system. (Rawls, John. *Political Liberalism*, rev. ed., Columbia University Press, 1996). https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/contractarianism-contemporary/.

[77] The Museum Association is the oldest museum association, founded in 1889 in UK. Today it is a professional membership organization based in London with the mission of enhances the value and the role of museum in society, to support the people who work in them. This association as also an Ethics Committee that embrace all the ethical issue concerning museums, their management and regulamentation.

[78] The International Council of Museums (ICOM), created in 1946, after the end of the second global conflict, is the only global organization of museum and museum professionals. It has been founded with the scope of promote and protect globally the natural and cultural heritage. The code of ethics established by ICOM identifies set and standard of excellence that must be observed by its members, and it underlines values and principles shared by the international museum community. "It is a reference tool translated into 38 languages and it sets minimum standards of professional practice and performance for museums and their staff." http://icom.museum/professional-standards/code-of-ethics/.

[79] The American Alliance of Museums (AAM) is a non-profit association that has been founded in 1906, in order to develop excellent standards and practices that American Museums must observe. The institution advocates the role of museums as vital and pivotal element in the American cultural landscape.

[80] The American Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD) is an organization of art museum directors that was established in 1916. It counts today 220 members circa. The AAMD's mission states: " The Association of Art Museum Directors advances the profession by cultivating leadership capabilities of directors, advocating for the field, and fostering excellence in art museums. An agile, issues-driven organization, AAMD has three desired outcomes: engagement, leadership, and shared learning." www.aamd.org/about/mission

[81] "Museums and professional associations, individual museums, non governmental organizations (NGOs), institutes, congresses and other bodies depend on these instruments to establish professional practices." Marstine, Janet. "The contingent nature of new museum ethics," in *The Routledge companion to museum ethics: redefining ethics for the twenty-first-century museum.* Abingdon (UK): Routledge, 2011. p. 6.

[82] Marstine, J. (2011). p. 6.

[83] From Janet Marstine chapter's title, "The contingent nature of new museum ethics".

[84] "These standards are directly informed by the field. They are filtered through the dialogue, debate and data generated by our excellence programs, professional networks, conferences and seminars, national studies and relationships with other museum service organizations. We recognize the great diversity of the museum field and the importance of the ethical codes, standards and best practices developed and issued by various discipline/interest-specific museum associations. Taken together, they work in concert to ensure museums hold themselves accountable to their peers and their publics." http://www.aam-us.org/resources/ethics-standards-and-best-practices

[85] For example, the American Alliance of Museums considers only the following domains where ethics should operate: Governance, Collections, Programs and Promulgation. While, the Code of Ethics for Museums, promulgated by ICOM, considers more interesting categories – a part from the common "collections," "display and exhibition," "acquisitions," – such as "professional conduct and responsibility," "conflict of interest," "interaction with dealers;" however, the code is still vague and rather generic. http://www.aam-us.org/resources/ethics-standards-and-best-practices/code-of-ethics, http://icom.museum/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/Codes/code_ethics2013_eng.pdf.

[86] "The contingent nature of contemporary museum ethics suggests that it is deeply engaged with the world around it and that it is adaptive and improvisational. [...] Contemporary museum ethics is shaped by - and touches - a broad range of disciplines and methods." Marstine, Janet. "The contingent nature of new museum ethics," p. 8.

[87] Richard Sandell is a professor of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester. His research focuses on the potential of museums to advocate for social justice and equality. He is interested in exploring the social agency of museums and their increasing engagement with contemporary issues related to human rights; sexuality, gender identity etc. He looks at museums are platforms for public debates and discussions. His most recent publication is the book "*Museums, Moralities and Human Rights*" published by Routledge in 2017.

[88] Hilde Hein is a scholar at Women's Studies Research Center - Research, Art and Activism in Brandeis University. She curated several exhibitions and wrote three books on museum theory and practice: *The Exploratorium: The*

Museum as Laboratory (1990), *The Museum in Transition: A Philosophical Perspective* (2000), *Public Art: Thinking Museums Differently.* (2006).

[89] Peter H. Welsh is the director of the Museum Studies Program at the University of Kansas. His research addresses the public representation and interpretation of culture. He has published widely on topics that include cultural property, museum interpretation, museum studies theory, and museums in society.

[90] Hein, Hilde. *The Museum in Transition. A Philosophical Perspective.* Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000, pp. 2-22.

[91] Marstine, Janet. (2011). p. 10.

[92] Sandell, Richard. "Social inclusion, the museum and the dynamics of sectorial change," in Museums, Prejudice and Reframing of Difference. Abingdon (UK): Routledge, 2007, p.45.

[93] Despite the big changes that have happened in museums - if we consider, for example, the huge impact that Internet and new technologies have had on museum interfaces and practices towards the visitors, or new inclusive curatorial approaches – it is necessary to acknowledge that they typically only attract a small segment of society and that they tend to serve the ruling classes, which are the same as those ruling the museums themselves as members of the board of trustees.

[94] See Ross, Andrew. *The Gulf: High Culture/Hard Labor.* ed. by A. Ross. New York and London: OR Books, 2015.

[95] I am referring respectively to the publications of Peter Vergo, Dewdney-Dibosa-Walsh, and Claire Bishop. Vergo, Peter. *New Museology.* ed. by P. Vergo. London: Reaktion Books. 1989. Dewdney, Andrew and Dibosa, David and Walsh, Victoria. *Post-Critical Museology. Theory and Practice in the Art Museum.* Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013. Bishop, Claire. *Radical Museology. Or What's Contemporary in Museums of Contemporary Art.* London: Koenig Books, 2015.

[96] Marstine, Janet. (2011). p. 4.

[97] Twitter, Facebook, and other online platforms have highly contributed in spreading ideas and actions' documentations across the world.

[98] Art No Oil Coalition, Liberate Tate, Gulf Labor Coalition + G.U.L.F (Global Ultra Luxury Faction) and Occupy Museum#, are only some of the most significant activist (artist + activist) collectives that since 2004 circa until today have fought for a radical transparency and ethicality in largest world's museums: The British Museum, The Tate, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Guggenheim and the Whitney Museum of American Art.

[99] For example, wrong and outdated production, showcase and defense of knowledge, disrespect for cultural diversity, disrespect for workers-rights, lack of transparency, conflict of interests and unethical funding, are - as aforementioned - some of the charges that artists and activists made and are making against these museums.

[100] Marstine, J. *Critical Practice. Artist, Museums, Ethics.* New York: Routledge, 2017.

[101] In order to sustain her ideas, Marstine cites the words of the international ralations scholar Ronald Fisher (2001, p. 28) " Successful reconciliation between alienated groups cannot take place without an adequate degree of genuine dialogue and conflict analysis of a mutual, interactive nature. […] The conditions and the outcomes of a successful dialogue and conflict analysis lay on the groundwork for the reciprocal enactment of the necessary element of reconciliation: acknowledgments of transgression, apologies for these, forgiveness of these and assurance that such acts will not occur in the future. In order for individuals from the mutually aggrieved parties to move toward reconciliation, they must come to understandthe other side - its perceptions, cognitions, motives, strategies, and failings - and the history of interaction that escalated and maintained the conflict."Marstine, J. *Critical Practice. Artist, Museums, Ethics.* New York: Routledge, 2017. pp. 19-20.

[102] *Ivi,* p. 27.

[103] Jonas, H. *Das Prinzip Verantwortung*, *Versuch einer Ethik für die technologische Zivilisation.* Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch, 1979.

[104] Arendt, H. *The Human Condition.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.