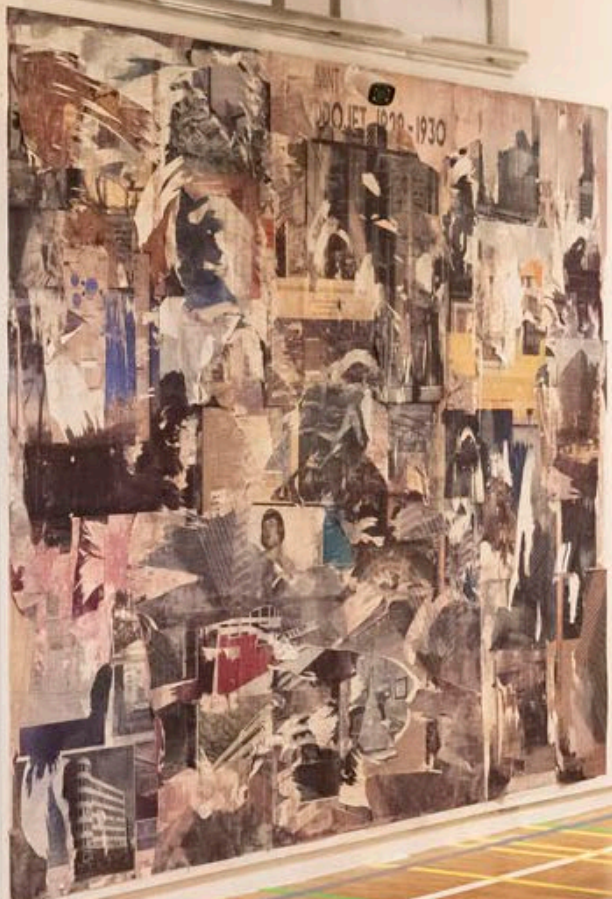


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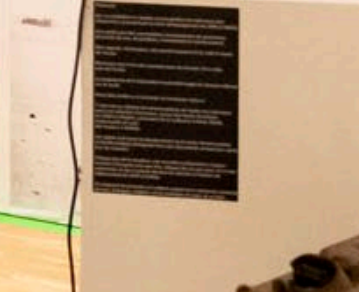
- 1. Marie Meloni
- 2. Antoine Escarot
- 3. Pierre, Éditeurs Cosa Mentale, 1995-1997
- 3. Luio Vaccini, Palestra, Losone (CHI), 1995-1997
- Cosa Mentale n°2, *Penser la structure*, 2010



- 4. Sverre Fehn, Pavillon des Pays Nordiques, Venise, dans la revue *Cosa Mentale* n°2, *Penser la structure*
- 5. Oscar Jespers, *Le Fardeau*, vers 1920
- 6. Akarova (Marguerite Acarin) dansant la Sicilienne et réalisé par l'artiste, 1932 (photographie de Rob D)
- 7. Marie Sétte, épouse de Henry Van de Velde, dansant portant une robe dessinée par l'architecte, vers 189



- 8. Samuel Gratacap, *Empire*, 2012-2014 (Classeur C
- 2017)
- 9. Marcel-Louis Baugriet, *Kaloprosopie*, ca. 1925, co
- d'Akarova en 1926
- 10. Elisabet Prins, *Projet de chambre d'enfant*, vers
- 11. Atlantropa, *Union Afrique-Europe*, 1932 (Classeur
- 2017)



# “Institution Building” at CIVA: Experimenting with Institutional Critique Through Architectural Exhibition

Arianna Casarini

## Keywords:

*Institutional criticism, Architecture exhibition, Architecture museum, Architecture institution, Architecture curation*

## ABSTRACT:

Despite the rising interest in the production of institutional histories, the field of institutional critique applied to the contemporary architectural institution is still an emerging framework of research and debate, both inside and outside this specific category of cultural institution. Due to the dominantly projective nature of the architectural institution, its critique tends to associate with and translate into proactive attempts at reimagining and rebuilding the institution. Institutional critique thus merges in the architectural context with the idea of the blueprint and the manifesto, and it is articulated in often collaborative and experimental formats. Through the exploration of the architectural exhibition “Institution Building” organized by the CIVA of Bruxelles in 2021, this article aims to analyze the use of the exhibition as a methodology for proposing a critique of the architectural institution, and to reflect on its effectiveness as a means to produce and mediate a critical discourse around the organization, functioning, and operations of the architectural institution.

Nonostante l'interesse crescente per la produzione di storie istituzionali, il campo della critica applicato all'istituzione museale contemporanea dedicata all'architettura è ancora un ambito emergente di ricerca e dibattito, sia all'interno sia che all'esterno di questa specifica categoria di istituzione culturale. A causa della natura prevalentemente proiettiva dell'istituzione museale dedicata all'architettura, la sua critica tende ad associarsi e tradursi in tentativi proattivi di re-immaginazione e ricostruzione dell'istituzione. La critica istituzionale si fonde così, in questo contesto, con l'idea del “progetto” e del “manifesto”, ed è articolata in formati spesso collaborativi e sperimentali. Attraverso l'esplorazione della mostra d'architettura “Institution Building” organizzata dal CIVA di Bruxelles nel 2021, questo articolo mira ad analizzare l'utilizzo della mostra come metodologia per proporre una critica dell'istituzione museale dedicata all'architettura, e a riflettere sulla sua efficacia come mezzo per produrre e mediare un discorso critico intorno all'organizzazione, al funzionamento e alle operazioni di questa tipologia istituzionale.

## Opening Picture:

Fig. 01: Display organization of the exhibition “Institution Building.” (Courtesy of Sepideh Farvardin).

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In its official, specialized, and, above all, *institutionalized* configuration as a specific organization of ‘museological persuasion’ primarily dedicated to the collection, exhibition, and mediation of architectural culture, the architectural institution can be considered a relatively new addition to the panorama of cultural bodies.<sup>1</sup> Despite its relative youth and the specificity of its program and operations, the idea of the architectural institution is enjoying persistent popularity on the horizon of potential and attractive contributions to the cultural *milieu* of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> Today, the current and seemingly unfaltering proliferation of multiple and diverse (para-)institutional spaces dedicated to the preservation and display of architectural materials and ideas testifies to a phase of enthusiasm that manifests simultaneous attitudes of ‘performative’ confidence and anxiety. On the one hand, the ongoing success of the architectural institution experiment shows the resolute interest in and conviction of the valuable contribution that this type of institution can bring to the contemporary cultural discourse. On the other hand, the continuous foundation of new institutions and the frequent restructuring and rethinking of relatively recent ones also present the image of an institution that is still challenging and debating its role, relevance, and purpose in the current global cultural panorama.

Given these premises, the architectural institution is thus not an undemanding subject to frame for analysis: both for the multiplicity of forms and missions it could express, and for its enthusiastic mutability

of organization, structure, and objectives.<sup>3</sup> Examined from the perspective of its structural configuration, the contemporary architectural institution emerges as peculiarly permeable to change and revision. In this behaving as a typical post-cultural industry institution, the architectural institution appears as a usually flexible entity that might undergo a repeated cycle of reflection, rethought, and renewal in its lifespan, often even in a peculiarly accelerated way.<sup>4</sup>

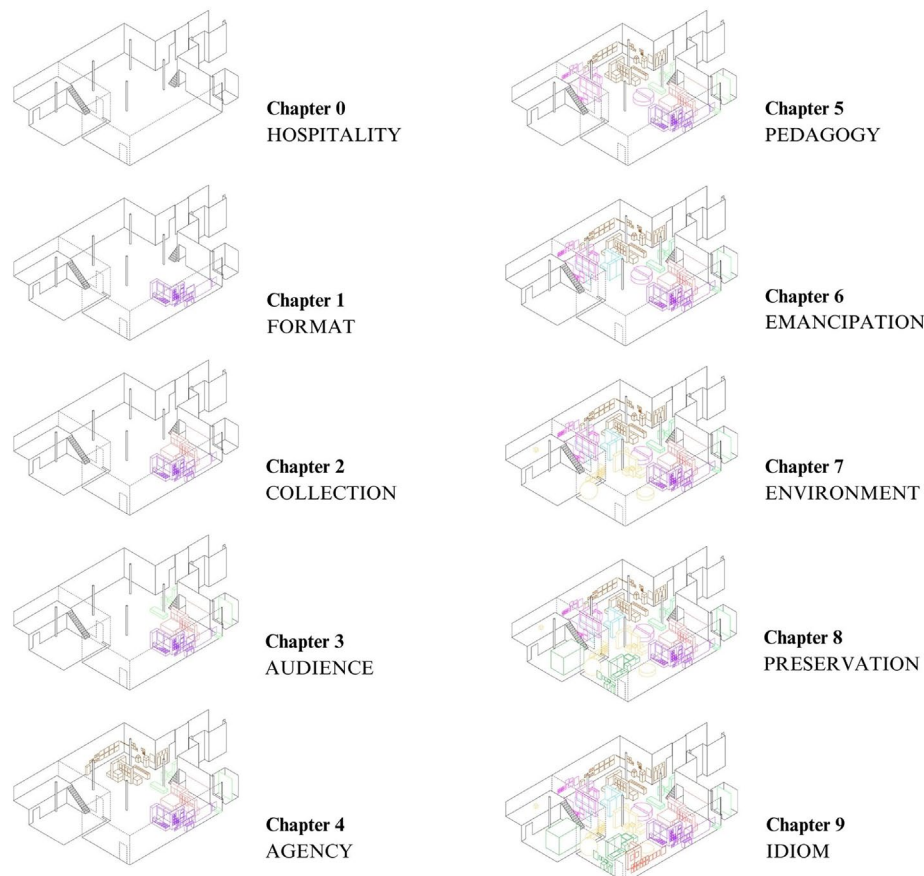
Almost to counterbalance this expeditious variability and preserve and track these rapid changes, current research scenarios around the architectural institution see the flourishing of several institutional histories produced not only around the most traditionally historical examples of the architectural institution<sup>5</sup>, but also on the youngest representatives of the category.<sup>6</sup> This interest in exploring the origins and the historical development of architectural institutions does not only reveal a recent recognition of this typology as a relevant object of study but, more importantly, the increasing need to establish the present and the future of these institutions, as well as their missions and operations, on the basis of a solid understanding not only of their ideological foundation and context of origin but also of the cultural, political, social, and economic conditions that generated them. Whether born out of an architectural institution’s internal need for meta-reflection or out of an autonomous research interest in exploring the origin of the architectural institution as a cultural phenomenon, these histories simultaneously aim at different

objectives. These aspirations are not exclusively limited to the interest in the historical record of the specific moment and context of an institution's foundation in order to preserve its memory in the general fluidity of architectural institutions. The histories of such institutions also pursue more praxis-oriented ambitions. On the one hand, they are instrumental to highlight the institutions' specificities in autonomously interpreting the idea of an architecture 'museum' in relation to the history of their conception, and in evaluating and analyzing their mission from this perspective. On the other hand, they try to assess the institutions' impact and their instrumentality on the development of architectural culture, by overviewing how they evolved to contribute with their projects or program goals

to the production and mediation of architectural knowledge. In addition, exploring the history of the architectural institution also means observing and assessing their behavior in structuring and implementing their missions and programs across mutated cultural environments. Evaluated from this perspective, the current production of institutional histories overtly declares the achievement of an appropriate level of ideological awareness of the architectural institution and its researchers regarding the interpretation and understanding of its form, function, and actions.

### From Institutional History to Institutional Critique

The fact that the architectural



**Fig. 02**  
Temporal and spatial evolution of the exhibition chapters of "Institution Building."  
Courtesy of CIVA, Centre International pour la Ville, l'Architecture et le Paysage.

institution reached the point where it can be meticulously investigated in its own foundational history and historical development is the necessary precondition for the manifestation of further levels of inquiry regarding its role, conduct, and intention as a producer of (architectural) knowledge and culture. After the historical investigation, and precisely *through* it and its results, the institution could face a new set of deconstructive research questions that challenge and problematize its status and behavior in the general panorama of institutional culture. However, in the architectural context, the impact and diffusion of the practice of institutional critique is a considerably recent phenomenon<sup>7</sup>, which has been interpreted and assimilated distinctively when applied to the case of the architectural institution.

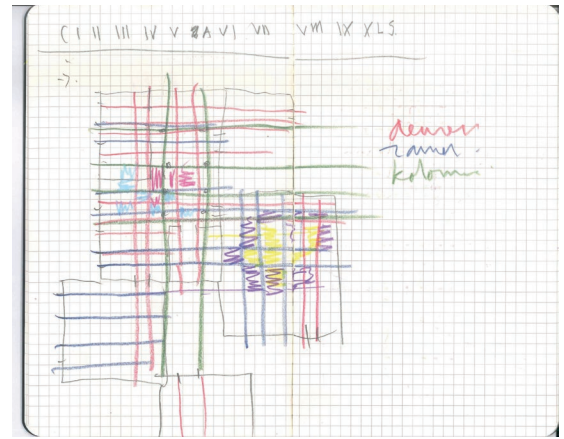
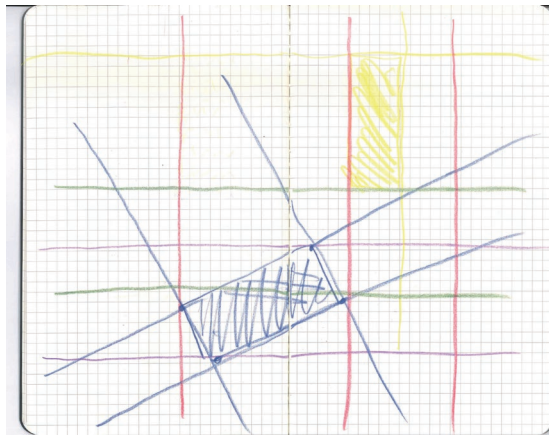
In this germinal panorama, it is consequential to highlight how the more structured examples

of architectural institutions critique are often produced and developed from within—so they are researched, manufactured, and disseminated *from* and *by* the institution itself.<sup>8</sup> This form of autarchic control and production of critique appears to be a specific prerogative of the architectural institution since in other cultural fields institutional critique traditionally tends to be predominantly produced from the outside.<sup>9</sup>

Possibly, this spontaneous and voluntary investment of the architectural institution on its deconstruction and ideological assessment is connected with the double essence of the architectural institution as both a reflective and projective body.<sup>10</sup> The architectural institution has always historically strived to orient its operations toward generating a proactive and direct impact on the discipline of architecture, not only in terms of fostering intellectual architectural



**Fig. 03**  
Display organization of the exhibition “Institution Building.”  
Courtesy of Sepideh Farvardin.



04-05

discourse but also influencing the functional aspects of architectural *praxis*. Thus, the necessity to verify if the behavior, mission, and program of the institution are up-to-date in response to the premises upon which architecture currently has to operate appears as a natural, if not required, integration to the institution's *ethos*. In this perspective, the architectural institution's inner re-examination of its ideological functioning appears to be its most immediate, available methodology to verify how relevant, instrumental, and effective its role still is in its service towards the discipline of architecture.

As a result of this engaged relationship with architecture and its developments, the critique of architectural bodies pairs deconstruction with construction: the ideological inquiry is accompanied by a programmatic blueprint for reimagining and rebuilding the institution, reimagining its contents, and actions.<sup>11</sup> Against this background, any theoretical attempt at institutional critique generated by the architectural institution is imperatively translated into a *manifesto* of intent rather than a simple deconstruction of functioning: the auto-analysis

merges into a proclamation of objectives and strategies, a design for a plan to prefigure, orient, and redraft the future of the institution.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, it is possible to observe that, despite the sophisticated tendency of the architectural institution for self-assessment, its critique still primarily focuses on content rather than structure. The impact of this type of critique undoubtedly sees the architectural institution responding to the pressure and the demand of contemporaneity with a revision and expansion of collecting methods, preservation policies, and exhibition and research programs. Nevertheless, animated by a predominantly pragmatic and functional attitude, this institutional critique rarely questions the ideological essence and the legitimacy of the architectural institution and its operation.

### Re-think to Re-Build: the Case of "Institution Building" at CIVA

Analyzed from the perspective of publicizing proactive investigation, the idea of presenting a critical programmatic manifesto in the format of an architectural exhibition appears to be an interesting attempt

**Figs. 04-05**  
Architectenjdviv,  
Preliminary  
sketches for the  
Scenography of  
the Exhibition  
"Institution  
Building" by CIVA  
Bruxelles, 2021.  
Courtesy of  
architectenjdviv.



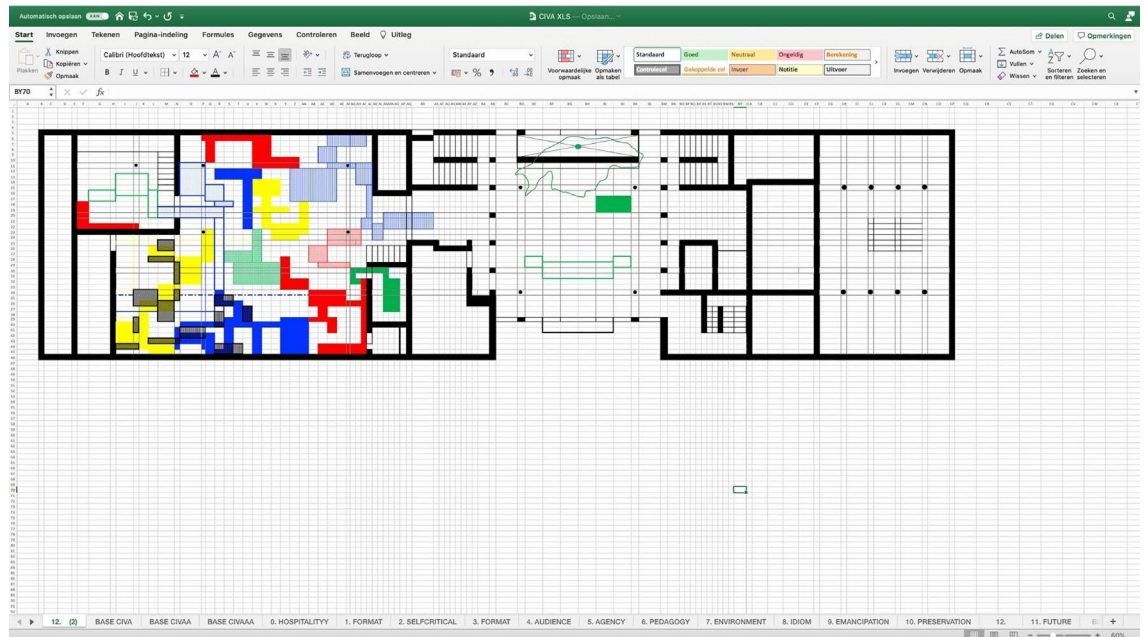
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by the architectural institution to use a methodology familiar to contemporary architecture culture to reflect, research, and expose its self-exploration. This operation seems remarkably coherent with the observed aims of the architectural institution critique. Displaying criticism can be read as a practice that exposes and proposes: exhibiting institutional critique is factually constructing a material platform for discourse around the institution and its methods. In addition, using the exhibition as a means of critique also contributes, from the perspective of the meta-reflection of the institution, to the idea of producing concrete actions that go beyond the critique. Reflecting on exhibitions as institutional apparatus, the architectural institution can use

the exhibition as a space where to openly manifest how it addresses its audiences, how it makes and manages knowledge circulation, and what methodologies it uses to mediate ideas. In this perspective, the institution exposes itself through its operations, concretizing the results of its self-analysis. Exposing the critique of an architectural institution represents a stimulating node for research. On the one hand, it allows the study of the methodologies exposed by the architectural institution for its self-investigation. On the other hand, it allows the exploration of its strategies for rethinking its form, structure, and mission.

Starting from this conceptual background, the organization of the architectural exhibition “Institution Building,” presented by CIVA, the

**Figs. 06-07**  
Architectenjddiv,  
Excel Drawings  
for the Scenogra-  
phy of the Exhibi-  
tion “Institution  
Building” by CIVA  
Bruxelles, 2021.  
Courtesy of archi-  
tectenjddiv.



International Center for the City, the Architecture and the Landscape of Bruxelles,<sup>13</sup> thus appears to be a notable case study to explore the possibilities, opportunities, and limitations of embodying critique through exhibition.

The exhibition experiment of “Institution Building,” which lasted from August 27 to November 7, 2021, represented a pivotal moment for the Centre and its development. It symbolically highlights several crucial milestones for the CIVA: it marks the beginning of a new chapter, being the first exhibition organized under the newly appointed director Nikolaus Hirsch, but it also marks the end of an era, foreshadowing a new one for CIVA, officializing its upcoming transfer to the new cultural hub of the KANAL Centre Pompidou, expected for 2025.<sup>14</sup> It is no coincidence that, in a moment of transition—especially such a controversial and problematic one—,<sup>15</sup> an institution feels compelled to look inward and rethink its essence and activities in view of its new form. Stemming from these premises, “Institution

Building” wanted to be both a moment of meta-reflection for the institution and the presentation of a possible, potential path for the future of CIVA: a future inspired by a diverse set of questions and an array of competing possible answers. Ideas of transition and transformation animated the intention beyond the critical curatorial efforts behind the exhibition; in particular, the intention to merge a process of rethinking into a plan for reinvention, initiating a process of meaningful re-imagination for the Centre.<sup>16</sup> From an operational point of view, the exhibition was thus imagined to fulfill two parallel sets of actions: “Institution Building” had to encompass both the questioning and the answering, the inquiry and the hypothesis in the scenography of its display. It needed to ask but also to explain, to state but also to imagine. In order to curate and manifest these intentions, the exhibition developed an experimental methodology that coherently articulated three parallel, interconnected dimensions (thematic, temporal, and spatial):



this strategy represents an interesting contribution to the materialization of critique through the exhibition.

### Performing Critique through Exposed Methodology

The “Institution Building” design functions as the materialization of an institutional image through a pervasive visualization of a curatorial methodology. Through the display of the curatorial strategy, which is made evident and manifested in the exhibition, the institution’s (aspirational) functioning is presented, critiqued and challenged.

The curatorial intention is primarily organized around the identification of significant institutional elements around which to orchestrate and congregate the simultaneous operations of questioning and re-imagining the architectural institution: a skeleton of subjects to structure the proactive critical discourse into objects, projects, and ideas. The constitutive institutional elements identified were translated into ten different thematic clusters: *Hospitality, Format, Collection, Audience, Agency, Pedagogy, Emancipation, Environment, Preservation, and Idiom*. Intentionally, the elements are left conceptually and functionally porous, so they can serve different operative objectives simultaneously, performing as objects of inquiry and agents of proposal at the same time. The clusters indicate both the aspects and activities of the institution that the exhibition wants to challenge and reinvent, as well as the thematic

operational framework for CIVA’s priority future field of action. The ten elements thus ideally resume the institution in its most visible and ‘exoteric’ parts,<sup>17</sup> alluding to its function and structure, as well as the reasons and ideologies behind it. The very choice of the clusters is thus an operation that intends to reveal and unveil the institution in its essence and aims: it not only displays the founding principles and components of the institution, but also reveals its ideological orientation at the moment of defining its program and mission.<sup>18</sup> The clusters are, essentially, the critique that is verbalized in themes. They function as conceptual islands, each manifesting an institutional component and positioning it in the vocabulary of the display. Together, they represent the semantic archipelago that captures the essence and behavior of the institution, but also its operational thesaurus for question and action.

The diverse conceptual clusters are transposed in the exhibition as sequential, additive chapters articulating through a temporal progression.<sup>19</sup> [Fig. 02] Week after week, the exhibition grows with a new addition, following an idea of process and work-in-progress that expands with new contributions for the entire lifespan of the exhibition.

From this perspective:

CIVA is not only a space of representation but a place of production. The exhibition is a visible process for visitors: from mounting to maintenance and the spectrum in between.<sup>20</sup>



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In fact, following this procedure, the exhibition builds itself, block by block, progressing through time under the gaze of its public. At the same time, through the progressive aggregation of the element, it constructs the image and the concretization of the potential architectural institution in the making. In the curatorial choice of its sequential articulation, “Institution Building” also materially manifests criticism in the exhibition as inquiry turning into production in the exhibition space, making its inquisitive and constructive progress tangible. Not only does the idea of sequential chapters challenge the idea of stability and permanence of the institution, questioning the solidity of its foundational ideologies and intentions, but also suggests the alternative idea of an unstable configuration that repeatedly redesigns itself: a structure that allows for progressive variations in an ever-expanding form.<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, the exhibition and, reflexively, the re-imagined institution function as a research process: they are a laboratory, a testing ground, and also a conceptual worksite. The exhibition-institution is not a static, finalized, immutable, self-contained statement: it changes over time and constantly enriches and problematizes the discourse, hypothesis, and proposals it produces. The exhibition as “a growing organism, constantly questioning and legitimizing its *raison d’être*”,<sup>22</sup> is thus a concept coherently translated into the operational dialogue produced by the process of additional and mutual re-organization of the sequence of elements.

The principle of temporal progression punctuates the rhythm for the gradual introduction of the diverse materials and contributions that compose each chapter and progressively populate the exhibition space. The multifaceted work of architects, artists, historians,

**Fig. 08**  
Architectenjdvviv,  
Scenography of  
the Exhibition  
“Institution  
Building” by CIVA  
Bruxelles, 2021.  
Credit photo:  
Thomas Ost.

writers, theorists, and activists, in an impressive lineup of more than 150 participants,<sup>23</sup> sequentially inhabits the exhibition space, crowding every available floor and wall.<sup>24</sup>

**[Fig. 01 and 03]** The curatorial emphasis granted to this image of a cooperative approach to knowledge production can also be interpreted as a curatorial method to display critique. The institution's objectives, form, and operations are presented as a collective, interdependent, interactive, and collaborative cosmos of contributions, works, perspectives, and ideas. From this angle, the exhibition and its idea of the architectural institution become a literal building inhabited by different actors, methodologies, and approaches, all contributing to its functioning. The exhibition reveals (and advocates for) the institution as a network of people, expertise, and ideas. In addition, the multiple contributions also build (or re-build) the institution: they inspire it to renew itself with their perspectives and fuel its reimagination process with their participation. Furthermore, through this additive process, the exhibition functions as an institution. The progression of the institutional chapters, as well as the organization of their collateral events, can be read as the macro-institution of "Institution Building" producing ten different thematic exhibitions, all distinguished by their own vernissage and program.

To coordinate and, in a certain sense, choreograph this impressive amount of materials and events, the curators requested architectural studio architectenjdviv (inge vinck jan de vylder architecten, here in collaboration with additional designers Pierre Labergue and

Shervin Sheikh Rezaei) to create an evolving scenography capable of containing and articulating the sequential logic of the ten institutional components. Imagining the exhibition space as the encounter between the surreal, correlative collaboration of a *cadavre exquis* and an Excel sheet's formatting and organizing capability,<sup>25</sup> **[Fig. 04-07]** architectenjdviv designed an associative exhibition display of areas of materials connected by colored lines drawn on the floor—an intricate system of organization and, above all, connection. **[Fig. 08]** The subtle presence of the colored line scheme on the floor highlights the transience of the display organization but also the spontaneity of the connections, suggesting their potential manipulability and re-arrangement. The scenography is thus an instrument for both reading and reconfiguring, allowing not only the public to interpret the exhibition, but above all the materials to acquire new meanings by following the ephemeric connection sketched by the architects and curators. In addition, following the principles of materializing critique, the organizing element also becomes part of the display on multiple levels. In fact, the participation of the scenography is not limited to making the organizational criterium perceptible and thus explainable and transparent. The line set design is considered an exhibition object in itself,<sup>26</sup> it is exposed, and it outgrows its serving function to become an actual symbolic and conceptual tool, a working hypothesis. It is not only a 'work' in itself, the visualization of an architectural and design plan to organize space, materials, and ideas, but also the image of how an

institution could potentially work and organize itself. In this way, the institution shows its functioning in the most literal terms, exhibiting its organizational criteria.

The experimental attempt of “Institution Building” to produce proactive critique through display thus goes beyond the mere visualization of theory or the presentation of a critical perspective to a curated narration of materials and documents. Through the explication and exposure of its curatorial strategy, “Institution Building” creates an identity between the exhibition display and the architectural institution. The exhibition not only represents and makes visible the institutional structure: it works, functions, and produces as an authentic architectural institution. The equivalence between exhibition and institution is achieved essentially by the incorporation of methodology into the display: the proactive action of the critique is to make the functioning of the institution visible and experienceable, so that the public can not only perceive it, but also understand, and participate in it. The critical curatorial strategy operated by “Institution Building” thus represents an engaging contribution to the idea of translating critique into display: the possibility of constructing, through the visualization of a methodology, an image of an institution that simultaneously questions and rebuilds its premises for existence and action.

## Endnotes

- 1 The formal foundation of the architectural institution in its contemporary declination is widely recognized as a production of the postmodernist, post-Beaubourg period and culture: both ICAM, the International Confederation of Architectural Museums, and a massive proliferation in the foundation of architecture museums, centers, and institution occurred in the decade between 1979 and 1988. For an overview of the architectural institutions' development phases, see Dietmar 2009, pp. 56-59.
- 2 This popularity is fueled and supported by the equally promiscuous development of short-lived events, festivals, fairs, and programs (but also journals and publications) dedicated to architecture and its related disciplinary production.
- 3 An example of this variegation can be observed in the inner diversity, as well as in the ambiguity, of the several member institutions included in the International Confederation of Architectural Museums (ICAM). Currently, ICAM's membership encompasses over 90 architecture institutions from more than 30 countries, without limiting their profiles to the architecture museum. ICAM accepts in its ranks architecture museums, architectural museum departments, centers, archives, and comparable institutions dedicated to promoting architecture and its history, as well as private collectionists, as long as they grant public access to their collections. The unifying element between these different realities seems to be their mission of disseminating, mediating, and fostering architectural knowledge and culture (the activities of collecting and archiving are relevant, but not ever-spread goals). For an overview of ICAM, its development and organization, see Giral 2009, pp. 7-14. Also, on the "inexistence of a typical architectural institution," see Dietmar 2009, pp. 59-63.
- 4 See, in this regard, the invitation of Mirko Zardini to reject a definition and search for a univocal typology of the architectural museum, as well as the refusal of fixity of plans in Zardini 2017, pp. 85-96.
- 5 The most exhaustive and structured examples can be summarized in the research on the three historically recognized postmodern architectural institutions: the DAM, the CCA, and the NAI. These types of publications include, for example: the study around the figure of Heinrich Klotz as the founder and inspirer of the early history and program of the *Deutsche Architekturmuseum* (DAM) in Frankfurt (see, Elser 2014); the several internal reports on the activities and one global monography produced by the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) in Montréal (see, Canadian Centre for Architecture 1988; Richards, 1989); and the institutional history and exhibition history overview published around the Netherlands Architecture Institute (NAI) and its updated version of *Het Nieuwe Instituut* (HNI) in Rotterdam (see, Figueiredo 2016; Cormier 2021).
- 6 This approach generally concerns brief monographic or cataloging summaries and overviews of the exhibition history of the institutions. In particular, this latest example is gaining remarkable popularity, probably in response to the rising demand for meta-archival practices intended to preserve the memory of the activity organized by the institution and the increasing research attention dedicated to architectural exhibitions and their history. For examples produced by a different and diverse array of architectural institutions, see Grima et al. 2009 (Storefront for Art and Architecture, New York); Zimm 2012 (Swedish Centre for Architecture); Cohen, Eveno 2001 (*Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine*).
- 7 An early example of this approach is *A Very Special Museum* (Damisch 2001, pp. 49-67). seminal essay, in which the author highlighted perplexities and criticality regarding the intention and consequences behind the operation of museifying architecture.
- 8 In this regard, it is also significant to highlight that the actors currently involved in the critique of the architectural institutions mostly come from professions other than that of the architect (and if they are or used to be, they preeminently work as directors or curator in architectural institutions in the current context).
- 9 For an updated overview of institutional critique and its field and actors of production, with a particular focus on contemporary art, see Fraser 2005, pp. 278-286.
- 10 The terminology employed here derives from the general observations on the nature of the architectural institution included by Figueiredo in the contextual introduction to his analysis of the historical creation of the NAI, see Figueiredo 2016, pp. 14-18.
- 11 In this, the attitude of the architectural institution can be compared to the third, recent wave of development of institutional criticism, highlighted by Karen Archey as a combination of criticism and care, scrutiny and contribution, in order to propose and generate material changes within the institution. For Archey's theory, sustained with contemporary examples of this attitude, see Archey 2022.

- 12 The most notable example of this approach is the critical manifesto *The Museum Is Not Enough*, (Borasi 2019), produced by the Canadian Centre for Architecture.
- 13 For an essential profile of CIVA and its mission, see Pourtois 2005, pp. 44-47.
- 14 CIVA decided to leave its current location in Ixelles (Bruxelles) after 24 years of activities and to participate in the new plan for the re-employment of the former Citroen Garage along the Brussel Charleroi Canal, which is to be converted into a cultural pole of international level. The ambitious project, supported by the collaboration and support between the KANAL Foundation and the Centre Pompidou, plans to create a multi-purpose cultural hub regrouping several different cultural institutions and activities in its renovated spaces. For further details regarding the project, and contextual information regarding the proposed project elaborated by noAarchitecten, EM2N and Sergison Bates architects, see Block 2018.
- 15 Even if the relocation of CIVA was justified by the need to expand the institution's spaces for storing its collection and archive, the decision of CIVA to be included in the plan for the KANAL Centre Pompidou was met with some perplexities. Primary doubts concern the consequences, for a local reality like CIVA, to subscribe to a project and a program of an external institution infamous for its attempts at 'cultural colonization': a choice that could significantly limit CIVA's autonomy in developing its structure and strategies. In addition, CIVA has not made a clear, official statement, nor expressed its position regarding its participation in a project that is considered part of a controversial operation of urban development, of which the KANAL Centre Pompidou is interpreted as a catalyst for gentrification through cultural operations, questioning the real reasons behind the agenda of the cultural internationalization of Bruxelles. For an overview of the KANAL Centre Pompidou controversy, see Debersaques 2021; Innocenti 2018, pp. 115-118; Seynaeve, Ménard, Rubio, Denys 2021.
- 16 Not coincidentally, this pause of self-reflection also followed the moment of the global pandemic.
- 17 The curators, in their conceptual statement, insisted particularly on the idea of making the institution visible in all its parts; see CIVA 2021, p. 2.
- 18 The 'voice' of the institution, proposing the themes, articulating the questions, and presenting the horizon of action is presented in the explanatory panels that introduce the space of each section. Brief summaries of the ten panels are available on the CIVA website, in the section announcing the opening of each institutional chapter: <https://www.civa.brussels/en/search/content/institution%20building>.
- 19 To refer to the complete temporal articulation of the exhibition, see CIVA 2021, p. 3.
- 20 CIVA 2021, p. 1.
- 21 It is no coincidence that Nikolaus Hirsch is also the editor of *Institution Building: Artists, Curators, Architects in the Struggle for Institutional Space*, published in 2009, which collect a series of reflections and hypothesis for the spatial imagination of a European Kunsthalle. The project sketched in the publication, from the idea of the institution as a space of production to the montage of its structure as an exquisite corpse, is remarkably coherent with the curatorial structure of the exhibition «Institution Building».
- 22 CIVA 2021, p. 1.
- 23 The complete list of participants and contributors can be found on the CIVA website: <https://www.civa.brussels/fr/expos-events/institution-building-0>.
- 24 It is also important to highlight in this context that the contributions were not limited to the materials, artworks, documentation, and physical objects on display in the exhibition, nor was the exhibition the only format for the manifestation of CIVA's operative institutional critique. The extensive program of «Institution Building» included a series of performances, talks, cultural visits inside and outside CIVA, and even the production of a series of dedicated podcasts.
- 25 During the pandemic, architectenjdvv started experimenting with Excel as a design tool for sketching and visualizing the development of their projects.
- 26 The 'Excel sketches' of the exhibition scenography are included in the exhibition under the chapter of Hospitality, as a documentational work titled "Verveling. Vervel(N)ing. Verve(e)ling."

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