Marcel Broodthaers and Fred Wilson
Contemporary Strategies for Institutional Criticism

Amy L. Boyle
Department of Art History and Communication Studies
McGill University, Montréal
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Abstract:

This thesis compares two contemporary artists who practice institutional criticism, Marcel Broodthaers and Fred Wilson. Looking specifically at Broodthaers's fictional museum project the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* from 1968-1972 and Wilson's 1992 installation *Mining the Museum* at the Maryland Historical Society, this thesis will critically analyze each artist's similar application of deconstruction as a method. Both artists employ allegory and history as aesthetic strategies of deconstruction; using allegorical structure, the artists mobilize objects that have been arrested in history, disrupting a historical continuum that would otherwise remain foreclosed. The focus of this study will be to explore the critical approaches of Broodthaers and Wilson individually as well as the similar theoretical tendencies of the artists jointly; this investigation will assess the effect of institutional criticism on the museum's present condition, unfolding both what has changed and what is still at play within this practice.

Abstrait:

Cette thèse compare deux artistes contemporains qui ont pour pratique la critique institutionnelle muséale, Marcel Broodthaers et Fred Wilson. Prenant spécifiquement comme cas d'études le musée fictionnel de Broodthaers, le *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* de 1968 à 1972 et l'installation de Wilson en 1992 *Mining the Museum* à la Société Historique de Maryland, cette thèse analysera l'application de la déconstruction comme méthode adoptée par chaque artiste. Les deux artistes utilisent l'allégorie et l'histoire comme stratégies esthétiques de déconstruction. En employant la structure allégorique, les artistes délocalisent des objets qui étaient jusqu'alors figés dans l'histoire, interrompant ainsi un continuum historique qui autrement, serait demeuré clos. La préoccupation centrale sera d'explorer les approches critiques de Broodthaers et Wilson individuellement ainsi que les tendances théoriques communes aux deux artistes. Cette investigation évaluera l'effet d'une critique institutionnelle sur la présente condition du musée, dévoilant ce qui a changé et ce qui reste toujours un enjeu au sein de cette pratique.

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INTRODUCTION

MARCEL DUCHAMP: INTRODUCING AESTHETIC CONTEXT

In April 1917 Marcel Duchamp submitted his notorious *Fountain* for exhibition at the American Society of Independent Artists in New York (Fig. 1). For this piece Duchamp rotated a 'readymade' J. L. Mott urinal onto its side, signed it with the pseudonym "R. Mutt, 1917," and placed it on a display pedestal, thereby inserting it into an exhibition context. Now considered one of the most famous and recognized works of modern art, Duchamp's *Fountain* was initially denied exhibition after inciting heated debate among the hanging jury. *Fountain*'s rejection from the 1917 exhibition of independent artists has likely had more influence on the art world than had it been accepted.

With *Fountain* Duchamp questioned the traditional notion of the art object, the perception of artistic creativity, and the status of the artist.[1] He generated a debate not only centered on the inclusion or exclusion from an exhibition, but also introduced a broader aesthetic debate that questioned the very criteria of art. By abstaining from the manual production of objects Duchamp engages in an intellectual process which reshapes the boundaries of artistic production. He frees the manufactured urinal from its utilitarian function, introducing it into an aesthetic context that questions the meaning of traditional artwork. Within this context, the object gains value as art by virtue of artistic authority—simply declaring "this is a work of art" completes artistic production. *Fountain* reveals Duchamp's interest in material objects and their ability to be commodified and

[1] Dalia Judovitz, Unpacking Duchamp: Art in Transit (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 1.

effectively introduces the concept of the 'readymade' medium to public attention, a concept that the artist himself defines:

> It means "completely finished," like off-the-peg garments. I simply came to this conclusion quite a long time ago. There is always something "ready-made" in a painting. You don't make the brushes, you don't make the colours, you don't make the canvas. So, taking this further, removing everything, even the hang, you arrive at the Readymade. There is nothing made by you: everything is "ready-made." What I do is simply sign it, so that it's me who made them.[2]

As a strategic intervention, the 'readymade' embodies the effort to rethink visual representation, contesting preconceived notions of beauty, taste, function, and production and revealing the ability to generate new meanings within already given terms by extending the creative act in context. With the 'readymade' Duchamp initiates a critique of traditional media and even presents the museum itself as a medium for critical analysis.

This thesis explores the artistic practices of contemporary artists Marcel Broodthaers and Fred Wilson who perform institutional critique of the museum by deploying an analysis of the conventions of traditional media in an investigation of the perceptual, cognitive, structural, and discursive parameters of the institution of art.[3] In the 1960s artists demonstrated increased interest in the museum in response to current politics of the art world.[4] Institutional critique emerged as a method of subversion, challenging conventions of art maintained by the museum's structure and ideology. Artist Daniel Buren declares the credo of institutional critique: "Any work presented within the museum, if it does not explicitly examine the influence of that framework

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[2] As quoted in Philippe Collin, "Marcel Duchamp Talking about Readymades," in Marcel Duchamp, ed. Museum Jean Tinguely Basel (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002), 37.
[3] Hal Foster, "What's Neo about the Neo-Avant Garde?," October 70 (Autumn, 1994): 20.
[4] James Rondeau, "The Artist in the Museum: Infiltrating the Collection," Sculpture 18, no.6 (July-Aug 1999): 26.

upon itself, falls into the illusion of self-sufficiency—or idealism."[5] The artistic interventions of Broodthaers and Wilson address this idealism by mobilizing specific material objects to deconstruct the grand fiction supported by the museum as a hegemonic structure of institutionalized culture. Looking specifically at Broodthaers's fictional museum project the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* from 1968-1972 and Wilson's 1992 installation *Mining the Museum* at the Maryland Historical Society, this thesis will critically analyze each artist's application of allegory and history as aesthetic strategies of deconstruction. I will show how each artist, motivated by his respective political outlook, implemented these poetic strategies of allegory and history to deconstruct the ideology of art and the linear meta-narratives constructed and perpetuated by dominant cultural institutions. Broodthaers and Wilson parallel each other's artistic practice, and as this thesis demonstrates, the combination of their projects, Broodthaers active during the 1960s and 1970s and Wilson gaining increased recognition since the early 1990s, maps the chronological development of institutional critique over the past thirty-five years and introduces the main issues relevant to assessing the museum's present state. Comparing the two artists' similar methodology and contrasting the result and reception of their individual projects serves to clarify both the goal and the achievement of institutional critique as a practice and to assess its effect on the modern museum.

Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* effectively introduces the primary issues addressed through institutional critique and within the projects to be discussed. His strategic interventions precipitate critical thought about the museum, museum context, and the

[5] As quoted in Brian Wallis, "Hans Haacke," in The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect, ed. Kynaston McShine (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1999), 154.

arbitrary valuation of art, essential questions that challenge the museum. Likewise, Duchamp's 'readymade' proves seminal to the post-medium methodology that is crucial to deconstructive practices such as institutional critique. Most significantly, it anticipates the confusion of visual and verbal media operative within postmodern projects of institutional criticism, a shift that encourages both the poetic interpretation of conventional media and the political deconstruction of a delimited museum experience.

MUSEUM POLITICS

Duchamp's *Fountain* prefaced a new era of critical analysis of the museum, unmasking it as both an epistemological and a political institution. In this new era, writings previously presenting all-encompassing, linear histories of the museum[6] shifted toward critical analysis of the structures, rituals, and practices that determined relations between objects, knowledge, and ideological processes.[7] In 1971 Duncan Cameron initiated a new vein of inquiry with his groundbreaking article, "The Museum: A Temple or the Forum."[8] Cameron distinguishes two perspectives on the museum; the traditional museum as temple and the newer museum as forum. The museum as temple, he notes, "provides opportunity for reaffirmation of the faith; it is a place for private and intimate experience although it is shared with many others; it is, in concept, the temple of the muses where today's personal experience of life can be viewed in the context of '*The*

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[6] See Alma S. Wittlin, The Museum: its History and its Tasks in Education (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949); Germain Bazin, The Museum Age (Brussels: S. A. Publishers, 1967); and Niels von Holst, Creators, Collectors, and Connoisseurs (London: Thames and Hudson, 1967).

[7] Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff, "Introduction: Frameworks for Critical Analysis," in Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles, eds. Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1994), x.

[8] Duncan Cameron, "The Museum: a Temple or the Forum," Journal of World History 14, no. 1 (1972): 189-202.

Works of God Through All the Ages; the Arts of Man Through All the Years.'"[9] In the democratized museum, collections that were formerly the private possessions of royals and wealthy patrons belong to the public. The public museum therefore institutionalizes individual collecting behavior and proscribes the aesthetic values of society. Cameron cites two principal problems deriving from the public collection. First, public collections are only meaningful to educated viewers. Second, institutionalized value systems reflect the interests of only a small population, sometimes middle-class but usually upper-middle class elites.[10] In this respect, Cameron notes that museums are, "by that omission, guilty of misrepresentation, distortion of fact and the encouragement of attitudes towards cultures other than our own which are dangerous and destructive."[11]

Cameron foresees the need for museum reform, which he believes necessitates the establishment of a forum. In contrast to the museum as temple, the museum as forum becomes a place for discussion, opposition, and experimentation. Cameron distinguishes, "the forum is where the battles are fought, the temple is where the victors rest. The former a process, the latter a product."[12] The forum gives artists and critics an open space to promote new ideas and confront established values and institutions. Within this space, ideas and voices are subjected to public judgment. Cameron notes,

> In the absence of the forum, the museum as temple stands alone as an obstacle to change. The temple is destroyed and the weapons of its destruction are venerated to the temple of tomorrow—but yesterday is lost. In the presence of the forum the museum serves as temple, accepting and incorporating the manifestations of change.[13]

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[9] Ibid., 195.
[10] Ibid., 194-195.
[11] Ibid., 196.
[12] Ibid., 199.
[13] Ibid., 202.

Despite this balanced ideal achieved through the forum, Cameron postulates that, sociologically, the museum more often performs a ritual function rather than an objective, educational one. Cameron recognizes a burgeoning crisis of the museum in its early form, where issues and tensions disallow the institution a fixed identity. He witnesses firsthand the foremost democratizing initiatives of the museum, welcoming broader audiences and promoting more inclusive exhibition schedules. By these objectives he outlines the tensions which were to become constant within the modern, public museum and prompted a number of critical writings in the past decades that analyze the museum as an institution.[14]

Art historian Douglas Crimp identifies the state of the contemporary museum and introduces the primary ideas influencing postmodern institutional analysis. In his 1980 article, "On the Museum's Ruins," Crimp describes the museum as an "institution of confinement awaiting archaeological analysis."[15] He introduces his argument by describing neoconservative Hilton Kramer's negative review of an installation of nineteenth-century art in the Metropolitan Museum's Andre Meyer Galleries, a disdain centered on the inclusion of paintings of "debased taste" alongside masterpieces. Kramer

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[14] See Tony Bennett, The Birth of the Museum: history, theory, politics (New York: Routledge, 1995); James Clifford, The Predicament of Culture: twentieth-century ethnography, literature, and art (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); The Desire of the Museum (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1989); Steven C. Dubin, Displays of Power: memory and amnesia in the American museum (New York: New York University Press, 1999); Carol Duncan, Civilizing Rituals: inside public art museums (London: Routledge, 1995); Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne, eds., Thinking about Exhibitions (New York: Routledge, 1995); Elizabeth Hallam and Brian V. Street, eds., Cultural Encounters: Representing Otherness (New York: Routledge, 2000); Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge (New York: Routledge, 1992); Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds. Exhibiting Cultures: the poetics and politics of museum display (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991); Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff, eds., Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Peter Vergo, ed. The New Museology (London: Reaktion, 1989).

[15] Douglas Crimp, "On the Museum's Ruins," in On the Museum's Ruins (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 48.

attributes this inclusive, homogenizing presentation to the death of modernism and the rise of postmodernism. In his review Kramer accurately describes the present transformations of the modernist movement, but fails, Crimp points out, to consider the postmodernist agenda questioning the museum's coherent representation of art. In elaborating, Crimp discusses the work of artist Robert Rauschenberg, who does not "create" in the traditional sense, but rather quotes, borrows, and repeats pre-existing images. Rauschenberg's techniques of reproduction, manifest in his silk screens and transfer drawings, appropriate pre-existing images and screen them alongside other reduplicated images within a flat picture plane, a practice that Crimp contends is distinctly postmodernist because of its transformation of the picture surface and its unique use of cultural subject matter. Crimp uses this discussion to link postmodernism to an abandonment of a "natural" orientation in the spectator's vision and to the absorption of a "heterogeneous array of cultural images," producing a discontinuity with a modernist past. He parallels this discontinuity with the epistemic shift described by Foucault. Crimp introduces Foucault's epistemology as the theoretical structure of his argument and also as a place to begin thinking about these issues, linking Foucault's archaeological analysis of modern institutions and their respective discursive formations to the museum and art history.

Crimp further explains the difference between the modernist "self-conscious relationship" to canonical paintings or texts and the postmodernist exposure of the fragility of the museum's claims to represent art coherently. To do so he discusses Flaubert's text *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, the story of two copy clerks who, seeking reality in life, only find contradictions and misinformation and eventually regress to their initial

task of copying. He uses both the text and Eugenio Donato's response to it to argue that the heterogeneous activities of the two characters are emblematic of the state of the museum, and furthermore that this heterogeneity challenges the systematization and homogenization the museum embodies. Using Donato's analysis, Crimp asserts that the museum's objects are sustained only by the fiction that they comprise a coherent representational whole, and without the fiction, are only meaningless fragments.

Extending his analysis of *Bouvard and Pécuchet* as a "parody of received ideas," Crimp introduces André Malraux's *Museum without Walls* as a "hyperbolic expression" of these ideas.[16] Malraux's *Museum* introduces photography as a medium of homogenization, whereby all works of art that can be photographically reproduced are placed in a great superoeuvre. Through the process of photographic reproduction the works of art have lost their properties as objects, reducing heterogeneity into a perfect similitude, an experiment that seems to provide a certain "knowledge" through homogeneity. Crimp, however, notes Malraux's error in perceiving photography as the very thing that constitutes the Museum's homogeneity. Photography can be understood as an object itself and thus heterogeneity is reestablished. He finally returns to the work of Rauschenberg as a truly postmodernist artist whose technique moves from production to reproduction, dispensing with both the aura and the fiction of the creating subject. Crimp supports this contention by recounting Rauschenberg's repeated appropriation of the *Rokeby Venus*, screening her alongside images of mosquitoes, a truck, and a reduplicated Cupid in *Crocus*, and with helicopters and water towers in *Transom*. In *Bicycle* she appears with the same truck from *Crocus* and the same helicopter from

[16] Ibid., 54.

Transom, in addition to sailboats and an eagle.[17] By establishing this gesture the artist reveals the heterogeneity that is the "purview of photography" and by extension, the museum. On the museum's ruins appropriation, confiscation, quotation, and repetition of pre-existing images undermine the notions of originality, authenticity, and presence essential to its traditional conception.

DECONSTRUCTING THE MUSEUM

By identifying the fictions sustaining museum objects, Crimp points to the fragile state of the institution when exposed by deconstruction. It is from these ruins that Broodthaers and Wilson build their critical analysis of the museum. It is important here to introduce the basic tenets of deconstruction that will later be expanded on when analyzing the specific projects of each artist. In order to fully understand deconstruction and its use as a methodology for institutional critique, one must distinguish it from structuralism and poststructuralism.

In *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes deploys structuralism, a methodology disclosing the structures governing language, culture, and society, as a way to reveal various "myths" within society.[18] He introduces "myth" as any sociological construct that extends the illusion of naturality, masking real structures of power. The modern museum and its ritual function illustrates one such myth. Barthes argues, "mythology can only have an historical foundation, for myth is a type of speech chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the 'nature' of things."[19] He maintains,

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[17] Ibid., 58.
[18] Roland Barthes, Mythologies, trans. Annette Lavers (St. Albans: Paladin, 1973), 109-158.
[19] Ibid., 110.

> everything, in everyday life, is dependent on the representation which the bourgeoisie has and makes us have of the relations between man and the world. These 'normalized' forms attract little attention, by the very fact of their extension, in which their origin is easily lost.[20]

By actively questioning how museums perpetuate ideology and determine meaning, Marcel Broodthaers and Fred Wilson function as "mythologists," demystifying the matrices of socio-cultural value, authority, and norm constructed in and through the museum.[21]

While Broodthaers and Wilson can be read as "mythologists," their projects also question some of the premises of structuralism, accepting a more dynamic critique that is better understood as poststructuralist. Poststructuralist methodology dismantles the structuralist understanding of meaning as fixed and accepts a reality ridden by contradictions, fluctuations, and movements. The autonomous linguistic system supported by structuralist practice is complicated within poststructuralism by the imposition of a larger, dynamic whole. Theorists Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson term this dynamism *perpetuum mobile*, that is a synchronic system "where there could be found neither a starting point for semiosis, nor a concluding moment in which semiosis terminated and the meanings of signs truly arrived."[22] Deconstruction, one of the main critical practices of poststructuralism, comprises a unique critical moment engaging both structuralism and poststructuralism. Deconstruction affirms the process of becoming

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[20] Ibid., 140.

[21] In *Mythologies*, Barthes explains myth as the systematic and arbitrary imposition of meaning. The role of the mythologist, according to Barthes, is to expose these signs as artificial constructs, to reveal their workings and show that what appears to be natural is in fact constructed. Uncovering the myth deconstructs how places become invested with importance. He adapts language as the model for his mythological system, studying myth as a semiological schema delineating the systematic relation between sign, signifier, and signified. The production and comprehension of myth depends on the invariable correspondence of word with concept.

[22] Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, "Semiotics and Art History: A Discussion of Context and Senders," in The Art of Art History: a Critical Anthology, ed. Donald Preziosi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 247.

elucidated by Bal and Bryson, but at the same time maintains a structural interest in language, signifying systems, and discursive practices. In contrast to structuralism, however, this method moves away from the binary oppositions that define meaning constructed and supported by structuralism, instead aiming to open definitions, relentlessly pursuing possibility within the structure. Through this method, constructions such as texts, traditions, practices, and institutions elude determinable meanings and always yield more significance than structuralism allows. With deconstruction, meaning exceeds defined boundaries, emphasizing a text's ambiguity and the impossibility of a complete, final interpretation. In short, deconstruction defies summary. There are, however, two dualisms that help clarify the dynamism of deconstruction on which I will elaborate: the reciprocity of text and context and the interdependency of poetics and politics.

The writings of Jacques Derrida are helpful in clarifying the reciprocity of text and context proposed by deconstruction. His text "Parergon" from *The Truth in Painting* (1978) serves as a specific study of the dynamic relationship between text and context.[23] In "Parergon," Derrida deconstructs Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and its philosophy that a work (*ergon*) stands independent of its beautification (*parergon*). Derrida titles his analysis "Parergon," a word of Kantian invention, but throughout the text confuses its given meaning, which to him is solely a construction dependent on Kant's conventions of rhetoric. By being an invention of Kant, *parergon* serves Derrida's purpose of elucidating the arbitrariness of the signifier, because the fabricated word holds no fundamental meaning outside of Kant's given context. Derrida focuses here on a lack

[23] Jacques Derrida, "The Parergon," in The Truth in Painting, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 37-82.

which surreptitiously exposes the necessity of both *ergon* and *parergon*, or text and context.

Derrida's most prominent stylistic device is his idiosyncratic writing style, characterized by forgoing customary capitalization rules, fragmented sentences, and the use of exaggerated space arbitrarily placed between sections. This writing style emphasizes the lack of a literary framework, which becomes visible only in its absence. Derrida explains, "the parergon is a form which has as its traditional determination not that it stands out but that it disappears, buries itself, effaces itself, melts away at the moment it deploys its greatest energy."[24] In its use, the framework goes unnoticed, but he illustrates that when it is omitted the framework becomes visible. His main claim is that "the *ergon's* lack is the lack of a *parergon*."[25] By humorously imposing his own writing style, however, he proves that in spite of the lack, the essence of his text is understood within its own particular context. He does not repudiate meaning, but rather, through omitting the traditional *parergon* of writing, proves that a new *parergon* emerges, "by virtue of an internal lack in the system."[26] *Parergon* becomes the context, without which the text would be rendered meaningless. What Derrida elucidates is that every text is a construction under the conventions of its author, opposing the metaphysical fiction of a text independent of context. He describes the *parergon* as "precisely an ill-detachable detachment,"[27] establishing text and context as mutually constitutive, demarcating one of the main premises of deconstruction.

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[24] Ibid., 61.
[25] Ibid., 60.
[26] Ibid., 57.
[27] Ibid., 59.

In *Of Grammatology* (1967) Derrida declares "il n'y a pas de hors-texte." By this phrase—"there is nothing outside of the text"—he accedes to context, arguing that social, historical, and political issues are already inscribed within the text. Bluntly, and this is crucial for the understanding of the artistic strategies of Broodthaers and Wilson, deconstruction fluidly conjoins poetics and politics. Within deconstructionist aesthetic projects like those of Broodthaers and Wilson, contemporary politics motivates a poetic critical strategy, and what I mean by this is a critique supported by discursive strategies. Conceptual art operates as one such strategy. A brief exploration of conceptual art will help to clarify the artistic application of deconstruction and elaborate on the interdependency of poetics and politics. Alberro and Stimson define conceptual art:

> The conceptual in art means an expanded critique of the cohesiveness and materiality of the art object, a growing wariness toward definitions of artistic practice as purely visual, a fusion of the work with its site and context of display, and an increased emphasis on the possibilities of publicness and distribution.[28]

Conceptual art as a rhetorical gesture questions the very function and operation of art as a viable system. Its discursive structure, manifest in the 'readymade' produced by Duchamp, reveals the arbitrary system of signs supporting interpretation. The 'readymade' critiques the institution of autonomous art through an embrace of everyday objects and aesthetic indifference, emphasizing the concept over aesthetic content. What is important to understand about this type of structure is that, far from linking object with concept, conceptual art opens up this system so the object can take on any meaning, and even multiple meanings, an aspect of great importance for Broodthaers. Institutional critique, as an aspect of conceptual art, shifts attention from the internal aesthetic of a

[28] Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, eds., Conceptual Art: a critical anthology (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), xvii.

work of art to the physical and ideological influences of the site of exhibition. As will become evident in each chapter of this thesis, conceptual art encourages a redefinition of relationships between audience, object, and artist, dismantling the traditional model of experience informed by a structural framework.

Understanding these two specifications, the reciprocity of text and context and the interdependency of poetics and politics, helps clarify the hypothesis developed throughout this thesis, for it is from these two dynamisms that the artistic practices of Broodthaers and Wilson evolve. Both Broodthaers and Wilson, influenced by their own contemporary politics, recognize and critique within their artistic practice a reality in constant flux.

DECONSTRUCTION IN PRACTICE

Broodthaers and Wilson employ deconstruction using two primary critical strategies, allegory and history. Allegory shares an affinity with history, so an analysis of one necessarily introduces the other. Within the artist's individual projects an allegorical element surfaces in a similar manner, although each explores history differently. Broodthaers explores a particular historicizing moment while Wilson introduces a genealogical model of history. Because of this difference I will reserve a detailed discussion of history for their individual chapters, but at this point it is important to establish a thorough understanding of allegory, addressing its function as a critical deconstructive tool and its value to postmodern projects. This understanding of allegory is crucial to analyze the critical artistic strategies of Broodthaers and Wilson.

Art historian and theorist Craig Owens contributes significantly to a rethinking of allegory, addressing its critical use within contemporary art. In "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," he theorizes on the affinities between allegory and postmodern aesthetic projects.[29] His analysis begins by describing the hostility toward allegory as an aesthetic strategy since the rise of modernism, where it is condemned as an outmoded device and not a matter of critical interest. Owens emphasizes how these judgments ignore the capacity of allegory to rescue significant fragments from historical oblivion by mediating a past and a present that would otherwise remain foreclosed. Elaborating on this function, he denotes the fundamental impulses of allegorical form as both "a conviction of the remoteness of the past" as well as "a desire to redeem it for the present."[30]

Owens argues that many contemporary artists have demonstrated an "unmistakably allegorical impulse," and cites many ways in which this impulse has reasserted itself in postmodern aesthetic projects.[31] To recognize allegory in its contemporary form Owens proffers two interrelated features which can be understood together. He first describes allegory's metatextual structure, seeing the palimpsest as paradigmatic of the allegorical work. Allegory occurs, he observes, "whenever one text is doubled by another."[32] Therefore, in allegorical structure one text must be read through another, a specification that explains allegory's foundation in commentary and exegesis. This relationship between texts, when manifested within works of art, gives rise to the second characteristic identifying allegory: allegorical imagery as a form of

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[29] Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," in October 12 (Spring, 1980): 67-86.
[30] Ibid., 68.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid., 68-69.

appropriated imagery. Through the allegorist, who confiscates images, supplanting an antecedent meaning with the allegorical meaning, the text or image becomes something other (*allos*=other + *agoreuei*=to speak).[33]

After establishing these two distinguishing features, Owens makes three critical links between allegory and contemporary art: the appropriation of images, attraction to site-specificity, and strategies of accumulation. The appropriation of images, he explains, generates and manipulates reproduced images, altering them in such a way that they are emptied of their original significance and simultaneously of any authoritative claim to meaning. Appropriation thereby fixes within the object the historical distance between the object and its production, a limitation that renders these images significant only by virtue of that distance. At this point, the image's signification is no longer directly transparent, thus, appropriated images "simultaneously proffer and defer the promise of meaning" and as a result the images appear incomplete and fragmentary.[34] According to Owens, allegory is "consistently attracted to the fragmentary," an affinity expressed through the ruin, which he further contends is emblematic of history as an "irreversible process of dissolution."[35] Introducing the allegorical cult of the ruin Owens shifts his argument toward the second link between allegory and contemporary art: an increased interest in the impermanence of site-specific works. Site-specific installations merge physically into a setting for a limited duration, becoming illustrative of transience. One of the strongest impulses in allegory, proposed by Walter Benjamin and emphasized by Owens, is the concern with rescuing the transitory for eternity within a "stabilizing image," the most common example being the photograph. By way of photography and

[33] Ibid., 69.
[34] Ibid., 70.
[35] Ibid.

more specifically photomontage Owens initiates the third allegorical motive, strategies of accumulation. He identifies a common practice of allegory to pile up fragments, thereby revealing its concern with the projection of "structure as sequence." This structure, he claims, encourages "a vertical or paradigmatic reading of correspondences upon a horizontal or syntagmatic chain of events," revealing allegory as furthermore being the projection of the "metaphoric axis of language onto its metonymic dimension."[36] This concern with structure as sequence introduces allegory's confusion of the visual and the verbal, a confusion of genre that was anticipated by Duchamp, and reveals allegory as synthetic, disregarding aesthetic categories and crossing aesthetic boundaries.

Owens sees the allegorical impulse deployed in contemporary art through diverse strategies such as appropriation, site specificity, impermanence, accumulation, discursivity, and hybridization, and like Crimp, distinguishes these strategies from modernist predecessors. He asserts that these diverse strategies reveal an allegorical impulse within postmodernist art, but feels that theory will remain incapable of representing that impulse when it fails to acknowledge allegory as an aesthetic form of critical interest. Owens argues that in practice allegory and modernism are inseparable, and moreover attributes the repression of the allegorical impulse to theory. He expands on this argument by citing a passage from "The Origin of the Work of Art," in which Martin Heidegger claims that every art work, by extending something other than itself, is allegory, and that by bringing together something other than the thing itself, the work is at the same time also a symbol. Owens challenges this claim arguing not only that applying an allegorical dimension to every work renders allegory meaningless, but also that because allegory is "regularly subordinated to the symbol," equating allegory and

[36] Ibid., 72.

symbol inevitably condemns allegory. He shows that within romantic art theory the symbol is conceived as "inner essence," and is furthermore emblematic of artistic intuition and a motivated sign. Allegory, conceived as the antithesis to the symbol, is therefore arbitrary, conventional, and unmotivated. This dichotomy, he maintains, was "inherited uncritically by modern aesthetics," and by this, romantic art theory provided the foundation for the "philosophical condemnation of allegory."[37] Owens promotes this argument by describing how allegory is regarded as supplemental, and is consequently considered detachable. Recalling allegory's ability to "usurp" its object and confuse an image's signification, he argues that allegory retains the disconcerting potential to show that what has been "merely appended" might be mistaken for the object's essence. It is due to this, Owens feels, that allegory has been suppressed and furthermore, critically ignored, recognizing the strategy of Western art theory to exclude any form that challenges the continuity of a work of art as an autonomous whole.

Owens ultimately relies on Benjamin to establish a restoration of allegory as a critical strategy. In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin prepares for the replacement of the symbol within romantic theory by exposing its inherent paradox in uniting the material and the transcendental object, confusing appearance and essence. In place of the symbol, Benjamin introduces the graphic sign, which represents "the distance between an object and its significance," opposing transcendence.[38] Benjamin's treatise liberates allegory from condemnation, appreciating its theoretical significance fully, and penetrating the "veil" that had previously obscured this achievement. Owens thus introduces the postmodern appeal for an "allegorical practice" and an "allegorical

[37] Ibid., 81-83.
[38] Ibid., 85.

criticism" that proposes an invitation to dig deeper into a text; this is what Crimp more specifically called an "archaeological analysis." Furthering this proposal he initiates words, images, and moreover, material to be the beginning of an infinite number of fissures, ruptures, and ruins, and therefore an impetus to investigation. He concludes by arguing that within these fissures lies the opportunity for a text to "double back on itself" and provide its own commentary, a metatextual instance that permits self-recognition, which, he proposes, is the present challenge to both art and criticism. This can only begin to be deciphered by recognizing allegory as a critical strategy.

It is from this understanding of allegory that I develop my hypothesis. Indeed, as elucidated by Owens, allegory is attracted to the fragmentary, so it is at this end of the museum's history, finding the museum in the ruinous state proposed by Crimp, that allegory can be applied as a deconstructive strategy. As will be further argued within this thesis, Broodthaers and Wilson use these fragments to create a unique engagement between past and present. Using allegorical structure, they mobilize objects that have been arrested in history, disrupting a historical continuum that would otherwise remain foreclosed.

In each successive chapter I explore the critical approaches of Broodthaers and Wilson individually, as well as the similar theoretical tendencies of the two artists, and I further articulate each artist's original application of allegory and history as aesthetic strategies. In the first chapter I elaborate Broodthaers's *Musée d'Art Moderne* and its specific engagement with the nineteenth century, which he used to reflectively critique the historical conditions of collecting and institutionalization. I specifically explore two

strategies he employs, subversive appropriation of the museum and the "implosion of medium-specificity."[39] I argue that in using these deconstructive strategies he liberates the historical institution and its discourse from a dominant and imposing ideology. This chapter serves to establish an understanding of institutional critique in its nascent stages, introducing Broodthaers as a pioneer of institutional critique and exploring the paradoxes therein. In my second chapter I take up Wilson's *Mining the Museum* project, which addresses the particular history of the Maryland Historical Society and encourages a different vision of race relations, prompting a rethinking of history. I will look at his application of the black body as an aesthetic model within two types of installations, portraiture and juxtaposition, to elucidate his critical strategies of allegory and genealogy. This second chapter is a consideration of institutional critique in its present condition, which is further developed in the conclusion to this thesis. Each chapter serves to contextualize each artist's contemporary moment, providing a glimpse at two critical time periods—the beginning and the present—along the continuum of institutional critique. This investigation addresses the similarities and the differences between the artist's projects and explores what has changed and what is still at play within this practice. My main objective is to address the effectiveness of deconstruction as a methodology for institutional critique, as well as its practical effect within the museum.

[39] Rosalind Krauss, "A Voyage on the North Sea": Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1999), 33.

CHAPTER 1

MARCEL BROODTHAERS'S *MUSEE D'ART MODERNE*: THE MUSEUM AS CONTEXT

"THIS IS NOT A WORK OF ART"

For the tenth section of his *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles,* the *Section des Figures (Der Adler vom Oligozän bis heute)* in 1972, Marcel Broodthaers collected over three hundred objects representing eagles, borrowed from forty-three museums and several private collections in Europe and abroad. Each object was provided with a label stating in English, French, or German, "This is not a work of art" (Fig. 2). In the first of the two catalogue volumes assembled to accompany the *Section des Figures* the artist credits two predecessors as influences for this project: first, Marcel Duchamp, whose *Fountain* (Fig. 1), a 'readymade' urinal exhibited as a work of art in 1917, demonstrated the discursive authority of both the art museum and the artist in declaring, "This *is* a work of art," and secondly, René Magritte whose 1929 painting *La trahison des images* (the treason of images), presented a pipe with the inscription "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" (this is not a pipe) (Fig. 3), introducing the "antithetical" concept or the rhetorical contrast of ideas.[1] Applying these two ideas to his *Section des Figures*, Broodthaers exposes the criteria of "art" as arbitrarily designated and cleverly inverts Duchamp's experiment. Whereas Duchamp transposes everyday objects into works of art, Broodthaers displays museum objects and challenges their identity as works of art, promoting instead their identity as simple objects.[2] This antithetical gesture serves to

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[1] Marcel Broodthaers, "Methode," in Der Adler vom Oligozän bis Heute, exh. cat. (Düsseldorf: Stadtische Kunsthalle, 1972), 1: 11-15.

[2] Rainer Borgemeister, "*Section des Figures*: The Eagle from the Oligocene to the Present," trans. Chris Cullens, October 42 (Fall 1987): 143.

introduce the overall premise of the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* project by illustrating the function of the art museum in determining "the contextual definition and syntagmatic construction of the work of art."[3]

Looking specifically at his museum fictions, this chapter explores Marcel Broodthaers's critique of the museum as a site of institutionalized culture. Using the main aesthetic strategies of allegory and history, the artist engages in a reflective criticism of the ideology of art. His critique, following the precepts of deconstruction, attacks the concept of aesthetic autonomy and is engaged in dismantling the metaphysical fiction of an object set apart from its historical condition, or a text autonomous of its context. Using selected sections from his project, I will argue that the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* promotes a deconstructionist agenda through subversive appropriation of the museum and "implosion of medium-specificity," two deconstructive tactics proposed by Rosalind Krauss.[4] This chapter will establish an overall understanding of institutional criticism in its nascent stages and introduce Broodthaers's influence on, and contribution to, the practice.

MARCEL BROODTHAERS: CREATOR OF MUSEUM FICTIONS

Marcel Broodthaers was born in Brussels, Belgium on January 28, 1924. His Belgian heritage influenced his interest in sign systems: growing up in multi-lingual Belgium, speaking three languages, he realized the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified. Initially a poet, he self-consciously began his career as an artist in

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[3] Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," October 55 (Winter 1990): 138.
[4] Rosalind Krauss, "A Voyage on the North Sea": Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1999), 33.

1964 when, he says, "The idea of inventing something insincere finally crossed my mind, and I set to work at once."[5] In addition to his motivation of "inventing something insincere," he admits "bad faith" as another trait of his curious artistic persona. In the Belgian journal *Phantomas*, he professed:

> Finally I would try to change into an art lover. I would revel in my bad faith. . . . Since I couldn't build a collection of my own, for lack of even the minimum of financial means, I had to find another way of dealing with the bad faith that allowed me to indulge in so many strong emotions. So, said I to myself, I'll be a creator.[6]

"Insincerity" and "bad faith" encapsulate two ideas central to his artistic practice: the intersection of art and commerce, and the related concept of fiction.[7] Through "insincerity" and "bad faith" Broodthaers discursively introduces and affirms his fictional ploy, functioning not only as a fictive creator, but also as a creator of fictions. This interest in language, signifying systems, and discursive practice is fundamental to understanding his critical strategy that, as described by Benjamin Buchloh, investigates "the transition from language to object, the object-language of art, and art's conceptualization to the status of language."[8] By declaring his insincerity and bad faith he adopts an attitude of ambivalence that opens the discursive field he intends to address and presents the ambition of deconstructive criticism: to expose a reality ridden with contradictions.[9]

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[5] Marcel Broodthaers, "Moi aussi je me suis demandé si je ne pouvais pas vendre quelque chose," (Brussels: Galerie Saint-Laurent, April 10-25, 1964); quoted in Kristen Erickson, "Marcel Broodthaers," in The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect, ed. Kynaston McShine (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1999), 62.

[6] Marcel Broodthaers, "Comme du beurre dans un sandwich," Phantomas, no. 51-61 (December 1965): 295-296; quoted in Douglas Crimp, "This is Not a Museum of Art," in Marcel Broodthaers, exh. cat. (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1989), 71.

[7] Erickson, 62.

[8] Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Marcel Broodthaers: Allegories of the Avant-Garde," Artforum 18, no. 9 (May 1980): 55.

[9] Broodthaers continued his artistic practice until his early death from liver cancer on January 28, 1976.

As detailed in the introduction to this thesis, deconstruction fluidly conjoins poetics and politics, where poetic critical strategy, encouraged by political motives, facilitates deconstructive practice. Broodthaers's artistic practice is influenced by both the poetic practice of his first career as well as contemporary politics, specifically the political protests of May 1968. During these protests, Broodthaers, along with fellow artists, political activists, and students, participated in an occupation of Brussels' Palais des Beaux-Arts,[10] intending to contest both governmental controls of cultural production as well as the increased commercialization of art. Douglas Crimp elaborates: "the occupiers declared their takeover of the museum to be a contestation of the control over Belgian culture exerted by its official institutions, as well as a condemnation of a system that could conceive of culture only as another form of capitalist consumption."[11] In an open letter datelined Palais des Beaux-Arts, June 1968, the artist proclaims: "A fundamental gesture has been made here that throws a vivid light on culture and on the ambitions of certain people who aspire to control it one way or another: what this means is that culture is an obedient material."[12] Inspired by the opportunity to exert such control over culture, the artist inaugurated the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* four months after the events of May 1968. Throughout his project, Broodthaers insists on "revealing the political dependence and ideological determination of an avant-garde practice that perceives itself as acting in a realm of neutral autonomy."[13]

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[10] Crimp, 75.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Marcel Broodthaers, Open letter, datelined Palais des Beaux-Arts, 7 June 1968, addressed "A mes amis," in Museum in Motion, 249; quoted in ibid., 76.
[13] Buchloh, "Allegories," 56.

Between 1968 and 1972 Broodthaers produced a total of thirteen sections as part of his fictional museum project, a series of installations with no permanent location and no permanent collection, that was never realized within the museum itself.[14] The project appropriates traditional museum practices of classifying, labeling, and exhibiting; yet it alters these practices by removing them from the museum context and emptying them of their original significance. Broodthaers reframes these altered practices within spaces always outside of the museum, evoking the concept of the museum by mimicking its traditional practices. Removing traditional practices from the museum context in which they once seemed natural, Broodthaers uncovers hidden conventions and exposes the constrained conditions of art production, raising questions about the nature of art and its institutions. In a press release for the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Sections Art Moderne et Publicité* the artist remarks that the one difference between the official museum and his fictional one is that "a fiction enables you to grasp both reality and at the same time those things that reality hides."[15] He here announces the main premise of his museum fictions: to reveal the elusive ideology hidden within the naturalized structure of the institution.

The *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* opened in 1968 with the *Section XIXème Siècle* in Broodthaers's Brussels apartment, which he designated as a museum. For this section the word *Musée*, inscribed on the two windows of the apartment facing the street, visually and discursively designated the space as museum. The three main rooms of the apartment held large empty crates simulating the

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[14] I credit my understanding of the installations of the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* to the descriptions in the exhibition catalog Marcel Broodthaers (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1989), 180-193.

[15] Marcel Broodthaers, "Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles Sections Art Moderne et Publicité," in Marcel Broodthaers: Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section Publicité, eds. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh and Maria Gilissen (New York: Marian Goodman Gallery, 1999), 9.

transportation and installation of works of art, while numbers on the doors designated the rooms as galleries. To further elaborate this ploy, he provided an empty transport truck parked outside the building for the opening and closing of this section. The works of art themselves, nineteenth-century French paintings by artists including Ingres, Corot, Courbet, Meissonier, and David, were represented only by postcards hung on the wall (Fig. 4). This representation reduced the works to a symbolic gesture questioning the valuation—or perhaps "overvaluation"—of art. The postcards, juxtaposed alongside the empty crates with stenciled inscriptions reading "Picture," "Keep dry," and "With care fragile," introduce two critiques. In one sense the juxtaposition underscores the disintegration of the auratic work, an emphasis that criticizes the authoritative rituals of assigning meaning, but in another sense mocks the museum practice of placing a postcard where a work on loan or undergoing restoration should hang. The placement of the empty crates beside the postcard display stresses the critical questioning of the value attributed to a work of art that lacks a material presence.

Beyond the physical content of the installation, Broodthaers appropriates certain formalities of the traditional museum to create the pretense of an art opening. He promoted his *Section XIXème Siècle* with an open letter of announcement, invitations to the opening, exhibition catalogs, and an inaugural address delivered on the occasion of the opening by the director of the Städtisches Museum Mönchengladbach, Dr. Johannes Cladders (Fig. 5).[16] These gestures humorously legitimize the fictional museum. The museum practices, which merely frame elements of the institutionalized space of reception and are therefore superfluous to the traditional museum, function in the *Musée*

[16] The Städtisches Museum Mönchengladbach was then one of Germany's most active museums committed to the support of contemporary avant-garde art; Dr. Johannes Cladders is featured to the right of Broodthaers in Fig. 5.

d'Art Moderne to signify the private space of Broodthaers's apartment as a public institutional space. The framing elements of traditional aesthetic production thus become constitutive elements in the fictional museum.[17]

ALLEGORY AND HISTORY IN THE *MUSEE D'ART MODERNE*

To get a better sense of the critique at play in Broodthaers's museum fictions, I will expand on the two primary aesthetic strategies he uses, allegory and history, and develop their function within his *Musée d'Art Moderne* project. Benjamin Buchloh offers the most critically progressive reading of Broodthaers's aesthetic use of allegory and its association with the avant-garde, providing the most thorough assessment of the artist's use of allegory in his 1980 article, "Marcel Broodthaers: Allegories of the Avant-Garde."[18] At its most rudimentary level, the allegorical engages the past in order to comment on the present. Buchloh argues that allegory further reveals the degree to

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[17] Twelve sections followed the intial *Section XIXème Siècle*: the *M.U.S.E.E D.'A.R.T. CAB.INE.T D.ES. E.STA.MP.E.S.*, 1968; *Section Littéraire*, 1968-70; *Section Documentaire*, 1969; *Section XVIIème Siècle*, 1969; *Section XIXème Siècle (bis)*, 1970; *Section Folklorique/Cabinet de Curiosités*, 1970; *Section Cinéma*, 1971; *Section Financière*, 1971; *Section des Figures*, 1972; *Section Publicité*, 1972; *Section d'Art Moderne*, 1972, and the *Musée d'Art Ancien, Département des Aigles, Galerie du XXème siècle*, 1972.

[18] Benjamin Buchloh has been the most prolific of Broodthaers's scholars and has made the most significant contribution to the body of scholarship on Marcel Broodthaers, returning to the artist and his work repeatedly, investigating the artist's aesthetic strategies of allegory, parody, and fiction. In his writings, Buchloh most consistently emphasizes the artist's association with language, highlighting objects and language to be the critical points of Broodthaers's investigation. His writings address the artist's emphasis on discursive criteria, which he denotes as "the participation of artistic practices within formations of language, ideology, power and the economic dimensions of artistic production." Buchloh notes especially the artist's contribution to addressing the language and architecture of the social institution that frames and contains the discourse of art. Buchloh, "Contemplating Publicity: Marcel Broodthaers' Section Publicité," in Marcel Broodthaers: Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section Publicité, eds. Buchloh and Maria Gilissen, (New York: Marian Goodman Gallery, 1999), 96.; See also: Buchloh, "Allegories"; Buchloh, ed. Broodthaers: Writings, Interviews, Photographs. October 42 (Fall 1987); Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969"; Buchloh, "Formalism and Historicity—Changing Concepts in American and European Art since 1945," in Europe in the Seventies: Aspects of Recent Art, exh. cat. (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1977); Buchloh, "The Museum Fictions of Marcel Broodthaers," in Museums by Artists, eds. AA Bronson and Peggy Gale (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1983); and Buchloh, "Parody and Appropriation in Francis Picabia, Pop, and Sigmar Polke," Artforum 20, no. 7 (March 1982).

which the present is in fact "encumbered by the past."[19] He sees the artist's process of inscribing the work into the institutional frame, supplanting antecedent meaning with allegorical meaning, as a dialectical strategy for revealing the contemporary conditions of object production. For Buchloh, this metatexual strategy discloses the historical conditions of aesthetic reality within its contemporary practices, specifically, within cultural institutionalization and commercial reification.[20] The *Musée d'Art Moderne*, as allegory, employs the past to explore the particular historicizing moment when the museum became embedded in ideology; Broodthaers's critique extends to the origin of the historical institution and to the discourse which encodes this origin. Buchloh further maintains that Broodthaers's allegorical investigation liberates the "proper historical and material conditions of discourse and production" that are embedded within a dominant, yet seemingly neutral ideology.[21] The artist uses allegory to reflectively critique the ideology of art, as well as to expose the "avant-garde practice that perceives itself as acting in a realm of neutral autonomy"; both critiques are replete with instances of historical appropriation.[22]

Douglas Crimp, who credits his knowledge and understanding of the work of Marcel Broodthaers to Benjamin Buchloh,[23] takes up Buchloh's preliminary analysis of the artist's use of the past. Crimp contributes an expanded historical analysis of the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles*, establishing a critical link between Broodthaers and the historian Walter Benjamin. In Crimp's 1989 article, "This is not a Museum of Art," he introduces the artist's self-proclaimed "insincerity" and "bad faith"

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[19] Buchloh, "Allegories," 52.
[20] Ibid., 56.
[21] Ibid., 52.
[22] Ibid., 56.
[23] Crimp, 91.

as an impetus for the creation of museum fictions, through which, Crimp argues, the artist reveals the "historical conditions of collecting as they now exist."[24] He maintains that Broodthaers's museum fictions involve a "consciousness of the present," rupturing the continuum of history and bringing about a "specific and unique engagement with the past."[25] He pinpoints the nineteenth-century—and its "romantic disposition" that alienates art from social reality—as the ideological origin of "the dilemma of contemporary art in the late sixties."[26] Calling Broodthaers an "archaeologist of the present" Crimp notes the artist's continual concern with the nineteenth century throughout the *Musée d'Art Moderne* and acknowledges his contribution in uncovering this dilemma by revealing the complicity of museum and marketplace.[27]

Broodthaers's fascination with the nineteenth century, a preoccupation shared by Walter Benjamin, proves a fundamental focus to his museum installations. Broodthaers's affinity with Benjamin is crucial to understanding the artist's allegorical impulse as both critics share a fascination with allegory as a critical aesthetic strategy and engage this strategy to explore the history of modernity.[28] To support his study of Broodthaers, Crimp relies on Benjamin's *Das Passagen-Werk* to set up an opposition between historical materialism and cultural history.[29] The historical materialist, the "positive countertype" of the collector, renders collected objects useless, thereby resisting capitalist demands and identifying their historical meaning. In contrast, cultural history, constructed by institutions such as the museum, separates objects from both their own

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[24] Ibid., 71-91.
[25] Ibid., 75.
[26] Ibid., 80.
[27] Ibid.
[28] It is important to note, as Craig Owens has argued, that Benjamin is the only twentieth-century critic to view allegory as a valid and useful aesthetic strategy.
[29] Crimp, 72-75.; Das Passagen-werk includes Benjamin's assorted notes on the collector that link collection to the task of the historical materialist.

contexts as well as present conditions and places them into a reified historical continuum, thereby creating an illusion of "universal knowledge." Crimp maintains that Broodthaers, as a historical materialist, not only exposes the unquestioned historicizing system of thought, but also emphasizes the relationship between institutional authority and knowledge. Broodthaers's reflective criticism further suggests that the origins of the art museum are arrested within cultural history, thereby revealing the historicizing moment that has determined the museum's present state. Allegory and history jointly play important roles throughout Broodthaers's *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles*, conveying the artist's view and promoting his purpose. These strategies function as deconstructive tools by disrupting a historical continuum that would otherwise remain foreclosed; using these tools the artist reflectively critiques the historical origins of ideology as essentially insubstantial and arbitrary.

SUBVERSIVE APPROPRIATION OF THE MUSEUM

The *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section XIXème Siècle* and its fictionalized practices of classifying, labeling, and exhibiting as well as its symbolic gestures of representing paintings with postcards, displaying empty crates, sending invitations, producing exhibition catalogs, and delivering an inaugural address, demonstrates subversive appropriation of the traditional museum. As outlined in the introduction to this thesis, Craig Owens pinpoints the appropriation of images as one of the three critical links between allegory and contemporary art, a process that empties reproduced images of their original significance and of any authoritative claim to

meaning.[30] Benjamin Buchloh details this impetus to appropriation: "In aesthetic practice, appropriation can result from an authentic desire to question the historical validity of a local, contemporary code referencing it to a different set of codes such as previous styles, heterogeneous iconic sources or to different modes of production and reception."[31] Appropriation of historical models in particular, he says, can be motivated by a desire to establish tradition and continuity as much as it can originate from an attempt to attain universal mastery of codification systems. Broodthaers's subversive appropriation of the museum should be understood as a deconstructive tool, activated through the allegorical mode, to question the historical validity of the museum as an institution.

By the title of his first museum section *Section XIXème Siècle*, the artist documents his return to the past, visually quoting and subversively appropriating the historical museum to serve his critical purpose. Buchloh proposes, this "altogether dated aura of 19th century bourgeois culture that many of his works seem to bring to mind might easily seduce the viewer into dismissing his works as being obviously obsolete and not at all concerned with the presuppositions of contemporary art."[32] It is by this engagement with the past, however, that the artist is able to disclose an acute 'consciousness of the present.' Here Benjamin facilitates and informs the analysis of Broodthaers's allegorical practice. In *Das Passagen-Werk* he argues that:

> In the act of collecting it is decisive that the object be dissociated from all its original functions in order to enter into the closest possible relationship

[30] The other two links Owens makes are attraction to site-specificity and strategies of accumulation; Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," October 12 (Spring, 1980): 69.
[31] Benjamin H.D. Bucholoh, "Parody and Appropriation in Francis Picabia, Pop, and Sigmar Polke," Artforum 20, no. 7 (March 1982): 28.
[32] Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Formalism and Historicity—Changing Concepts in American and European Art since 1945," in Europe in the Seventies: Aspects of Recent Art, exh. cat. (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1977): 98.

> with its equivalents. This is the diametric opposite of use, and stands under the curious category of completeness. What is this "completeness"? It is a grandiose attempt to transcend the totally irrational quality of a mere being-there through integration into a new, specifically created historical system—the collection. And for the true collector every single thing in this system becomes an encyclopedia of all knowledge of the age, of the landscape, the industry, the owner from which it derives. . . . Collecting is a form of practical memory and, among the profane manifestations of "proximity," the most convincing one. Therefore, even the minutest act of political commemoration in the commerce in antiques becomes, in a sense, epochal. We are here constructing an alarm clock that awakens the kitsch of the past century into "re-collection."[33]

In this passage, Benjamin sets up a relationship between past and present that is dependent on rendering material objects useless or obsolete. To elaborate, at the outset of "Marcel Broodthaers: Allegories of the Avant-Garde" Buchloh argues that the allegorical mode is dependent on historical obsolescence which functions to reveal how the present is determined by the past. He explains that with allegory the seemingly vital objects of analysis and representation are in fact historically obsolete, a characteristic that renders these objects available for appropriation and reification.[34] Recall that, according to Owens, appropriation fixes within objects the historical distance between the object and its production, rendering the object significant only through that distance. Appropriating historically obsolete objects exposes the distance between present and past that supports an acute consciousness of the present and furthermore discloses the degree to which contemporary art practices are historically determined. The allegorical mode in Broodthaers's work relies on historical obsolescence to negate the contemporary ideological discourse sustaining the objects and to reveal their "past material potential."[35] Benjamin's true collector, likewise, renders the objects of his collection useless, resisting

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[33] Walter Benjamin, Das-Passagen-Werk (Frankfurt am main: Suhrkamp, 1982), 1: 271.
[34] Buchloh furthermore asserts reification to be the historical subject of allegory and equally notes ideology to be allegory's historicized material; Buchloh, "Allegories," 52.
[35] Ibid., 56.

capitalist demands and activating the ability to unravel the "secret historical meaning" behind the things he accumulates.[36] The true collector is thus an allegorist, appropriating outmoded objects to reveal historical truths. Broodthaers uses the "dated aura" of the nineteenth century to reveal contemporary attitudes about culture and, more critically, to address the dilemma of contemporary art.

Appropriating the nineteenth century as the model era for his fictional museum, Broodthaers sees the museum as an obsolete site of institutionalized culture. He emphasizes this critique by repeating the premise of his first installation in subsequent installations. At the closing of his *Section XIXème Siècle* Broodthaers announced the opening of the *Section XVIIème Siècle* at A 37 90 89, an alternative exhibition space in Antwerp. A bus transported those present at the closing reception in Brussels to the opening reception in Antwerp (Fig. 6). Although representing two separate, and discontinuous, centuries, the form and content of the two installations are largely the same. The *Section XVIIème Siècle* like the *Section XIXème Siècle* included crates, packing cases, postcards of artworks (all these works by Peter Paul Rubens), and opening ceremonies.

While the *Section XIXème Siècle* remained open for a year, the *Section XVIIème Siècle* remained open for only a week. About five months later, the *Section XIXème Siècle (Bis)*, a continuation of his *Section XIXème Siècle*, opened at the Stadtische Kunsthalle in Düsseldorf; this section remained open for only two days. For this section Broodthaers assembled eight nineteenth-century paintings borrowed from the Düsseldorf Kunstmuseum, hanging the works according to size and shape (Fig. 7). The arrangement

[36] Crimp, 72.

recalls the hanging practices of eighteenth-century museological practice, and are hung with a decorative rather than a didactic purpose. Opposite the actual artworks he hung postcards, photographs from the *Section XIXème Siècle*, and posters from both the *Section XIXème Siècle* and the *Section XVIIème Siècle*. Considering all three sections together illustrates the extent of Broodthaers's fiction, emphasized by the repetition of the installation and the discursive ploy involved in declaring from one location to another, "This is the museum," for one year, for one week, or for two days. Shortening the duration of each successive section the artist draws attention to the temporality of each installation, an aspect that emphasizes the consciousness of the present so important to the allegorical mode.

Broodthaers continues his subversive appropriation of the museum with the *Section Documentaire* in 1969. This section consisted of a manifestation of the museum on the beach at Le Coq, on the North Sea coast of Belgium. A relief form dug into the sand suggested the plan of the museum, and a sign posted in the sand with the Flemish "Museum voor Moderne Kunst" designated the area as the site for the Modern Art Museum (Fig. 8). Broodthaers and his assistant, one of his collectors Herman Daled, wore caps inscribed "museum" while posting signs in the sand reading "Touching the objects is absolutely forbidden" (Fig. 9). Broodthaers created a theoretically enclosed museum space out of the vast area of beach, an installation whose presence would eventually be obliterated by the returning tide. This installation inverts text and context, where the installation becomes the context by which the museum can be read as text, emphasizing the mutually constitutive relationship between text and context.

In "Marcel Broodthaers: Allegories of the Avant-Garde," Buchloh has pinpointed Broodthaers's prime concern, "to distinguish the limits between outside husk and inside kernel, frame and body, the interaction between object and subject, or in more precise terms, the gradual transgressions from living dialectics to cultural reification that determine artistic production."[37] In the *Section Documentaire*, where language creates the museum space as much as objects, the material form of the beach embodies the limits between text and context. Deconstruction relentlessly pursues possibility within the structure, an ambition that illustrates that the external is sustained by the internal and thus perpetuated, a precept embraced by the *Section Documentaire*. Broodthaers inscribes this work into the theoretical institutional frame, a practice that, as previously noted, reads as a dialectical strategy for revealing contemporary conditions of object production.

The relation and transmission between object and language become critical points in the artist's allegorical investigation. He demonstrates particular interest in the processes that concretize the material object: reification, commodification, and ideological appropriation. Material concretion within the discourse of art, however, is inevitably appropriated by the ideology of the "culture industry" and made to support and affirm the socio-political conditions it was initially attempting to negate, and the discourse itself must be critically negated.[38] The paradox, as Buchloh identifies, is that to avoid the fallacy of idealism, the critical negation must accept the status of the object-discourse, reifying the object even further. This critical negation of the objects within Broodthaers's work renders the objects obsolete and, Buchloh argues, ensures their

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[37] Buchloh, "Allegories," 55.

[38] Ibid., 55-56.; The concept of the "culture industry" derives from Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's chapter "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" from The Dialectic of Enlightenment (1944). They argue that popular culture produces standardized cultural goods for passive enjoyment by the masses.

allegorical character, which refuses the contemporary ideological life of objects and, at the same time, is reminiscent of their past material potential. Allegory therefore functions in his artistic practice to reveal the historical nature of aesthetic reality in its contemporary practices of cultural institutionalization and commercial reification, laying bare what is normally concealed from the individual involved in the act of production.

IMPLOSION OF MEDIUM-SPECIFICITY: THE FIGURE AND THE EAGLE

Rosalind Krauss's book *"A Voyage on the North Sea": Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (1999) builds on the previous writings of Buchloh and Crimp, contributing an expanded exploration of Broodthaers's work through the lens of the aesthetic medium. She argues that the "post-medium condition" that introduces the intermedia "loss of specificity" can trace its lineage to the *Musée d'Art Moderne*, whose eagle, as a 'readymade' material object, collapses the difference between aesthetic and commodified and proclaims the end of medium-specificity.[39] Krauss describes the resonant relationship between the post-medium condition and post-structuralism, denoting Broodthaers as the "knight errant" of this resonance, whose *Musée* demonstrates both subversive appropriation of the museum and "implosion of medium-specificity," two deconstructive tactics. Further, she pinpoints the paradox that arises from this resonance to be the collusion between theory and the culture industry noting that because of the potential for theory to be absorbed and appropriated, any critique of the culture industry will inevitably also support that industry. She further explores the irony of this paradox by demonstrating that Broodthaers conducts a form of *détournement*, or subversive appropriation, on himself by acknowledging his consistent contradictions and

[39] Krauss, 12-20.

interest in obsolescence. Emphasizing the artist's attraction to the outmoded, in particular the nineteenth century and the true collector as defined by Benjamin, she contends that using techniques that have been rendered outmoded reveals the "inner complexity of the mediums those techniques support" and establishes the specificity of mediums as differential.[40] By using mediums that cannot be reduced to material, Krauss argues that Broodthaers stands for and thereby stands in, the "post-medium condition." She concludes by characterizing the postmodern as the "complete image-permeation of social and daily life," where art finds itself complicit with the globalization of the image.[41] She ultimately contends that Marcel Broodthaers has been fundamental to the postmodern understanding that the medium must be reinvented or rearticulated in the age of the post-medium condition.

The tenets outlined by Rosalind Krauss concerning the aesthetic medium and Benjamin Buchloh's critical analysis of the acculturation process and his investigation of parody as an aesthetic strategy, expanded on in the conclusion of this chapter, emphasize the issues at play in the *Musée d'Art Moderne*. Indeed, as proposed by Rosalind Krauss, the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* "constitutes the ultimate implosion of medium specificity,"[42] pinpointing the fate of media in the rise of a critical post-modernism, of which Broodthaers's *Musée*, as institutional critique, is an example. The form and content of the *Musée* abandon traditional media, a feature that is important to understanding the artist's critical agenda. As described by Benjamin Buchloh, the artist's installations "abandoned traditional pictorial and sculptural materials and procedures in

[40] Ibid., 53.
[41] Ibid., 56.
[42] Ibid., 33.

favor of a transformation of art into linguistic definitions."[43] Producing artwork outside of traditional media acknowledges that art is made not only of material, but is also constructed by framing narratives, a recognition that supports deconstruction. Institutional critique shifts attention from the internal aesthetic aspects of a work of art to the physical and ideological influences of the site of exhibition, dismantling the fiction of a text autonomous of context. This conceptual form of art production endeavors to purify art of materiality, producing instead "a mode of theory-about-art."[44] In negating medium-specificity, the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* indeed sets forth the theoretical basis of its own project.[45] To illustrate this point, I will explore two concepts that are fundamental to Broodthaers's project: the figure and the eagle. Outlining this self-referential theoretical basis will be crucial to understanding the artist's critical enterprise.

Typical of Broodthaers's work, he affixes figure numbers to miscellaneous objects, assigning them as Fig. 1, Fig. A, Fig. 0, Fig. 12, etc., as demonstrated in the *Section Cinéma* of the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* installed from 1971-1972. This section includes two rooms in the subdivided basement of the Haus Burgplatz in Düsseldorf. The smaller room displays an arrangement of various everyday objects such as a mirror, a pipe, a clock, and even a framed photograph of an eagle's head labeled with figure numbers (Fig. 10). The larger room projects several films, including a Chaplin film and a travelogue of Brussels. Broodthaers attached figure labels to the movie screen itself so that every image projected onto it engaged in an arbitrary system

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[43] Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Marcel Broodthaers: Open Letters, Industrial Poems," in Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975 (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000), 73.
[44] Krauss, 10.
[45] Ibid., 33.

of classification (Fig. 11). The figure numbers, including three "fig.1"s, three "fig.2"s, one "fig.0," one "fig.A," and one "fig.12," remained in the same place for every projected scene.[46] By emptying the figure and its label of any signification Broodthaers subverts the didactic label. The notice for the section announced the showing of "didactic films" every Thursday from two to seven in the evening.[47] Through this announcement the artist mocks the pedagogical role of the museum while also hinting at the informative purpose of his subversive gesture and overall project. His "didactic" intention, however, is less instructive than it is theoretical. To explain, I will propose that the word "figure," as opposed to symbol, object, or image, was of particular significance to the *Musée d'Art Moderne* project. A concept that "implies seeing, observing, but not yet explaining," the word "figure" evades definition.[48] Broodthaers's critic Dirk Snauwert asserts that the artist's label "'Fig.' indicates the position of an object between observation and translation into an image."[49] In this position of ambivalence, the "figure" may assume any implied meaning.

The "figure" also appears in the *Section des Figures: Der Adler vom Oligozän bis heute*, installed in 1972. The *Section des Figures* recollects the heterogeneous profusion of objects and their subsequent reclassification as practiced in the nineteenth century, another instance of the outmoded era appropriated by the allegorical mode. Broodthaers collects his three hundred eagles and displays them in glass vitrines, on pedestals, and mounted on walls within his constructed museum (Fig. 12). He marks each artifact again

[46] Buchloh and Gilissen, 186-187.
[47] Crimp, 82.
[48] Dirk Snauwaert, "The Figures," trans. Kaatje Cusse, October 42 (Fall 1987): 128.
[49] Ibid.

with figure numbers and the previously mentioned declaration, "This is not a work of art." The figures are arranged in no particular numerical order, nor do they follow any particular chronological order as the subtitle "Der Adler vom Oligozän bis heute" or "the Eagle from the Oligocene to today" might suggest. *Oligozän* rather functions primarily to give a false air of scholarship, another subversion of the museum's function. The section's organization appropriates both curatorial practice and the historicizing enterprise, and illustrates the fallacy in any system of logic or governance; accordingly, the figures' operation is theoretical. Broodthaers proposes: "A theory of the figures would serve only to give an image of a theory. But the Fig. as a theory of the image?"[50] By this complex statement, he predicts even theory to be subject to appropriation by a larger framework or ideology, giving only a glimpse of its true meaning, where real intentions remain intangible. By his question, however, he envisions the redemptive qualities of the Fig., "a fragment that participates wholly in neither language nor icon."[51]

For Broodthaers, the Eagle represented the object of a method.[52] As the symbol and name of the museum department, the eagle represented the one constant aspect in Broodthaers's project.[53] In the *Section des Figures*, Broodthaers displayed everything from eagles printed on vases, eagles in prints, eagles in paintings, a temple sculpture of a stone eagle's head, an Eagle brand typewriter, an eagle comic-strip character, a

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[50] Statement inscribed on an untitled work of art 1973-4, as quoted in Krauss, 33. I credit my understanding of Broodthaers's intention to Krauss's footnote, 60.
[51] Ibid., 60.
[52] Borgemeister, 137.
[53] *Département des Aigles* was indeed the only constant part of the museum. Broodthaers in fact changed the nearly constant *Musée d'Art Moderne* in his closing section two months after the opening of the section. First called *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section d'Art Moderne*, Broodthaers retitles the section *Musée d'Art Ancien, Département des Aigles, Galerie du XXème Siècle*: the final manifestation of the *Musée d'Art Moderne*.

taxidermic scene representing an eagle hunting a rabbit—to name but a few examples.[54] Broodthaers had no intention of establishing a fixed meaning for the eagle and the fact that the eagle was already a heavily loaded symbol, encoded with weighty historical and cultural ideas, was a precondition of his experiment.[55] Mythology, folklore, and regalia abound with eagles yielding weighty signification, but adopting any of these definitive identifications would be unbefitting the artistic style of Broodthaers. Indeed in his installations the fluctuation between meanings and within meaning functions as the very meaning itself. The artist himself notes, "the concept of the exhibition is based on the identity of the eagle as an idea with art as an idea."[56] To emphasize his point, he even issued false and often contradictory theories to confuse his meaning of the eagle.[57] In a short typescript Broodthaers ironically defines the purpose of the *Section des Figures*:

1) To baffle every ideology which can be formed around a symbol (it is false).
2) To study objectively these symbols (the eagles) and particularly their use in artistic representation (eagles are useful).
3) To use the discoveries of conceptual art to illuminate objects and pictures of the past.
   Conclusion: The eagle is a bird.[58]

By these precepts Broodthaers rejects any ideological or symbolic meaning given to the eagle as contingent and variable, accepting only the essential quality of the eagle as a bird. For Krauss the eagle proclaims the end of medium specificity. She terms the "eagle principle" that which "implodes the idea of an aesthetic medium and turns everything into a readymade that collapses the difference between the aesthetic and the

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[54] More examples can be found in Borgemeister, 139.
[55] Ibid., 138.
[56] Marcel Broodthaers, "Section des Figures," in Der Adler vom Oligozän bis Heute, exh. cat. (Düsseldorf: Stadtische Kunsthalle, 1972), 2:19; quoted in Crimp, 86.
[57] Martin Mosebach, "The Castle, the Eagle, and the Secret of the Pictures," in Marcel Broodthaers, exh. cat. (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1989), 175.
[58] Michael Compton, "In Praise of the Subject," in Marcel Broodthaers, exh. cat. (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1989), 50.

commodified."[59] In essence, the eagle functions as an emblem for Conceptual art; accordingly, "it becomes a form of advertising or promotion, now promoting Conceptual art."[60] By this assertion Krauss underlines the very paradox of the *Musée d'Art Moderne*, revealing the project's constitution in language and ideology and its subsequent absorption by the process of acculturation.

MUSEE D'ART MODERNE AND THE CULTURE INDUSTRY

Broodthaers closed his *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* in 1972 with the *Section Publicité* and the *Section d'Art Moderne* at documenta 5 in Kassel. In a press release for the exhibition, he reflects critically on the fate of his museum:

> Founded in Brussels in 1968 under the pressure of political perceptions of the moment, this museum now closes its doors at documenta. It will have passed from a heroic and solitary form to one bordering on consecration, thanks to the help from the Kunsthalle Dusseldorf and that of documenta. It is therefore only logical that the museum freezes in a state of boredom.[61]

The subject of these final installments of the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* adapted the transformations throughout the first four years of the project. From its inception in 1968, the project intended to address political concerns and to oppose cultural commodification and the commercialization of art, but in its final stages the artist recognized the inevitable process of its cultural reception as well as the cultural conditions of artistic production. Benjamin Buchloh recognizes the artist's prescient realization:

> With the canny clairvoyance of the materialist, Broodthaers anticipated, as early as the mid-1960s, the complete transformation of artistic production

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[59] Krauss, 20.
[60] Ibid., 15.
[61] Printed in Buchloh and Gilissen, 9.

> into a branch of the culture industry, a phenomenon which we only now recognize.[62]

Over the course of its thirteen installations, the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* acknowledged the inevitability of this transformation. In fact, it seems as though in the act of negating medium specificity and intentionally initiating a discursive field, Broodthaers relinquished his project to absorption by theory. Furthermore, by promoting the identity of his borrowed museum objects as simple objects he ensures their stasis and their ability to be commodified. By the end of his project, the artist accepted the impossibility of an aesthetic of radical transgression or individuality within the institutional and discursive framework, and requested the following to be printed in French, English, and German on the cover of the avant-garde journal *Interfunktionen*:

> VIEW according to which an artistic theory will be functioning as publicity for the artistic product in the same manner that the artistic product functions as publicity for the regime under which it was conceived.[63]

According to this, any theory, even if it is submitted as a critique of the culture industry, will inevitably support that very industry. By this paradox, it seems his critique fails in its attempt to oppose and moreover dismantle the acculturation process.

In assessing the effectiveness of Broodthaers's critique, it is necessary to further discuss the process of acculturation and the artist's response to it, a process that can be better understood by analyzing parody as an aesthetic strategy. In his article "Parody and Appropriation in Francis Picabia, Pop, and Sigmar Polke," Benjamin Buchloh provides an insightful reading into parody as a critical aesthetic strategy that can be applied to understanding Broodthaers's critique of the museum. At the outset of this text, Buchloh

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[62] Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Intoductory Note," October 42 (Fall 1987): 5.
[63] Buchloh, "Contemplating Publicity," 88.

introduces the strategy of appropriation, and makes a critical link between the motivations for appropriation and cultural dynamics, claiming that all cultural practice lean towards appropriation. He furthermore sees the impetus to appropriation as an often "authentic desire to question the historical validity of a local, contemporary code."[64] He offers as example the contemporary neo-avant-garde artist who, he explains, appropriates elements from low culture within a framework of high culture—a way, he proposes, of "publicly denounc[ing] the elitist isolation and the obsolescence of its inherited production procedures."[65] Paradoxically, appropriation widens the gap it sets out to bridge, creates the commodity that it set out to abolish, and furthermore seems to "reinstitute and reaffirm precisely those contradictions that it set out to eliminate." [66] Buchloh mobilizes parody as one of the rhetorical modes, along with disguise and mimicry, that can justify the aesthetic "failure to negate both subjectified, private practice as a possible substitute for collective practice, and the objectifying discourse of high art that interrupts the process of true individuation."[67] Parodistic appropriation therefore functions to reveal the dilemma of the individual in contemporary artistic practice, locating the individual's constitution in language and ideology. This process subsequently inscribes the individual into "dominant conventions and rules of codification." Accordingly, signifying practice must be subverted and deconstruction deployed in frameworks such as the market, the commodity, and the institutions of art. To that degree, Buchloh explains that parodistic appropriation, "anticipates the failure of

[64] Buchloh, "Parody," 28.
[65] Ibid., 29.
[66] Ibid., 30.
[67] Ibid.

the attempt to subvert the ruling codification and allies itself in advance with the powers that will ultimately make its deconstructive efforts abort in cultural success."[68]

Buchloh outlines the neo-avant-garde use of parody taken up by Broodthaers as "an appropriate rhetorical mode for replying to and denouncing the claims of a dominant Modernist ideology that lacks credibility and validity."[69] Parody, therefore, like allegory, functions as a deconstructive strategy revealing the fallacy of ideology and disclosing a reality ridden by contradictions, fluctuations, and multiplicity. Buchloh reminds us that, "criticism of such strategies as ultimately reaffirming mass-cultural manipulation and glamorizing collective alienation falls short of asking the crucial critical questions these strategies raise and fails to recognize the actual place of these strategies within the tradition of twentieth century art."[70] In his final analysis of parody, Buchloh purports that, although from the outside parody may look "clownish" and "enslaved," looking at parody from the inside reveals a successful battle, performing liberation with "subversive vigor."[71] Indeed, through deconstruction, which subverts the dominant ideology and liberates both the historical institution and the discourse within which it is fabricated, Broodthaers's *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* successfully introduces into the era of critical post-modernism a practice of institutional critique.

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[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid., 31.
[70] Ibid., 32.
[71] Ibid., 34.

CHAPTER 2

FRED WILSON'S *MINING THE MUSEUM*: ACCESSING THE COLLECTION OF THE MARYLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

OPPOSING HERITAGE

Authoritatively, subjectively, arbitrarily, heritage constructs social memory.

Stuart Hall interprets "heritage" as

> the whole complex of organizations, institutions and practices devoted to the preservation and presentation of culture and the arts—art galleries, specialist collections, public and private, museums of all kinds (general, survey or themed, historical or scientific, national or local) and sites of special historical interest.[1]

National heritage claims to preserve a comprehensive history, but through an essentializing process, certain national memories are silenced and effectively forgotten. Heritage constructs systems of knowledge and represents authoritative histories. Through a monolithic discourse, both textual and visual, heritage conveys national history and communicates it as objective truth.

Fred Wilson confronts the privileging of certain heritages over others in his exhibition at the Maryland Historical Society, *Mining the Museum* (1992). He introduces viewers to his project with the alluring and provocative *Truth Trophy* (Fig. 13). The whole of this particular installation consists of a gold and silver globe, emblazoned with the word "Truth," encased alongside eight empty acrylic mounts within a glass vitrine, as well as six pedestals, three black, and three white, flanking each side of the trophy. On the right, the three white marble pedestals support the busts of Henry Clay, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Andrew Jackson. On the left, three black pedestals remain empty, but

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[1] Stuart Hall, "Whose Heritage? Un-settling 'The Heritage', Re-imagining the Post-Nation," in The Third Text Reader on Art, Culture, and Theory, eds. Rasheed Araeen, Sean Cubitt, and Ziauddin Sardar (London: Continuum, 2002), 72-73.

bear the names Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, and Benjamin Banneker, three significant figures in African-American history. With the pedestals, Wilson raises questions about history, collecting, and curatorial selection. In particular, he questions why three busts of white men, none of whom had a significant impact on Maryland's history have been collected and displayed at the Maryland Historical Society while Tubman, Douglass, and Banneker, all from Maryland, remain conspicuously absent. What heralds the most attention, however, is the shining gold trophy bearing in capital letters the central idea of the installation: truth. The immaculate golden trophy presides over the installation, although its authority is complicated by the presence of the empty acrylic mounts, a presence that emphasizes absence. Furthermore, Wilson encases the trophy and the empty mounts within a glass vitrine, appropriating conventional museum practices of display to accentuate the impenetrability of institutional authoritative truth. What truth has been omitted? Whose truth is on exhibit at the Maryland Historical Society? Who has access to the creation of this truth?

Stuart Hall explains,

> Like personal memory, social memory is also highly selective, it highlights and foregrounds, imposes beginnings, middles, and ends on the random and contingent. Equally, it foreshortens, silences, disavows, forgets and elides many episodes which—from another perspective—could be the start of a different narrative.[2]

Fred Wilson intends to tell this different narrative, not a new narrative, but one which has been historically silenced and that questions the accepted "truth" of a homogenous past. Looking specifically at *Mining the Museum*, this chapter explores how the artist applies the aesthetic strategies of history and allegory, introducing the black body as an aesthetic

[2] Ibid., 75.

model, in order to deconstruct the linear metahistory[3] constructed and perpetuated by dominant cultural institutions such as the Maryland Historical Society. I will introduce the function of allegory within his project and then develop the genealogical model of history, explaining how this method applies to Wilson's installations and furthers his critique. With these strategies, I take a closer look at his project and two types of installations—portraiture and juxtaposition—that the artist uses to evoke the presence of the black body, encouraging a different vision of race relations and prompting a rethinking of history. I will show how Wilson, with access to both the permanent collection, as well as the museum archives of the Maryland Historical Society, in turn provides historically anonymous subjects with the tools to access their own history as well as their own subjectivity. I intend to address the overall effectiveness of this type of institutional critique, highlighting the profundity of addressing these issues within an established museum using its own collection and history.

FRED WILSON: MINING THE MUSEUM

Fred Wilson was born in the Bronx, a multicultural borough in New York City, in 1954 to an African-American father and West Indian mother. The Civil Rights Movement peaked from 1955-1965 and the Civil Rights Act, which legislated against discrimination in public facilities, in government, and in employment, was passed in 1964, making racism an urgent issue throughout his development. Both his mixed ancestry and his proximity to the movement toward racial integration influenced his perspective on American culture as well as the American museum. In an interview he

[3] I have adopted the term "metahistory" from Michel Foucault, "Nietzche, Genealogy, History," in The Foucault Reader, ed. Paul Rabinow, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).

expressed his exposure throughout childhood to museums and cultural events, claiming museums to be "the cultural venue I know most about."[4] He describes his early interest in the politics and practices of the museum saying: "I had always paid attention to various museum practices: the way objects were displayed, what curators said about the art and artists in wall labels."[5]

Recent and current museum studies scholarship and contemporaneous museum projects underscore Wilson's critical views about institutions. Questions of race and representation in the museum have become increasingly more pronounced since the debut of institutional criticism as a practice. Within the past thirty-five years, the increased scholarship questioning the structures, rituals, and ideologies influencing the museum has inevitably also questioned the constitution of objects and others within the museum context. Wilson's work follows a vein of institutional criticism including Duchamp's *La Boite-en-valise*, Andy Warhol's *Raid the Icebox*, Marcel Broodthaers's *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles*, and James Luna's *The Artifact Piece*, a trajectory laid out by art historian Jennifer Gonzalez. She argues that his work mirrors the main premise of each preceding project: critiquing the museum as arbiter of taste, creating installations from a museum's permanent collection, and countering the ideological effects museums have on minority communities, such as identity formation.[6] Of critical importance to Wilson is the exploration of identity and how cultural institutions such as museums shape identity. In the post-Civil Rights era, examining the historicity of "race" has been a

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[4] Fred Wilson as quoted in Leslie King Hammond, "A Conversation with Fred Wilson," in Mining the Museum: an installation, ed. Lisa G. Corrin (Baltimore: The Contemporary, 1994), 26.
[5] Wilson as quoted in Maurice Berger, "Collaboration, Museums, and the Politics of Display: a Conversation with Fred Wilson," in Fred Wilson: Objects and Installations 1979-2000, ed. Maurice Berger (Baltimore: Center for Art and Visual Culture, 2001), 33.
[6] Jennifer Gonzalez, "Against the Grain: the Artist as Conceptual Materialist," in Fred Wilson: Objects and Installations 1979-2000, ed. Maurice Berger (Baltimore: Center for Art and Visual Culture, 2001), 24.

crucial project due to political disenchantment coinciding with a profound rethinking of the nature of identity.[7] An analysis of the modern museum recognizes the museum's ability to communicate a national identity which inevitably excludes "other" cultures, including minority cultures within their own societies.

As detailed previously in this thesis, poetics and politics coalesce under post-structuralist methodology. Contemporary politics motivates Wilson's critique, which is, like Broodthaers's and other conceptual art projects, supported by language, signifying systems, and discursive practice. Wilson's unique artistic practice is not only influenced by contemporaneous issues in museum studies and increased activism amongst disenfranchised populations, but also by the merging of politics with conceptual art's rejection of the institutional frame in the 1960s and 70s, shaping the critical appraisal of the institution of the museum.[8]

Lisa Corrin, curator and educator at The Contemporary, facilitates the analysis of Wilson's critical poetic: "Wilson is fluent in the language of the museum, using it with deftness and humor to put into question its authority. His installation gestures articulate, in the museum's native tongue, its cultural appropriations, misreadings, and 'sins of omission.'"[9] Deploying a postmodernist criticality he undermines the principles on which the museum and its structure were founded. By appropriating and reusing existing objects, Wilson reinterprets sign systems that are already in place and offers a critical perspective on the history of museums. With this gesture Wilson critiques the mainstream ideology of history that restricts interpretation of the museum's contents,

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[7] Judith Wilson, "New (Art) Histories: Global Shifts, Uneasy Exchanges," in New Histories, eds. Lia Gangitano and Steven Nelson (Boston: The Institute of Contemporary Art, 1996), 17.
[8] Gonzalez, 24.
[9] Lisa G. Corrin, "Installing History," Art Papers 18, no. 4 (July-August 1994): 11.

using the historical resources of the museum to call attention to both the presence and the erasure of African-American identity in historical representations; this is Wilson's original contribution to institutional criticism. He reveals the historical complexity through which ethnic identities and cultural ideologies are formed, and his deconstructive efforts promote an understanding of self and society as products of global histories that are uneven, discontinuous, yet intricately enmeshed.

The project *Mining the Museum* arose in 1991 when The Contemporary, an alternative art institution in Baltimore specializing in community projects, invited Wilson to choose one of the city's museums to create an installation using its permanent collection. Without question the artist chose the Maryland Historical Society specifically because, he says, it was "the most conservative environment" of all of Baltimore's museums.[10] Although the museum proclaimed its dedication to recounting Maryland's entire history, Wilson found much of the state's history omitted, most importantly, its history as a slave owning state. Curatorial omission and distortion within the museum suppressed Maryland's history of slavery, racism, and social domination. Using both works within the museum's displayed collection as well as excavating previously unviewed items from the museum's archive, the artist questions the museum's program, exploring whose history has been included or excluded from Maryland's historical narrative.[11]

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[10] Fred Wilson and Ivan Karp, "Constructing the Spectacle of Culture in Museums," Art Papers (May-June 1993), 4; quoted in Maurice Berger, "Viewing the Invisible: Fred Wilson's Allegories of Absence and Loss," in Fred Wilson: Objects and Installations 1979-2000, ed. Maurice Berger (Baltimore: Center for Art and Visual Culture, 2001), 10.

[11] Mining the Museum also briefly addresses Native American history, but for the purpose of a succinct argument, I will be discussing only issues of black history.

It is important to describe the Maryland Historical Society and its collecting efforts before *Mining the Museum* to emphasize the impact of Wilson's installation. Many members of the Colonization Society, an influential organization that endorsed the removal of black people from the state of Maryland, participated in the formation of the Maryland Historical Society. More than coincidental, this colonizationist founding influenced the black person's "barely visible and always subordinate" status within the museum.[12] Before *Mining the Museum*, the Society exhibited traditional displays of "decorative arts" displaying furniture, silver, and other domestic objects of the elite with minimal attention to non-affluent or non-white communities. The African-American experience was represented by two outdated vitrines devoted to jazz musician Eubie Blake; slavery is briefly referenced in an exhibition devoted to the Civil War, "Blue against Grey;" while the life of freed blacks is referenced only by a painting from the collection of Isaac Myers, the first African-American owner of a Maryland shipyard.[13]

Mining the Museum was accepted on the conditions that Wilson would not be refused access to any part of the collection, and that the Society would accommodate any need or request made by the artist for the duration of the project. Additionally, rather than working with museum staff already prejudiced with an established vision of the collection, the artist would be assisted by independent volunteers with expertise in African-American local and state history, astronomy, and museum history. When the project opened, Wilson displayed a red, green, and black sign alongside the official museum sign, announcing to "other" audiences that a different history was displayed

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[12] Ira Berlin, "*Mining the Museum* and the Rethinking of Maryland's History," in Mining the Museum: an installation, ed. Lisa G. Corrin (Baltimore: The Contemporary, 1994), 43.
[13] Lisa G. Corrin, "*Mining the Museum*: Artists Look at Museums, Museums Look at Themselves," in Mining the Museum: an installation, ed. Lisa G. Corrin (Baltimore: The Contemporary, 1994), 11-12.

inside. In the museum lobby, Wilson introduced himself and his intention to his audience with a video recording that identifies the museum as a place to "make you think, to make you question," and implores the audience to consider how *Mining the Museum* has changed the terrain of the museum.[14] After these introductions, the audience proceeded up the elevator to the installation on the third floor. Like many historicizing installations, the narrative sequence of *Mining the Museum* does not unfold along a linear trajectory. The exhibition is rather arranged according to successive emotionally and politically provocative colors—grey rooms of historical truths, a green corridor evoking human emotions, red rooms associated with slavery and rebellion, and blue representing the realm of dreams and achievements.[15] Throughout these corridors Wilson introduces objects and images that deconstruct the traditional history supported and perpetuated by the Maryland Historical Society.

USING PORTRAITURE: VISUALISING FORGOTTEN SUBJECTS

The first room in the green corridor of *Mining the Museum* presents to the audience canvases, watercolors, and photographs portraying figures from Maryland's history. To these original portraits Wilson introduces various devices that revise the viewer's engagement with the original work. Motion detectors sense the viewer's presence and trigger spotlights, voice recordings, and video projections that proffer a different view of the works. Equally, by presenting altered titles to works in the permanent collection, the artist disrupts the museum's traditional narrative. Adding such visual apparatuses, Wilson uses these portraits to expose presence of the black body.

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[14] Ibid., 13.
[15] Berger, "Viewing the Invisible," 12.

Uncovering the black body's existence and yielding a concrete and perceptible subject, Wilson's intervention uncovers the series of subjugations within Maryland's history, exposing the relationship of domination and subjugation exploited by slavery and racism.

Wilson alters eighteenth-century portraits of white subjects from the Maryland Historical Society's permanent collection to give voice to historically silenced subjects. Black figures were often utilized in eighteenth-century portraiture as "a stock device" to balance the central figures.[16] Pushed to the edges of the frames, these figures, usually slaves owned by those that are prominently portrayed, are often barely visible due to the dark pigments used to paint their skin. To draw attention to the hidden black children in the portraits, the artist installed a motion sensor that prompted a spotlight and audiotape when approached.[17] The voice of the young black girl in *The Alexander Contee Hanson Family* portrait by Robert Edge Pine circa 1787 asks, "Where is my mother? Who washes my back? Who combs my hair? Who calms me when I am afraid?" (Fig. 14). In the portrait of *Henry Cas Darnall III as a Child* by Justus Engelhardt Kuhn circa 1710, the voice of the anonymous slave with a metal collar around his neck raises questions about the relationship between the white child and his black slave asking, "Am I your brother? Am I your friend? Am I your pet?" (Fig. 15).[18] By posing these questions, Wilson expands the field of historical inquiry and gives these nameless figures subjecthood.

In an adjacent display, Wilson assigns alternate titles to watercolors by eighteenth-century folk-artist Benjamin Latrobe. These watercolors depict genre scenes that include the daily activities of slaves, but fail to personify any of the figures present.

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[16] Corrin, "*Mining the Museum*," 14.
[17] Gonzalez, 28.
[18] Ibid.

Latrobe titles the canvases with scenic descriptions, *View of Welch Point and the Mouth of Backcreek* (1806) (Fig. 16) and *Preparations for the Enjoyment of a Fine Sunday among the Blacks* (1797) (Fig. 17), a process that undermines the presence of the black figures within the scene. In Latrobe's rendering these figures are observed but not identified. Wilson's intervention draws attention to this oversight. Using actual names of slaves found in slave records recovered from the archive, he re-titles each canvas and designates an identity to the figures in each scene. *View of Welch Point and the Mouth of Backcreek* transposes to *Jack Alexander in a Canoe. Preparations for the Enjoyment of a Fine Sunday among the Blacks* becomes *Richard, Ned, and their Brothers*. The display presents the viewer with both titles, altering vision to see not only the presence of the figures but the original omission of their identities.

Wilson presents a more intense and surprising use of portraiture in *Portrait of an Unknown Man* (Fig. 18). With the inclusion of this damaged painting that the artist found in the recesses of the museum's storage, Wilson questions the concept of pure racial identity. This portrait of a white man originally painted by Henry Bebie circa 1860 is complicated by a videotape of a black man projected through the torn white surface of the canvas. Through an audiotape, the image voices the story of the unknown subject, the son of a white master who raped the subject's enslaved black mother, a hidden racial identity that the narrator comments, "nobody knows" is inside.[19] The subject's mixed racial background complicates his identity and questions the ideality of pure descent by revealing that heritage is an unstable assemblage of faults, fissures, and heterogeneous layers. Furthermore, Wilson's display of a damaged work, an institutional foible that is usually discreetly hidden from public view, functions as a metaphor for the hidden shame

[19] Corrin, "*Mining the Museum*," 14.

of the figure.[20] Through the fractured surface of the canvas, the artist excavates not only the black identity hidden underneath, but exposes the violence and injustices of slavery, the insubstantiality of visual appearances, and the heterogeneity of identity, revealing a Maryland more diversified than is often assumed. Wilson uses the black body to excavate the lost history of historically invisible subjects.

Evoking presence through absence, Wilson's deconstructive use of portraiture presents multiple historical voices. Raising questions and giving voice to physically present but underrepresented subjects, Wilson activates a dialogue that reveals the fallacy of singular representation. As will be further developed later in this chapter, the black body and its specific function in *Mining the Museum* can be understood as an aesthetic manifestation of historical deconstruction. To facilitate a thorough understanding of Wilson's use of the body, specifically the black body, I will begin by establishing the strategy of allegory and its critical function, an analysis that introduces the artist's engagement with history.

Maurice Berger, curator of Wilson's retrospective exhibition *Objects and Installations 1979-2000* offers the most significant contribution to the study of allegorical form within Fred Wilson's installations in his catalog essay, "Viewing the Invisible: Allegories of Absence and Loss" (2001).[21] He begins by detailing *Mining the Museum*'s emotionally provocative work, *Cabinet Making: 1820-1960*, to illustrate how the artist uses his objects and installations to animate history and to activate questions about the "absent bodies" and the "lost history" omitted from the museum. This process of

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[20] Ibid.
[21] Berger, "Viewing the Invisible," 9-20.

retrospective association, by which the artist presents fragments of history in order to reveal difficult contemporary truths, Berger proposes, is an aesthetic strategy corresponding to a significant literary and artistic form, allegory. He expands by explaining that allegory intends to tell one story through others, extricating what is culturally significant from the past and reinterpreting it in ways that give it contemporary relevance. The artist evokes a familiar historical narrative but introduces shocking juxtapositions to reveal the presence of absent bodies and lost histories, those removed or elided from a metahistory. Berger ultimately argues that Wilson's objects and installations are "preeminently allegories of absence and loss."[22]

Fred Wilson appropriates the black body as an aesthetic model to reveal the absent bodies and lost histories at the Maryland Historical Society. Michel Foucault, whose theory will be further developed in the next section, notes, "The body manifests the stigmata of past experience and also gives rise to desires, failings, and errors. These elements may join in a body where they achieve a sudden expression."[23] Introducing the black body, an inscribed surface that physiologically expresses racial heritage, causes uneasiness by presenting alterity to the white body as manifested in works such as *Portrait of an Unknown Man.* Historically this anxiety has been assuaged by denying the black figure subjectivity, thereby suppressing multiplicity. By opening interpretation and expanding discourse, Wilson crafts an apparatus for embodiment, one which uses history as a deconstructive tool to facilitate access to the collection of the Maryland Historical Society as illustrated in works such as *The Alexander Contee Hanson Family* and *Henry Cas Darnall III as a Child.* Drawing attention to black presence within these portraits, he

[22] Ibid., 10.
[23] Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 82-83.

allows these figures the opportunity to become subjects, revealing the presence of both black and white subjects in Maryland's history. As an embodied subject, one that is concrete and perceptible, the black body exposes the multiplicity of silenced narratives, thereby disrupting the continuity of traditional history.

The black bodies in Wilson's installations, evoked in portraits, through objects, and within dialogue, assume allegorical form. As established in the previous chapter, allegory assumes both a consciousness of the present as well as a specific and unique engagement with the past. As allegories, Wilson's black bodies reveal the degree to which the present, specifically present cultural institutions and ideology, is determined by the past. Through these bodies the artist discloses an acute consciousness of the present that shatters the continuum of history and deploys a reflective criticism of ideology. In assessing Wilson's strategy, I again apply Berger's analysis. Berger analyzes a number of the artist's installations focusing particular attention to the concept of dialogue—aesthetic conversations, giving voice to objects, setting objects in dialogue with each other—a strategy that he terms a "dialogic imperative." This confluence of dialogues, he proposes, reveals the objective of the artist's installations. He further explains:

> Dialogic expression refuses to accept the arrogant assumption that there is one language, one image, one isolated story through which the absolute truth can be articulated. It acknowledges the conditional nature of representation—that the "meaning" of any utterance or object or image is ultimately dependent on the words and objects and images around it and on the reader who interprets it. It brings the various languages and codes of culture into relationship with each other in an effort to reveal the contradictions and complexity of human existence.[24]

Through this dialogic strategy, evident within his altered portraits, the artist reveals varied and opposing voices and insists that "no cultural object stands alone, outside of the

[24] Berger, "Viewing the Invisible," 12.

social and ideological context of other objects, texts, social forces, and institutions," a strategy that positions an engagement with the past that is characteristic of allegorical form.[25] Such is the artist's deconstructionist agenda, a methodology that embraces allegory and opens the historical field for excavation.

Berger relies on Craig Owens to provide a thorough assessment of allegory, in particular its use in progressive aesthetic projects as a theoretical tool to engage the past for critical comment about the present.[26] He pinpoints site-specific earthworks, one of the three critical links between allegory and contemporary art established by Owens, as particularly relevant to Wilson's installations, describing how his institutional critique is "innately site-specific and archeological."[27] Berger further develops the archeologist metaphor alongside a description of the institution as a site where the ruins of the past can be unearthed and juxtaposed. Through this understanding, where ruins function as metaphor for cultural decay, Wilson's allegories reveal the extent to which prejudices supported by museums are "ruined and destructive." As activist allegories, Wilson's juxtapositions of past and present communicate the imperative for progression beyond institutional hierarchies that exclude certain communities, indicating need for change and reassessment. This strategy is evident in portraits that actively set two figures in opposition such as *The Alexander Contee Hanson Family* and *Henry Cas Darnall III as a Child* and is indeed manifest within his other type of installation to be discussed, the juxtaposition of objects.

A thorough understanding of the ruin will be crucial to understanding the aesthetic imperative of Wilson's work and fundamental in developing the present

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[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid., 15.
[27] Ibid., 16.

condition of the museum. The ruin has been identified by Walter Benjamin as the "allegorical emblem par excellence."[28] As argued by Owens, allegory is consistently attracted to the fragmentary, the imperfect, and the incomplete, an affinity which, he asserts, finds its most comprehensive expression in the ruin.[29] Ruins of the past as sought by allegory, like archaeological ruins, can be excavated and reclaimed for the present. To contextualize the significance of the allegorical form, Berger references mid-nineteenth century Paris, an era when the "ancient, outmoded city" was passing into a "modern metropolis."[30] Contemporaneous visual artists and writers allegorized this passage using the "mournful remnants" of the city's past. He distinctly mentions journalist and photographer Maxime DuCamp, famous for his images of ruins, who captured the city during its growth, creating melancholic allegories documenting the city's progress from ancient to modern. As Berger argues, Wilson comparably "allegorizes the passage of the museum's old guard into a new and uncertain present."[31] For Wilson, he contends, ruins stand as metaphors of the museum's "tragic and broken history," and he creates allegories by recontextualizing these fragments of a ruined past within the context of the modern museum.[32] With the ruin, the artist deploys a sustained aesthetic inquiry to challenge the present-day status of the museum. His allegories metaphorically encourage an emergence from a ruinous past and progression into a new museological space for rethinking and correcting historical biases and omissions. Using portraiture Wilson reclaims the ruins of art and ethnographic history, excavating the museum's lost history

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[28] Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism," October 12, (Spring 1980): 70.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Berger, "Viewing the Invisible," 18-19.
[31] Ibid., 19.
[32] Ibid., 17-20.

from the dark recesses of canvases, the erroneous display labels, and the damaged works within the collection. From these ruins he encourages emergence into a new museological space that is more inclusive of marginalized subjects.

USING HISTORY: GENEALOGY & THE (BLACK) BODY AS AESTHETIC MODEL

One of the key strategies of deconstruction employed in the *Mining the Museum* project is the strategy of genealogy. Fred Wilson has appropriately been referred to as a "Foucauldian archaeologist," a designation that recognizes his skill for "unearthing objects that reveal hidden histories and, more importantly, the internal workings and ideological paradigms of archives and museum collections."[33] I further propose Wilson to be a Foulcauldian historian. He researches history to find what a metahistory elides. He disproves essentiality by digging into history and unearthing the different. Excavating what has been collectively forgotten, he effectively unsettles accepted notions of history and "truth." Michel Foucault's "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" is a key text to understanding the artist's deconstructive method. In this essay, Foucault relies on the previous writings of Nietzsche to propose genealogy as a different approach to writing history, one which opposes the metaphysical, homogenous view of history. He explains:

> Nietzsche always questioned the form of history that reintroduces (and always assumes) a suprahistorical perspective: a history whose function is to compose the finally reduced diversity of time into a totality fully closed upon itself; a history that always encourages subjective recognitions and attributes a form of reconciliation to all the displacements of the past; a history whose perspective on all that precedes it implies the end of time, a completed development.[34]

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[33] Gonzalez, 29.
[34] Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 86-87.

Genealogy discloses the discontinuity of history, focusing attention to the spatial organization of individual events within the linear progression of time. Illuminating discrete events, genealogy disproves history as a progressive development.

To explain the genealogical model of history Foucault employs three theoretical tropes: origin (*Ursprung*), emergence (*Entstehung*), and descent (*Herkunft*). He delineates the etymological difference between *Ursprung*, *Entstehung*, and *Herkunft*, all of which translate from German to English as "origin," and reveals the effectiveness of their differentiation. For Foucault, metahistory searches for *Ursprung*, or original basis, in order to secure the exact, pure essence of things. Genealogy, however, entirely rejects this historical quest for origin, critiquing it as faulty and essentialist. *Entstehung*, translated as emergence, and *Herkunft*, translated as descent, more appropriately record the objective of genealogy, but only by recovering their proper meanings. The proper use of emergence reveals history as episodic and irresolute. Traditional history erroneously believes a development reaches its purpose in its becoming, seeing emergence as a culmination, as the final term of a historical development. Genealogy, however, interprets emergence as the appropriation of a system of rules to impose a direction, revealing the development as merely the current episode in a series of subjugations. The genealogical meaning of descent implies multiplicity, divulging heritage as an unstable assemblage of heterogeneous layers. Where a traditional analysis of descent seeks unification and fabricates a coherent identity, genealogy permits the dissociation of the self, liberating divergence and lost events. *Ursprung*, *Enstehung*, and *Herkunft* prove uniquely useful to Foucault's purpose in that it is through their signified unity as "origin" that he advances their inherent differentiation.

Foucault employs *Ursprung*, *Entstehung*, and *Herkunft* to deconstruct a history that has traditionally been expressed as an unalterable form, thus it is through these tropes he discloses the errors of traditional history. He denotes that history can be a "privileged instrument" of genealogy when it abandons the certainty of absolutes and looks for differences, for change, and for rupture, what Foucault calls, "effective history."[35] Rather than writing the singular event into an ideal continuity, effective history celebrates the individuality of each discrete event at its unique moment in history, introducing multiplicity and disrupting what once was thought to be cohesive and stable. Foucault pinpoints the final trait of effective history to be its affirmation of knowledge as perspective. He thereby provides a theoretical alternative to history that is useful to deconstruction by introducing a methodology that remains conscious of the embeddedness of discourses and the processes by which knowledge is accumulated.[36]

As introduced in the previous section, it is the body, in particular the black body, that is key to the artist's critique. Indeed, the body serves as a pivotal element in the study of genealogy. The body is useful for Foucault in that it not only physiologically models the expression of his genealogical tropes but also serves as a physical entity that fashions material reality. Foucault anthropomorphizes history by positing, "History is the concrete body of a development, with its moments of intensity, its lapses, its extended periods of feverish agitation, its fainting spells; and only a metaphysician would seek its soul in the distant ideality of the origin."[37] Traditional history focuses its metaphysical

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[35] Ibid., 87.
[36] Irene Winter, "Exhibit/Inhibit: Archaology, Value, History in the Work of Fred Wilson," in New Histories, eds. Lia Gangitano and Steven Nelson (Boston: The Institute of Contemporary Art, 1996), 183.
[37] Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 80.

gaze on the distant past, a furtive practice attempting to master the non-material events outlying the self. Alternatively, effective history shortens its vision to what is closest to it, notably, the body. History mimes the body in its organicism, its fluidity, its instability, and its mortality. The body as an inscribed surface of events, as a surface which is highly affected, as a locus of a dissociated self that appears unified, embodies the tropes of "effective history." Because of its organicism and therefore its tendency towards instability, the body exemplifies how history should be written. For Foucault the instability of history mirrors the instability of the body; history is subject to faults and fissures just as the body is susceptible to contagion and illness. By inserting the body as a model for history, the tracing of the past as a stable and continuous development can be systematically disassembled.

The black body furthermore presents the most effectual model disclosing how one must write history. Because the presence of the black body, as it is opposed to the white body, contests an ideal origin that proposes the linear development of one singular race, the traditional definitions of *Ursprung*, *Entstehung*, and *Herkunft* do not absorb its presence. Therefore, by theorizing the black body in history, Wilson's installations reestablish the appropriate use of the genealogical tropes of origin, emergence, and descent for genealogy's objective. The effective black subject is capable of liberating divergence and marginalized events because its body is a dissociated body capable of "shattering the unity of man's being through which it was thought he could extend his sovereignty to the events of his past."[38] As an inscribed surface of events—events which have either evaded or been omitted from social memory—the black body proves the

[38] Ibid., 87.

incomprehensive nature of history and identifies the accidents, the errors, and the false appraisals of a metahistory.

USING JUXTAPOSITION: DIALOGUE BETWEEN OBJECTS

Following Wilson's exploration of portraiture in the first room of the green corridor of *Mining the Museum*, the audience proceeds to meet another of the artist's unique installation techniques, the juxtaposition of objects. In his juxtapositions, presented in the second room of the green corridor as well as the first red room of his project, the artist investigates the processes by which objects are attributed meaning and most importantly recognizes the potential for objects to be reinterpreted. Seeing the instability and multiplicity of meanings, he realizes his ability to make his own meaning, endowing objects with his own relevance and significance. Historian Ira Berlin explains:

> Again the historical meaning of racism's transit is found not in the artifacts of the past, but in the way men and women invested them with meaning, meaning derived from their relationships with one another and to the context in which they are found. Wilson plays out the historian's concern for expanding the terrain of historical understanding within the confines of the familiar objects of everyday life.[39]

Wilson recognizes that the placement of objects largely determines their meanings, and in turn, through literal acts of dis-placement and re-placement he deconstructs the language of museum display. He explains, "Normally there is one museum for the beautiful things of one's culture and perhaps a separate room or a separate museum for the horrific things. Life, however, does not occur in neat categories."[40] In his installations, he pairs the expected with the unexpected, the comfortable with the discomforting, the banal with the shocking, exposing prejudices and omissions. In

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[39] Berlin, 45.
[40] Fred Wilson as quoted in Judith Wilson, 21.

Modes of Transport, Metalwork: 1793-1880, and *Cabinetmaking: 1820-1960* Wilson explores juxtaposition to prompt a rethinking of history. For these pieces, the artist displayed items from the Maryland Historical Society's permanent collection alongside objects recovered from the museum's archive.

One pairing from the installation *Modes of Transport* (Fig. 19), situated in the second room of the green corridor, presents an early-twentieth century baby carriage from the Society's permanent collection with a white hood, emblem of the white supremacist group Ku Klux Klan, pulled from the archive. The hood rests within the pram as innocuously as the infant it references. Adjacent to the display a photograph captures a scene of two black nannies pictured with a similar carriage and the white children in their care. Through both the juxtaposition of the hood and the carriage and juxtaposition of this pairing and the photograph, Wilson evokes a presence within the empty carriage: the presence of a future oppressor, suggesting the metaphorical transport of racist ideas from one generation to another.

In *Metalwork* (Fig. 20), displayed adjacent to *Modes of Transport*, Wilson pairs fine repoussé silver with unrefined slave shackles. The unexpected pairing effectively raises more questions than answers and heightens curiosity about the relationship between the objects, and the historical subjects they evoke, by suggesting the interdependence of luxury and slavery. The logic behind the ironic juxtaposition contradicts the nonchalant presentation. These objects, fine silver and slave shackles, respectively represent privilege and oppression, opposites which Maurice Berger notes, "rarely, if ever, share the same page in historical narratives or the same space in

museums."[41] These installations prompt a critical analysis of the museum, questioning why these institutions display the heritage of white, upper-class citizens while ignoring the implicit issues of intolerance and domination. Equally, they assert the inability to isolate African-American history from European-American history. The baby carriage and the repoussé silver are as much a part of the black experience as they are a part of the white one. The Klansman's hood and the slave shackles can be understood as part of the European-American narrative as much as it can be understood as part of the African-American one.[42]

Leaving the green corridor and entering the first of the red rooms the viewer encounters *Cabinetmaking* (Fig. 21) in which Wilson furthers his strategy of juxtaposition to a visceral level, addressing deeper emotional issues of domination and violence. This display pairs elegant Victorian chairs with an austere whipping post. The chairs, each chosen to represent a distinct social class—clergy, middle class, blue blood, businessman—surround a whipping post that was located in front of the Baltimore city jail until 1938.[43] The post underscores the corporeal suffering of the black body, evoking the abstract presence of an anonymous absence, while the elegant chairs voyeuristically face the austere post. Through this provocative arrangement, Wilson sets these objects in dialogue with each other, provoking questions about the identities of the absent bodies.

In his juxtapositions Wilson evokes both black presence and white presence to expose through their comparison that what is accepted as factual, historical truth is actually rooted in domination and subjugation. He exposes those power relationships

[41] Berger, "Viewing the Invisible," 9.
[42] Berlin, 45.
[43] Corrin, "*Mining the Museum*," 16.

which obliterate certain interpretations to the detriment of objective history, demonstrating that "what is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity."[44] Wilson's juxtapositions must be understood both as genealogical and allegorical; the objects evoke the black body which models the genealogical tropes of origin, emergence, and descent, and in adopting this abstract form, the objects engage past and present to reveal a new historical narrative and deconstruct traditional history. To elaborate I will introduce Jennifer Gonzalez's work, which not only assesses Wilson's affinity with Foucault that will further the understanding of his juxtapositions as genealogical, but she also effectively introduces the most useful analysis of the artist's application of material objects, which will support the artist's juxtapositions as allegorical.

In her catalog essay, "Against the Grain: The Artist as Conceptual Materialist" (2001), also accompanying Wilson's retrospective exhibition *Objects and Installations 1979-2000*, Jennifer Gonzalez introduces projects in which the artist interrogates the forms of museum display with particular focus on the colonized Other and the experience of cultural or racial "otherness." She presents *The Other Museum* (1990) as both a formal and a conceptual model for his projects that reveals underlying structures and relations of power within the museum. These projects, she argues, stage critical views of the ways material objects have been read "within a narrow conception of culture based on racial and cultural hierarchies."[45] Developing her analysis, she introduces Wilson's mode of questioning as "interrogative archaeology" further arguing Wilson, as noted previously in this chapter, to be a Foucauldian archeologist excavating objects that reveal both hidden

[44] Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 79.
[45] Gonzalez, 25-27.

histories and the internal workings of museum collections. She supports her argument by citing that for Michel Foucault, an archeology of knowledge:

> does not imply the search for a beginning. . . . It designates the general theme of a description that questions the already-said at the level of its existence: of the enunciative function that operates within it, of the discursive formation, and the general archive system to which it belongs. Archeology describes discourses as practices specified in the element of the archive.[46]

In juxtapositions such as *Modes of Transport*, *Metalwork*, and *Cabinetmaking*, Wilson's work seeks to unearth and uncover that which has been lost or repressed in historical discourses about race in cultural institutions. Gonzalez argues that Wilson addresses "not only a history of aesthetics and material culture, but also includes a history of human lives and the epistemological structures within which those lives are understood and represented," an argument that is also supported by Foucault's genealogical model of history.[47]

Gonzalez uses the writings of Walter Benjamin to frame her critical analysis of Wilson's work, making a critical link between the philosopher and the artist. For Benjamin, she explains, history is a series of dialectical images, juxtaposing past and present, focusing especially on material traces such as art, artifact, and architecture. Returning to the historical materialist introduced in the previous chapter, this critical persona, according to Gonzalez brings signs from the past into a new confrontation with the present, a process that places the present "in a critical condition."[48] She asserts that Benjamin and Wilson share the critical insight that "historical discourse is a form of argumentation" involving material evidence, and the task of the artist or historian is to

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[46] Michel Foucault, The Archeology of Knowledge, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 131; quoted in ibid., 29.
[47] Gonzalez, 31.
[48] Ibid.

use this evidence to present alternate histories.[49] This strategy is reflected in Wilson's juxtaposition of material objects. She furthermore argues that Wilson's work marks an important shift in contemporary art practice that combines the institutional and semiotic investigation of conceptual art with historical materialism, an approach she proposes might be called "conceptual materialism." Wilson's projects illustrate that "history is itself a culturally constructed artifact, one reproduced through the collection and display of objects that stand as traces of untold stories lost in the debris of the past or repressed in the commodity-saturated present."[50]

Both Broodthaers and Wilson demonstrate an affinity with Benjamin, all three sharing a critical interest in allegory as an aesthetic strategy and engage this strategy to explore the history of modernity. Like Broodthaers, Wilson uses objects to both address the language of the social institution that frames and contains the discourse of art and to expose the unquestioned historicizing system of thought. In contrast to Broodthaers, however, who emphasizes the status of objects as simple objects, Wilson uses objects to create subjectivity, taking up allegory in a different way by appropriating the black body as his model for re-imagining history, an aesthetic strategy that disrupts the metahistorical narrative promoted and perpetuated by cultural institutions like museums. By evoking absent bodies, Wilson demonstrates, as he does in works such as *Modes of Transport*, *Metalwork*, and *Cabinetmaking*, how the museum classification system compartmentalizes historical experiences and consequently has been an effective structure for denying parts of history.[51] Using juxtaposition and irony, he sets objects and

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[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Corrin, "Installing History," 13.

histories in dialogue with one another, a composition that articulates multiple voices, which reveal the multiplicity of interpretations, whether congruent or conflicting.

ASSESSING THE MUSEUM

Mirroring formally and metaphorically the alluring *Truth Trophy* that introduced his installation, Wilson concludes his exhibit with an evocative and intriguing celestial globe (Fig. 22). The whole of this final installation pays tribute to self-taught astronomer-mathematician and notably free African-American Benjamin Banneker, displaying Banneker's astronomical journal, an IBM computer simulating the night sky circa 1790 as Banneker observed it, and at the very end of the corridor, the celestial globe. The proclaimed focus of this final section is described by the artist as the "aspirations and dreams and achievements of African Americans in and outside of slavery."[52] He presents the life of a distinguished and respected emancipated black, but simultaneously reveals through excerpts from Banneker's journal presented in wall texts, the torment of slavery, even on free blacks. The wall texts disclose a letter sent by Banneker to colleague and contemporary president Thomas Jefferson urging the abolishment of slavery as well as descriptive dreams and haunting visions, all revealing that a distinguished free black is no less immune to the oppression of slavery than enslaved African-Americans. Through these objects the artist evokes the presence of Banneker and pays tribute to his personal quest for an equitable place in history. Artist and educator Ann B. Stoddard proposes, "Wilson's success in evoking African-American presence despite official omissions seems largely due to his employing the unifying

[52] Fred Wilson, unpublished lecture at the Seattle Art Museum, April 1992; quoted in Corrin, "*Mining the Museum*," 18.

subtext, the epic quest of an African American for a rightful place in history, first introduced by Wilson in the video [presented in the museum lobby] and reintroduced by Banneker later."[53] With the celestial globe, Wilson's exhibit comes full circle. Echoing the impressive *Truth Trophy*, the globe reflects the unifying theme "truth," a reflection that conveys how questioning institutional authoritative truth and excavating historical heterogeneous truths can open the possibility of agency and encourage the recognition of the aspirations, dreams, and achievements of historically anonymous subjects.

The success of Fred Wilson's interventions results from the possibility of agency. Foucault explains, "the successes of history belong to those who are capable of seizing these rules."[54] Genealogy exposes the misrecognition that domination is a finality and opens the possibility of seizing and turning history against its birth, giving agency to marginalized groups. Wilson uses this strategy with the black body as its aesthetic model to reveal the systems of subjection in Maryland's racist past and underscore the insubstantiality of domination. Ira Berlin attributes the accomplishment of *Mining the Museum* to the way the exhibition seeks to acknowledge achievements, "without celebratory contributionism or patronizing victimization."[55] In his installations the artist never focuses on oppression which would inevitably render his subjects little more than victims, constricting their ability to shape their own destiny. Rather, he re-inscribes his subjects into history, giving them a voice and a subjecthood.

By presenting more questions than answers, Wilson provides the audience with a means to access the terrain of the museum. bell hooks implores "the ability to manipulate one's gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it opens up the

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[53] Ann B. Stoddard, "Redecorating the white house," New Art Examiner 20, no. 6 (February 1993): 19.
[54] Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 86.
[55] Berlin, 44.

possibility of agency."[56] Wilson reorients the viewer's gaze towards the historical complexities hidden within the dominant art historical canon, claiming history for empowerment. He exposes the subjective racist bias underlying official American history while challenging the audience to reinterpret that history. In the end, instead of simply deconstructing a historical collection, he politicizes the entire context of traditional history.[57] While traditional history seeks to show how things have not changed, using genealogy, Fred Wilson shows how history can change when effective history is employed.

It is important at this time to assess the success of Wilson's installation from the perspective of museum studies by activating a critical dialogue between museum scholars. Establishing this critical dialogue will provide a basis for the assessment of institutional critique in the conclusion of this thesis. As curator and educator at The Contemporary, the art institution that fostered Wilson's project, Lisa G. Corrin has had direct involvement with *Mining the Museum* since its inception. In the catalog essay "Mining the Museum: Artists Look at Museums, Museums Look at Themselves," she introduces his project by situating Wilson and his work amongst similar museum interventions by contemporary artists.[58] She elaborates three different strands for comparison: recent exhibitions with similar revisionist readings of collection and exhibition practices, contemporary artists that make comparable critiques of the museum, and lastly, artists that, like Wilson, have acted as curator, creating their own museum or

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[56] bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators," in Black Looks: Race and Representation (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 116.
[57] Stoddard, 20.
[58] Corrin, "Mining the Museum," 2-8.

collection. She details recent exhibitions such as *Art/Artifact* (1988) at the Center for African Art in New York, *The Desire of the Museum* (1989) at the Whitney Museum of American Art, *Downtown* (1989) and *Art Inside Out* (1992) organized by the Department of Education at the Art Institute of Chicago, and *A Museum Looks at Itself: Mapping Past and Present at the Parrish Art Museum, 1897-1992* (1992), whose objectives have been to demystify the museum and to question "the relationship among power, context, reception, and meaning."[59] Corrin likewise describes the projects of contemporary artists such as Daniel Buren, Michael Asher, Louise Lawler, Judith Barry, Andrea Fraser, and Hans Haacke, whose works have critiqued the power structures, value systems, and practices governing galleries and museums. She also presents projects by artists who have curated their own exhibitions or have created their own museum or collection naming Marcel Duchamp's *La Boite-en-Valise* (1941), Marcel Broodthaers's *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* (1968-1972), and the Fluxus Group's invented museums (1960s and 1970s) as early examples, and more recently Barbara Bloom's *The Reign of Narcissism* (1989), Christian Boltanski's *Inventory of Objects Belonging to a Young Woman of Charleston* (1991), and Sophie Calle's *Ghosts* (1991-2). The collective of these types of projects and installations have formed a movement within museums that Corrin proposes be termed "museumism."

Although these projects have made political progress in dismantling the ideological apparatus of museums, Corrin notes that thus far museum-based projects have eluded direct discussion of issues of race and also evaded the museum space itself. She emphasizes how Wilson's exhibit deviates from the "museumism" genre by addressing race and museums in an established museum using its own collection and history,

[59] Ibid., 3.

exploring how one particular museum has failed to document the histories of people of color. Describing Wilson's earlier projects she names his *Mining the Museum* as a departure in several ways. The project provides an opportunity to extend his museological critique in a traditional history museum exploring the specific history of the host institution. Wilson would additionally be considered an on-staff project director with control over the final design of his installation. Furthermore, this type of engagement allowed him to provoke dialogues not only about a museum but within the museum itself. Describing the various pieces in his installation and the devices used, Corrin elaborates on his dialogical method, a strategy she terms an "ethics of questioning," where the artist presents more questions than answers. She proposes that this "ethics of questioning" should lead to further questioning both by the audience and more importantly by museums themselves. She concludes that the questions raised by Wilson should lead museums to ask questions to explore their own histories and their own role in historical myths and institutional omissions.

Two years after *Mining the Museum*, Corrin returns to Wilson and his project with an expanded analysis and assessment of the artist's use of history, within a critical survey of contemporary installation art entitled "Installing History" (1994).[60] She begins by outlining the "three assumptions" made by installation art: that content cannot be separated from context in a work of installation art; that installation redefines roles for the artist, the viewer, the curator, and the museum by activating a relationship between artist and audience that transforms the viewer into a participant; and, lastly, that installation art challenges the participant-viewer to question and theorize the visual experience in

[60] Corrin, "Installing History," 6-14.

context.[61] She traces installation art back to Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*, a critique continued by contemporary artists who contest the museum's exclusive view of history. Corrin asserts that museological installations consider the museum to be a social, and more importantly, historical microcosm, and therefore take history or historicity as a subject to question the museum's role in interpreting history and to address the "political implications of representation."[62] Historicizing installations furthermore interrogate unitary claims about truth, deploying a poststructuralist criticism of a single historical narrative. She offers several case studies of contemporary installation artists such as David Bunn, Sylvia Kolbowski, Lawrence Gipe, and Renee Green, among others, all of whom focus on the museum's role in disseminating the dominant view of cultural history while revealing the museum's complicity in "the construction of a history that is indifferent to the cultural other."[63] Overall she asserts the shared objective of all artists practicing in this medium to be a deconstruction of an institutional history constructed on white patriarchal power. Concluding this brief survey and introducing Wilson's project, Corrin argues that "as long as historicizing installations such as those described here are circumscribed within the museum as being 'exhibited' as works of art, their ability to affect social change is also circumscribed."[64] She cites Wilson as a unique example to the contrary, precisely because in contrast to being an "exhibition" about African-American history, *Mining the Museum* is about a specific institution and its individual history examining its relationship with people of color. She asserts that because of the attention received by both contemporary artists and museum professionals, Wilson's

[61] Ibid., 6.
[62] Ibid., 7.
[63] Ibid., 9.
[64] Ibid., 10.

intervention into the history and collection of an actual museum illustrated that postmodern critique is a "political initiative." She proposes that the ultimate measure of success for *Mining the Museum* will be whether museums accept their responsibility in revising a history imbedded in cultural and social biases or whether the museum community merely entertains the artist's strategies, relegating them to mere gestures. The future of historicizing art, she projects, depends largely on the institution, stipulating that until museums are willing to confront their own historical myths, institutional omissions, and ideological biases, the "activist potential" of historicizing installations will be hindered.

Reesa Greenberg, collaborative editor of the critical anthology *Thinking about Exhibitions* (1995), which addresses the political and cultural issues surrounding art exhibitions, addresses the work of Fred Wilson in her article "Making up Museums: Revisionism and Fred Wilson" (1994).[65] This article must be read as an affirmative answer to Corrin's concern. Greenberg's article analyzes the artist's work at a critical juncture, two years after *Mining the Museum*, as an installation which has motivated museums to integrate institutional critique in its programmation. Indeed, museums began taking critical notice of Wilson's work and inviting him to perform similar installations in their own institutions. She credits his unique ability to effectively question traditional narratives of art history as represented in museums and equally observes his interest in the "local," a key component of the success of his site-specific installations. His localized interventions, she notes, enable him to personalize the issues addressed in his

[65] Reesa Greenberg, "Making up Museums: Revisionism and Fred Wilson," Parachute, no. 76 (Oct.-Dec. 1994): 38-42.

projects and facilitate "collaborative rather than confrontational responses."[66] Equally his engagement with context allows him to include local references, a device that augments the meaning of his exhibitions and their interest to a wider audience. Greenberg observes, however, that with more popularity and more demand, Wilson can no longer involve himself in his installations for the same duration and with the same intensity. Without prolonged engagement, his strategies risk becoming "formulaic gestures" drawing only superficial attention to the problems and issues he intends to address. Additionally, many institutions with no intention to change their traditional methods, but who find it "politically expedient" to be identified with this form of institutional critique invite Wilson to create critical installations with their collections, an invitation that does not support the intention of the artist's project.

In relaying her own personal dream for the artist to collaborate with the collection at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Greenberg describes how Wilson's type of art may not benefit all museums, noting that his presence may amount to what Bruce Ferguson has called a "token of change," within museums that are unwilling to revise their traditional values. She credits Wilson's success in engaging his audience with potentially controversial issues to his ability to be "provocative, surprising, and humorous."[67] His own developed techniques of montage, juxtaposition, and interrogation support his ability to integrate his vision into the museum collection. He uses devices such as hybrid objects, inversion, irony, the incorporation of language, unconventional display techniques, and highly emotive images to inspire institutional change. Greenberg concludes by recognizing other contemporary artists involved in museum interventions.

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[66] Ibid., 38.
[67] Ibid., 40.

She emphasizes that no single intervention and no one artist is solely capable of transforming the museum, insisting that for a different museum ethos to evolve, repeated, varied, and constant critique is required, in addition to a decided will on the part of museums.

Undoubtedly, *Mining the Museum* has made an impact on the museum world. Not only did the exhibition present many deviations from typical institutional critique as described by both Corrin and Greenberg, but it is important to note that the opening of the installation was timed to coincide with the annual national conference of the American Association of Museums. The conference featured numerous panels and workshops and the organization sponsored several in-depth reports, addressing the current "trend" in museum politics to address questions of race and representation in the museum and to hear the "other" voices present in the museum's audience.[68] The correlation of the show's opening with the conference, as well as its promotion of the current issues addressed within the conference programs, made the exhibition's influence and recognition substantial. For its duration from April 1992 until mid-February 1993, attendance at the society was 53,759 compared with 40,393 during the same period the previous year.[69] Underscored by contemporary museum politics, the impact of *Mining the Museum* provoked dialogue not only about museums but within museums.

Art critic for *The Baltimore Sun*, John Dorsey, promoted the impact of the installation:

> As all acknowledged, "Mining" was of major benefit to everyone involved. Aside from record attendance, the society benefited from exposure to Wilson's innovative ideas and techniques, including video and

[68] Corrin, "Installing History," 11.
[69] John Dorsey, "'Mining' exhibit shatters records, opens eyes at Historical Society," Baltimore Sun, 1 March 1993, 1D.

> audio. It also benefited from a widening of its audience, especially among the black community. In fact the society considers "Mining" so important that it's seeking funds to bring Wilson back this year to do a permanent "Mini-Mining" installation.[70]

Two months after the closing of the exhibition in another article featuring the Maryland Historical Society, Dorsey introduced a new exhibit entitled "Classical Maryland:"

> In February, "Mining the Museum," Fred Wilson's multicultural-oriented installation about African-American and American-Indian history, closed after an 11-month run. Last Saturday, in the same spaces, the MHS opened a show that's as traditional as you can get in its approach: beautiful objects made for rich people, subjected to scholarly research and installed to please the eye. The MHS proves with this juxtaposition of exhibits the validity of both approaches. In the cases of both shows (working with The Contemporary in that of "Mining the Museum"), it has pulled off major successes, and in the process has reached out to a new audience without abandoning its established audience.[71]

In heralding the "validity of both approaches," Dorsey ignores the critique Wilson makes, overlooking the contradiction of the "museum's benefit" and the artist's critical intention. Dorsey's analysis of the museum's "benefit" embraces promotion, attendance, and recognition rather than a comprehensive exploration of the museum's history and a successful acknowledgment of the museum's role in historical myths and institutional omissions. This contradiction emphasizes the argument introduced by Corrin and Greenberg that the overall success and future of historicizing art and institutional criticism depends largely on the museum itself.

Because of its value in assessing Wilson's installation, I will reiterate Corrin's proposition that the ultimate measure of success for *Mining the Museum* will be whether museums accept their responsibility in revising a history imbedded in cultural and social biases or whether the museum community merely entertains the artist's strategies,

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[70] Ibid., 3D

[71] John Dorsey, "At Historical Society, antiques exhibit fits fine tradition," Baltimore Sun, 20 April 1993, 1D.

relegating them to mere gestures. Following this principle and considering the contradiction between museum's benefit and artist's intention in the case of the Maryland Historical Society, it seems Wilson's critique fails in its attempt to oppose and moreover dismantle the linear metahistory constructed and perpetuated by cultural institutions. I, however, disagree with Corrin's formula for success in that it is not solely the museum that determines the achievement of the installation, but the ways in which an installation is able to raise questions and nourish debate around the meta-histories of museums. Historian Irene J. Winter facilitates and informs my argument:

> The challenge [Wilson] poses for governing paradigms and their adherents is not an amateurish glimmer of early post modern un-ease, but a direct, fully developed, late post modern gauntlet flung: the familiar can be defamiliarized via context; the past is a construct; archaeology is not free of ideology; value is contingent; alternative histories can, and will, be written.[72]

Describing his strategy as a mere "gesture" (the "late post modern gauntlet flung"), Winter identifies the success of the artist's critique. *Mining the Museum* succeeds in its deconstructive investigation and in expanding the field of historical inquiry. The installation blurs the boundaries between art and its institutional frame, deploying a simultaneous deconstruction and reconstruction of the museum.[73] Wilson's intervention into the history of the Maryland Historical Society shows that postmodern critique is not only a method but is, moreover, a political initiative, and successfully escorts the museum into a critical stage for analysis.

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[72] Winter, 189.
[73] Corrin, "Installing History," 6.

CONCLUSION

THE POSTMODERN MUSEUM

To develop a comprehensive understanding of the present critical state of the museum it is necessary to understand the opposing views of postmodernism and introduce the predominant dialectic facing contemporary art production. I will use Douglas Crimp to guide my examination, whose 1987 article "The Postmodern Museum" and its main arguments will be crucial to this understanding. In his intentionally polemic article Crimp extends his previous article "On the Museum's Ruins," to oppose a "reactionary postmodernism" that repudiates politicized, materialist practices.[1] He initiates his argument by introducing postmodern architect James Stirling and his celebrated *Neue Staatsgalerie* in Stuttgart, a project ubiquitously called "a breakthrough for postmodernism."[2] Crimp argues that the *Neue Staatsgalerie*, in its idealism, mocks his earlier contention in "On the Museum's Ruins" that post-modernism is "founded on the collapse of the museum's discursive system;"[3] while Crimp declares the museum's obsolescence, Stirling's contemporaneous addition to the *Staatsgalerie* attests to its vitality. To further situate his argument he relates the *Neue Staatsgalerie* to an increase in museum construction and a parallel resurgence of art production, which shares a symbiotic relationship with these new museums. He thereby introduces a second character to his critical anecdote, the neo-expressionist artist Markus Lupertz, whose article "Art and Architecture," accompanying the opening of an exhibition

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[1] Douglas Crimp, "The Postmodern Museum," in On the Museum's Ruins (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 282-325.
[2] Ibid., 290.
[3] Ibid., 282.

commemorating seventeen of Germany's new museums, celebrated the mutually beneficial relationship between art production and museums.

Together Stirling and Lupertz propose a postmodernism that depends on the elision of the politicized, materialist practices of the 1960s and 1970s, instead advocating a reified historical continuum that separates objects from their historical conditions and creates an illusion of universal knowledge. This proposition is in "diametric opposition" to Crimp's proposed version of postmodernism as set forth in "On the Museum's Ruins." Crimp summarizes his version: "'my' postmodernism subjected the reigning idealism of mainstream modernism to a materialist critique and thereby showed the museum—founded on the presuppositions of idealism—to be an outmoded institution, no longer having an easy relationship to innovative contemporary art."[4] To further establish the foundation for his argument, Crimp engages Hegel and Marx through an oft-quoted passage from Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire*: "Hegel remarks somewhere that all the facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce." Crimp here introduces this primary dialectic, between Hegel and Marx, and sets up a historical drama of the art museum, introducing his "tragic actor" Alois Hirt and naming Markus Lupertz to be the main player in the farce.

Crimp expresses particular interest in the fact that Stirling's *Neue Staatsgalerie* reflects an earlier project, that of Karl Friedrich Schinkel's *Altes Museum* (1823-1830), which notably has been said to perfectly exemplify the museum at its founding moment. It is Schinkel's *Altes Museum* and its historical evolution that embodies the denouement in the "tragedy" written by Crimp. The setting for this drama centers on the Germanic

[4] Ibid., 287.

nation Prussia between the years 1797 and 1840 at a time when the German states, inspired by France's recent conversion of the royal art collection into a national collection began conceiving of what kind of institution the museum should be. Crimp introduces several players to this ensuing drama, the central figure in these debates being Alois Hirt, who first proposed the construction of a museum to house the king's art collection. Hirt reappears throughout the museum's establishment in an active dispute against the museum commission whose propositions consistently ran counter to his very conception of the museum, insisting that the institution would in fact be called a museum and would be built "for the study of antique objects of all kinds and the fine arts," as opposed to the institution as *monument*, *treasury*, or as Schinkel viewed his vision for the museum, *sanctuary*.[5] Schinkel, in fact, considered his museum to be an "inviolable gestalt" calling his plan "a totality whose parts work so precisely together that nothing essential can be altered without throwing the ensemble into disarray."[6] Crimp argues the influence of Hegelian aesthetics on Schinkel's plan. Indeed, as the appointed chair of philosophy at the University of Berlin, in concert with his noteworthy lectures on aesthetics delivered between the years 1823 and 1829, Hegel imparted a predominant influence on the museum's conception. As an "inviolable gestalt," Crimp argues, Schinkel's museum constitutes the Hegelian "sublation" in which, Schinkel himself pronounces, "the destiny of art is that representation of its objects which makes apparent as many relationships as possible."[7] Within Schinkel's gestalt relationships between objects are carefully fixed, relinquishing any indications of the material conditions of art.

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[5] Ibid., 293.
[6] Karl Friedrich Schinkel, "Schinkels Votum vom 5. Februar 1823 zu dem Gutachten des Hofraths Hirt," in Aus Schinkels Nachlass 3:244; quoted in ibid., 300.
[7] Schinkel, "Aphorismin," in Aus Schinkels Nachlass, 2:207; quoted in ibid.

Through this historical narrative Crimp introduces the nascent polemic between Hegel and Marx even before Marx's entrance onto the theoretical stage, highlighting the "disproportion between philosophical speculation and material reality in early nineteenth-century Germany."[8] Here Crimp unfolds the dramatic conflict of this tragedy:

> Art and the public have come to be accepted as stable, rather than historically constructed, ideological categories. But when the public is understood as universal, as unfractured by class divisions, it is Hegel's idealist conception of the state and civil society, rather than Marx's critique of that conception, that is perpetuated. And when art is thought to be naturally lodged in the museum, an institution of the state, it is an idealist rather than a materialist aesthetic that is served.[9]

He ultimately argues, "It is upon this wresting of art from its necessity in reality that idealist aesthetics and the ideal museum are founded; and it is against the power of their legacy that we must still struggle for a materialist aesthetics and a materialist art."[10] By this he intends to claim a critique of autonomy and of its institutionalization for contemporary art practices.

Setting up this opposition between idealism and materialism, Crimp is met with a challenge by postmodern theorist Frederic Jameson who rejects the idea that idealism is reactionary and instead proposes that the idealism/materialism dichotomy is perhaps itself idealistic. Crimp contends, however, that at this end of the museum's history idealism has become very clearly reactionary, evidenced by "the resurgence of idealism in farcical guise."[11] He further labels Jameson "relentlessly Hegelian," critiquing his totalizing scheme that renders modernism as a *forged* unity created through the elision of

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[8] Ibid., 291.
[9] Ibid., 295.
[10] Ibid., 302.
[11] Ibid., 304.

"threatening disruptions"; that is, a modernism which is canonized and institutionalized.[12] Jameson indeed shares a similar view with institutions of modernism, centered on bourgeois subjects and the invention of a personal, private style. Crimp criticizes this emphasis on autonomous individuality as a "current idealist reconstruction of modernism," a version of modernism that he says is "all too commensurate with that of the postmodern museum."[13]

In his final section Crimp elaborates his notion of the "postmodern museum" by way of the current trend in German art towards idealism and expressionism. He returns to Stirling's museum, emphasizing the irony that a museum commissioned for a collection of modern and contemporary art imitates Schinkel's museum of 150 years prior, a similarity that produces the idea of art as an uninterrupted historical continuum. He also revisits Lupertz, citing American critic Donald Kuspit, who describes the neo-expressionist artist's work as art that still has "a redemptive power of transformation over history," implicitly proposing that German expressionism liberates the German people from historical periods and past identity so that they can be "authentically new."[14] Expressionism as it has been adopted in Germany exemplifies what Crimp calls "reactionary postmodernism." Employing Marx, Crimp offers a rejoinder to these ideas of freedom and "redemption." Marx writes, "It is only possible to achieve real liberation in the real world by employing real means. . . . 'Liberation' is an historical and not a mental act, and it is brought about by historical conditions. . . ."[15] Deeply rooted in

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[12] Ibid., 306.
[13] Ibid., 306-7.
[14] Donald Kuspit "Flak from the 'Radicals': The American Case against Current German Painting," in New Art from Germany (St. Louis: The Saint Louis Art Museum, 1983), 46; quoted in ibid., 313.
[15] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, The German Ideology (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 61; quoted in ibid., 314.

Marx, Crimp ultimately encourages a political stand against the reactionary postmodernism that is embraced by the postmodern museum, a critique that includes a determination to know the meaning of history and insists on attention to materialist practice.

Crimp's article insightfully identifies the present condition of the museum, highlighting the primary issues at play throughout this thesis, and, most importantly, effectively introducing materialism. It is through a consideration of the materialist practices of Marcel Broodthaers and Fred Wilson that I will articulate the most important distinction between their projects, and furthermore contend that it is their different application of material objects that reveals the recent shift in contemporary art criticism and moreover maps the progress of institutional criticism. As elaborated in this thesis, both Broodthaers and Wilson demonstrate an interest in material objects. What is different, however, and I return here to the claim I introduced in the previous chapter, is that while Broodthaers emphasizes the object's status as simple objects, Wilson employs objects to evoke subjects. This difference encompasses both Crimp's frustration and his hope. While Broodthaers's critique remains arrested in his melancholy acceptance of acculturation that is easily absorbed by and elided within the postmodern museum, Wilson's concern with subjectivity imagines the critical potential of contemporary art.

In a collaborative article published in a recent issue of NU: the Nordic Art Review, editors Maria Lind, the Director of the Kunstverein Munchen in Munich, Nicolas Bourriaud, the Director of the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, and Frederico Nicolao, Fabrizio Gallanti and Andrea Balestrero from the Italian collective Gruppo A12

contribute to a discussion addressing the relationship between new approaches to art criticism and new art practices. In this article, entitled "UN: politics of the artistic space," these writers introduce the question:

> What happens when art ceases to be materialized in closed art objects, and instead turns into open and incompletable processes of social and cultural production, processes that can activate the viewer not just as a participant in the creation of meaning, but as being outright essential for the actual genesis of the work as such?[16]

To address this question I elaborate on the artists' divergent use of material objects. Recall that in his analysis of the allegorical impulse within postmodern art projects, Craig Owens initiates words, images, and most importantly, material, to be the beginning of fissures, ruptures, and ruins. Moreover, he denotes that amongst these ruins exists the opportunity for a text to double back on itself and provide its own commentary. Both Broodthaers and Wilson mobilize specific material fragments to deconstruct the metahistorical fiction detained within the museum, but it is within this self-referential opportunity to signification identified by Owens that their critiques differ greatly. Broodthaers's emphasis on the status of objects as simple objects arrests the object within a delimited signifying entity; his reflective criticism thereby necessarily refers inward. In contrast, by appropriating the black body as his model for re-imagining history, Wilson motivates his objects to create subjectivity from which criticism extends outward in new directions. Wilson's progression from objectivity to subjectivity embraces a new way of thinking about art and art criticism as identified by the collaborative editors of "UN: politics of the artistic space" who imagine a criticism that seeks out new directions, "not in towards the work's hidden and meaningful interiority (centripetal criticism), but

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[16] Maria Lind, Nicolas Bourriand, Frederico Nicolao, Fabrizio Gallanti, and Andrea Balestrero, eds., "UN: politics of the artistic space," trans. Mike Garner, NU: The Nordic Art Review 4, no. 1-2 (2002): 149.

outwards from the forcefield of potentiality that it generates (centrifugal criticism)."[17] The editors further propose that contemporary art can offer new subject positions, as is indeed demonstrated by Wilson; and it is from these new positions that the critical field opens to offer "other discursive possibilities and other positions from which writing can begin."[18] In this moment the museum holds the possibility to liberate any material fragment into the "forcefield of potentiality," a shift that embraces the dynamism that contemporary art produces and moves art criticism forward to realize the critical potential of the museum.

[17] Ibid., 150.
[18] Ibid.

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Figure 21. Fred Wilson. *Cabinetmaking 1820-1960*. 1992. Installation view.
Figure 22. Celestial globe. Maker and date unknown.

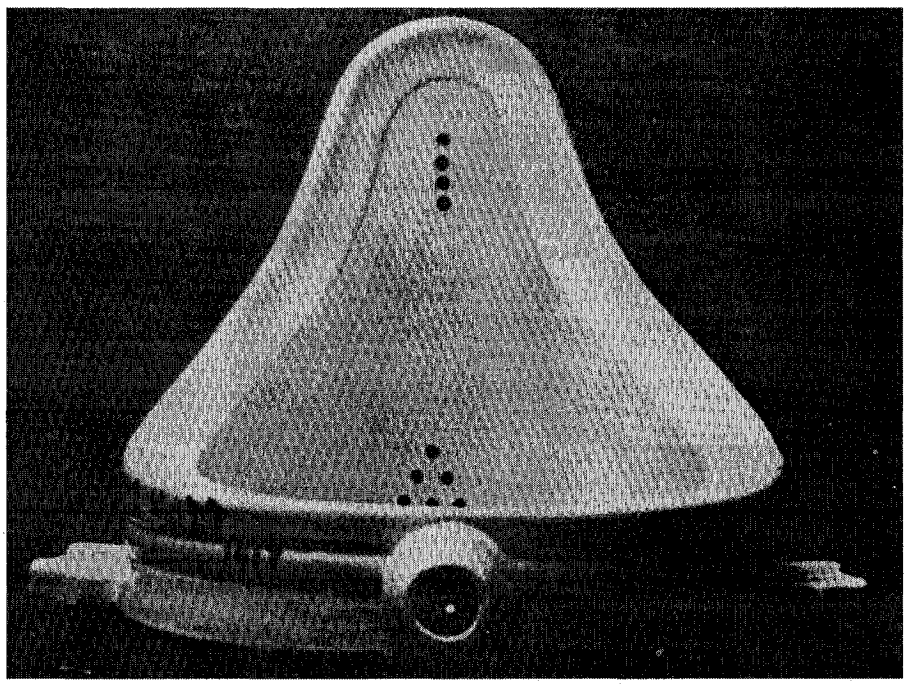

Figure 1. Marcel Duchamp. *Fountain*. 1917.

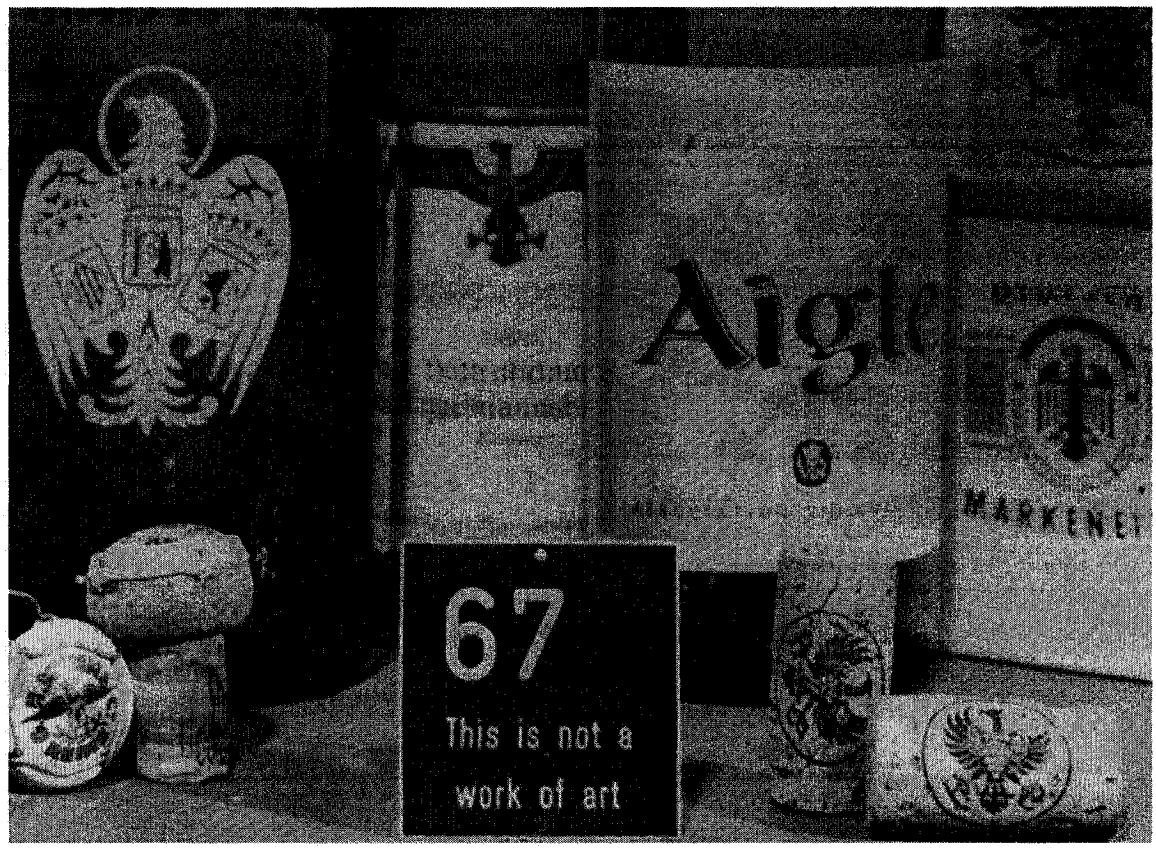

Figure 2. Marcel Broodthaers. *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section des Figures (Der Adler vom Oligozän bis heute).* 1972. Detail of the installation.

Figure 3. René Magritte. *La trahison des images*. 1929.

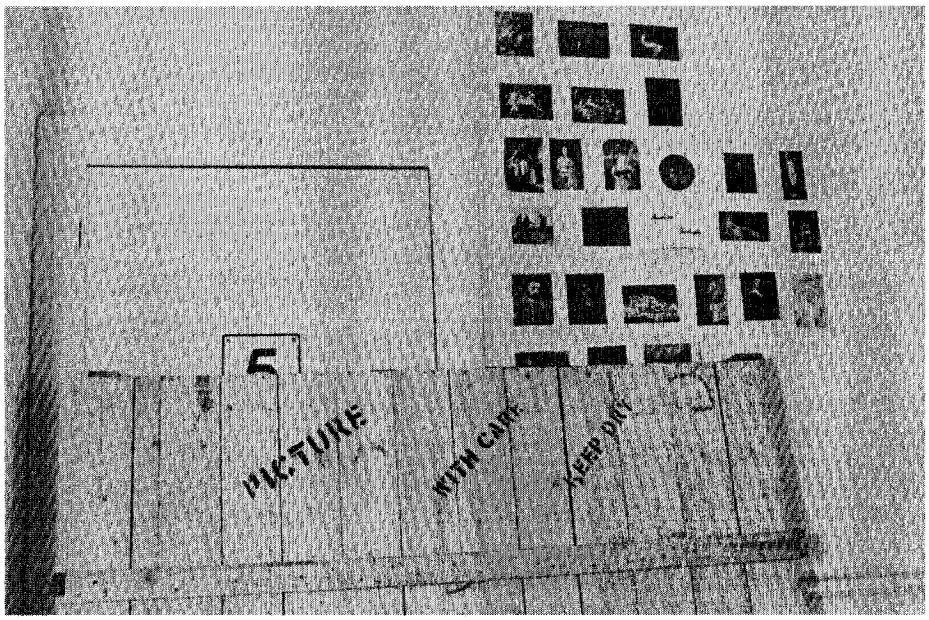

Figure 4. Marcel Broodthaers. *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section XIXème Siècle.* 1968-9.

Figure 5. *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section XIXème Siècle.* 1968. Broodthaers speaking at the opening.

Figure 6. Guests traveling by bus from the closing of the *Section XIXème Siècle* to the opening of the *Section XVIIème Siècle* in Antwerp. 1969.

Figure 7. Marcel Broodthaers. *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section XIXème Siècle (Bis)*. 1970.

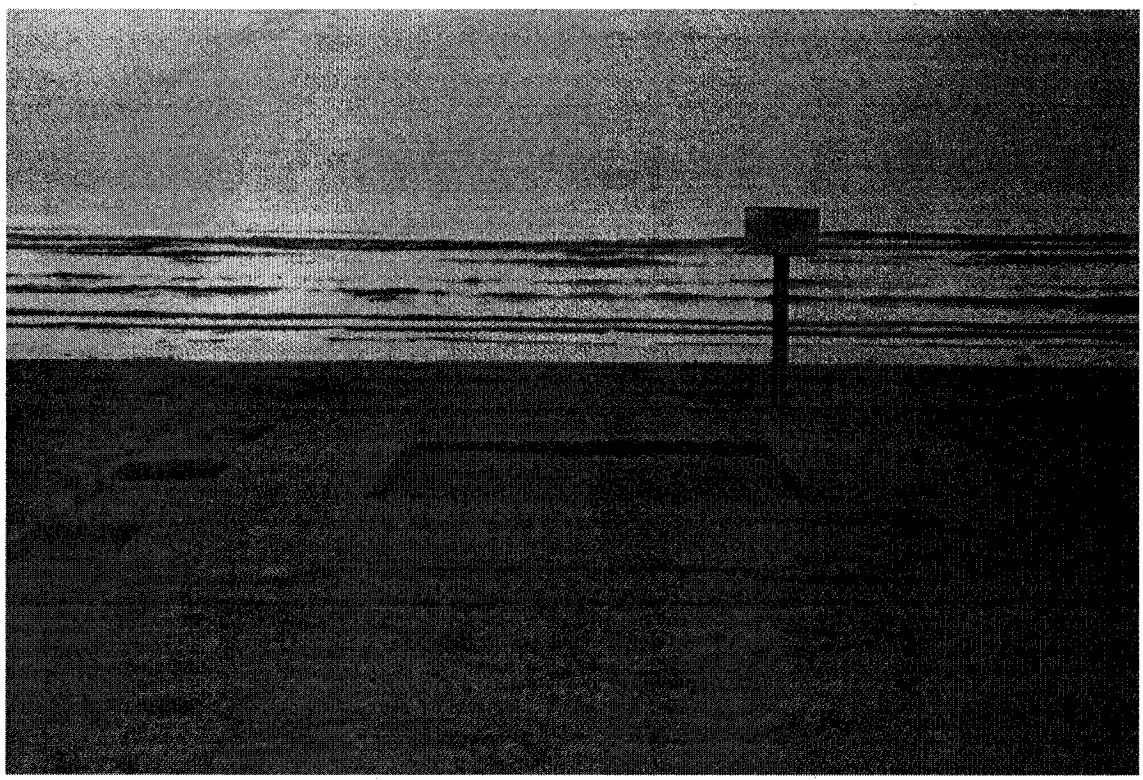

Figure 8. Marcel Broodthaers. *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section Documentaire*. 1969.

Figure 9. Marcel Broodthaers. *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section Documentaire*. 1969.

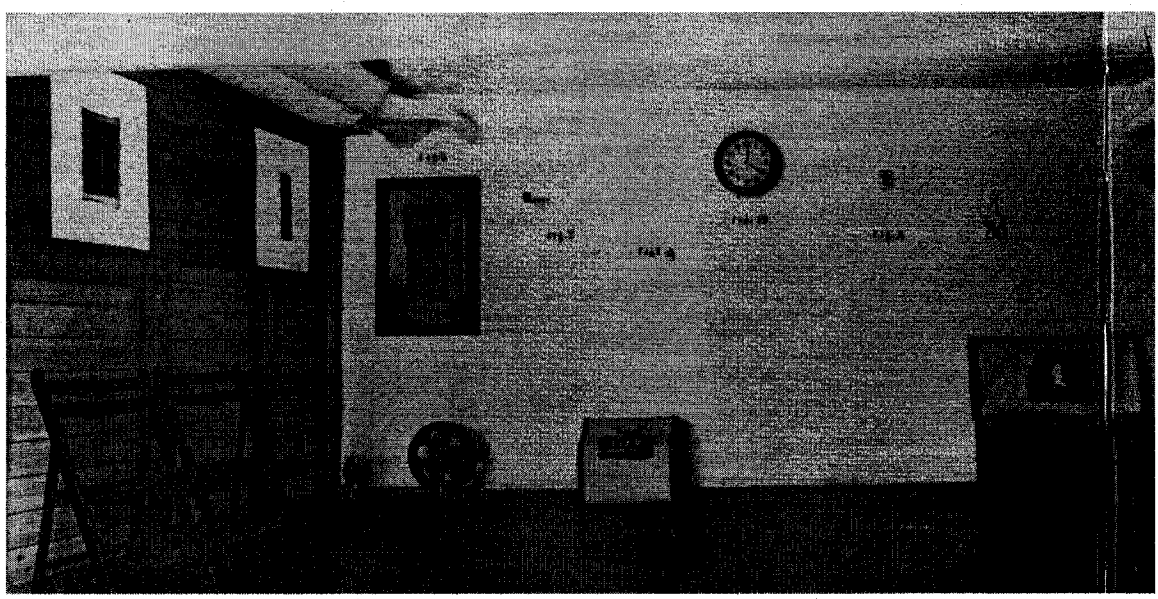

Figure 10. Marcel Broodthaers. *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section Cinema.* 1971-72.

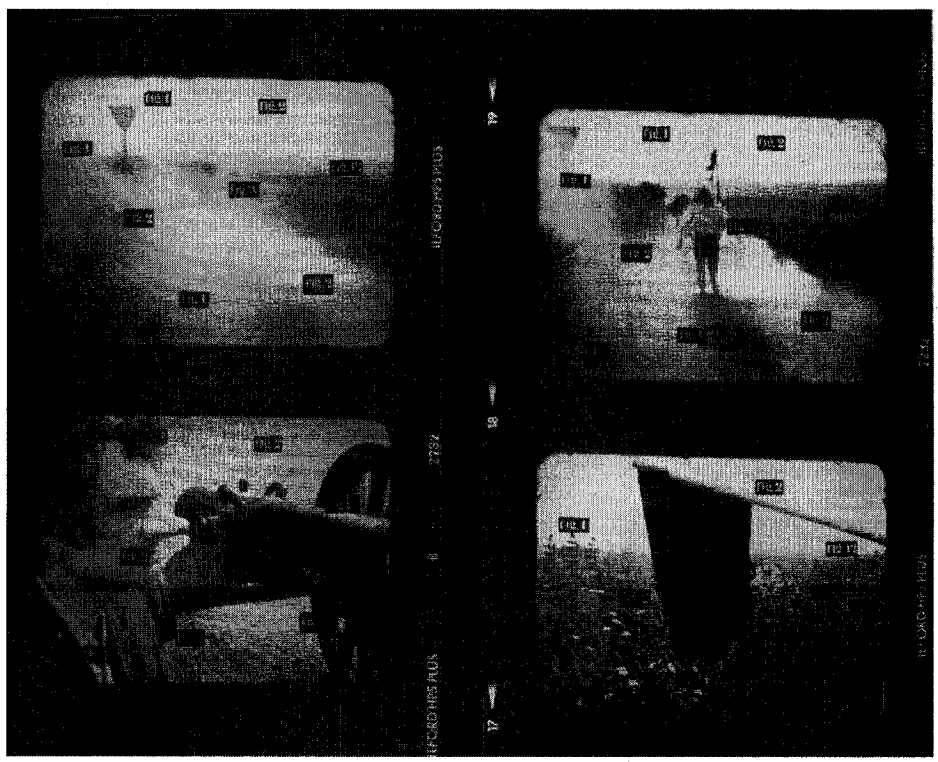

Figure 11. Marcel Broodthaers. *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section Cinema.* 1971-72.

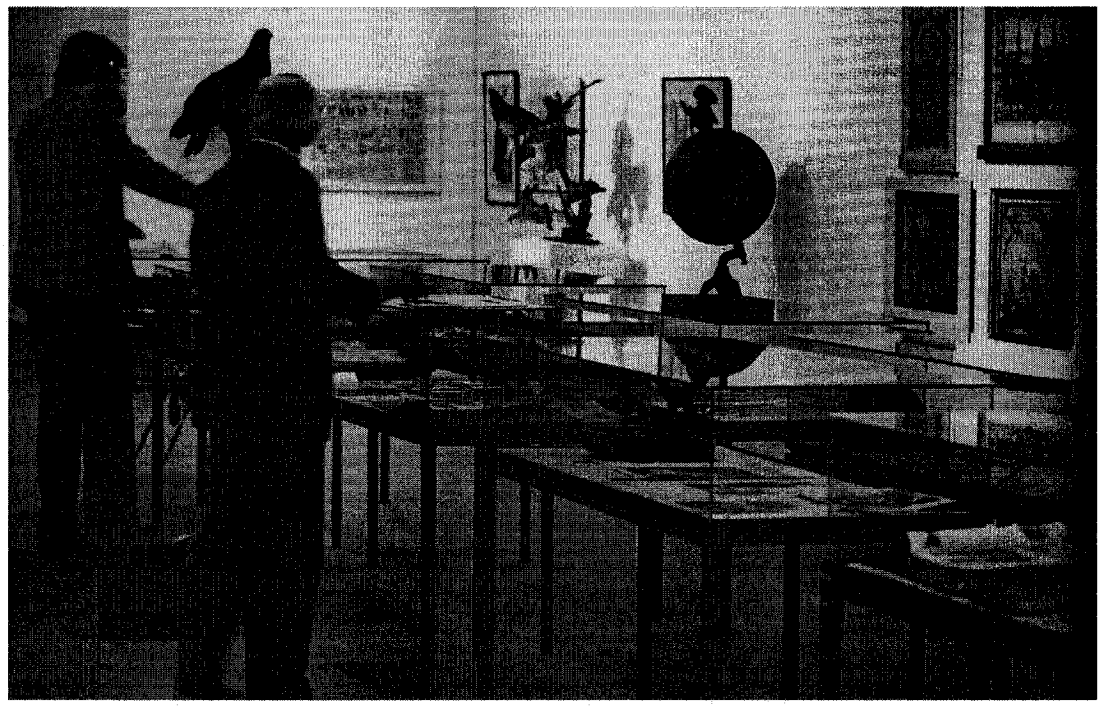

Figure 12. Marcel Broodthaers. *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section des Figures (Der Adler vom Oligozän bis heute)*. 1972. Installation view.

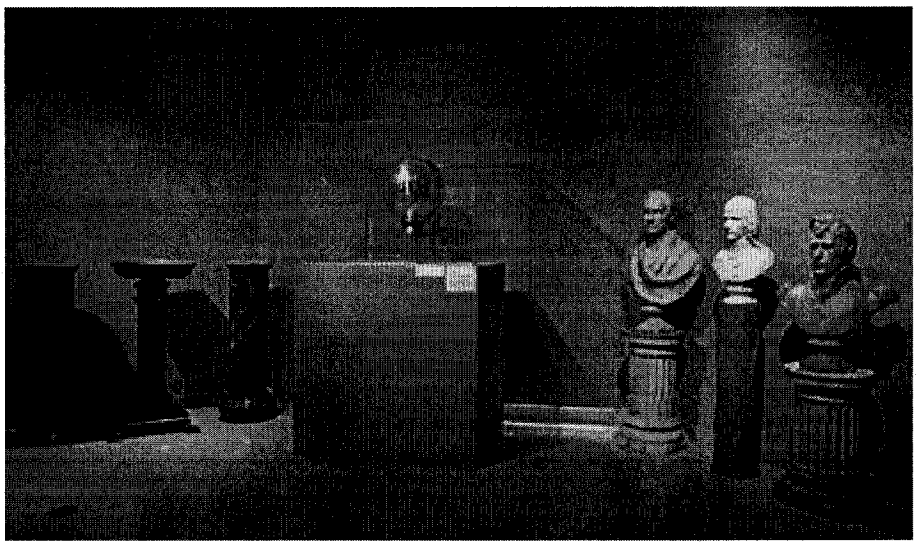

Figure 13. Fred Wilson. *Truth Trophy.* 1992. Installation view.

Figure 14. Robert Edge Pine. *The Alexander Contee Hanson Family*. c.1787.

Figure 15. Justus Engelhardt Kuhn. *Henry Cas Darnall III as a Child.* c.1710.

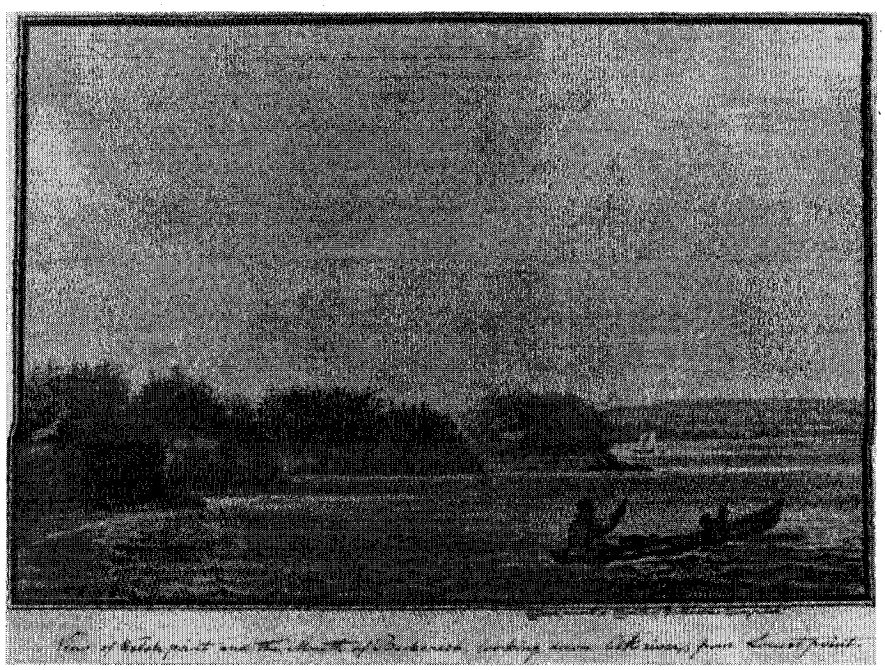

Figure 16. Benjamin H. Latrobe. *View of Welch Point and the Mouth of Backcreek.* 1806.

Figure 17. Benjamin H. Latrobe. *Preparations for the Enjoyment of a Fine Sunday among the Blacks*. 1797.

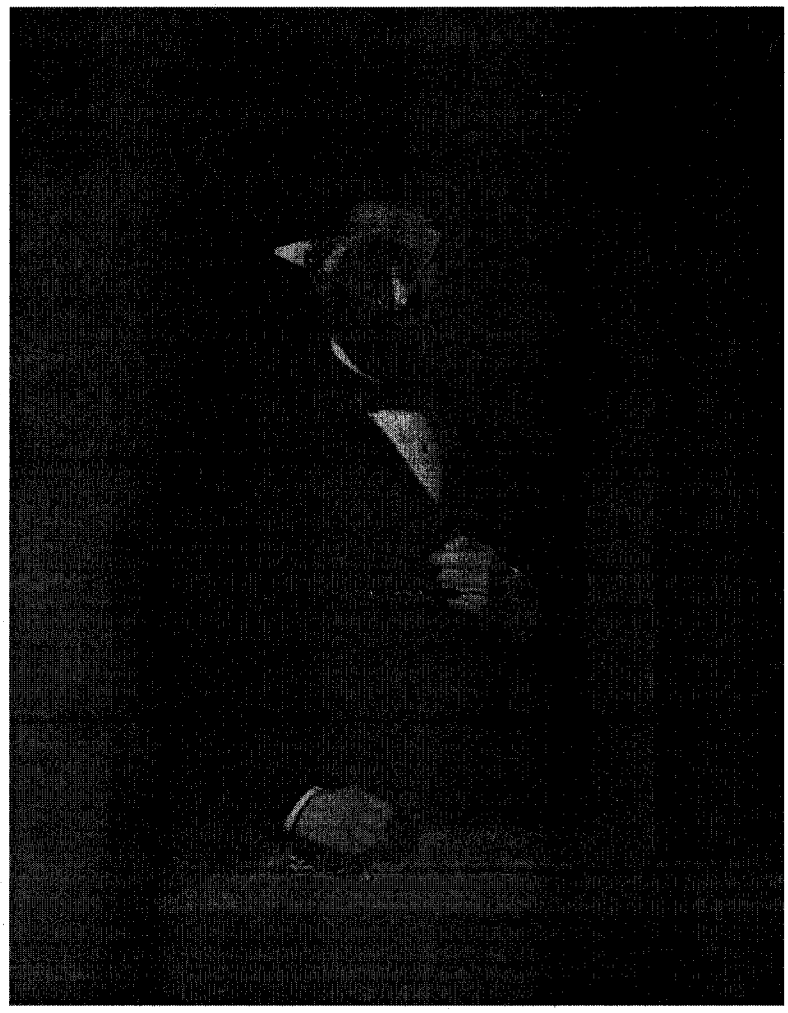

Figure 18. Henry Bebie. *Portrait of an Unknown Man.* c. 1860.

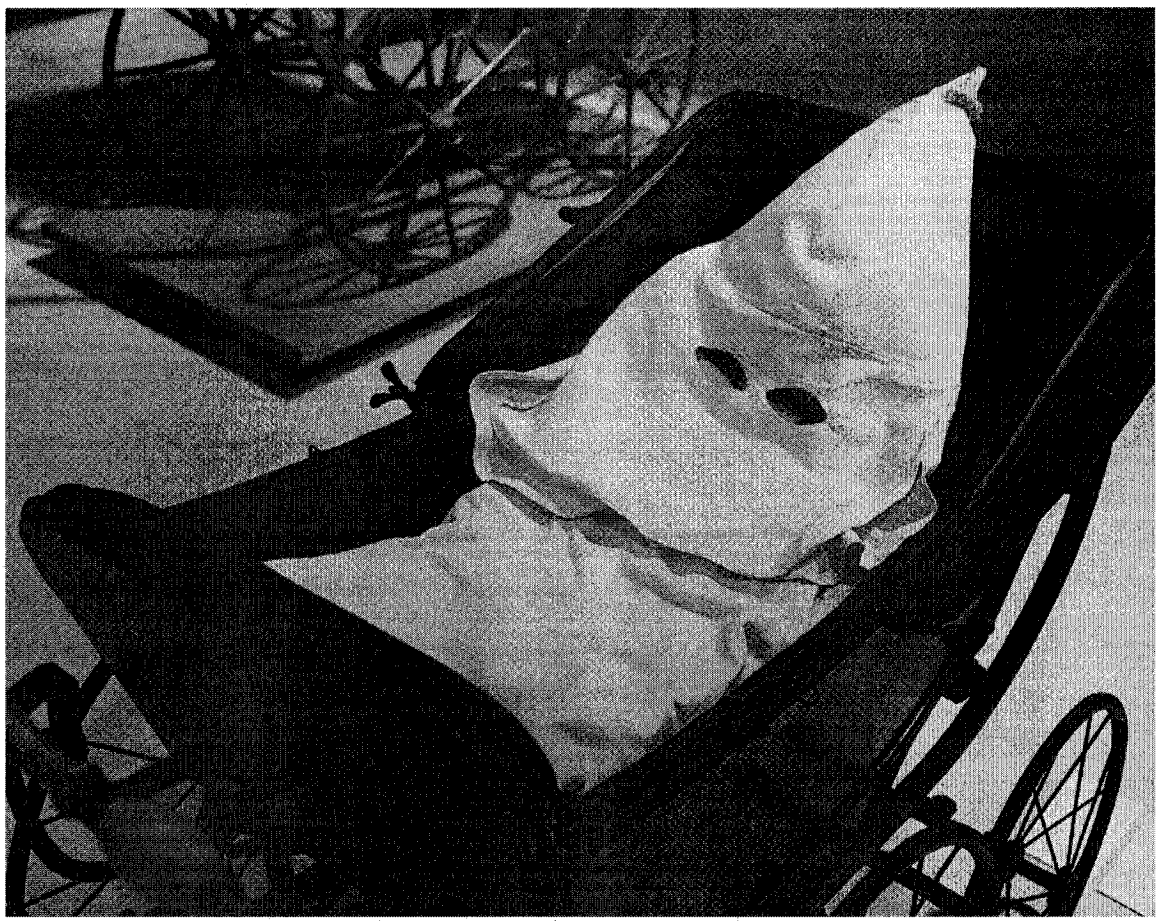

Figure 19. Fred Wilson. *Modes of Transport*. 1992. Detail of the installation.

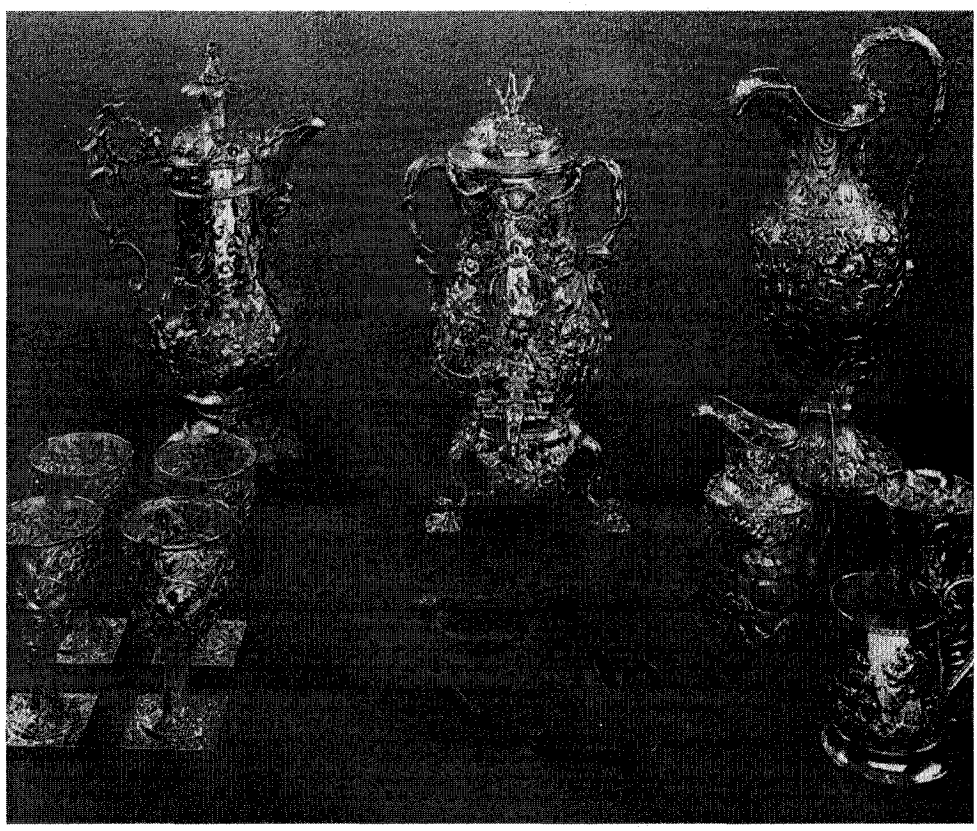

Figure 20. Fred Wilson. *Metalwork 1793-1880.* 1992.

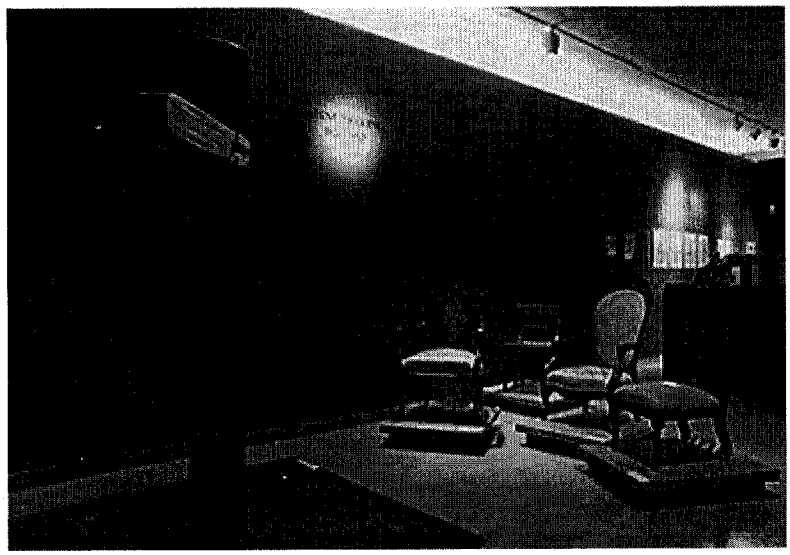

Figure 21. Fred Wilson. *Cabinetmaking 1820-1960.* 1992. Installation view.

Figure 22. Celestial Globe. Maker and date unknown.

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