

# The museum in the expanded field

– the influence of one work on another



Found photograph, Paris 2014

A recent talk at the Tate on the release of *The Books that Shaped art History* included essays by Boris Groys on Clement Greenberg and Anna Lovatt on Rosalind Krauss. These essays were the starting point for the questions I felt worth addressing in relation to my work, the politics of display, the market and the museum.

I remember only a few things from my masters program at RMIT. One of these was visiting lecturer and artist Stephen Bush who spoke about artists who reproduced their own work over and over to achieve a stylistic totality to please the market or out of fear. Artists Bush claimed were like Len Deighton's of the art world, pot boiling their arses off.

The position paper Rosalind Krauss' writing can read as is often avoided in contemporary art writing. And despite reservations I have about some of her ideas the polemic nature of her writing was what drew me to her work. Krauss' books and essays are staples of art teaching, perhaps none more so than her essay *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*. This essay comes with a Klein diagram, a Structuralist device used to expand meaning according to relational oppositions negations contradictions and implications

Krauss' Klein diagram has many variants some serious including theorist George Baker's diagram and some not such as artist Sam Durant's.

Artists straight out of art school will refer to their work as expanded drawing or expanded painting. The attachment to the term and in

turn Krauss' essay may be in name only as the statements will sometimes also invoke the post medium nature of their work. Expanded and post medium are terms indebted to Krauss and form stages in her theories. From the structuralist *Sculpture in the Expanded Field* to post modernism and post structuralism to post medium to a rejection of post medium and a return to the Klein diagram in 2011's *Under Blue Cup* Krauss' work has undergone the perpetual inventory she argues is crucial to criticism and I would argue is key to making art work.

*'...A critic revives not only her conception of the direction and most important currents of contemporary art, but also her convictions about the most significant work within them. This entails a perpetual reassessment of the field she surveys and the demand that it be articulated in her writing...'*<sup>1</sup>

A perpetual inventory unlike pot boiling your arse off is hard to maintain in a practice and harder to maintain over time. The need for ongoing reassessment as a means of making, exhibiting, collecting, and writing about art, is an acknowledgement of the myth of permanency and fixed ideas.

For people to change they have to in some ways forget, rewrite, and re-remember – déjà all over again. To work with history and memory as museums attempt to do even if it is the history of the recent past involves imperfect recollection through selection and omission.

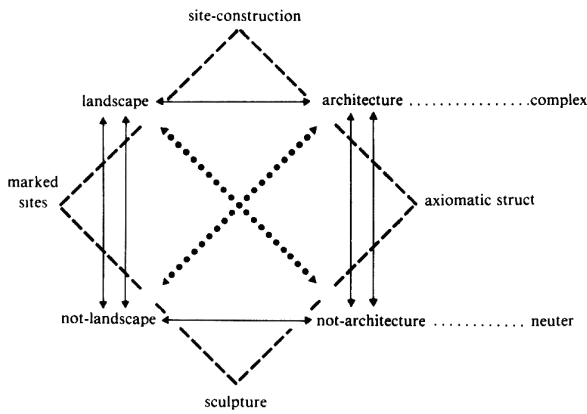
Krauss' reconsideration of her seminal diagram to deal with memory and forgetting was for me an interesting way of thinking about past and present, a dialectic that sometimes feel locked into a predetermined mode of making. Krauss has said that the artists she feels are most effective remember the importance of the medium namely modernism and then forget the traditional specific supports which for painting might be canvas and stretchers.

It can be hard to identify why some artists are championed by Krauss and others dismissed however it appears to be in the cohesion of this act of remembering a history and forgetting the application or specific nature of the supports

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### Rosalind Krauss Sculpture in the Expanded Field Klein diagram

or materials. Artists who she claims effectively operate within this dialectic are often the same ones and include William Kentridge, James Coleman, Christian Marclay and Marcel Broodthaers.

In an interview in *The Brooklyn Rail* with Yves Alain Bois about *Under Blue Cup* Bois addresses the inherent difficulty in remembering and forgetting. Quoting Wittgenstein loosely Bois says you cannot forget at will. Nor can you declare you wish to forget, as it will force the opposite reaction. To which Krauss replies that this is exactly the dialectic her recent work *Under Blue Cup* seeks to address.<sup>2</sup>

Using Krauss' reconfigured Klein diagram gave me a way to think about how making work based on historical narratives might mean remembering the form but forgetting the content. The museum as form or medium could be among other things the museum's vitrines, the gift shop's size and placement and the location of the administration offices. The content could be the rationalizations and social conditions that determine the acquisition policy or the overall curatorial direction. Or it might mean the work that is hung, hidden in storage, or de-accessioned.

My work often incorporates real or invented collections working with memory and forgetting to address nostalgic notions of the past and how the past is co-opted into the present. Recent works include the invented archive *Counter intuitive* from 2013 about a fake modernist movement from Kandos a central western NSW town built to accommodate workers from the cement works.

My latest work is a recreation of a collection from 300 BC in the Louvre called the Tanagras. The collection is named after the area in which they were discovered in what was Boetia and is now part of modern Greece. The Tanagras are

ceramic figures that when unearthed became part of a system of market and museum relations that continue today. It is unclear if their original function was decorative or religious. Their unearthing was undertaken in a form of antiquities gold rush that destroyed context in its wake.<sup>3</sup>

Neguine Mathieux in her essay *the Tanagras in Paris: A Bourgeois Dream* describes the response in 19th century Paris to the figures discovery as emphasizing the unremarkable nature of the Boetian town. Ceramics and certainly terracotta that was cast and reproduced were not viewed as valuable in the same way as other antiquities up until the discovery of the Tanagras.<sup>4</sup>

Mathieux points to the discovery of the figurines by nonaccredited agents without museum or institutional affiliations as ensuring museums had no official advantage in a competitive market.<sup>5</sup> The figurines as a result became a staple for the bourgeois and the occasional collector.

The figures are both ancient and modern, serial and fake. Copies were made by the original crafts people in 300 BC and by crafts people from neighbouring regions and again on their unearthing in the 19th century. They are original antiques that in their lifetime were made in multiples.

Viewed among the vast treasures of the Louvre they remain constant small reminders of the appetites of the market and the ability of money, empire, and bourgeois taste to amass collections.

But what might it mean to recreate this work including imitations of the imitations. In part it is the seductive nature of the collection and the desire to own a part of a museum collection that ultimately cannot be realized. It's a way quite literally out of the gift shop.

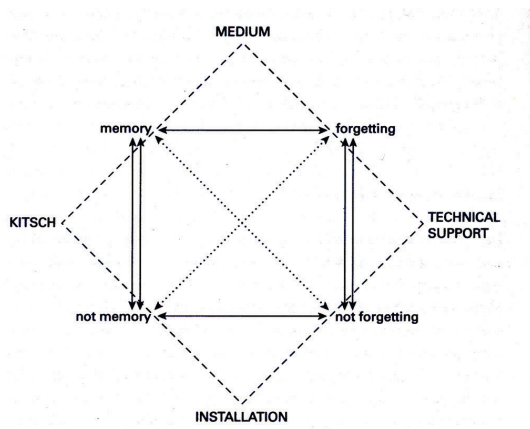
In *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* Krauss discusses the work of Marcel Broodthaers and his Museum of Eagles. Quoting art historian Benjamin Buchloh's glowing estimation of Broodthaers work as having

*...the canny clairvoyance of the materialist, Broodthaers anticipated, as early as the mid 1960s, the complete transformation of artistic production into a branch of the culture industry*<sup>6</sup>

Broodthaers *Museum of Modern Art, Eagles Department* and later *Museum of Old Master*

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Rosalind Krauss Under Blue Cup memory and forgetting Klein diagram

*Art [Art Ancien]* was a sequence of works from a fictitious museum where all elements were reduced to their underlying market value through use of the signage tags that denoted fig 1 fig 2 etc.<sup>7</sup>

Broodthaers is accused by the critic Douglas Crimp of 'bad faith' when he talks of his decision to stop being a poet and become an artist to make the work he hadn't the money to collect. Walter Benjamin cites a similar reason for why writers write in his *Unpacking my Library* in a story by German romantic writer Jean Paul *Life of the Merry Little Schoolmaster Maria Wutz in Auenthal*.

*"Wutz acquired (a large library) over time by noting all the works whose titles interested him in exhibition catalogues and, since he could not afford to buy them, writing them himself."*

*"Actually writers are people who write books not out of poverty but out of dissatisfaction with the books they can afford but do not like. That...you will regard as a whimsical statement but everything said from the standpoint of a true collector is whimsical"*<sup>8</sup>

Benjamin writes whimsically of the non-writer who wrote to amass the collection, the library they desired, but argues for the writer who can afford to buy but instead chooses to write to amass the collection that surpasses the available collection. As Broodthaers ceases to write to be an artist to make the work he could not as a writer afford

I can't buy the Tanagras so as with Broodthaers I make my own. Equally if I do not agree with or perhaps like art that is available I will as Walter Benjamin suggests remake it for myself.

When my Tanagrass is re-made it is installed in vitrines and on plinths using museum display conventions to suggest its antiquity and its value to confer upon it 'museum quality'.

Krauss cites Walter Benjamin's discussion of capitalism alternating impulses of the cynical and the utopic to dismiss installation or post medium work.<sup>9</sup> For Benjamin the cynical element gains the upper hand over time: and the utopic moment of a social form or technological development arises only at its birth or at its death.

Krauss situates Broodthaers at the birth and therefore utopic moment of what is characterized by her as the *international fashion of installation*, ... one she sees as...essentially... *complicit with a globalisation of the image in the service of capital*.<sup>10</sup>

Her distaste for installation is repeatedly made, and in strong terms. She has described her

*'disgust at the spectacle of meretricious art called installation...'*<sup>11</sup>

Boris Groys has argued in his Tate talk *Art Criticism in the post medium age* Q&A that Krauss misreads installations as exhibitions. For Krauss he says the work is the sum of its parts. For Groys the installation is a privatization of public space by the artist and an expression of the nature of the two freedoms in Western democracies.<sup>12</sup> In this understanding of installation rejection of the work can only mean rejection of the work in total and not a rejection of individual inclusions.

For Groys the installation is where art production coincides with the act of its presentation and provides the perfect experimental terrain for revealing the ambiguous nature of western freedom.

In support of installations he suggests two categories of freedom - the sovereign freedom of the artist is in making their own choices on their own terms. And the institutional freedom of the curator even when the curator operates outside an institution or museum is contingent as the curator is accountable to the public.<sup>13</sup>

One can say that in Western society the notion of freedom is deeply ambiguous not only in the field of art, but also in the political field. Freedom in the West is understood as allowing private, sovereign decisions to be made in many domains of social practice... But in some other domains, especially in the political field, freedom is understood primarily as the freedom of public discussion guaranteed by law as non-sovereign, conditional, institutional freedom.

In the context of installations in museums or installations using museums as their material support that revelation could expose accepted

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notions of freedom within the art world both the institutional art world and the relations within all tiers of that world from the collectors to the collection.

For Groys the installation of necessity should be viewed by a group. The group forms a very contemporary community similar to groups at film screenings or large outdoor gigs creating communities that share no common past and are more radically contemporary than political, religious or working communities as they mass around art objects together and unknown to each other.<sup>14</sup>

Groys assertions of the truly contemporary and experimental nature of the artists privatized public space is further developed to argue against the aura of the modernist original in favour of the fluid unstable nature of the copy in the 21st century.<sup>15</sup> The copy can now be shown in multiple venues and sites infecting the original. The copy is the new and now in a different context.

Krauss and Groys description of installation are from critics with different interests in how artwork is presented and viewed. Krauss is a critic borne of the free market whereas Groys is a critic from a very different historical moment, one where art was in many ways freed from its ties to capital. The art of communist Russia Groys was part of was excluded from the global art market with its systems of exchange. Instead the artists and critics operated from apartments and outside the state sponsored art world and the commercial gallery system of the free market west.

The act of installing and altering the museum space by an artist in Groys formulation is a revelation of sovereign freedom inside institutional freedom. The Tanagras when installed exist literally, physically and spatially as copies of copies, one freedom hidden inside the other. Understanding this moment of disruption in the broader relations of the institution might signal the return of the Benjamin's utopic moment however it could also be a reminder of the possibility that seeking exchange value is one but not always the only attribute of the art object.

1 Krauss R., *Perpetual Inventory*, October Books The MIT Press 2013, p.11

2 Bois Y.A., *ROSALIND KRAUSS with Yve-Alain Bois*, The Brooklyn Rail, [www.brooklynrail.org/2012/02/art/rosalind-krauss-with-yve-alain-bois](http://www.brooklynrail.org/2012/02/art/rosalind-krauss-with-yve-alain-bois), viewed 25/5/15

3 Mathieux N., *The Tanagras in Paris: A Bourgeois Dream*, The Tanagras Figurines for Life and Eternity, Fundacion Bancaja 2010 p.17

4 Ibid p.17-18

5 Ibid p.18

6 Krauss R., *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*, Thames and Hudson 1999 p.9

7 Ibid p.15

8 Benjamin W., *Unpacking my Library*, One Way Street and Other Writings, Penguin, London 2009

9 Krauss R., *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*, Thames and Hudson 1999 p.41

10 Ibid p.56

11 Bois Y.A., *ROSALIND KRAUSS with Yve-Alain Bois*, The Brooklyn Rail, [www.brooklynrail.org/2012/02/art/rosalind-krauss-with-yve-alain-bois](http://www.brooklynrail.org/2012/02/art/rosalind-krauss-with-yve-alain-bois), viewed 25/5/15

12 Groys B., *The Politics of installation*, e-flux Journal #2 January 2009, p.2-3

13 Op Cit

14 Groys B., *The Politics of installation*, e-flux Journal #2 January 2009, p.5

15 Groys B., *The Politics of installation*, e-flux Journal #2 January 2009, p.5-6