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WARM, WARMER, ART MUSEUM – THE SOCIAL AGENCY OF
ART MUSEUMS IN THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY

Dissertation submitted to Universidade Católica Portuguesa to obtain a
Master's Degree in Culture Studies

By

Lucie Nana Albrecht

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ABSTRACT

Climate emergency is one of society's most pressing and contemporary challenges, since it can create areas of uninhabitable climate and provoke conflict zones but also because it accelerates mass extinction. Fossil fuels are a driving factor, continuously pushing the planet towards its limits. Departing from the observation that many art museums across Europe are in some way sponsored by fossil fuel corporations, this research attempts to find out if and how art museums can reflect and act upon the current climate emergency. While art museums serve many purposes, they fundamentally define and express major social narratives by providing a space for participation and knowledge production. By focusing on collecting, preserving and showing art, they become – at their best - a critical storyteller of social narratives, in a position to deal with complex contemporary challenges like the climate emergency. Hence, this research focuses on how art museums can be agents for social change, particularly in dealing with the challenge of climate emergency. A brief literature review on the relationship between art museums and agency composes the first part of the dissertation, articulating concepts on the capacity of art within the museum environment (Bennett 1995; Hooper-Greenhill 1994; Janes and Sandell 2019), education and communication in the art museum (Rogoff 2008; Nielsen 2017) and theories on social agency (Eisenhardt 1989; Shapiro 2005). Acknowledging the conflicting relationship between the corporate sponsorship of museums and their accountability and agency in the climate emergency, chapter two engages in the critical analysis of the difficulties that art museums face in utilising their outlined social agency in the climate emergency. Based on a literature review of the concept of sponsorships, particular focus is set on how this relates to the previously established agent-principal relationship as well as an underlying conflict of interest. This is then further illustrated by analysing the sponsorship of BP to both the Tate Modern and the British Museum. This research suggests that art can operate in society from within institutions, and that art activism practices might even have a larger impact in the context of art museums that are sponsored by fossil fuel corporations and thus provoke action towards the climate emergency. This will be illustrated by a close analysis of one performance within the case study - "Hidden Figures" by *Liberate Tate* and a comparison will be drawn to briefly outlined performances by *BP or Not BP?*.

Keywords: *art museums, social agency, climate emergency, fossil fuel, corporate sponsorships, artistic activism*

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Introduction

How is it that museums, as social institutions, may remain aloof from the litany of socio-environmental issues that confront us, when many of these issues are intimately related to the purpose, mission, and capabilities of museums as we know them? This is not a call for museums to become social welfare agencies or Greenpeace activists, but rather to heighten their awareness and deliberately coalesce their capabilities and resources to bring about change, both internally and externally. Margaret Wheatley writes: “There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about.” Will communities continue to care about museums in their current guise? Will museums discover what they care about? Or are museums at risk? (Janes 2016: 160).

This quote by Robert Janes highlights several aspects that are useful in framing this research. First of all, the author questions the role of museums in the environmental crisis, and notes that they should be involved in creating awareness, while also pushing themselves and their audiences to constantly adapt and evolve. Questioning the future of museums, Janes indicates a certain doubt as to whether museums are actually fulfilling their potential for social change or whether they run the risk of neglecting their position within the community. The power of the community is emphasised as the driving force behind social change and also deciding instance in criticising the museum for the position it takes (or does not to take). One of the first key points to acknowledge in the narrative of this thesis is that of climate emergency and its presence as one of the biggest threats to society. If we do not aim to keep the increase of global temperature below two degrees by 2030, we will be faced with severe flooding, affecting almost two-thirds of the world's cities, food and water scarcity due to destruction of crops by rising temperatures, as well as increasing political unrest and violence resulting out of major population displacements (United Nations 2020). This is just to name a few consequences. While eco-awareness needs to be practised by every individual and projects for reducing everyday household waste or saving energy are important, the actual danger for our climate lies somewhere else: “It is not the climate change that needs to be tackled. It is the political power of the fossil fuel industry”, says Richard Denniss, Chief Economist at The Australian Institute (TedxTalks 2018). According to a study by the Guardian from 2017, there are only 20 firms responsible for one third of all the carbon emission in the world (Taylor and Watts 2019). These companies are all engaged in fossil

fuel energy, extracting oil, gas and coal from the planet to cover society's high demands in energy. The Union of Concerned Scientists backs up the Guardian study and looks at the privately-owned companies, narrowing it down to a list of eight, headed by Chevron, ExxonMobil, Royal Dutch Shell and British Petroleum (Union of Concerned Scientists 2018). The first two are seated in the United States, while Shell and BP have their headquarters in Europe: Shell in The Netherlands and BP in the UK. The EU is the third biggest emitter of CO₂, right behind China and the United States (Friedrich et al. 2020; BBC 2020). Nevertheless, the EU members were also among the first to take steps towards greener policies: in 2009, the EU set the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 20 percent by 2020 (Mulvaney 2020). With the Paris agreement coming into place in 2015, this target was increased to 40% by 2030, including the aim of producing 32% of their electricity via renewable energies (ibid.). Despite the overwhelming scientific evidence for the severity of the climate emergency, and the first important steps being taken by the EU as well as other nations across the globe, there is still a strong resistance to act upon the evidence and confusion about how to act promptly. To fulfil all the climate goals for instance, fossil fuel industries such as the BP would have to stop all their current drilling projects immediately instead of planning and investing in new gas and oil fields (Harris 2020). One key point in fighting against the changing climate is education, the first article agreed upon by all parties at the Paris Agreement stressing that, “parties shall cooperate in taking measures [...] to enhance climate change education, training, public awareness, public participation and public access to information [...]” (UNESCO 2018). This is where in this research, the key role of museums, in specific art museums, is positioned: Art museums are vital stakeholders within the public sphere. One of their roles is producing while communicating knowledge through (visual) narratives for audiences and possessing the reach and experience to provide as much access as possible to that knowledge (Bishop 2012; Cameron 2010; Evans 2015). The focus is set on art museums since contemporary art encompasses certain activist practices that target social change in specific. The particular function of art and creativity puts emphasis on notions such as communication, participation, and re-imagination. Art museums act as role models and possess a certain authority and institutional power within society that can accelerate their mission for education. As Hans Haacke noticed:

Art institutions are political institutions. One could say that they are part of the battlefield where the conflicting ideological currents of society clash. The art world,

contrary to what is generally assumed, is not a world apart. What happens there is an expression of the world at large and has repercussions outside its confines (Bourdieu and Haacke 2005: 75).

Haacke emphasises here the impact audiences have on art institutions as well as, conversely, the impact these institutions have on the public sphere within which they are acting. Therefore, it is not surprising that the conflicting arguments around the climate emergency can be found within the organisational structures of museums. As a connecting point between art museums and their role in climate emergency, this dissertation is not only interested in understanding the social agency of art museums but also in determining where and how it can be compromised. As one possible organisational component, corporate sponsorship, in particular by fossil fuel companies, is outlined. Art museums receive financial support from fossil fuel companies and in return provide them with a platform for marketing, branding and influence on knowledge production. Such is the case in the UK which is home to one of the largest oil and gas companies responsible for a large share of CO₂ emission: BP is looking back on a long history of sponsorships at the Tate Modern (UK) and the British Museum (UK), amongst other cultural institutions. Criticism against these partnerships has been voiced for some time, most visibly from artistic activist groups such as *Liberate Tate* and *BP or Not BP?*. These collectives started protesting and raising awareness for the contradictory messages art museums were sending to audiences by allowing BP branding within the museum spaces. The collectives were also able to voice their opinion at curatorial boards and processes of preservation.

Even though this dissertation is inspired by museology, curatorship and art history, it is not exclusively rooted in any of these disciplines. Rather, in order to answer the research question, various references are used, which work across disciplines, intersecting at multiple points with culture studies: I will first shed light on the notions of art, art museums and social agency, and set this into the context of the social, political and ecological challenge of climate emergency. The main aim here is to answer how art museums can be social agents, in this case, in combating climate emergency. Notions such as knowledge production, participation, re-imagination and action are key demands from the climate emergency, which can be connected to the social agency of art museums. As Janes hints at in the initial quote, art museums' role in the climate emergency is less than clear. This is where close attention

is being paid to fossil fuel sponsorship, highlighting the role of sponsors by connecting it to the previously outlined agent-principal relationship. A conflict of interest as well as the museum's position of neutrality are viewed as trigger points for the conflicting relationship between the corporations and the art museum. This research does not aim to propose a solution to the determined problems. However, by closely looking at the case studies, I speculate on the ways in which artistic activism can challenge the social agency of art museums, thereby provoking action towards the climate emergency.

METHODOLOGY

Beginning with a literature review, I develop a conceptual work grouped around three chapters. Each chapter focuses on a different concept necessary to the research at hand. Chapter one lays the groundwork and state of the art for the following reflections. It aims at identifying the social agency of art museums in connection to the climate emergency. To do so, I first look into the unique capacity of art and the tasks of art museums (Hooper-Greenhill 1994; Bennett 1995; Duncan 1995) as well as some defining characteristics of the art museum in a social and political context. In this discussion there are important notions of education (Rogoff), communication and storytelling (Janes 2016; Newell et. al. 2017) and the political role of the cultural institution (Mouffe 2007; Gielen and Lijster 2017). In order to understand the role of art museums in society, the concept of agency is explored in terms of its power relationships and responsibilities (Eisenhardt 1989; Shapiro 2005; Gray 2017). Lastly, the climate emergency is addressed as a specific social, political and cultural challenge for the art museum. I will first introduce a distinction between the terms climate change and climate emergency before outlining some of the particular demands of the climate emergency, such as cooperation, participation and re-imagination (Dessler 2011; UNFCCC 2021). These will be connected to the social agency of art museums, highlighting that art museums can have the capacity and responsibility to act upon climate emergency (Newell et al. 2017; Janes and Sandell 2019; Cameron and Nielsen 2015).

Chapter two critically examines the previously outlined social agency of art museums by looking into its direct connection to fossil fuel via corporate art sponsorships. A short overview of the concept of sponsorship is given and set into relation to the power relation of

the agent-principal concept (Seitanidi 2007; Lewandowska 2015; Lund and Greysier 2015). Concepts of corporate citizenship and social license to operate are highlighted in this reflection (Carroll 2000; Henderson and Williams 2002; Thomson and Boutillier 2011). A first introduction to the case study is used to illustrate and explore these notions: BP as a fossil fuel corporation is set into context as a sponsor for the Tate Modern and the British Museum. This is then followed by a critical analysis of the impact of this specific sponsorship on the agency of art museums according to three main problems: resource dependency, limited participation and private versus common (Bourdieu and Haacke 2005; Graham 2016; Janes 2016; Janes and Sandell 2019). These are traced back to an inherent clash of interest in the principal-agent relationship of the museums discussed (Evans 2015). The chapter finishes with a proposed series of concluding remarks, challenging the art museum in its position of neutrality (Duncan 1995; Cameron 2011).

Chapter three aims at suggesting a way for the art museum to be challenged in the conundrum outlined in chapter two, and move away from a position of neutrality when it comes to the climate emergency. I propose artistic activism as a tool in the realisation of this aim. First, I will briefly outline the notion of artistic activism, whom it includes and where it is situated (Beuys 1993; Harrebye 2015; Lambert 2016; Duncombe 2017). I frame this artistic activism within the context of this research and closely relate it to the case studies in order to not exceed the scope of this dissertation. One case study is then chosen to be analysed in order to contextualize and illustrate certain notions of this activism: The performance “Hidden Figures” (2014) by *Liberate Tate*, protesting the disclosure of important information on the sponsorship relationship between BP and Tate Modern. In order to broaden the discussion and provide further viewpoints on the subject, I will roughly compare this performance to the work of *BP or Not BP?* and briefly outline their untitled performance in three acts (2019). Their work highlights the activists’ disagreement with the relationship between BP and the British Museum. The final part of this chapter picks up on the issues outlined in chapter two and speculates on how artistic activism could approach these problems, thereby challenging the social agency of art museums (Mouffe 2007; Rogoff 2008; Graham 2016; Janes and Sandell 2019). I choose speculation here as part of my methodology since it allows for space to question, doubt and rethink the presented conflicts as well as approaches to them from the perspectives of audiences and art museums. While I base all my speculations on the previous literature review and analysis of the cases, I do not claim to have found an ultimate solution

to the outlined clash of interests, nor do I view artistic activism as the only way to approach these conflicts. My aim hereby is rather to understand how some of the consequences of such sponsorships for the art museum can be challenged and what and how art and artistic activism can contribute to that discussion. In the concluding remarks I highlight a few of the limitations of this research and make suggestions for future research: The role and position of museum workers can be a potentially important field to understand and challenge the agency of art museums in climate emergency.

1. Art Museums and Agency

According to the definition established by the International Committee of Museums (ICOM) in 2007,

A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purpose of education, study and enjoyment (ICOM 2007).

Since 2019, this definition has been reviewed by a designated committee, and although all the committee members have yet to agree on it, it is essential to mention that certain notions are supposed to be added to the definition. This includes the focus on museums as democratic spaces, open to addressing and presenting conflict and challenges via safeguarding the past to provide an outlook for the future. To achieve this, they aim to contribute, amongst other social challenges, to planetary wellbeing and the sustainability of our ecosystems (Kendall Adams 2020). Though not officially confirmed, these potential additions indicate a trend in the museum sector towards building awareness for contemporary social and political issues, specifically the climate emergency, and the ambition of positioning the museum as a relevant platform within the public sphere.

This chapter explores the role of the art museum in society and its specific agency and responsibility in the climate emergency. It is therefore structured into three parts: The first part will give a detailed account of the function of an art museum, based on its task as a collector, preserver and exhibitor of art objects. It will explore the social implications a museum can have through processes of knowledge production and the production of social capital, participation, re-imagination and community building, and it will discuss how this positions the art museum as a political institution in the democratic, civic sphere. The second part picks up on these notions and puts them in relation to the concept of agency, arguing for a clear responsibility of museums for society. These ideas will then be cross-examined through the lens of a specific social problem, the climate emergency, in the third part. Here, a short introduction to the topic of the climate emergency will create an understanding of the challenges and the demands for society, as well as how this affects the art museum. The

concluding part draws attention to some of the art museum's problems in correctly utilising its agency and leads on directly to further exploration of this theme in the second chapter.

1.1 Art museums and their role in society

For the purpose of this research I turn to the question of the function of art museums in society. As Duncan points out, there are initially two separate forms of museums: the aesthetic and the educational museum (Duncan 1995: 4). This follows the idea that Hooper-Greenhill has identified as the two contradictory functions of the public museum, “that of the elite temple of the arts, and that of a utilitarian instrument for democratic education” (Hooper-Greenhill 1989: 63), to which Tony Bennett later added a third function “as the museum was shaped into an instrument of the disciplinary society” (Bennett 1995: 89). However, as Bennett points out, the museums can function in-between and beyond these categories, which will be outlined further in the following sections. Canclini notes on this: “[...] to enter a museum is not simply to go into a building and look at works; rather, it is a ritualised system of social action” (García Canclini 1995: 197). Of particular interest to this research are those in-between areas where the art museum has a strong influence on the visitor, and which positions the museum uniquely within society.

First of all, one must look at the historical development of art museums to understand what distinguishes the art museum from other museums and why it has been chosen as the focal point of this research. The Louvre opened its doors in 1793 and became known as one of the first public art museums. From then on, art museums began to appear slowly across Europe throughout the 18th century, especially in Italy with examples like the Uffizi Gallery in Florence or the Villa Borghese in Rome, representing the collection of the Borghese family. Many elite and wealthy families collected art at that time and started displaying their collections first in semi-public and then later in public exhibitions, not only to display their wealth but also to provide a space for the upper class to meet and exchange: “Such spaces were designed to stimulate social interaction – well-to-do visitors from all over Europe met and mixed in front of works of art and were expected to exhibit their knowledge and taste in polite conversation” (Paul in Estrada 2014). Throughout the 18th century, art museums became a key factor in the development of the Enlightenment, enabling the public to focus less on rational thought and more on emotional and individual involvement. According to

Bennett, a new role of civic responsibility emerged (Bennett 1996), which Janes describes in the following:

The gentry believed that if museums were opened for public access, labourers would eschew the local tavern for a chance to ponder the art and artefacts of Western civilisations. Time spent in such contemplation was thought to lead to character reformation and a general improvement in the nature of the working class (Janes 2016: 211).

Art museums established themselves therefore as vital instruments for identity formation and knowledge production in the public sphere. Audiences could not only reflect on individual beliefs, but also compare and discuss them with a general view of society. As Ames points out: “[...] the public [...] came to believe that they had the right to expect that the collections would present and interpret the world in some way consistent with the values they held to be good [...] and with the view of social reality they held to be true” (Ames in *ibid.*). The following will examine how the art museum could establish itself in such a way, which position it has in society today and what role art plays in this.

1.1.1 The art museum

During the 18th century, critics and philosophers started to “attribute to works of art the power to transform their viewers spiritually, morally and emotionally” (Duncan 1995: 14). This can be traced back to the mimetic function of art that encourages direct engagement, reflection and re-imagination by the viewer, (Gielen and Lijster 2017) and enables new channels of communication between humans as the observer and objects (Duncan 1995). It starts with the artists’ unique way of looking at reality. As Howard Becker explains: “One of the ways artists seem to work is that they hold reality at a distance, a distance from which they can then examine and study it. By doing so, they move into the realm of abstract thought which creates a symbolic representational universe [...]” (in Cameron and Neilson 2016: 158). By utilising visual tools, the artist not only engages in a new internal discourse but also a new line of communication and a thought process is set in motion within the viewer. In Gielen and Lijster’s words: “[...] works of art often do create both utopia and dystopia. [...] It is precisely this transference to an imaginary world that provides us with the possibility to

look at the non-fictional world or simply everyday reality from a completely different perspective” (Gielen and Lijster 2017: 46). This can happen on an entirely personal and individual level with art being an “instrument to look into [our] own consciousness and [our] own role in the world” (Visse and Mik in Gielen and van Heusden 2015), but has also consequences for society at large, with art becoming a mobilising force of reflection and re-imagination of the current order of things. Already Plato and Aristotle noticed the capacity of art to create an experience, or the illusion of an experience, where people can come to explore new ideas and perspectives (Duncombe et al. 2017). Furthermore, art can create awareness for various opinions and interests in the public sphere that might not have found expression without the gathering of different people for expression and observation. Therefore, art plays an essential role in fostering new communal spaces (Gielen and Lijster 2017). Communities will be able to bond via objects but also the discursive dialogue they spur (Duncan 1995). The unique capacity of art objects in this context lies, according to Gielen and Lijster, in their capacity for humour, irony and exaggeration. Combined with their visual effect, art objects are able to communicate complex messages and situations rather effortlessly to a broader community, as well as opening up new ways of expressing critical views (ibid.). Bertolt Brecht, for example, held the opinion that by alienating people from their own experiences and their environment, art can trigger critical reflection upon those notions (Duncombe et. al. 2017). Art can thereby also enable re-conceptualisation and communication as well as different modes of participation, engagement and re-imagination through its mimetic characteristics. As Jean Baudrillard puts it: “Art can become a sort of sociological, socio-historical or political witness. It then becomes a function, a sort of mirror of what the world had in fact become, of what will become of it, including its virtual involvement” (Baudrillard 2005: 63 – 64).

The art museum itself amplifies the effects of the art objects it holds through the display of those objects in its collections. Art objects can act as symbols of past civilisations, mirrors of human development and expression of historical, cultural and social awareness. As Robert Janes describes: “All museums must continually embrace the responsibility of providing meaning to people – for museums, in effect, are storehouses of individual and collective consciousness” (Janes 2016: 112). This is an important statement as it not only accurately describes museums as keepers and collectors of social consciousness but furthermore

indicates the responsibility held by the museum. The notion of responsibility will return at a later point in this chapter as it is vital for understanding the role of art museums in society.

Humans are unique in their desire and capacity to collect and conserve objects in museums. This makes museums an exciting space to observe when making assumptions about the public sphere (Miller in Cameron and Neilson 2015: 188). By actively collecting across the globe for centuries, museums become “seed banks, keepers of memory and knowledge through their collections” (Janes 2016: 113). This process has been increasingly criticised by society over the past decade since it is strongly rooted in colonisation and oppression by former colonial powers, leading to Western art institutions’ collections being claimed as “stolen” from other nations and cultures. This is an important and interesting debate but one which is beyond the scope of focus for this thesis. However, it is essential to keep this context in mind whilst understanding the extensive role museums played and still play in collecting memory and assembling knowledge. They can become contemporary bridges to our social and cultural past, connecting past and present and through art’s capacity of re-imagination, allow for the construction of alternate paths into the future. In the words of John Greer: “Culture [and art] is memory. An authentic culture roots into the collective experience of a community’s past and from this source draws meaning for the present and tools for the future” (Greer in *ibid.*: 275). Art museums embody such roots via their collections and their function as keepers and preservers of humanity’s cultural memory.

However, the art objects and collections do not just function on their own. One of the most crucial tasks of art museums is that of communication to the public achieved via skilful storytelling: Collections consisting of art objects are arranged into narratives and exhibitions to reveal the stories they inhabit. A few terms need clarification at this point, since they play a vital role in the work of art museums, and will be referred back to on multiple occasions throughout this research: interpretation, communication and storytelling.

Interpretation is a process of meaning-making through which an understanding is constructed (Hooper-Greenhill 1994) and it can be “informative, exciting and provocative” (Nielsen 2017: 3). Further, “creating meaning is also about creating a memory – something museums generally acknowledge through new approaches to their exhibitions” (Nielsen 2017: 3). Through the collection of objects and the exhibition as a medium of display, museums enable the process of interpretation in the visitor, which is essential in processing

the knowledge presented and gaining an understanding of the topic. Fostering the capacity for interpretation is therefore an important outcome of the art museum's work in collecting and exhibiting.

Communication “is at the heart of everything a museum does” (Nielsen 2017: 1-2) and encompasses an “interaction with ourselves, with others and with our external and internal environments” (Narula 2006: 2). It relates to other functions of museum work such as collection, management, outreach and conversation, but in its core, the term is mainly associated with “the creation of understandings” (Nielsen 2017: 4). “It is commonly believed that what museums communicate – as complex platforms of communication – is worth communicating. However, what museums also communicate is the intention of communicating” (Nielsen 2017: 4). This means that it is not just seen as important what museums communicate but also the inherent process of communication in the way that it can cultivate meaning making and interpretation skills. The last concept is storytelling, introduced with the words of Newell:

Collections are valuable in many ways, as constructions of knowledge and experience, repositories of cultural memory [and] agents for cultural creativity [...]. They have the capacity to create unique visual, kinaesthetic and affective modes of perceiving and understanding. In other words, they create unique forms of material storytelling (Newell 2017: 4).

Storytelling is an important notion in the social function of art museums with its capacity to uniquely communicate subject matters to an audience. Significant, as a result of this, is that the constructed narrative engages and invites further communication and interpretation. Storytelling “combines the articulation of understandings that defines museum communication and the engaging narrative that forms the story” (Nielsen 2017: 6). Moreover, “stories tend to activate imaginative processes by connecting with our experiences and emotions. Stories can thus encourage creativity on many levels” (Nielsen 2017: 7-8). This is important since by being emotionally absorbed, people tend to “lower their intellectual guards” (ibid.) and more readily engage with unknown topics and discussions. In art museums, stories and narratives are expressed often in the form of exhibitions which, as Newell continues,

[...] promote new modes of thinking and understanding, emphasising associational and synthetic approaches that build abilities to consider how our choices, actions and lives are entangled with the other species and forces of the planet (Newell 2017: 5).

Collections of art objects thereby become essential tools for education and embody a sense of the passing of time as well as individual and collective self-awareness. They can create and reach out to new communities as well as communicate new subject matters. Museums are constantly being challenged in adapting to changing cultural, social and political landscapes, re-thinking their purpose and approach. What they should be aware of is their unique position in society, and what constitutes relevant and privileged platforms: “Most importantly, museums are privileged because they are organisations whose purpose is their meaning” (Janes in Nielsen 2017: 5).

Summarising this first part, one can say that the art museum has a vital role in collecting, preserving and exhibiting artworks, as it is outlined in the first part of ICOM’s official definition. Thereby, they create valuable narratives and maintain a social memory, communicating connections across various time frames. This is important as it constitutes the art museums as a platform within the public social sphere for knowledge production and education of audiences as well as creating a space for audiences to gather and discuss. This refers to the second part of ICOM’s definition. The following section will pick up on this with the focus applied in this research: the art museum’s role as a social agent. First of all, one must understand the notion of the social in this context. The following quote from Duncan can work as a trigger point for such a reflection:

Exhibitions in art museums do not of themselves change the world. Nor should they have to. But, as a form of public space they constitute an arena which a community may test, examine, and imaginatively live both older truths and possibilities for new ones. It is often said that without a sense of the past, we cannot envisage a future (Duncan 1995: 133).

1.1.2 The social museum

Art museums encourage a particular approach from the visitor or, as Duncan describes it, a specific receptivity: “The museum space is carefully marked off and culturally designated as special, reserved for a particular kind of contemplation and learning experience and

demanding a special quality of attention” (Duncan 1991: 91). Following this, the art museum constitutes its own space and conditions the visitor to engage with certain experiences and knowledge. As ICOM is quoted above, education is part of the museum’s definition and primary goal. For this research, education is viewed synonymously with knowledge production, interpretation, and building a foundation for a critical exchange – in short, everything that is needed to constitute and inform active social citizens (Dahlgren 2006). “[...] one of the things that make us relevant is knowledge and expertise. The best way to be socially just is to know what we’re talking about” (Holt 2013: 30). To support this, Irit Rogoff adds an interesting notion to the term education which applies quite well to the museum framework: “Education is by definition processual – involving a low-key transformative process, it embodies duration and the development of a contested common ground” (Rogoff 2006: 6). Art museums substantially foster this notion of education and embody the processual through their collections. They bridge memories and actualities, witnessing and documenting transformations in individual and collective consciousness and making this accessible for the public to be received and debated. Or as Newell notes: “[...] museums are places that foster learning of many different kinds, including through congregation and sharing and in emotional and embodied, as well as analytical, modes” (Newell 2017: 1). It is hereby also less about choosing objective versus subjective truths, or mainstream beliefs versus individual opinions. These are in themselves debatable dichotomies which will be touched upon again in the second chapter of this research. However, the museum’s social role is more directed at providing the visitor and the public with the tools and experience to construct their own vision of reality. This is in line with ICOM’s definition mentioned above, in that the museum becomes an open space in the service of society, aimed at education. Bennett describes museums therefore as “switch points in the circuits through which knowledges are produced and circulated through different networks” instead of becoming “self-contained knowledge/ power apparatuses” (Bennett 1995: 16). Also relevant here is the notion of learning that Janes uses to describe the knowledge production taking place in museums, noting: “[...] learning is essential to intelligent and caring change, and learning requires that we ask difficult and uncomfortable questions of ourselves, others, and museums as social institutions” (Janes 2016: 9). He points out another important outcome of the education process: It takes place on an individual level but ultimately leads to and requires the formation of a community, or at least a counterpart,

in order to step into a discursive dialogue. According to Rogoff: “At its best, education forms collectivities – many fleeting collectivities that ebb and flow, converge and fall apart” (Rogoff 2006: 6). Irit Rogoff is the main advocate when it comes to what is referred to as ‘the educational turn’. In general, she aims to challenge the educational role of museums and exhibition places and encourages platforms between artists, audiences and the public sphere. This approach advocates “criticism of the regulation, appropriation and commodification of knowledge-based production” (Rogoff 2006: 5). This will be an interesting concept for chapter three of this research, which explores the possibilities of artistic activism also in connection to education and knowledge production.

Next to knowledge production, the social role of art museums can be also observed in the space it creates for participation, and the voicing of dissonant opinions. Art museums are already historically seen as places where various audiences meet and are actively confronted with their differences. As Bennett writes: “Going to a museum, then as now, is not merely a matter of looking and learning; it is also – and precisely because museums are as much places for being seen as for seeing – an exercise in civics” (Bennett 1995: 102). Or, in different words: “[...] the museum embodied what had been [...] a major aim of panopticism – the democratic aspiration of a society rendered transparent of its own controlling gaze” (Bennett 1995: 101). This suggests that the museum is not only a passive space for collection and memory preservation, nor is it merely a space for individual reflection and knowledge production, but it can also become an active, timely space for communication and engagement of the public, based on that, Nielsen formulates the following aim for museums:

Museums represent all types of curiosity, imagination and knowledge that all deserve to be addressed. It is the role of all museums to address obvious questions, as well as the questions we dare not ask or do not know how to ask. This requires that the museum creates environments where social interaction can take place and develop (Nielsen 2017: 12).

Art museums are therefore established as spaces for the public, by the public. They provide a place where the public can gather, not just to learn from each other, from the museum and its objects, but where the public through participation can engage in internal, individual dialogue. This emphasises the possibility of the art museum to act beyond its mere function of presenting certain knowledge and objective truths but rather phrasing them within a context that allows for its discussion and also critical reflection. Robert Janes frames it as

follows: “Museums know deeply that nobody has a monopoly on the truth, simply because all competent museums recognise and celebrate the diversity of thought and action” (Janes 2016: 131). The visitor is established as an active participant in the museum space, taking in art objects via constructed stories and narratives and then embedding them in their own discursive frame of references. This creates new insights and deepens the realm of possibilities, which is especially important in an age where much of the face-to-face communication is replaced with online technologies and interaction via social media and “[...] society suffers from dissonant voices speaking in isolation” (Hawken in *ibid.*).

Participation does not, however, only imply the external public participation in the internal museum space. It can also imply the museum's engagement with external stakeholders beyond the museum visitors. Meijer van Mensch speaks about this within, what he calls, “the new paradigm” which involves “an increased social engagement of museums” (Meijer van Mensch in Marstine 2011: 44). Art museums themselves become active agents in fostering and creating a network that contributes to their unique social position. This brings with it an awareness as well as sense of responsibility for the art museum to curate carefully who is part of this network and who can contribute most beneficially:

[...] museums show an interest in an expanded series of stakeholders but, at the same time, accept that new stakeholders show on their part an interest in the policy of museums. The concept of stakeholders does not necessarily refer to a party that visits or acts directly in the museum, but may be a party that acts directly or indirectly upon the museum instead (*ibid.*: 44).

This topic of interaction with stakeholders will be further developed in chapter two of this thesis, focusing on corporate sponsorships and how quickly clashing interests can put the social agency of museums at stake. However, other stakeholders in the museum's environment can be policymakers and governments, as well as artists, curators, researchers, and the public, who are all participating in the constitution and discursivity of the environment of the art museum.

With a well-grounded understanding of the past and a discursive dialogue about the present with a collective outlook, art allows for a re-imagination of the future. Re-imagination therefore becomes a vital purpose of art museums in society. As Rogoff describes: “If education can release our energies from what needs to be opposed to what can be imagined,

or at least perform some kind of negotiation of that, then perhaps we have an education that is more” (Rogoff 2006: 7). Re-thinking our future and the capacity to imagine alternative paths is vital for art museums to remain relevant in the fast pace of contemporary society. Moreover, since ICOM constitutes museums’ goal to become active in tackling social challenges, fostering this kind of discursive, forward-looking space is essential. This will be discussed later on in the chapter with a closer focus on climate emergency.

Art museums, as keepers of memory, educators, storytellers and participators, should ideally foster a social atmosphere of trust, community and information. This leads Janes to the following assumption: “[...] museums are potentially significant generators of social capital in a market economy. Among other things, social capital consists of trust and respectful relationships” (Janes 2016: 194). It is essential to talk about the art museum’s connection to the marketplace at this point for two main reasons: First of all, it is important to acknowledge the interconnectedness of art museums in society and their far-reaching impacts across different sectors: from the cultural, social, political to the economic sphere. This helps to not romanticise the notion of art and museums, but rather ground them in the consumer society and certain market ideologies that they are highly influenced by and dependent on, a vital approach for this research. The second reason for mentioning these notions at this point is that the concept of social capital summarises the ideal outcome of the work of art museums in the social sphere and it gives a grounding notion at a later point of this research when discussing the needs in combating climate emergency but also activism. Social capital is a complex notion that first appeared in literature at the beginning of the 20th century. It became popular through the works of sociologists such as James Coleman and Robert Putnam. More recently, Pierre Bourdieu’s discussion of the use of social capital within power structures has become a relevant part of the discourse. However, for the scope of this research, I will follow the definition developed by the OECD. They define social capital as “networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate cooperation within or among groups” (OECD 2007). Networks range here from family to friends to colleagues meanwhile norms and values constitute somewhat unspoken rules in society (Ibid.). “Put together, these networks and understandings engender trust and so enable people to work together” (Ibid.). Social capital is mainly acquired through participation and lays an essential basis for community formation. According to Dahlgren, it is a critical component to civic

society and is vital to fostering democracy. Art museums create a space for people to come together, learn from each other, and exchange opinions, thereby playing a crucial role in forming social capital:

It is the so-called “third sector” that contains the organisations upon which the marketplace depends, these organisations are neither government nor business. All the organisations in the third sector, including museums, are building and enriching the social capital upon which the marketplace is based. Neoconservatives appear to believe that markets create communities when, in fact, the opposite is true. Communities create the trust for the marketplace to unfold (Janes 2016: 131).

However, there is also some criticism of the concept of social capital. While it can foster communal growth through its network strategy, it can also create biases, unequal benefits and exclusion. This happens through tightly knit networks that only work within themselves and establish their own norms that need to be fulfilled to become part of this network. This can be seen, for example, in business relationships where one job is passed on purely based on the existing link in the network and not necessarily because of the specific skill set. Chapter two of this research will look at this more closely regarding corporate sponsorships of art museums and how they benefit from existing social capital.

In summary, when speaking about the social realm of art museums, this research highlights the capacity for knowledge production, participation and the engagement in a discursive dialogue, as well as the constitution of a broad network consisting of audiences, artists, museum staff and management.

1.1.3 The political museum

So far, we looked into the social impact of art museums based on their collections, the narratives they create, the space they offer to the public and the social memory they embody, as well as their connection to social capital and the marketplace. As Hans Haacke was quoted in the introduction, art institutions, and here art museums, play a vital role in the political sphere in the way that they shape and mirror what is happening (Haacke in Bourdieu and Haacke 2005). The political, according to Jacques Rancière is

[...] defined by taking part in living together and in actions that (may) rearrange the relations within a society. The political therefore does not simply coincide with a fixed

position within political institutions (parliament, government or political party), but is all about questioning and moving such positions (Ranciere in Gielen and Lijster 2017: 68).

As we have seen above, the art museum can constitute a playground for such questioning and evolving, by opening a space to the broader public, where it can collect and exhibit collective memory, providing paths for its understanding and discussion, and allowing for and encouraging participation. Art becomes important at the point of configuration of joint spaces, “as it is able to introduce new sensations into the common sphere, which then require interpretation and can allow for a redistribution of the sensible” (Thije 2017). In other words, the art museum becomes a platform that motivates civil behaviour and civil action and therefore is viewed as political in nature (Gielen and Lijster 2017). Also, Chantal Mouffe highly advocates for a connection between the political and the artistic realm:

There is an aesthetic dimension in the political and there is a political dimension in art. This is why I consider that it is not useful to make a distinction between political and non-political art. From the point of view of the theory of hegemony, artistic practices play a role in the constitution and maintenance of a given symbolic order or in its challenging and this is why they necessarily have a political dimension (Mouffe 2007: 4).

It is again interesting to consider the notion of participation and community building or networking with relation to the political.

As shown previously, art museums play a significant role in creating and opening up a participatory space for citizens to come together to engage in discursive dialogues, develop critical opinions, and be encouraged to voice those opinions. Why does this type of active and critical participation seem to be a desirable and essential criteria of society? In short, educated participation informs civil citizenship, the civic society and constitutes democracy (Dahlgren 2006). Going back to the French Revolution, Bennett explains how it “transformed the museum from a symbol of arbitrary power into an instrument which, through education of its citizens, was to serve the collective good of the state” (Bennett 1995: 89). This was just the beginning of a growing social and political role the museum would inhabit within the public sphere. It became a space supposed to empower the general public, the citizens, instead of exercising power over them (Bennett 1995: 95). “Given the position

of museums as public institutions, and as physical and discursive spaces in the public sphere, museums are ultimately accountable to their publics” (Janes and Sandell 2019: 75). This positions them as essential contributors to a democratic mindset in an active civil society that strives for democratic principles. The art museum is “a public for the public, of the public” (Barrett 2007: 6) that crosses boundaries between the people and its representatives and therefore becomes an important nodal point within the complex network of contemporary social, political and economic life. As Milenko Matanovic points out: “[...] the success of democracy [...] rests on the relationship between individuals and their community” (in Janes 2016: 193). This relationship is threatened more and more, as previously indicated, by the growing isolation of individuals within society due to, for example, the age of technology (ibid.) but can be re-established and further enforced via community forums such as art museums and the increase of people’s social capital (ibid.). The space art museums provide, especially for critical dialogue, as explained above, is of utmost importance for our democratic society. In Vlachou’s words:

In moments of political, social and moral crisis, the quality of our democracy depends on the active involvement of citizens. Museums may be places where one comes across and reflects on more than just the comfortable truths; places which acknowledge the existence of different views and where these views may be discussed and alternatives sought (in Janes and Sandell 2019: 55).

This describes the focus of this research: Museums are places within the social and civic sphere, giving a voice to the public in terms of audiences through the objects they collect and exhibit. They are seen as highly trusted sources of information, which puts them in the critical spot of having to maintain this trust. Fiona Cameron states: “In many areas of public debates, there’s lots of heat and not much light, what is desperately needed is a trusted source of information that people can turn to understand issues better...museums are in a great position to be part of public dialogue” (Cameron 2011: 96).

Summarising, Janes and Sandell claim:

[...] the museum must now become an institution of the commons – a resource belonging to and affecting the whole of a community. [...] we cannot ignore the fact that the Western world’s citizen-based democracy [...] is dependent upon participation and to participate is to be permanently uncomfortable – emotionally, intellectually, spiritually. Museums will need to embrace this discomfort and uncertainty in order to

become authentic participants they are equipped to be, and to make good on their singular combination of historical consciousness, sense of place, and public accessibility (Janes and Sandell 2019: 17).

This is an appeal to museums to fulfil their role as collectors, preservers of cultural memory, storytellers and educators, connecting amidst civic society. As I outlined in this part, the art museum is theoretically capable of being such an institution of the commons. In the following, I will pay specific attention to the notions of agency and responsibility that come with this.

1.2 Agency and responsibility of art museums

As outlined above, art museums' role in society stems from their ability to collect and preserve art objects, thereby creating a narrative throughout history along society's individual and collective consciousness. These narratives are accessible to a large part of the public in the form of stories and exhibitions, with art museums substantially contributing to knowledge production and education of audiences subsequently encouraging them to participate in the open space for discourse provided actively. This discourse includes asking questions, critically examining what is displayed and the ideas represented, as well as taking it one step further and re-imagining alternative futures. As community platforms, "museums exist in, of, by and for society" (Janes 2016: 237), playing therefore an active role in shaping civic society. This demands not only identifying a set of social goals and aims for the museum environment but instead taking active steps to fulfil this role or as Janes puts it: "Museums [...] are obligated to continually ponder their work in an effort to be worthwhile and make a difference" (Janes 2016: 237). In order to grasp this better, applying the notion of agency becomes useful.

Agency theories originated in the economic sector and focused on the concept of risk-sharing (Eisenhardt 1989) in which two parties collaborate and contribute to a task with different approaches to solve a problem. These two parties are identified as principal and agent, which lay the basis for two main agency theories: the principal-agent and positivist theories (Benedickson and Muldoon et. al. 2016). Generally, cooperative behaviour is supposed to be established, in which outcomes are specified by the principal, and the agent accepts a

certain level of responsibility in order to achieve like-minded goals (ibid. 4). Two different problems arise out of this. The first one is referred to as information asymmetry stemming from a divergence in the area of risk-sharing: “When the principal-agent relationship is initiated, the agency costs are clear to the principal. However, when the agent takes action counter to the agreement, the principal perceives that he or she has assumed more risks” (ibid. 3-4). The second problem presumes a certain level of self-interest behaviour in the agent:

When the agent engages in self-interested behaviour, information asymmetries are created where the principal is unable to properly monitor agent behaviours. The measurability of outcomes [...] thereby becomes elusive, leading to another problem – monitoring agent behaviour (ibid. 4).

In order to overcome the problems of information asymmetry and monitoring, governance mechanisms are implemented to align the risks of the goals and objectives between principal and agent. This is generally referred to as positivist research, in which additional factors in the contract environment between principal and agent play a significant role. Shapiro summarises this economic approach with the following: “In this paradigm, agency relationships are contracts, and the incentives, monitoring devices, bonding, and other forms of social control undertaken to minimise agency costs constitute the elements of the contract” (Shapiro 2005: 266). Economics so far has been the main field in which agency theory has been applied, although there has been some criticism of this perspective: First, it assumes that the principal is “in the driver’s seat” (ibid.: 267). As soon as agents are selected, based on their professionalism and knowledge expertise, or often remain in the field for longer and therefore gain experience, based on repetition opposed to the often short term influence of principals, “the asymmetry of power shifts from the principal to the agent” (ibid. 267). Second, the economic perspective assumes agents and principals to be a singular entity. However, multiple agents and multiple principals can work together, forming vast groups which often also have conflicting interests. This does not only lead to principals having to approach a diverse group of agents in different ways, since agents respond to different incentives, but it also raises the question of how agents will respond to conflicting interests from different principals (ibid. 267). The political, as well as the sociological perspective on agency, is still less researched but already picks up on these points of criticism. Political science explores the involvement of multiple, complex characters in the principal-agent

relationship in which the delegation of power from the principal to the agent can take place based on “credibility of their commitment [...] or to avoid blame for unpopular policies” (Shapiro 2005: 271). As Shapiro continues: “Instead of providing incentives and sanctions to align the interests of agents with their own, principals seeking credibility from their agents select agents operating at arm’s length, with very different policy preferences, and confer considerable discretion and autonomy to them” (Ibid.: 271). In the political and sociological interpretation, agency becomes a term that describes “the capacity, condition, or state of acting or of exerting power” (Merriam-Webster) or the general theory of “acting for” exercised by the agent and the principal as the guide that corrects the agent’s action (Shapiro 2005). Therefore, agency is both related to action and a form of power (Janes and Sandell 2019: 86). Agents can be chosen here based on their ability to overcome the information mentioned above and according to their embeddedness and trust within the network, which minimises the risk of doubting the agent’s motives or incentive to act (Shapiro 2005). A common problem that can arise is that of goal conflict:

The real problem is that the agent is most likely serving many masters, many of them with conflicting interests. Even if the agent is able to silence his or her own interests, there is the matter of how to manoeuvre through the tangled loyalties he or she owes to many different principles and how to negotiate through their competing interests and sometimes irreconcilable differences (Shapiro 2005: 278).

The complexity of agency theory becomes evident when trying to apply the notions of principal and agent onto the various stakeholders in this thesis: art museums, fossil fuel as corporate sponsors and audiences as visitors, consumers and civic citizens. On the one hand, when looking at an organisational level, one could see the museum as an agent, and the corporate sponsors, here fossil fuel, as a principal being in control of financial resources. On the other hand, one can also take an approach from the side of the audiences: Audiences can be seen as consumers and visitors as the common denominator between the corporate sponsor and the museum, which both of them are trying to attract and satisfy. Therefore, audiences could be considered to be the principal actor, who consciously or unconsciously guides the action of the agents, the corporation and the museum. This position does not negate the aforementioned power-relations, but rather can be combined to exemplify what Shapiro noted as the agent’s problem of clashing interests: While the museum may be an agent to the public, it can also be an agent to its corporate sponsor, therefore being in a

precarious situation when public and corporation have different goals. This is precisely the subject of this research with a particular focus on the climate emergency: the public might demand something different than fossil fuel corporations leaving the museum in the position of a possible clash of interest. Chapter two will elaborate on this point.

Furthermore, necessary for this research is to acknowledge the complexity of principal-agent relations and to understand that agency is related to a certain degree of action-taking and having the capacity to act on particular demands. A specific focus that shall be pointed out here is that of personal agency, and specifically that of museum staff. According to Gray, especially in Britain, “the museum sector is not a politically-central subject for actors in the public sector [...] leading to the opportunity for people within the sector to operate according to their own policy concerns and commitments” (Gray 2017: 118). The relatively decentralised system of museums in the political environment leads to greater possibility for internal museum staff to act on their own accord (ibid.). This does not mean they are entirely left out of policy expectations, on the contrary, art museums are influenced by policy decisions and are expected to react. However, due to their independent professional network a much clearer core of policy participants is defined compared to other sectors, and enables a more direct interaction amongst agents (ibid.). While the various agents within the museum environment may disagree on the appropriate way of reacting to external demands, “their individual and collective responses to these demands can certainly be identified as examples of agency at work within the sector” (Gray 2017: 118). However, Gray also notes in his study:

There is certainly a recognition that museums are in a constant state of justification [...] to ensure their survival [...] with this leading to a position where ‘you give us the money and we’ll jump through your hoops’ [...]. In these cases it might be thought that museum staff are adopting a simple instrumental relationship to the demands that are generated by ideologically-driven external policy requirements, with these being hurdles to be negotiated and managed rather than direct determinants of internal choice (Gray 2017: 121).

However, this is also applied to civic agency which refers to the larger social sphere in which agency needs to engage with “often-prevailing imbalances of discursive and social power

such as lobbying, mobilising, bargaining, disruption and even civil disobedience” (Dahlgren 2006: 282).

As a form of social power and action, agency needs to be closely viewed in connection with social responsibility. As Janes loosely defines, social responsibility incorporates the “will and capacity to solve public problems” (Janes 2016: 144). Expanding on this, “being socially responsible can also mean facilitating civic engagement, acting as an agent of social change, or moderating sensitive social issues” (Smithsonian Institute 2002: 9). In connection to museums, the notion of civic responsibility emerged in the 1850s and remained strongly linked to museum’s work throughout its evolving position in society (Bennett 1995). Social agency and responsibility are generally grounded in certain sets of values (Janes and Sandell 2019). Within this research, values are understood as the museum’s organisational values, which relate to fulfilling the social agency and responsibility, so performing their social role, to the best of its abilities. Socially responsible museums, according to Block, have four central values in common: idealism, intimacy, depth and interconnectedness (Block in Janes 2016: 145). While intimacy and depth refer to the range of connections and strength of relationships between various people and stakeholders that can be fostered via the platform of the art museum, interconnectedness takes this even a step further by stressing the “growing societal awareness [stemming from] the deep connections between our own wellbeing and that of [...] the whole of humanity” (ibid.: 145). Idealism is particularly interesting for this research since it entails “thinking about the way things could be, and then taking action, rather than simply accepting the way things are” (ibid.). In what way art museums fail to take such action and how they can be challenged to change is partly to be determined in this dissertation. Considering the nature of art, this point gains significance and shows again why it is interesting to look at art museums and art activism in particular. Art can be centred on five distinctive values or objectives: disturbance, disruption, suspension, criticism and activism. These inherently challenge a certain status quo, questioning social issues at hand and encouraging participation in the process.

Enforcing the importance for museums to be socially responsible agents, and also justifying it as the focus of this research, is the fact that museums have become some of the most trusted sources of information in society (Cameron 2011; Janes 2016; Newell 2017; Janes and Sandell 2019). As the American Alliance of Museums claims: “[...] museums are the most trustworthy source of information – rated higher than local papers, non-profit, researchers,

the U.S. governments, or academic researchers” (American Alliance of Museums in Janes and Sandell 2019: 6). The Museum Association came to similar results in their study amongst citizens in England and Scotland with regard to the public’s perspective on the purpose and values of museums in society: “What surprised the research team [...] was the consistency of views across all of the workshops. Even people that didn’t visit frequently showed a strong emotional attachment to museums, and most trusted them highly as guardians of factual information and free from bias” (Kendall Adams 2013). Moreover, Newell emphasises: “[...] museums, despite decades of critical re-evaluation, remain for many of their publics trusted sources of information” (Newell 2017: 1). So in short: The general public as audiences seem to trust museums in their role as collectors, preservers of cultural heritage and education as well as communication. This, according to Janes, makes “museums, as public institutions [...] morally and intellectually obliged to question, challenge, or ignore the status quo and officialdom, whenever necessary” (Janes 2016: 252). Or in other words: “My understanding of a socially responsible museum is one that acts to benefit society, above and beyond education and entertainment. It implies a certain activism, which also includes the welfare of the biosphere” (Janes 2016, 167). This leads to the final section of this chapter: As outlined, art museums have a specific social agency and responsibility to act upon contemporary issues that occupy society and citizens. One of such topics and a focus of this research is the issue of climate change and resulting climate emergency.

1.3 The art museum and climate emergency

There are many social challenges the art museum can take, and is taking, agency for. This research, however, is focused on the climate emergency in particular. The following part will situate the notion of climate emergency within the topic of climate change and then outline how it impacts the art museum, what it demands from the public and how the art institution can support this. The main discussion of the climate emergency here will be taken from the angle of fossil fuels and their impact on the environment, since this determines the link to art museums within the framework of this research.

Climate change is defined as a “long-term change in the average weather patterns that have come to define Earth’s local, regional and global climates” (Callery and Bailey 2021). Changes in the earth’s climate have been observed since the early 20th century and are mainly driven “by human activities, particularly fossil fuel burning, which increase heat-trapping greenhouse gas levels in Earth’s atmosphere, raising the Earth’s average temperature” (ibid.). This human-caused increase in temperature is commonly referred to as global warming. Rising temperatures lead to extreme climate events such as heatwaves and heavy rainfall, causing, amongst others, droughts, burnings, flooding and hurricanes that destroy not only habitats of animals and humans but also affect crops and agriculture as well as clean water resources which heavily impact world food production systems (Dessler 2011). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) suggested that a stop of global warming at 1.5C is vital to avoid further, irreversible damage to the earth’s ecology (Callery and Bailey 2021). Reducing the peaking of greenhouse gas emissions is a central concern in this goal. To achieve this goal of reducing the global temperature, 196 parties adopted a “legally binding international treaty on climate change” known under the Paris Agreement which came into place in 2016 (UNFCCC 2021). Taking such political action is of utmost importance when fighting against climate change because, as Hulme states: “Climate change [...] is a political problem before it is a scientific fact. [...] The meaning of scientific facts is always culturally mediated and politically contested. So is the meaning of climate change. So politics, not science must take center stage” (Hulme in Cameron and Neilson 2015: 11). To enforce political participation and action in particular, declaring a state of a climate emergency is an added pressure point. Climate emergency has already been established as a term in the Oxford Dictionary and is there defined as “a situation in which immediate action is needed to prevent serious and permanent damage to the environment” (Oxford Dictionary 2021). The UN environment guidelines add to this: “It is an action taken by governments and scientists to acknowledge humanity is in a climate emergency” (UN Environment). It is a political declaration made by scientists and governments to mobilise and spur action across nations. Its main goal therefore, is to reduce carbon emissions in order to meet the goal of the Paris Climate Agreement, which identifies fossil fuel energy as the driving cause of changing climate. The emergency is declared until carbon neutrality is reached. “While the declarations are largely symbolic gestures, they have in some cases become jumping-off points for real action. It’s the culmination of coordinated efforts by activists pushing

governments to take action that is as dramatic as the threats posed by the climate crisis” (Calma 2019). Taking immediate action towards the reduction of carbon emission is the aim of such a declaration.

For the purpose of this research I am referring to the term climate emergency instead of climate change in general for two reasons: First, climate emergency describes an active element of calling for action from specific stakeholders, the fossil fuel industry, as opposed to climate change which describes the general state of changing climate. This leads to the second reason, with climate emergency constituting two clear goals: that of spurring action across nations on a political level and directly reducing carbon emissions from fossil fuel industry.

1.3.1 A brief overview on the social and political demands of climate emergency

With no apparent political will to address the reality of climate disruption globally, it’s as if we’re in a car, heading towards a cliff, and we’re arguing about which radio station we should be listening to. [...] The public conversation about climate change has entered the theatre of the absurd (Rand in Janes 2016: 273).

Rand describes here in 2014 the long stagnation in society, and in specific the political realm, when deciding on action taken in the climate emergency. Since then, however, some steps have been taken politically, with the Paris Agreement as well as the declaration of climate emergency. As Dessler defines:

[...] risk reduction intervention in the form of mitigation and adaptation is required to minimise the impacts of climate change. Mitigation option includes understanding the present and future components of the climate system and interaction among them [...]. Finally, the global issue of climate change could be addressed by taking worldwide cooperation and action and adopting sustainable measures like use of alternative energy sources (Dessler 2012).

In order to tackle global reliance on fossil fuel, cooperation and participation need to be fostered, creating awareness on a national and international scale. In the end, the fight against climate change is a communal effort involving individual citizens and the public as a collective. In the words of Mia Armstrong: “Although the magnitude of climate change may

make individuals feel helpless, individual action is critical for meaningful change” (Armstrong 2016). The Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement identify the involvement of the public in climate action as crucial in tackling the emergency. They highlight certain areas for public engagement, namely: education, training, public awareness, public participation and access to information as well as international cooperation (UNFCCC 2016). Participation of everyone, the involvement of every citizen, is vital in all these aspects. According to Ramkumar and Petkova

[...] the new environmental governance paradigm requires that citizens be empowered to influence environmental outcomes. The governance framework must enable citizens to have access to environmental information; decision-making processes and the opportunity to participate in them; and redress and legal remedy to contest the denial of opportunities to participate in decision-making (Ramkumar and Petkova 2007: 282).

Or as Mel Evans says in an interview: “The climate crisis cannot wait for the status quo to catch up – it’s time for the people who shape culture to change it” (Evans in Frieze 2020: 109). Here, she points to the critical role culture plays in this: Culture can be used as a tool to activate, communicate and mediate change and the people involved in culture-making need to become aware of this power. Ecologist and professor William Rees notes: “To achieve sustainability, the world community must write a new cultural narrative that is explicitly designed for living on a finite planet, a narrative that overrides humanity’s outdated, innate expansionist tendencies” (Rees 2010: 13). Rees suggests here what seems somewhat apparent but is important to be acknowledged and stated clearly: In order for humanity to survive the ecological crisis, alternative futures need to be imagined for having a certain vision to work towards and to understand what exactly needs to be done to achieve this vision. The path to re-thinking and re-imagining is via culture:

Civil society and cultural institutions have to play their parts in making the most conscientious demands for action. More than that, the arts must offer us a way of imagining what lies beyond our current toxic infrastructures. [...] Cultural institutions can provide us with the history and vision to recognise that the way the world is today may not be the way it is tomorrow (Evans 2020: 109).

In summary, the climate emergency constitutes a clear goal to act against climate change, specifically the impact of fossil fuels. This demands the awareness and participation of a vast network, incorporating various stakeholders in society. Culture is determined as a tool

to foster such levels of awareness, particularly in its ability to create communication and capacity for re-imagination. In light of this, the following section will take a closer look at the role art museums are equipped to play in this, based on their social agency outlined in the first part of this chapter.

1.3.2. Climate emergency as a concern for art museums

In 2019, ICOM adopted a resolution on sustainability and the implementation of Agenda 2030 which called on its institutional and individual members to

[...] empower ourselves, our visitors and our communities through making positive contributions to achieving the goals of Agenda 2030, acknowledging and reducing our environmental impact, including our carbon footprint, and helping secure a sustainable future for all inhabitants of the planet: human and non-human (McGieh 2019).

ICOM thereby acknowledges the ecological crisis and the vital role museums should and can play in taking action. Museums in the end do not only serve an altruistic purpose in fighting the climate emergency; on the contrary, museums are just as much part of the dependence and interdependence of the biosphere and “in the process of overlooking the meaning of interdependence, museums continue to contribute to their own marginalisation” (Janes 2016: 379). Museum’s collections and cultural narratives are at stake, with the cultures, regions, stories and minorities they are supposed to represent, being made uninhabitable by drought or floods or even brought to complete extinction; the museum’s buildings are in themselves exposed to nature’s forces such as floods and fire. Newell notices something of utmost importance: “[...] within museums we have a responsibility to look for those stories that matter not just to us, but to those people whose cultural and ecological heritage we hold within our walls” (Newell 2017: 48). This appeals to the social agency and responsibility of museums, the focus of this research. As previously outlined, to safeguard humanity’s survival and the ecosystem we live in, immediate action is vital, making the climate emergency a social, political and cultural problem involving all humanity. Action is achieved through education, increasing awareness, communication of the issue in society and the participation of a large community in this global project as well as fostering the capacity for re-imagination of and thereby broadening the path into new futures. Ultimately, these futures do not involve the participation of fossil fuel. It is part of art museums' social

agency and responsibility to participate in providing and enacting solutions, and I argue with this chapter that they are perfectly equipped to do so.

Education, awareness building and communication are critical tools in this mission. “As social resources, museums can, and should, play an important role in educating the public about the unpredictable and overlapping effects of climate change on the earth’s ecological and social system” (Lyons and Bosworth in Janes and Sandell 2019: 175). As pointed out before, art museums' social agency relates to their capacity for knowledge production and education. This becomes essential in the pursuit of a climate emergency. In educating audiences, awareness for the topic is created and a democratic, discursive dialogue about the measures that should be taken is encouraged. As Janes points out: “Museums are grounded in a sense of place, committed to stewardship, and widely respected – they can readily serve as the vital bridge between science and the public interest” (Janes 2016: 257). Museums can play a key role in “putting a human face on climate change” (Dawson in Newell 2017: 35), meaning they move beyond merely showing abstract scientific data and can use their skills of storytelling to create engaging narratives that “create spaces for people to develop their own culturally sensitive, local ways to live with our global predicament” (Newell 2017: 35). Most important is to start and enable continuous communication about climate change, even if this proves to be an uncomfortable communication (Janes and Sandell 2019: 3). In general, “[...] institutions can foster the pedagogical conditions that might lead to new forms of self and social critique as part of a broader project of constructing alternative desires and critical modes of imagining socio-ecological futures” (Salazar in Cameron and Neilson 2016: 95). This leads to the next important point in not only understanding but also acting upon climate emergency: the capacity to envision alternate futures and re-imagine paths with which to get to them.

Arjun Appadurai describes the future as a “cultural fact” (Appadurai 2013), which makes cultural institutions crucial in realizing a life in a climate-changed world and a life that adapts to nature instead of working against it.

Museums may not be able to contribute to the resolution of many of our global problems, but museums are in a position to invent a new future for themselves and their

communities. Museums could at least help create an image of a desirable future – the essential first step in its realisation (Janes 2016: 379).

By enabling audiences to imagine such a future, action becomes a much more feasible step, with a more precise goal orientation. Storytelling has been identified as the museum's unique way of creating engaging and comprehensive narratives. Art adds its capacity for appealing to the viewer emotionally, disrupting previously established truths and encouraging the examination of such truths. The path of re-imagination cannot remain an individual quest. Participation is a key concept in this.

“Museums should fulfil their democratic mission by also opening up informed spaces for public reflection and deliberation on how the world might and should be” (Hulme in Cameron and Neilson 2016: 15). As pointed out above, one of the art museums main social functions is that of fostering and creating the participation of the public thereby constituting a democratic civic realm. Participation is one of the key aspects in fighting climate emergency, hence art museums can be of great support in that regard. Janes summarises:

Citizens are crying out for enlightened leadership from public institutions to address the issues that are relevant to their lives, to their civic responsibilities, and to their place in the biosphere – in a manner that transcends ideology, political partisanship, and corporate malfeasance. Museums of all kinds are untapped and untested sources of ideas, knowledge, and memory, and are uniquely placed to foster individual and community participation in the quest for greater awareness and workable solutions to global problems (Janes 2016: 189).

Education, awareness building, participation and re-imagination are key notions in defining the role art museums can play in a climate emergency. As agents in service of the public, one could claim that it is the art museum's responsibility to act, since immediate change and action is demanded from society in order to avoid the severe consequences of climate change. With the declaration of climate emergency, political action is expected, not least from the art museum as a platform amidst the social, political sphere.

1.4 Promoting action towards climate emergency

As outlined in this chapter, art museums hold a unique position in society: Through preservation and collection of art works they can create and communicate complex narratives to a broad audience while constructing a space for open, democratic discourse. Participation, knowledge production and re-imagination have been named as key concepts in their social role. Furthermore, as institutions they are highly connected to the marketplace, engaging and depending on economic as well as political decision making. This constitutes them not only as agents of the public but also agents to their stakeholders and partners. Climate emergency, as a major concern and call for action of society, is relevant to museums, their mission and their work. Therefore, this research claims that art museums have a social agency to act upon climate emergency. They can do so mainly through education, the participation of the community and the re-imagination of a future due to their ability as a trusted institution, the creation of an open space for discourse, having the experience in storytelling and knowledge production and due to their unique position in bridging the cultural, social, political and scientific realm. Fiona Cameron and Neilson develop nine principles for museums to follow as agents to promote action in the climate emergency. These include the demand for “complex narratives and creative pathways” (Cameron and Neilson 2015: 250), the engagement of a “plurality of actors and audiences” (ibid.) as well as facilitating communication and open dialogue among a large network through “liquid boundaries” (ibid.) thereby “fostering co-creation and co-discovery” (ibid.), “working across space and time, just as climate change does” (ibid.) and utilising the arts in order to activate imagination and creativity for “enabling experience instead of presenting information” (ibid.). This perfectly summarises and puts in relation the demands of the climate emergency on art museums and the social agency they hold.

However, the art museum faces some problems when trying to act upon those demands. Cameron traces the main problem back to Cartesian Rationality governing the traditional and often static hierarchical museum structures, which in the end prevent the art museum from adapting to current social and political topics or acknowledging the importance of the ecological crisis in general:

[...] the modern museum form based on hierarchical and dualistic principles is, however, inadequate in its ability to deal with climate change because it fails to acknowledge the entanglements between human and nonhuman actants, and therefore is unable to produce the kind of knowledge and cognitive frames necessary to deal with the messy and complex environmental problems currently facing the world (Cameron and Neilson 2015: 18).

It would indeed be an interesting approach to look at art museum structures and hierarchies in general, in order to understand the dissonance between demand and action. However, this would go beyond the scope of this research. Here, the focus lies on identifying one specific problem the art museum faces and that problem can in turn impact museum behaviour on a larger scale. At the core of this lies an awareness for the various stakeholders involved in the art museum. Critical towards Hans Haacke's previous quote where he situates art institutions amidst social and political struggle and as a mirror to current events, Tony Bennett highlights the importance of the stakeholders:

Indeed, it is partly as a consequence of the host of competing political demands placed on it that the pretensions of the museum to offer a microcosmic reconstruction of the order of things in the world outside the museum's walls has been exploded from within. [...] This is to suggest that, in addition to what gets shown in museums, attention needs also to be paid to the processes of showing, who takes part in those processes and their consequences for the relations they establish between the museum and the visitor (Bennett 1995: 103).

Chapter two looks at corporate sponsorships of art museums, specifically from fossil fuel, and how this impacts the social agency of art museums in the climate emergency.

2. Art Museums and Corporate Sponsorship: When Financial Sustainability Clashes with Agency

As shown in chapter one, art museums have a social agency for communication, knowledge production, participation and re-imagination, all of which enables the museums and gives them a responsibility to act upon the climate emergency. This chapter will shed light on fossil fuel corporations and their sponsorship of art museums and how this may impact or challenge the social agency of art museums. Firstly, the concept of sponsorships will be explained here, as well as the goals and objectives of such a relationship, in specific to fossil fuel and art museums. Secondly, I will take a closer look at a specific case study – BP at Tate Modern and the British Museum – in order to understand how this relationship works in practice. The last part of this chapter will elaborate on a few conflicts of interest within this relationship and how the art museum has approached those conflicts until now.

2.1 Corporate Sponsors and Art Museums

Art has traditionally been under the strong influence of wealthy individuals who collected paintings and sculptures to exhibit in their private houses, or later passed them on to museums to display them. These people were generally referred to as patrons who “came from a higher class in society, and therefore the relations between patron and [...] artists were asymmetrical in nature; with the patron maintaining the central role of power and therefore control in the relationship” (Seitanidi and Ryan 2007: 250). These kind of power structures still persist in various ways in contemporary museums and will be in the focus of this research. Currently, funding for the arts is drawn from multiple sources, of which this research focuses on corporate sponsorships. Corporations have been involved in the financing of the arts for a long time, however, as Alexander notes, “it was not until the mid-sixties that corporations began to fund the arts in notable amounts” (Alexander 1996: 91). Until the 1980s patronage and sponsorship were terms often used synonymously, however, a clear distinction between the two became necessary when sponsorships started moving

more into the commercial realm (Seitanidi and Ryan 2007). This coincided with a “corporatization of public and non-profit organizations in terms of privatization, professionalization, the shift towards corporate populism and the embrace of spectacle culture” (Fisher and Frazer in *frieze* 2020: 103) during the 1990s which placed corporate sponsorship on the agenda of art museums. In the UK, Margret Thatcher’s incentivisation of private involvement and the resulting privatisation of public services lead to, what Graham describes as , “an ambiguously defined commitment to the social in art and a move toward a public/private model of funding committed to access” (Graham 2016) which persists in the UKs model for cultural institutions today. These neoliberal doctrines are described by Holt as follows: “As public budgets decreased, the profit-oriented utilitarianism has changed the language of private arts funding, replacing the charitable approach with a win-win situation which indicates the arts organizations are not just a passive beneficiary, but rather act as business partners” (Holt in Lewandowska 2015: 1). Throughout the 21st century, with its rapid technological changes and innovations, arts-business relations evolved: The concept of “creative economy” (UNCTAD 2010) enforced the idea of the arts as central to creative human activity and “popularised the idea that the artistically-rooted creativity can be disseminated across other sectors and lead to their transformation” (Lewandowska 2015: 2). This encouraged the engagement of the private sector with the arts and also art museums. Several concepts played an important role here such as philanthropy, patronage and sponsorship. It is important to acknowledge their differences since the motivation behind each of them is different, which plays a vital role in this research. While philanthropy correlates with activities aimed at “improving employee morale and business’ relationship with the community” (Kirchberg 2007: 145), patronage was considered to be motivated by altruistic purposes (Seitanidi and Ryan 2007) and, as noted above, introduced certain power relations between patron and artists. On the other hand, sponsorship serves the promotion of brand or image, focusing on compensation rewards that were supposed to create a more balanced relationship between two parties by introducing measurable benefits for both of them (Lewandowska 2015). The following will look into the concept of sponsorships in more detail, focussing on corporate sponsorships in specific and shedding light on the objectives as well as their relationship to art museums.

2. 1. 1 The concept of sponsorship

In general, cultural sponsorship can be defined as a "cooperative, long-term and mutually beneficial business relationship between two business actors – the sponsor and the sponsored" (Olkkonen and Pekka 2006: 67). This research focuses on corporations in the fossil fuel industry as sponsors and the art museum as the sponsored. As Olkkonen and Pekka continue: "Managing cultural-sponsorships is especially demanding because it involves relationships between quite different aspects of society – business and the arts" (ibid. 67). This chapter will shed light on the difficulties arising from this. Sponsorship is also closely linked to advertising since many scholars define it as "a marketing tool used by companies to associate with the image of a sponsored entity for commercial purposes, providing financial support to this entity in return" (Lewandowska 2015: 3). In this research, cultural sponsorship is studied as a three-party exchange relationship among the fossil fuel corporation, the art museum, and their audience.

Cornwell and Maignan define two main activities involved in sponsorship:

(1) an exchange between a sponsor and a sponsee whereby the latter receives a few and the former obtains the right to associate itself with the activity sponsored and (2) the marketing of the association by the sponsor. Both activities are necessary if the sponsorship fee is to be a meaningful investment (Cornwell and Maignan 1998: 11).

Sponsorship, although closely linked to advertisement, differs from it in its relationship with the audience: "[...] advertising targets viewers whereas sponsorship targets active participants, spectators, and media followers" (ibid.: 12). However, there have been cases where sponsorship was used as a loophole in order to promote brands that were banned from advertisement due to their negative health impact such as tobacco or alcohol (ibid.). An example is Marlboro cigarettes, who were a major corporate sponsor of museums and performing arts from the 1980s, until international health laws prohibited tobacco advertisement, leading to museums such as Tate Modern, the National Gallery, and the National Portrait Gallery ending their sponsorship (Bailey 2019). This is interesting to keep in mind when considering the impact of fossil fuel on the global health of the planet and how arts sponsorship can impact humanity.

2.1.2 Objectives of corporate sponsorships in the arts

In general, sponsorships are geared towards "an exchange of capital: financial capital on the part of the sponsors and symbolic capital on the part of the sponsored" (Hans Haacke in Bourdieu and Haacke 2005: 17). For the sponsored, financial capital plays a significant role, especially in the arts and culture sector. After the immense funding cuts in the 1980s, art sponsorships have increased dramatically and today constitute an important part of the annual budget of art museums. Many art museums state that they could not be able to operate without the income from their sponsors, and fossil fuel corporations are involved with a significant number of art institutions: The Total Foundation subsidises the Louvre and the Foundation du Patrimoine, the oil company Eni is associated with arts sponsorships in Rome, Milan, New York and Paris, Norwegian Statoil functions as a global art buyer and sponsor of exhibitions in Oslo National Gallery for Contemporary Arts and festivals such as Nord-Norge and Bergen International (Evans 2015). This illustrates the point that these kinds of sponsorships are common, and while the focus of this thesis is on BP's sponsorship of British art museums, this kind of discussion could have broader implications. With sponsorships, it is important to notice that another point distinguishing it from a philanthropic activity is its vast public recognition and impact formation, leading to legal and financial rules for tax exemption (Cornwell and Maignan 1998). As Lewandowska describes: "[...] in most European countries arts sponsorship needs to be interpreted as advertising if a given company wishes to make its support tax-deductible. This legislative context has shaped the dynamic of arts and business relations, which [...] has now turned into business transactions" (2015: 3). This leaves fossil fuel corporations sponsoring art museums financially and at the same time profiting from resulting tax reductions. The consequences for the consumer, visitor and the art museum will be elaborated on in the course of this chapter; for now, tax exemption as a part of sponsorship schemes is acknowledged.

Further, the sponsor receives what Hans Haacke refers to as symbolic capital. The objectives on the sponsor's side are closely linked to a product or corporate image as well as corporate identity, its awareness and visibility in society (Olkkonen and Pekka 2006; Meenaghan 1991). In this case, fossil fuel corporations such as Shell, BP or Total are seeking to improve their image and identity as well as visibility, through their associations with museums such as the Van Gogh museum and the Louvre. This can happen through brand associations,

meaning the consumer relates the corporation to the institution it sponsors, and it is closely related to notions of corporate citizenship and corporate image, which will be explored in detail in the upcoming section. However, increasing awareness and visibility also takes place via fostering new networks based on the extended stakeholder relationship. As Lund and Greyser describe: "Many companies engage in co-marketing strategies to access resources and to build relationships in specific markets in a more flexible way" (2015: 5). Take, for example, the yearlong partnership between the Swiss bank UBS and the Guggenheim Foundation; Lund and Greyser note in their observations on the partnership: "Besides the financial contribution from UBS that enables Guggenheim to build its collection, the partnership was also developed as a collaborative marketing strategy to reach new audiences, and to build business and networks in international markets" (ibid.: 14). This is not only important to UBS as the sponsor but also to the museum; UBS, as one of the world's leading wealth managers, can link the museum to many clients who are not only interested in the arts and the collection of artworks but also have the resources to support the sector, thereby fostering connections with private collectors and possible future donors (ibid.). As Lund and Greyser continue:

The events and meetings in connection to exhibitions offer a platform for social interaction between and among clients. These meetings can add value to the network from a structural point of view and can strengthen the role of the bank as a network broker by connecting different clients with each other (ibid.: 26).

This principle can also be applied to the dynamics within this research: Fossil fuel corporations benefit from a network of highly influential and often wealthy businessmen who seek to associate themselves for various reasons with the arts. By connecting to the business world in this way, the museum has valuable opportunities to reach new possible donors, funders and partners.

In conclusion, sponsorships describe relationships based on an exchange of capital: in the case of the connection between art museums and fossil fuel, financial capital is offered from the side of the fossil fuel corporations and symbolic capital from the side of the art museum. The goal is to financially stabilise and support the art museum and create and foster an extended network of stakeholders from which both parties can benefit. As Cameron and Neilson state:

If museums are to be agents of change they need to adapt their operations rapidly across different scales and to institute polycentric responses forming new cross-sector alliances, new relationships with audiences, and extended networks that bring together disparate people, ideas, and institutions across social and geographical distance (2015: 4).

However, the most significant and most critically discussed part of sponsorship is the resulting brand association as well as image and visibility for the corporate sponsor, which will be explored in the following section.

2.1.3 Corporate citizenship and the art museum

The building blocks of a corporate brand consist of their internal identity and their business performance on the one hand and their external identity and citizenship on the other (Andriof and McIntosh 2017). Paramount is corporate citizenship, which describes the intrinsic and extrinsic social responsibilities and ethics of a corporation (Carroll 2000). These can be grouped according to four primary responsibilities: economic as in being profitable, legal in terms of obeying the law, ethical by engaging in ethical behaviour and philanthropic through engaging in corporate contributions (Ibid.). The first two are essential for the corporation in its necessity to act legally and make a profit. To state this clearly: "Profit-making is not anti-ethical to good corporate citizenship. Indeed, it is required of good citizenship" (Carroll *ibid.*: 2). However, "good corporate citizens need to be more interested in what should be done than what is being done" (*ibid.* 4), which is where the latter two responsibilities come in. As Carroll further points out: "Businesses wishing to be regarded as exemplary corporate citizens not only carry their own weight by being economically successful and functioning in compliance with law, but they also strive to operate in an ethical fashion" (*ibid.* 3). Business ethics include establishing certain concepts and practices around acceptable business behaviour that are expected to be followed by all the stakeholders involved, shaping their relationships. This is not only expected to influence the internal corporation but is also supposed to be demonstrated externally by actions, decisions and practices. Sponsorships play a vital part in the construction and maintenance of a corporate image and identity:

Corporate image captures the subjective perceptions of the company so sponsorship should [...] have a direct impact on it. More precisely: company [or corporate] image refers to the impressions of a particular company held by some segment of the public (Johnson and Zinhan in Rajshekhar and Taylor et. al. 1994: 50).

This is where sponsorships get increasingly associated with marketing, or what is also referred to as customer relationship management (CRM): "CRM is commonly regarded as the association between a product and a good cause where a company offers to a charity a small percentage of the money generated from product sales [...]" (Seitanidi and Ryan 2007: 253). However, this has also been criticised as ingenuous, based on the often small amount of actual financial capital that is contributed in return for "businesses profiting from [...]" wrapping themselves in the cloak of public service for corporate benefit" (ibid. 254) or by actively misleading the consumer about the details of the relationship campaign (ibid.). Therefore, brand association and image marketing via sponsorships have been described as giving the corporations a "social license to operate". This term was first coined in 1997 by Jim Cooney in a meeting with the World Bank and originated in the mining industry. Often faced with costly delays due to protests and resistance, the mining industry was trying to find a way to gain trust and acceptance from local communities (Boutilier, Black and Thomson 2012). There are three fundamental concepts in this approach, identified by Thomson and Boutilier, namely legitimacy, credibility and trust:

They suggest that as a mining operation develops legitimacy and credibility with its local stakeholders, acceptance and then approval of the operation will follow. As this relationship develops into full trust, the local community would be expected to begin to co-identify with the mining company and actively support its interests (Moffat and Zhang 2014: 62).

Institutional trust is defined by Black as the key operator in reaching the goal of legitimacy (Black in Boutilier and Thomson 2011). This can be gained via association with trustworthy institutions, such as art museums (ibid.), which gives corporations access to 'special publics', key target groups that represent influential audiences, as a point of access to credibility. According to Henderson and Williams:

The key target audience should be special publics. It is opinion formers that grant the license to operate and often set the tone for how the general public hears about and

assesses companies. The goodwill of customer audiences could be disproportionately affected by an adverse reputation among special publics (in Evans 2015: 79).

In short, corporate sponsorships are not just motivated by the growth of their networks and social capital but also by creating visibility through fostering a corporate image and identity in the public eye. Art as a status symbol for wealthy businessmen is not a new development but is deeply embedded in the history of art collections, as Duncan notes: "[...] giving spiritual treasures to the public in any form could bring a certain kind of social-moral credit to men who might have had a special need to repair their public image or [...] salve a bad conscience" (Duncan 1995: 83). Furthermore: "Indeed, in the modern world, art museums constitute one of those sites in which politically organised and socially institutionalised power most avidly seeks to realise its desire to appear as beautiful, natural and legitimate" (ibid.: 6). Art and culture are connected to educational, democratic and social values, from which the sponsors would like to draw, demonstrating corporate citizenship via shared values with consumers and shareholders, through the use of art. This is supposed to have internal effects on the corporation in terms of motivation and fostering the creative capacity of staff: "[...] creative development of an organisation is reached through arts-based learning, as well as partnerships with the arts, where employees are encouraged to think creatively in the process of co-creation" (Lewandowska 2015: 6-7). Collaboration with the arts is seen as a form of innovative alliance, which the corporation will benefit from, through increasing organisational creativity in terms of "its adaptability, a higher level of interpersonal skills, deliberate improvisation, creative thinking and emotional engagement of employees" (ibid.: 13). The connection of corporations to art museums also influences their external corporate image:

Arts sponsorship is often directed more towards niche audiences, and is often used for building corporate image and [...] relationships with clients through social meetings [...]. Sponsorship is increasingly being linked to broader social objectives related to the betterment of society and is a way of demonstrating corporate citizenship (Lund and Greyser 2015: 8).

So one can conclude that relationships with art museums benefit corporations since they foster internal corporate identity and employee engagement, as well as establishing an outside image related to being a good corporate citizen. Through collaborations with art

museums, corporations acquire cultural and symbolic resources, which can be used to strengthen relationships within their own corporate environment, but also with the audience they share with museums. However, problems arise here for the art museum, not just from the fact that the corporations are not inherently interested in art as such, but rather because they seemingly fund art as a "public relations gambit" (Alexander 1996: 98), using the association as a social license to operate. In the case of fossil fuel, this can have a substantial impact, as Evans states critically:

Right now, too many large cultural institutions around the world allow oil sponsors to brand their entrances, their catalogues and their events. For the oil companies this provides a valuable social license to operate, a guise of social acceptability masking the harmful impacts of the fossil fuel industry (Evans and Smith in Cameron and Bieman et al. 2016: 104-105).

She continues by describing this specific method of disguise or social license to operate as 'artwashing' in which the "wash" of image is made possible via culture (Evans 2015). As pointed out above, sponsorships are ideally based on a mutual exchange, with symmetrical power relations between both parties. Fossil fuel corporations receive, in return for their financial contribution, access to the network of the art museum, increased social capital, improved internal corporate identity and work engagement through access to creative input while increasing their visibility and image in public through the association with a trusted institution. While the art museum receives financial support, the fossil fuel corporation uses its association with art for image awareness and identity politics as part of growing corporate citizenship. That this includes tax exemption status as well as gaining a social license to operate can be critically discussed in terms of the fundamentals of sponsorship. As Gavin Grindon, curator in the UK and advocate for activist arts as well as institutional critique, writes: "Sponsors and donors' valuation of our public culture is of an order very different from everyone else's. For big oil, big pharmaceutical companies and the arms industry, it is not simply a case of doing good. For them, sponsorship of the arts is not charity; it is a strategic expenditure" (Grindon 2020). Grindon is right to see sponsorship as a strategy applied by corporations. However, this thesis does not intend to criticise fossil fuel corporations marketing and sponsorship strategies. What is of interest here is the art museums role as the recipient of sponsorship by fossil fuel companies and whether this affects the social agency of art museums. As Grindon also notices: "Museums have long

celebrated themselves as ideal spaces serving the liberal public sphere [...]. This means recognising that ethics of funding cannot be isolated from ethics of curation. Funding, and funding models, represent the institution and its values" (ibid.). Brand association works in both ways: the corporation is relating itself to art and the museum is in turn associated with the corporation. Museums have had to distance themselves from sponsorships in the past for this reason, as in the previous example of Marlboro or in a more recent example with the Guggenheim's and the Louvre's distancing from the Sackler family and their involvement with Purdue Pharma during the opioid epidemic (Carrigan 2019). Also, as we will see in the case study used for this research, Tate Modern withdrew in 2016 from the sponsorship deals with BP due to the company's direct influence on the climate emergency (Khomami 2016). Of importance here are values, agency, responsibilities and the influence sponsorships can have on a museum's possession of these qualities. The following section will take a closer look at one of those cases: BP and their former sponsorship of the Tate Modern as well as their ongoing relationship with the British Museum. This will illustrate and add to the constructed theoretical framework on corporate sponsorships of art museums and indicate some conflicting interests for the art museum's agency. Part three will then delve into these conflicts in greater detail.

2.2 Fossil fuel sponsorships: Introduction to BP and Tate Modern/ British Museum

Fossil fuel corporations deal with three types of fossil fuel – coal, gas and oil – all of which are formed through the decomposition of carbon-based organisms, which are then extracted and burned for energy. As non-renewable sources they currently supply around 80% of the world's energy. Large amounts of carbon dioxide are released into the atmosphere during the burning process, which is a heat-trapping greenhouse gas that causes global warming. Fossil fuels are responsible for the largest amount of the world's total carbon emission and methods of drilling and fracking have led to spills in the ocean with devastating impacts on the ecosystem (ClientEarth 2020). Since the late 1980s, scientists have warned about the contribution of carbon emission to the greenhouse effect and discussed steps to reduce this emission (Union of Concerned Scientists 2019). Based on The Climate Deception Dossiers,

which collected internal company and trade association documents, largely disclosed through the Freedom of Information (FOIA) requests, it also becomes clear that many of the responsible fossil fuel corporations such as Exxon and Shell were aware of this but actively "deceived the public and covered up the science" (ibid.). Today, the climate emergency is a global topic with international reactions and action plans: Germany for example announced coal phase-outs until 2030 and Finland said they would go carbon neutral by 2035. This directly impacts the energy industry; for example, in 1980 the energy industry represented around 28% of the S&P 500 index; in 2019 it represented less than 5%. (Worland 2020) As the Banks of England and France are quoted in Worland's *TIME* article: "[...] any company that does not change strategically to the new energy reality will fail to exist" (ibid.). As Harris concludes: "There's little doubt that fossil-fuels are, culturally speaking, on the wrong side of history" (Harris 2020). According to a study by the Guardian, BP is one of the largest fossil fuel corporations, and ranks number six on the list of the 20 largest emitters of carbon dioxide (Taylor and Watts 2019). With regards to changing public opinion and awareness for the impact of fossil fuel, BP reacted quickly in targeting its public image to retain trust and credibility: In 2000, BP changed its logo to the Helios as part of its rebranding campaign, as well as engaging more and more in various sponsorships. Art museums are playing a critical role for BP in this strategy, as described by this statement from Tate Modern describing its relationship with the sponsor:

Through support of Tate, BP's objectives are publicly stated by Tate as the oil company seeking to a. connect people and inspire creativity; b. reach a broad national and international audience; c. promote understanding and enjoyment of art to a wide reaching audience; d. engage with clients through exclusive entertaining; and, e. engage employees in their arts and culture programme (Liberate Tate 2010).

This relationship is in line with the previously identified framework of sponsorships: The sponsor seeks, through financial participation, to grow its network and benefit from association with the arts externally as well as internally. For 26 years, BP engaged in such a relationship with Tate Modern. Founded in Millbank, London, in 1897, the Tate as an institution has held the national collection of British art from 1500 to the present day and today also possess a collection of international modern and contemporary art (Government UK 2021). It consists of four art museums Tate Britain (London), Tate Liverpool, Tate St Ives, and Tate Modern (London), the latter being in the focus of this research. According to

Tate's annual report from 2019/2020, "Tate is a non-departmental public body (NDPB) under the auspices of the Department for Digital Culture, Media and Sport. Tate is an exempt charity [...]" (Board of Trustees 2020: 4). Associated charities are Tate Foundation, Tate Americas Foundation, Tate Canada Foundation. Their mission is, "to increase the public's understanding and enjoyment of British art from the sixteenth century to the present day and of international modern and contemporary art" (ibid.: 3). The main aims are thereby preserving collections, maintaining open access to the public and "generally promoting the public's enjoyment and understanding of British art" (ibid.). Like most public art museums in the UK, the Tate is free to enter, which is an integral part of their objective to achieve accessibility to a broad public. With BP as their sponsor, Tate Modern would host collections and events such as "The BP Walk through British Art", "BP Spotlight" and "BP Saturdays", the latter targeting young people to participate in art exchange projects between schools and galleries. BP board members were invited to special openings, networking events and one on one meetings with associated artists and curators. As an agent in this sponsorship relation, Tate Modern seemingly played its part in supporting BP using brand association as a tool, through visible logo placement and by fostering a growing network between the art museum and the corporation. On the other hand, BP as a principal in charge of financial resources was often promoted as the main reason for being able to keep Tate Modern entrance free (Evans 2015). However, in 2013 Nicholas Serota shed light on this misconception, stating: "There is no direct connection between any single sponsor and the ability of Tate to maintain free admittance" (ibid.: 52). Far from constituting such an essential part of Tate's budget, through investigations into the budget of Tate Modern, one can observe that the BP sponsorship represents only a small part of the organisational income, amounting to £500,000 a year in 2012-2013, only 0.6% of Tate's annual operating income (Evans 2015). As Evans summarises: "BP is defended as an essential agent in Tate's livelihood [...], yet in reality it is negligible and merely a minor part of the organisation's diverse income" (Evans 2015: 62). This fuelled strong protests of the sponsorship, with the public highlighting the negative implications of an association between fossil fuel and art. The next part of this chapter will highlight a few of these arguments. 2017 marked the year where Tate Modern ended its sponsorship with BP. Today, the museum acknowledges their role in fighting climate emergency: "As well as reducing its own outputs, Tate has a role as a space in which

awareness of the climate emergency can be raised and in which topics can be debated and addressed through art" (Board of Trustees 2020: 7).

The British Museum also looks back on a long history of sponsorship by BP. Founded in 1753, the British Museum located in London aims to "hold for the benefit and education of humanity a collection representative of world cultures [...], and ensure that the collection is housed in safety, conserved, curated, researched and exhibited" (British Museum 2021). It works as an exempt charity and a non-departmental public body, "funded by a combination of grant-in-aid allocated by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sports and income secured through commercial, fundraising, sponsored and charging activities" (ibid.). BP has been associated with several projects and exhibitions at the British Museum, such as the celebration of the Day of the Dead in collaboration with the Government of Mexico, the funding of the BP Lecture Theatre and international projects and touring exhibitions. During these exhibitions, the art museum displays the BP logo and name frequently, and hosts special events for board members of the corporation, thereby adhering to its part of the sponsorship agreement. In return, the financial contribution of BP marks around 0,4% of the museum's annual budget (Evans 2015), presenting, just as with the Tate Modern, a relatively small amount. As there is no adequate measurement to assess the economic impact of providing a social license to operate and expanding the network, it is difficult to calculate how much of a financial contribution from the part of the sponsor would be adequate (Olkkonen and Pekka 2006). This kind of economic evaluation of social license would go beyond the scope of this research, however, it needs to be noted that the annual contributions of BP to Tate Modern and British Museum are considered by the public and museum professionals as too little to justify the immense platform fossil fuel gains via association with art museums (Evans in Cameron and Bieman et al. 2016). This is also a central argument of protests against these sponsorships, which, despite going on for several years, have not yet had the desired outcome of ending the relationship, in this case of BP with the British Museum. Chapter three will elaborate further on the goals and objectives of such activism.

This section has contextualised the previously outlined theory of art museums and sponsorships by framing some facts of sponsorship between BP and the Tate Modern and the British Museum. This can be by no means considered as a complete account of BP as a

corporation, nor its full connection to Tate Modern and the British Museum. Going into more detail would exceed the scope of this research. However, the information given here will form a base to the following critical discussion on some issues relating to this sponsorship deal, primarily in connection to the climate emergency and the notion of social agency.

2.3 The Clash of Interests

In this research, I claim that there is a paradox resulting from the relationship between fossil fuel and art museums, which can be approached from various angles. Since this research is based on agency in relation to the climate emergency, I am suggesting to first view the relationship of the museum and the fossil fuel corporation from the position of a clash in interests or a lack of like-minded goals in this respect. As outlined in chapter one, agency theory relies on agent and principal having like-minded goals to work successfully together. Whether in this triangle of art museum, fossil fuel sponsor and the public is viewed as principal or agent, they do not follow the same goals when observed from the perspective of social agency and climate change. As previously outlined, the art museum has a certain responsibility to their audiences, we have seen this described before as being for the people, by the people and with the people. In connection to climate change, which poses a threat to the survival of society and the public, this research assumes that one primary aim of the audiences and therefore also of the art museum is to mitigate the impact of climate change and work on solutions to adapt our lifestyles in more sustainable ways. For fossil fuel companies, which are rooted in and relying on market economy, the goal is mainly corporate growth. For the climate, dangerous emissions of heat-trapping gasses come as a bi-product of this and reducing it would force the corporation to re-think their growth model and maybe risk a decline in income, making them reluctant to change until this point. Therefore, working on preventing climate change cannot be considered one of their main goals, hence their clash of interests with art museums and audiences. However, in the case of BP, fairly recent steps proposing renewable energy solutions have been taken, which could be considered steps into repairing the asymmetry of information and towards a goal alignment in the principal- agent relationship at hand. What this means for the sponsorship will be discussed further in chapter three. For now, I will pick up on the conflict of goals and clash

of interests as a starting point for the discussion, since one can notice its impact within several stages of sponsorship, which will be outlined in the following.

2.3.1 Resource dependency

The first part of the sponsorship consists, as previously outlined, of the financial resources provided by the fossil fuel corporation to the art museum. While this can be an important contribution to the art museum's annual budgets, it can also lead to resource dependency. According to Alexander,

[...] resource dependency suggests that those who control crucial resources coerce organisational decision makers to meet their demands. Museums cannot operate only on membership fees and gate receipts; consequently, they are highly dependent on large donors for funds. In order to maintain such funding, museums must please these large donors. One way museums do this [...] is to conform to the demands of those who supply resources. [...] This is the kind of argument used by those who argue that funding, especially corporate funding, has 'distorted' the goals of museums (Alexander 1996: 88).

Collaborating too heavily with commercial partners can compromise the freedom of curatorial processes, as Lund and Greyser notice in their study of the sponsorship between UBS and the Guggenheim. They note that certain dependencies develop, resulting in "damaging the reputation of the Guggenheim as a high calibre independent arts institution and the risk of compromising its curatorial integrity by becoming too dependent on popular exhibitions that corporate sponsors want to be associated with" (Lund and Greyser 2015: 16). Sponsors follow specific goals that influence and shape their giving, being more willing to invest financial resources into exhibitions that suit those goals, which influences "the overall mix of exhibitions" (Alexander 1996: 87). This is in itself quite a normal process. The basics of organisational theory consists of acknowledging the impact of environmental factors on organisations and internal conflicts, but it also suggests "that managers attempt to reduce the amount of influence on them" (ibid.: 88). However, the challenge here for museum decision-makers is to

[...] contend with the demands made by funders and at the same time maintain the museum's vitality without compromising their vision of its integrity. Their ability to find creative resolutions to the problems brought about by new funding patterns affects both the content of exhibitions and aesthetic definitions (ibid.: 93).

In order to manage that challenge, a certain level of staff autonomy and staff agency is needed to navigate through these intersecting demands and dependencies. When balancing the contradictory demands of fossil fuel corporations and art museums, staff are often left with little space to manoeuvre around all the external expectations (Gray 2017). One can even observe the limiting of staff autonomy, which Graham describes as a parasitic tendency in her research. She explains:

In everyday parlance, far away from the annual reports, conferences, and glossy brochures, such practitioners, be they educators, artists, curators, or "community participants", often describe themselves in jest as "para-sites" or as engaged in acts of para-siting: living off the wealth of their hosts – their material resources and symbolic capital – attempting to redistribute cultural funding, reallocating cultural resources, and reorienting cultural projects toward progressive social and political outcomes (Graham 2016).

This is yet another way of describing the resulting dependency of museums, not just on the sponsor's resources, but also on everything they represent and the position of power they inhabit within the institution. Ahdaf Soueif, a former member of the board of trustees at the British Museum who resigned from this position in 2019, argues that the central challenge of museums is money and patronage. In an interview with the art magazine *frieze* she states:

My decision to depart was shaped by my belief that there's an ethos that should hold for all museums: one that defines their role as social agents. Calls for restitution, the need to divest from oil sponsorship and the protection of workers' rights are not separate from a museum's programming – they reflect an ethical position that, for a public institution, should be unambiguous (Soueif in *frieze* 2020: 112).

It is Soueif's opinion that the funds stemming from sponsorships have limiting effects on exhibition formats, content, and staff, ultimately reflecting on the art museum and conflicting with its original mission and purpose. As identified in chapter one, education, awareness and communication are essential for the art museum's social agency in the climate

emergency since they enable science communication and the possibility of re-imagining alternative futures and paths towards a more sustainable outcome. These characteristics are even part of the broad definition by ICOM which was also outlined in the previous chapter. With museum staff having to adapt their work to the sponsor's expectations, the museums' main tasks of storytelling and communication are impacted in such a way that they might feel pressure to follow the narrative of fossil fuel instead of raising awareness for the climate emergency. An example of limitation of expression due to the influence of a sponsor, is a workshop that was supposed to be held in 2010 at the Tate Modern. The workshop on art and activism was titled "Disobedience Makes History" and invited artists and curators to discuss environmental issues. However, the participants received a notice from Tate, urging the workshop organisers not to mention any topics or criticism related to Tate's sponsors, interpreted as a direct reference to the sponsorship of BP (Hickey 2010). This led to the participants pulling away, criticising Tate for sanctioning freedom of speech and compromising their agency as an open, discursive and democratic platform (Pinar 2019). Out of this, *Liberate Tate*, a collective protesting the sponsorship of BP at the Tate Modern, was born, which will be the focus of chapter three of this thesis.

In conclusion, by accepting and relying on money from fossil fuel corporations, the social agency of art museums can be compromised in terms of its communication and ability to build awareness for the climate emergency, fuelled by limited staff autonomy and restricted agency.

One can raise the point that no matter the resource dependency and the implications of that dependency, the mere fact of art museums receiving money keeps them open and working. As Naomi Klein points out: "[...] we become collectively convinced not that corporations are hitching a ride on our cultural and communal activities, but that creativity and congregation would be impossible without their generosity" (Klein 2001: 35). As shown in the case study of BP, this is not necessarily the case due to the small amount of financial support. However, this might merely be one case, and other sponsorships such as the Louvre and Total should be examined on an individual basis. It would go beyond the scope of this research to look into all of these cases, bearing in mind that reliable data on art museum budgets and the contribution of their sponsors is not always publically accessible. However, in the case of BP at Tate Modern and British Museum, one can raise doubts about how

financially essential BPs contributions really are; especially given that Tate Modern in 2021 marks five years without their support and is still hosting international exhibitions and remains admission free. This also ties into the previously outlined mechanisms of sponsorships; as indicated in the first part of this chapter, sponsorships lead to tax exemptions for the corporation. This is simply part of the legal framework of sponsorship agreements. Nevertheless, Hans Haacke and Bourdieu describe an interesting circle of consequences within their conversation about institutional critique. Bourdieu describes:

In any case, private patronage may justify the abdication of public authorities, who use the pretext of the existence of private patrons to withdraw and suspend their assistance, with the extraordinary result that citizens still finance the arts and sciences through tax exemptions. Furthermore, they finance the symbolic effect brought to bear on them to the extent that the funding appears as an example of the disinterested generosity of the corporations. There is, in this, an extremely perverse mechanism which operates in such a way that we contribute to our own mystification [...] (Bourdieu and Haacke 2005: 16).

Simply put, he claims that if the corporations paid their taxes accordingly without exemptions that arise from small sponsorships, there would be more public resources that could in the end be used for cultural institutions, decreasing the museums dependency on private sector funding. As it stands now, according to Bourdieu, the public, as taxpayers, are financing this loop-hole for corporations. In Hans Haacke's words: "We are the ones subsidising the corporate propaganda" (ibid.: 18). In light of the urging climate crisis impacting society and demanding action from every agent, finding oneself indirectly supporting fossil fuel, the biggest driver of the climate emergency, is a dilemma and compromises any action.

2.3.2 Limited participation

The second part in sponsorship theory is the establishment and growth of a communal network leading to increasing social capital for both parties. However, as noticed in chapter one, social capital and its resulting networks can sometimes lead to elitism, exclusion and favoritism. Graham describes:

These organisations [art museums], while often showcasing socially progressive art, are increasingly structurally oriented towards securing social hierarchy by providing greater levels of access and influence to corporations, real estate developers, wealthy individuals, and paternalistic state policies (Graham 2016).

This can be observed in the sponsorship relations between fossil fuel and art museums:

Many of their boards are increasingly indistinguishable from their corporate counterparts, with too many directors being chosen for their business experience, corporate loyalty, or ostensible influence in fundraising. Although such qualifications are obviously important, the danger lies in the growing tendency for these boards to self-select on the basis of these criteria, to the exclusion of other attributes such as cultural diversity and community connectedness (Janes 2016: 224).

In the case of BP these connections are quite evident. During the 1980s when the new neoliberal government fostered ties between business and art sectors, Robert Horton, back then head of BP America, became chair of the Tate Foundation from 1988 to 1992 (Evans 2015). Nicholas Serota brought BP to Whitechapel Gallery around the same time, during his position as director there. John Browne, former CEO of BP, oversaw sponsorship deals with the British Museum and Tate from 1995 to 2005 (ibid.). These are just a few examples, which however give a small glimpse into relations between leading positions at BP and boards of art museums in the UK. It becomes clear how this could potentially restrict the autonomy of curators, other board members, artists and art museum staff in general, as outlined in the previous section. Chapter one also hinted at the possible limitations social capital can bring to the realm of art museums. Acting in favour of the sponsor, its wishes, expectations, goals and image, as has happened in the example of the cancelled Tate Modern workshop, can be seen as both a dependency on resources and as favouritism stemming from a nepotistic network. This has severe implications for the art field, as Graham quotes political philosopher Brian Holmes: It leads to a "double game of cultural institutions that present radical art and culture with no interest in supporting radical social consequences" (Graham 2016). Another example of this can be seen in Tate Modern's reaction to protests surrounding its continuation of a relationship with BP after the Deepwater Horizon disaster in 2010: A major oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in spring 2010 fuelled discussion on the climate crisis and the impact of fossil fuel corporations on climate emergency. Activists, artists, as well as

staff members, protested Tate's resistance against re-evaluating the sponsorship of BP, claiming that association with such a corporation was harmful for the art museum as a platform that is supposed to educate about, and encourage action against, the climate crisis. Nicholas Serota, the director of Tate Modern at that time, responded to this: "You don't abandon your friends because they have a temporary difficulty" (Evans 2015: 107). This statement shows clearly the close connections and solidarity amongst the boards of art museums, with relationships beyond the professional and into personal friendships, raising the question of clouded judgment pertaining to the evaluation of organisational values. Janes goes so far as to describe this as "bad museum behaviour" (Janes 2016: 165) in which board members are hired based on personal preference, often acting alone instead of having a focus on collective responsibilities (Ibid.). "The result of this incompetence [...] is a serious drain on the scarce resources of museums, not to mention the anxiety and tension resulting from a governing authority at odds with the best interests of the organisation" (Janes 2016: 165).

This dissonance becomes more complex and controversial, when observing the unique and individual goals of various stakeholders. One could question now, as Janes did in the previous quote, the quality and use of a network in which the stakeholders follow very different goals and act upon opposing values. As Graham points out: "Those who align themselves with social justice movements schizophrenically find themselves para-siting the realms of corporate and cultural elites [...]" (Graham 2016). She goes on to describe it further as "the hypocrisies of activating social justice motifs in hegemonic institutions that, due to their structural makeup, are divorced from the possibility of social justice action" (ibid.). Tight networks, just as resource dependency, limit the autonomy of museum staff, impacting curatorial freedom, methods of communication and content of storytelling. At best, these networks can lead to a strong dissonance in knowledge production that can easily be criticized as hypocrisy. This becomes even more clear when applied to the conceptual problems of agent-principal relationships outlined in chapter one. One of these problems refers to the agent being hired according to their professionalism, which might exceed the principal's actual knowledge and therefore surpass their judgment. As Janes points out:

Both, executives and staff alike must answer to governing bodies consisting of individuals or organisations whose experience and expertise have little or nothing to do with the museum and gallery practice. This is in contrast to corporate boards, which

seldom include anyone other than business people. At the same time, museums and galleries must also provide meaning and enjoyment to a diverse range of publics within the context of changing societal values (2016: 134).

Whilst wanting to comply with the art museum's social agency and speak out as well as act upon the climate emergency, art museums find themselves having to comply with the goals and expectations of fossil fuel corporations who do not have an interest in publicly discussing the topic or even criticising their own role in the emergency. The second problem here is that of the agent's struggle to follow the principal's needs when it is actually in conflict with them. The current guidelines of the American Alliance of Museums suggest maintaining an arm's-length relationship between museums and sponsors to avoid the appearance of a conflict of interests. However, as Ledbetter asks: "But how can an existing museum compete when the donor could as easily find their own museum, and become effectively curator in chief, director, and chair of acquisition committee all in one?" (Ledbetter in Janes 2016: 342). This again refers back to the problem of resource dependency and the tendency for art museums to feel the need to please the sponsor in order to keep on receiving the financial support and remaining useful to the sponsor.

A result of these problems is limited participation: This partly arises from the limited autonomy of museum staff, when being merely a passive part of the network, instead of actively incorporated. It also comes from the public being treated as passive consumers instead of actively participating in the knowledge production and exchange that the art museum is supposed to encourage. In a report by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, which attempts to understand the influence of community and education programs on the decision making of cultural institutions at an organisational level, Bernadette Lynch concludes: "Communities remain, or at least perceive themselves to be, fundamentally separated from processes within these organisations: rather than engaging at every level of their work, they are relegated to mere consumption of museums' and galleries products" (in Graham 2016). The art museum's social agency, in light of the climate emergency, is to provide a platform to promote active participation of the public, including a plurality of actors, and to create democratic decision-making processes that can shape a feasible path into a sustainable future. However this can be problematic for art museums in their current state, due to problems of clashing interests and tightly knit networks between museum and sponsor.

As a way out of this conflict Graham suggests to "amplify contradictions in order to become more conflictual. If facilitated, such strategies might be opportunities for para-sites to gain, by way of exit of rebellion, new consistency and new ground" (ibid.). This call for action and conflict to challenge the existing ties and dependencies will be further explored in chapter three of this research, which looks at how artistic activism could challenge these problems, specifically the compromised agency of art museums.

2.3.3 Private versus the commons

Corporate citizenship and corporate identity are crucial for the operation of fossil fuel companies. The art museum gives them what was referred to as the social license to operate, hence increasing their visibility and improving their image internally and externally. One major question that should be asked here is: How can the art museum, which is viewed as one of the most trusted institutions in society, actively support fossil fuel companies, in the knowledge that those companies are using their relationship with the museums to deceive the public and "wash"¹ their image with art? The problem can also be formulated differently: It is a conflict between the private power of the fossil fuel corporation on the one hand and the democratic art institution in service of the commons on the other. As Lund and Greyser note: "[...] one of the main challenges when it comes to building long term partnerships with commercial brands is melding corporate culture with a non-profit culture" (Lund and Greyser 2015:17). Both, especially when applying the focus of this research on agency and climate emergency, follow different goals, interests and approaches. As Robert Newman notes critically:

What nobody seems to think worth mentioning is how corporate sponsorship changes the very meaning of these places of culture. The British Museum and the National Portrait Gallery, in particular, are meant to stand for who we are as a people, as a democracy. They are cathedrals of democracy. Corporations are not democratic

¹“Greenwashing” is a term stemming from an increasing corporate social responsibility (CSR) of organisations and companies in the climate change and the growing consumer demand for sustainable behaviour. By associating themselves with sustainable practices, companies and organisations aim at increasing CSR and green marketing. However, often a discrepancy can be found between the sustainable behaviour and sustainable claims (de Freitas Netto and Sobral et. al. 2020). “Greenwashing suggests that organizations try to reap the benefits of a green positioning without behaving accordingly” (De Jong and Beldad 2019).

institutions. They are vast blocks of unaccountable private power; and the more they advance into the central areas of public life, the more they stultify the ways in which we talk to each other and think about our place in the world (Newman in Janes 2016: 341).

This supports my previous claim of a goal conflict in the given relationship. Abandoning the public cause would have severe consequences for art museums' agency in society and for climate emergency if you consider what Lyons and Bosworth describe as the problem of the commons. They state: "[...] the roots of the ongoing climate emergency lie in the privatisation of the commons" (Lyons and Bosworth in Janes and Sandell 2019: 178). This can be observed in the collaboration of art museums, who according to Lyons and Bosworth, should be "championing the common good" (ibid.), with private businesses such as fossil fuel corporations. Lyons and Bosworth define the commons not only as natural resources but also "the wealth of knowledge institutionalised in public places like museums. The commons does not belong to any individual or corporation, but to all of us. Within our political economy, the commons has been enclosed" (Lyons and Bosworth in Janes and Sandell 2019: 177). The rhetoric of the commons has been present in contemporary arts since the beginning of the 20th century, putting emphasis on values of "inclusivity, the exchange of ideas, and play and creativity between human (and nonhuman) entities" (Elias 2016: 3). Elias continues:

The term designates arts that support and employ alternative spaces and public performances; that encourage public participation in the making of art; that wish to undermine or redefine the authority of institutions such as museums, universities and, ultimately, markets in order to allow the public to engage with and control art production and interpretation; and that use art as a means to facilitate the creation of new models of community and sociality (Elias 2016: 3-4).

The commons' link to the notion of space and participation will be picked up on again in chapter three, in connection to artistic activism which fosters the compromised notion of the commons. The privatisation of the common good and therefore of the art museum as a cultural institution comes at a high price. According to Hans Haacke: "Practically speaking, [...] the public cause is being abandoned. Even though the sponsors cover only a small part of the cost, it is they who really determine the program" (Bourdieu and Haacke 2005: 71).

In summary, resource dependency, limited participation and the dissonance between private and common realm have been identified as some of the outcomes of the sponsorship of art museums by fossil fuel corporations. These outcomes have also been put into direct relation with the limitation of art museum agency in the climate emergency. Examples from the case study of BP as a sponsor of Tate Modern and the British Museum have helped here to contextualize the problem. So far, I have traced all these problems back to conflicting goals or a clash of interests. As noted, this is just one way of approaching this conundrum of fossil fuel sponsorships at art museums. For example, many scholars suggest that it is a problem of persisting market ideologies at art museums; Robert Janes states: "Many of the museums that have adopted the corporatist growth model have also come to resemble corporate entities, with revenues and attendance being the predominant measures of worth" (Janes 2016: 224). He speaks of a "growing disconnection between the market-driven search for meaning and relevance [...] and the desires of governments, foundations, donors, and citizens that museums demonstrate their societal value and play a more significant role" (ibid.: 232). The problem with this is, according to Janes:

Museums are not immune to the marketplace, nor should they be, as business literacy and efficiency are essential in a competent museum. [...] For museums, however, financial self-sufficiency is a myth that permits museums and their boards to pursue growth and consumption as the keys to the future, thus avoiding any substantive consideration of what sustainability might look like in the long term (ibid.: 314).

Bourdieu agrees with this, stating that "we cannot leave cultural production to the risks of the marketplace or the whims of a wealthy patron" (Bourdieu and Haacke 2005: 69). Ultimately, following the path of unlimited growth indicated by the marketplace would encourage the art museum's "descent into irrelevance and collapse" (Janes and Sandell 2019: 10). Based on the concepts related to agency theory connected in specific to climate emergency, I suggest that the problem of goal alignment, as defined in chapter one, can be taken a step further. As agency theory proposes, in order to create a successful relationship of agent and principal, active participation of the stakeholders is required. Hence, in political and social science, agency is also defined as the capacity to act or the general conception of "acting for" (Shapiro 2005). This relates to another source for some of the outlined problems in this sponsor relationship: the myth of museum's neutrality. This will be discussed in detail in the following and last part of this chapter and it will lay the groundwork for chapter three

of this research, which will explore the possibility of artistic activism as a tool to challenge the compromised social agency of art museums.

2.4 The myth of neutrality: Preventing action in the climate emergency

When looking at the problems outlined, as well as the social agency of art museums in chapter one, it becomes clear that museums have to respond and act upon several different demands in society; they are required to be both agent and principal as well as public institution; They depend upon financial stability in order to produce their activities, whilst aiming to respond to social challenges such as the climate emergency without compromising expectations of stakeholders. Duncan describes this in the following:

Like science and history museums, public art museums are mediating institutions, situated between academic and critical communities on one side, and, on the other, trustees, the museum – going public, and, on occasion, state officials, all of whom expect museums to confirm their own beliefs about art. Most art museums are caught in the middle. [...] they are under pressure to present forms of knowledge that have recognisable meaning and value for a broader community. They are expected to augment and reinforce the community's collective knowledge about itself and its place in the world, and to preserve the memory of its most important and generally accepted values and beliefs (Duncan 1995: 103).

Managing all these external and internal demands, art museums can find themselves taking the path of most objectivity or also neutrality. They can aim for scientific objectivity and maintain good relationships with sponsors who, as seen previously, can represent quite different views and objectives (Rodegher and Freeman in Janes and Sandell 2019). Janes and Sandell state:

[...] museums have increased their reliance on corporate, donation, and private funding, and more and more business people are appointed to their governing boards. The unspoken argument is that museums cannot risk doing anything that might alienate government and private funders, real or potential (Janes and Sandell 2019: 8).

However, when looking into the topic of climate emergency, one major misunderstanding or limitation is "the belief that information can be impartial [...]; that climate change information and research can be rendered politically neutral" (Cameron 2011: 101). Chapter one suggested that the climate emergency is not just a scientific but overall a political, social and cultural problem that needs to be addressed and actively tackled by everyone in the public sphere. As historian Howard Zinn points out: "You can't be neutral on a moving train" (Zinn 1994). Or Steinhauer who writes: "Claiming not to take a position is actually a way of taking one" (Steinhauer 2018). In today's art museum literature, there seems to be a division between the people who think museums should stay away from being political, and the people who claim that museums always have been political without a choice. Steinhauer views the museum as a democratic, civic platform and states: "Truly democratic spaces are not made by remaining neutral; creating them requires recalibrating the balance of power" (ibid.). Applying this to the art museum and its position on the climate emergency, passivity towards fossil fuels who are responsible for the majority of pollution and global conflict as well as driving species towards mass extinction "is equivalent to consent" (Janes and Sandell 2019: 176). Further, Janes states:

By disregarding environmental and social issues which, in effect, are ethical issues, museums have opted to serve the prevailing corporate structure. Underlying all of these issues and concerns is the need to break the tacit silence that surrounds the role of contemporary museums as keepers of the status quo, at a time when the façade of democracy disguises the extent to which big business, transnational corporations, and the financial sector rule our lives and our governments (Janes 2016: 343).

A growing consensus is becoming clear that the inaction of art museums has direct negative impacts on society and must be challenged, especially when considering the capacity and responsibility the art museum has to become active agents. One way to do so is via re-imagination, as Raicovich describes: "In order to enact better structures and spaces, we need to imagine them. Neutrality is a veil for wielding power and, because it is veiled, it becomes invisible and just the way things are. This is the status quo that requires resistance" (Raicovich in Frieze 2020: 114). Conventions, or the status quo, need to be confronted to invent and imagine alternate paths into a more sustainable future. Fostering open and tolerant spaces where different perspectives can be addressed from a transparent viewpoint is critical

to challenging the museum's position of neutrality (McCann in Janes and Sandell 2019). As Vlachou summarises:

This is what we need museums to be in the 21st century: not safe, anodyne or comfortable but rather clear about their mission, the reason why they exist, and capable of creating the appropriate space for an honest dialogue; one that might help societies become more willing to listen, without fear and perhaps also with greater empathy (Vlachou in Janes and Sandell 2019: 54).

In conclusion, I have outlined so far that art museums have a clear social agency in face of the climate emergency, which is framed by the ability of storytelling and communication across society, providing an accessible platform for democratic discourse and inviting the participation and re-imagination of possible futures. As highlighted in this chapter, accepting sponsorships from fossil fuel corporations such as BP, compromises the social agency of art museums for several reasons: Depending on the resources, they fall into adjusting content and curatorial as well as organisational decisions to the sponsors. Strong, often personal connections across the boards can lead to favoritism, conflicting with participation and staff autonomy. Having to balance business and the arts, private and common interest can stand in stark contradiction, compromising the position of trust the art museums usually finds itself in. I have traced these problems back to an inherent clash of interest, with fossil fuel corporations aiming for economic growth while the art museum aims to act against the climate emergency. By retreating into a position of neutrality, in order to balance the conflicting demands, art museums tend to not avoid the conundrum but rather increase the negative impact it has on their position in society, strongly limiting their social agency further. In this research I propose artistic activism as a tool to challenge the art museum's social agency in face of the climate emergency, by confronting the institution with the consequences of such sponsorship ties. Chapter three will discuss this artistic activism in more detail.

3. Artistic Activism as Fuel for Museum's Agency

As outlined in chapter one, art museums have social agency in tackling the climate emergency, through education and communication, creating awareness, participation and the construction of spaces for the possibility of (re-)imagination and democratic dialogue. This is based on the unique capacity of art but also the art museum's trusted position amongst audiences, bringing together a multitude of actors and stakeholders. However, as chapter two suggests, by accepting sponsorships from fossil fuel corporations, art museums compromise their agency, due to an inherent conflict of interests between the sponsor and the museum, which ultimately has an impact on artists and audiences. The results of this are resource dependency, leading to limited autonomy of staff and museum professionals, as well as limitations in artistic and curatorial freedom, and therefore knowledge production. Furthermore, exclusive networks often arise, which limit participation, and the created social license to operate puts private interests in stark contrast with democratic and trust values generally associated with the art museum. Many different demands and responsibilities come together in the environment of art museums, which can often be found to coalesce to an impossible position of neutrality and static hierarchies, leaving museum values, goals and objectives in a state of stasis and museum professionals at a loss for a clear direction. Altogether, this leads to the observation that the sponsorships of fossil fuel corporations negatively impact the social agency of art museums threatened by climate emergency.

In this research, I suggest artistic activism as a way of challenging the compromised social agency of art museums, provoking response and a more explicit standpoint when it comes to the climate emergency. I will use artistic activism as a concept that supports the positions taken in chapter one and two and I will analyse particular examples of artistic activism and their relationship with fossil fuel sponsorships at art museums. The chapter begins with a short introduction of various notions of artistic activism in connection with the climate emergency; it focuses on specific aspects of art activism that are applicable to the environment of art museums such as its use of language and methods, the space it occupies, the participating audiences as well as its overall objectives. Secondly, I will view this in practice by analysing two case studies that build upon the previously examined case of BP

at the Tate Modern and the British Museums: The main focus will be set on the collective *Liberate Tate*, presenting one of their performances called “Hidden Figures” (2014). The second case is *BP or Not BP?*, also a group of artistic activists in London, targeting the sponsorship of BP. In order not to exceed the scope of this research, I will go into less detail on their specific performances and rather use the latter case as an illustrative example within the practice of *Liberate Tate*. Lastly, I will connect some characteristics of artistic activism to the previously outlined problems of limited autonomy, decreasing participation, compromised trust and museum stasis, in order to understand how it can challenge the social agency of art museums.

3.1 Artistic Activism

Researcher and founder of the Center for Artistic Activism (C4AA) Steven Duncombe describes the following: “Artistic Activism [...] goes by many names: political art, creative activism, activist art, artivism, socially engaged arts, social practice arts, community based arts, arte útil, etc. each with slightly different emphases, and a different place on the art/activism spectrum” (Duncombe et. al. 2017: 1). This shows the complexity of the concept of activism in combination with creativity, and the need to narrow it down and frame it precisely within this dissertation. It would go beyond the scope of this research to look at the concept in its entirety, so I will apply a particular lens to the topic: The notion of art and its social implications is important for this research, so I will focus in this section on how art and creativity contribute to the concept of activism, leading to the idea of artistic activism. I have situated this research within the social, cultural and political context of climate emergency. I use this context when looking at artistic activism by examining examples that have the goal of engaging in climate-conscious decision-making. A key reference will be the work of Joseph Beuys and his concept of social sculpture, which links notions of art, creativity, audiences and activism. Lastly, I have been looking at the specific environment of the art museum focusing on its stakeholders as well as their influence on the public and the art museum’s agency over their audiences. This provides the final frame to the idea of artistic activism, relating it to the art museum, its previously identified struggle to balancing audiences and other stakeholder expectations, as well as its overall role in civic society.

Hence, I will be looking at activism which uses artistic or creative methods to communicate, with the aim of challenging art museums in their position towards climate emergency. Within this research, I am not looking at activist art, or the way art and artists can become activists, nor would I describe the subjects of this research using the concept of activism which is strongly rooted within the art world and from the perspective of artists. I am more interested in understanding how the concept of artistic activism, motivated by the audience's, activists' and museum visitors' participation, works as a bridge or connecting point to the agency of art museums, the challenge of the climate emergency and the conundrum of fossil fuel sponsorships.

3.1.1 What and Why: Artistic Activism and its goals

Activism is usually understood as a form of action undertaken to challenge the status quo. [...] Activism doesn't necessarily mean conflict or protest; it can be on a small as well as a large scale. [...] Activism doesn't belong to other people; we all have agency and therefore we all have the capacity to make change. Recognising and owning our agency is the first step towards making change; then it is about what we do and how, and equally what we don't do (Hollows in Janes and Sandell 2019: 86).

Hollows provides in this quote a first and general understanding of the complex topic of activism. It is important to take from this the idea that activism entails action geared towards challenging a given situation in order to change it. It is peaceful, ranging from smaller to large scale projects, which can involve and target every individual. As Alice Walker claimed: "Activism is the rent I pay for living on this planet" (Walker in *ibid.*: 116). She refers here to activism as an individual responsibility and part of everyday participation in society. The next step is to acknowledge the role that art and creativity play in these processes. Using art and creativity in activism is nothing new and can be traced back throughout history: One can take Jesus's parables as an example of skilful storytelling and the Boston Tea party as an exploration of visual symbolism and creative disruption (Lambert 2016; Harrebye 2015). Also during the Civil Rights Movement, the 1960s counterculture, feminist movements or Occupy Wallstreet – creativity has been a part of the activism, or in Harrebye's words: "There is an art to every practice" (Harrebye 2015: 130). The 20th century is a testimony to that, since one can observe defining movements in places such as Russia in the 1910s, USA and Germany in the 1930s and the world in the 1960s and 1970s strongly challenging the boundaries of art, science and politics in original ways (*Ibid.*). The work of Joseph Beuys

forms an essential connection between notions of activism, audiences, art and environment. His idea of an “ecological Gesamtkunstwerk” (Adams 1992: 3) centres on the approach to society as a work of art, constituted by the democratic participation of all citizens (ibid.). Art thereby becomes, in Beuys’ view, synonymous to creativity, a capacity that all humans share, which therefore establishes audiences not only as vital to art making in itself but also to the construction of knowledge production and interpretation of the environment. The concept of social sculpture involves everyone as an artist (Tate n.d.), giving every individual the capacity and responsibility to shape society’s reality. Applied to environmental activism, this creates an interesting, participatory sphere: In Beuys’ works “7000 Oak Trees” from 1982, he piled up 7000 basalt stones in the city of Kassel with the intention that each time a tree was planted, one stone would be taken away (Figure 1). After five years, 7000 trees were planted and the pile had disappeared. Interpreted as a move towards green urban renewal (Tate 2015), this work incorporated audiences, city planners and artists equally in conceptualising and realising the project, creating an overarching collaboration. Just as Hollows in a previous quote highlights activism as a form of communication and action accessible to every citizen, Beuys views art and creativity as an essential part of human nature that enables us to comprehend subject matters outside of our own consciousness and empathize with society and environment at large.

This feeds into the definition of artistic activism presented by the group PLATFORM: “activism [...] is vision, collaboration, and action towards social and environmental justice: ‘art’ is an imaginative, sensual, skilled, social and powerful practice with impacts beyond rational explanation” (PLATFORM 2010: 17). Taken together, the impact can be much more significant. However, as Shank points out: “While politically motivated art has existed in healthy fashion throughout the centuries, activists have not officially married into the artistic community and fashioned a working relationship beneficial to both fields” (Shank and Zinn 2004: 539). This describes how the notion of activism or activist is often met with certain suspicion and prejudice. However, I will demonstrate the impact artistic activism has even on people who would not have described themselves as activists, simply because it creates participation and elegantly sidesteps certain stigmas. Using art, a culture of creativity is stimulated that creates a peaceful and accessible format which can energise and attract many different people and organisations. As Gielen and Lijster point out: “Art and culture can make us aware of voices that we did not hear before, of political emotions and interests that

suddenly acquire a public face” (Gielen and Lijster 2017). It can therefore also circumvent certain established spaces:

Project organised social activism is not based on a stable political organisation – with reference to party membership or a well-defined repertoire of protest such as strikes and mass demonstrations. Neither does it stress the importance of long-time planning and registration. The new form of critique is better expressed through creative events, contemporary groups on Facebook and spontaneous reaction, than on policy agendas and membership (Sorensen in Harrebye 2015: 128).

In summary, deploying art and culture can create new openings and access to activist notions of action and change. This will be explored in more detail further along in the chapter. To conclude this, Duncombe offers a general definition of artistic activism:

Artistic Activism, a form of activism which uses art forms as its medium of expression and action, seems to conform readily to an idealist theory of social change. Art, after all is said and done, is the communication of ideas, ideals and perspectives. It is Culture: a symbolic representation or expression, that influences culture, the system of meanings and ideals through which we make sense of our lives (Duncombe et.al. 2017: 6).

Or in Harrebye’s words: “[...] creative activism can be defined as a practice that attempts to create a new political space in the attempt to revitalise the political imagination” (Harrebye 2015: 129). The connection between the artistic and the political realm becomes important here in order to grasp certain capacities of re-thinking and change. As Beuys argues: “[...] politics itself must become art to produce really effective change” (Adams 1992: 5). This leads to the question of the motivation behind artistic activism and to answer that I will pick up on what Beuys mentions in the previous quote: change.

It is necessary to outline the meaning of change and the desire for change as it is used within the framework of this research: When I speak of the notion of change, I’m discussing not only a growing sensitivity and awareness towards climate emergency within the environment of art museums, but also an active attitude to take steps in acknowledging its severe impacts on society and altering and re-imagining our future path. As Janes suggests:

It is fashionable to talk of change, but we must move beyond the talk and seriously consider how we can best equip ourselves and our museums to deal with change constructively. One of the most promising developments in this regard is the idea of

self-organisation. This is a group phenomenon and it occurs spontaneously when members of a group produce coherent behaviour, in the absence of formal hierarchy within the group [...]. People empower themselves, rather than being empowered by management (Janes 2016: 129).

Individual agency and group dynamics play a key role in the organisation of social change, as Duncombe also supports: “Social change happens when individuals act collectively towards a certain end” (Duncombe et al. 2017: 8). Reasons for that can be political opportunity, the mobilisation of resources or the establishment of individual and community agency, leading to a collective identity (ibid.). According to Duncombe there are four main ways artistic forms of activism can cause change: First, imminent cultural shift effecting an evolving public opinion by having an immediate impact on the way people think, which can lead to the second, ultimate cultural shift, forming long-term changes in the way people think and feel, thereby also generating a new vision for the future. The third way is imminent material impact, such as initiating changes in legislation and politics, leading to ultimate material results incorporating more broad and structural changes such as the implementation of a new economic or political system (ibid.). Central to this is identity formation, stemming from individual agency that connects individuals to a collective identity, motivating them to take action instead of remaining passive or simply encouraging an attitude of coming up with ideas that can be tried out and implemented (Pollin in ibid.: 15). Social change can then be potentiated through artistic activism and its ability to challenge power structures. As Hollows points out: “Activism might be nurtured by creating horizontal structures around a vertical hierarchy, enabling everyone to contribute across systems, harnessing their personal agency, their power to effect change” (Hollows in Janes and Sandell 2019: 89).

3.1.2 Where and Who: The notion of space and participation

Before going into more detail on how artistic activism actually works and how it achieves the ambitious goal of social change, one must look into where it takes place, in other words, there is a question of space. In an abstract way, art can be seen as a tool for transcending different spaces, opening up communal spaces for mental exploration (Shank and Zinn 2004; Harrebye 2015; Gielen and Lijster 2017). As Gielen and Lijster note: “[...] works of art often create both utopia and dystopia. [...] [It] is precisely this transference to an imaginary world that provides us with the possibility to look at the non-fictional world or simply everyday

reality from a completely different perspective” (Gielen and Lijster 2017). The created space is used for “critical reflection through facilitating action and overcoming mainstream” (Harrebye 2015: 128). This extends to the physical space as well: “Creative activism wants to have a socio-political impact and break free of the institutional framing of the art world confined within the exclusive and privileged spaces of galleries, museums and private collections in order to engage in the globalised world on its own terms” (ibid.). Thereby, creative activism creates “temporary autonomous zones through the social production of space” (ibid.). Artistic activism can be found within and outside institutional spaces, in streets, squares, in front of town halls and public spaces (Duncombe et al. 2017). However, in this research I focus on artistic activism specifically at and within the art museum. Practically speaking, art museums provide a great space for artistic activism, since they not only share a common language of art and are deeply rooted in the creative and cultural sphere, but also because they already possess a space open to the public, connecting to a vast and valuable network.² Art museums work with skilled communication departments and their agency consists of providing a space for democratic dialogue (Janes 2016). As McNamara points out:

A museum is rich in potential for social activism, through work by artists who play with disruption and provocative re-enactment, because it provides both a staging ground with considerable gravitas, and a sourcebook, with a rich seam of remarkable stories buried inside the archives or on public display (McNamara in Janes and Sandell 2019: 105).

She also points to the museum’s rootedness in collection and storytelling, providing a background for engagement in various topics. Providing a space for conflict becomes a key

² At this point, the concept of institutional critique must be briefly noted. Emerging in the art world around the 1960s, it centres on criticising power structures and ideologies within art museums, galleries and private collections. Marcel Duchamp, Hans Haacke and Andrea Fraser are amongst the pivotal voices of this critique, exploring the boundaries between the art world as an institution and its connection to spaces, organisations and individuals (Fraser 2005). Questioning the possibility for critique as coming from within the art institution is an essential part of their concern. Fraser formulates this in the following: “[...] just as art cannot exist outside the field of art, we cannot exist outside the field of art, at least not as artists, critics, curators, etc. And what we do outside the field, to the extent that it remains outside, can have no effect within it.” (Fraser 2005: 8) Institutional critique is an important frame for discussing the impact of art museums on society as well as their agency and responsibility and their difficulties in fulfilling certain expectations. However, since it is highly concerned with the role artists can play in this and to what extent artists are part of possible social challenges and renegotiating their spaces, it remains outside the narrow frame of this research. This research is more concerned with the role audiences and artistic activism as a tool can play in challenging art museums agency, not focusing on the artist persona in specific. Hence, institutional critique is only briefly mentioned here and will not be further developed.

task of the art museum and especially relevant for the research at hand: “Viewing the museum as a space of conflict allows an approach that takes seriously the discord that surrounds its operations and recognises how the dynamics of global governance penetrate its walls” (Neilson in Cameron and Neilson 2015: 185). McCann suggests two interesting notions that highlights the art museum’s capacity as a connector and networker, making it a valuable space for activism. The first one describes the museum as a ‘convener’, which characterises the museum’s connection not only to outside perspectives and its role as a host for dialogue, but also its access to “resources, information, and relationships around the priorities and values that foster positive change” (McCann in Janes and Sandell 2019: 228). She continues:

Thus, the museum’s active involvement in bringing together unlike actors and connecting various parties can itself be a form of activist practice. Similarly, focusing on the museum as a member of a system embeds activist practice in relationships and relevance, and shifts attention to building connections. Activist practice is then framed as a process of building pathways for exchanging and challenging ideas and perceptions (McCann in Janes and Sandell 2019: 228).

The latter part links back to the definition of artistic activism previously established, which claims it as a practice or concept that questions established notions or structures and opens up spaces to re-think and change them. What becomes clear here is that the art museum can act similarly and aid this process, or, as I claim in this research, that artistic activism can aid and challenge this role of the art museum. The second notion McCann establishes is that of the museum as a barometer, which highlights the museum’s capacity to identify relevant trends and attitudes in society and connect a “wide range of seemingly unlike groups” (McCann in Janes and Sandell 2019: 228) around them. Again, this can support a reciprocal relationship between artistic activism and the art museum, geared towards large networks around a broad range of social topics.

Considering the notion of space, the openness to a broad network, and the acceptance and exploration of conflict arising within this space, plays a significant role in understanding how artistic activism works. Here, we can analyse Chantal Mouffe's agonistic model, which challenges the concept that consensus or agreement emerges in public spaces. She states: “For the agonistic model, on the contrary, the public sphere is the battleground where different hegemonic projects are confronted, without any possibility of final reconciliation”

(Mouffe 2017: 3). Mouffe states that within these spaces there might not be an “underlying layer of unity” (ibid.), however, this makes articulation of the various spaces even more important. They need to commit to continuous changes and evolve in order to be able to challenge the persisting hegemony. In her view, artistic activism does precisely that, and her agonistic approach helps to understand “the nature of the new forms of artistic activism that have emerged recently and that, in a great variety of ways, aim at challenging the existing consensus” (ibid.: 5). She continues:

I submit that to grasp the political character for those varieties of artistic activism we need to see them as counter-hegemonic interventions whose objective is to occupy the public space in order to disrupt the smooth image that corporate capitalism is trying to spread, bringing to the fore its repressive character” (ibid.).

Mouffe's agonistic approach highlights the importance of artistic activism to break with an existing hegemony, here within the art museum environment, to claim their own, new spaces, and re-articulate a different order within such spaces. Disruption is named here already as one crucial way of doing so and will be further developed shortly. Also a more detailed connection to the art museum and what the agonistic approach means for that specific environment will be drawn in the final part of this chapter. However, one can notice that disruption and the breaking with “the existing state of affairs” (ibid.), seems to be a challenging task. As Rose Paquet-Kinsley notes: “I don’t think an institution can do much to change that (systemic oppression) on its own – it takes all of us shifting our own consciousness to work towards greater change” (Coleman and Moore in Janes and Sandell 2019: 97). This leads to the next question: Who is involved in artistic activism and who does it target?

As the Center For Artistic Activism claims, anyone can be an activist. All one needs is motivation to participate (C4AA 2018). There is an extensive body of research working on activists' characterisation, which is, however, not relevant for this research and would go beyond its scope. Here, I am focussing on the general civic public, which art museums count as their visitors. Although speaking about artistic activism and the art museum, I am also not focussing on the artist as activist, but would simply exceed the scope. I am viewing artists as part of the general public, audiences, museum staff and further stakeholders at art museums. Beuys’ notion of the social sculpture and his view that anybody is an artist,

highlighted previously, supports this framing; I am interested in understanding people's reactions, actions and participation based on their own creative capacities which, according to Beuys, are inherent to every individual, hence, make everyone equally part of the social sculpture of society (Adams 1992). Ultimately, I follow his line of thought that society, individuals and audiences, by holding creative capacity in themselves, have as much potential for impacting and participating in certain decision-making-processes and in the creation of awareness. This comes down to my focus on participation, which is triggered and encouraged by artistic activism as a discipline, as well as on the art museum as an institution in the public sphere. As Heal points out: “Often activism is rooted in the methodology of participatory practice – of listening to, and working with, communities to reflect and effect change on the issues that matter to them” (in Janes and Sandell 2019: 210). Harrebye emphasises the related aspect of inclusivity: “[...] happenings, stunts, pranks and spectacles put on display are inclusive, in that spectators become participants and co-creators of expression and meaning” (Harrebye 2015: 141). And he continues pointing out that the “transient, interdisciplinary and hybrid nature of e.g. performance art allowed for more public participation” (ibid.). Before I delve further into the methodology and tools leading to such levels of participation and inclusivity, it is also interesting to note that, despite art having been deployed in many social movements and activist strategies, it gained new importance and impact with the turn of the millennium. As Harrebye explains:

[...] the increase in the living standards of the growing middle class has meant that many of the former centres of mobilisation such as the trade unions, the organised social movements and the political parties do not seem adequate for the younger generation who have seen how the radicalisation of the great ideologies of the 20th century has failed. They are religiously eclectic, juggle identities and are political drifters (Castells 2004). Therefore, because of these changed conditions [...] creative activism must also be understood as – at least in part – a new phenomenon (Harrebye 2015: 133).

He emphasises here a demand for a new type of activism, partly due to a different generation that grows up with different values and methods of communication, one example of that being the age of social media and mass communication.

3.1.3 How: A toolkit for artistic activism

When looking at artistic activism, communication is a crucial concept. As Duncombe points out: “Good artistic activism [...] requires good communication” (Duncombe et. al. 2017: 27). He further states that this communication is of a “dynamic, interactive, and multi-directional” nature and therefore resembles a conversation” (ibid.). In the following, I will take a closer look at what this conversation is constituted of and how artistic activism communicates. According to Boyd: “It does so through innovative tactics such as flash mobs, subvertisement, hacktivism, urban guerrilla gardening, identity correction, forum theatre, infiltrating media-jacking, prefigurative interventions, etc” (Boyd et al. 2012: 129). What these tactics share is their creative use of artistic language and artistic expression by utilising music, dance, theatre, performance but also simply drawing from certain culturally established signs and symbols that are presented in a new and unexpected way. As Gielen and Lijster point out: “We know too well how easily images and music can reach out to a wide audience and bring masses into action, perhaps more than words and most certainly more than scientific reports” (2017). According to them, art has the possibility of bringing a unique idea to the front, making it easier to also grasp its complexity, mobilise forces and create a space for imagination (ibid.). This makes art a useful and powerful medium for activism, as Mouffe agrees:

According to the agonistic approach, critical art is art that foments dissensus, that makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate. It is constituted by a manifold of artistic practices aiming at giving a voice to all those who are silenced within the framework of the existing hegemony (2007: 4).

By deploying art, activism can further involvement, addressing delicate topics in comprehensible ways and thereby creating deeper levels of participation. I am aware that not all forms of artistic activism have participation as their goal, in the same way that art or activism are not the only means of creating inclusion. However, in this research I have identified the importance of participation and communication across audiences as vital for fostering agency in the climate emergency, establishing this as a measure and lens with which to apply to the framing of artistic activism in this context.

As Lambert suggests, one of the most important aspects of conceptualizing a creative activist campaign is “to be seriously funny” (Lambert 2016). Humour is essential when it comes to

“presenting critical, and often challenging, ideas in ways that the public might be more attracted to and interested in them” (ibid.). Not only can humour create a heightened sense of awareness and communicate challenging topics more effortlessly, it can also attract new levels of participation, as Miller points out:

[...] a sense of humour is crucial in order to avoid the image of environmentalists as finger-wagging scolds, corporate capital must be opposed in public, the media’s need for vibrant textuality can be twinned with serious discussion as a means of involving people who are not conventional activists [...] (Miller et al. in Cameron and Neilson 2015: 201).

Irony and parody are used most frequently since they both can trigger discussions and represent individual opinions that might have been “numbed through repetition and by entrenched positions on either side of a stale debate” (Harrebye 2015: 133). While irony is rhetorically defined as “an utterance with a figurative meaning that departs from its literal meaning on one of several standard ways” (Wilson and Sperber 2012: 1), parody is “an act of duplication where the original is placed beside itself and the copy is used as a joke” (Hariman 2008: 249). While the latter is often used by artistic activists as an external way of communication, picking up on subject matters in a visually challenging way that invites people from outside to explore its meaning and therefore trigger discourse, the former relates to rather internal communication since “irony [...] is critically directed towards those who cannot see and hear this existential insight [...]” (Harrebye 2015: 133). Parody and irony both expect a certain level of knowledge of a topic, since they play with already existing signs, symbols and language, thereby making issues like the climate emergency accessible to a public that might otherwise not engage with the topic. On the other hand, one can critically note that it can lead to exclusion when people don’t understand the references and basis to the employed humour due to, for example, their different cultural background or upbringing. In summary:

Irony and humour both have a disarming effect on dialogue and conflicts as they make it harder for authorities (be they judges, politicians, the police or journalists) to use simple force. By surprising the public one may also affect people who would have chosen not to watch and participate had they been given a choice (ibid.: 134).

While this can be seen critically, since maybe not everyone wants to be confronted and participate, it also leads to the next point: Artistic activism creates openings via disruption and surprise. As Harrebye points out: “[...] surprise can open up a temporal, experiential space where anything can come in [...] which can then lead to disruption of the elites, [...] [foster] attractive alternatives [...] [and] stimulate the political imagination” (ibid.: 132). The element of disruption has been long part of the history of activism, taking a variety of forms: in the 18th CE it could come in the form of an individual attack on someone who did wrong, in the 19th CE in the formation of barricades and the 20th century was marked by strikes at workplaces in form of sit-ins and sit-downs (ibid.). “Today opposition movements have become skilled at mounting symbolic and peaceful forms of disruption that avoid repression while maintaining contentious vigour” (ibid.: 138), naming the environmental movement as an example for that.

What disruption, surprise and humour share, in their use within artistic and creative language, is that they play on emotions. The use of emotions marks an important aspect of artistic activism’s strategies and success. As climate activist Bill McKibben notes:

[...] you don’t build movements with bar graphs. You build them, in part, with art. With painting and with music and with graffiti and with dance and with concerts and with everything that engages the right brain. Or that engages the heart, trusting that where the heart leads the head will follow (McKibben 2010).

People are moved to change through emotional stimuli, which art can provide: “[...] art activism can use the languages of art to access emotional pathways; this alternative, arts-based approach makes social stalemate no longer impenetrable” (Shank and Zinn 2004: 539). Duncombe and Lambert’s theory of AEffect is based on this principle: Generating affect and empathy is a desired goal for many activist campaigns, since it engages people emotionally in an effective way and makes them more prone to understand and act upon certain topics. This can be achieved through the use of art and can lead to the desired effect of change. As Duncombe describes:

[...] people don’t just soberly decide to change their mind and act accordingly, they are moved to do so by emotional stimuli [...]. And [...] we make sense of our world less through reasoned deliberation of facts, and more through stories and symbols and metaphors that allow us to make sense of the information we receive. As such, when it

comes to stimulating social change, effect and affect are intertwined. We might think of this as: Affective Effect, or Effective Affect. Or we can simplify both with a new term: AEffect (Duncombe et al. 2017: 7).

In conclusion, through the use of art, humour, surprise, disruption and emotion, artistic activism creates deeper understanding and awareness for the topic of climate emergency because it gives the chance of experiencing the topic in a different context (Gielen and Lijster 2017). It can trigger greater levels of participation and reflection, “being able to reach people with ideas in ways that circumvent their usual defences” (Duncombe et. al. 2017). Furthermore, and maybe even most importantly, artistic activism allows, through these tools, the view of new contexts, since it “leaves room for interpretation and the freedom to make up your own mind without being told what to do. There might often be a specific agenda, but the main function is to broaden a given field of possibilities” (Harrebye 2015: 141). This is essential when aiming for change with regards to the climate emergency, making the stimulation of political imagination important for artistic activism campaigns. Communicative strategies such as theatricality, visibility, aesthetic interventions, humour, and disruption can provide an important and successful starting point to discuss climate emergency at art museums further, and encourage the possibility of re-thinking certain hierarchies and envisioning or re-imagining alternatives. Before I develop this further and directly link artistic activism to previously outlined challenges of the social agency of the art museum, I will first look into two specific case studies with the purpose of illustrating what artistic activism can do and how it operates. However, I fully acknowledge that these are two examples among many and the variety of cases also implies a manifold of contexts, methodologies, and impacts. For the aims of the current study, I decided to frame the examples in the context of two large institutions in London.

3.2 Situating artistic activism in the UK through the lenses of the BP case

In the following, I am looking at two specific cases of artistic activism. The first one is a performance by the collective *Liberate Tate* that targeted the sponsorship of BP at the Tate Modern in 2014. The second one is the group *BP or Not BP?*, founded in 2012 “in response to BP’s sponsorship of the Royal Shakespeare Festival” (*BP or Not BP?* 2021) and at the

time of the writing of this dissertation, in 2021, still questioning the sponsorship of BP at the British Museum. I selected these cases for several reasons: First of all, due to my own cultural background, I was interested in the context of European major fossil fuel corporations, which narrowed it down to BP and Royal Dutch Shell. Both corporations engaged in art sponsorships and have been the subject of major protests over the past decade. The Tate Modern being the first major art museum ending its sponsorship deal with BP increased my curiosity and I wanted to understand what led them to do so. This is why I chose *Liberate Tate* as my first case and set focus on BP as a sponsor. My second aim was to find a group with a similar goal that is still active, situated within the same cultural, social, and political environment, making it a comparable case. This led me to *BP or Not BP?*, who have been actively engaging in artistic forms of protests for almost 10 years. Both cases were extensively covered by the media and provide accessible literature that makes them suitable objects for this research. As previously mentioned, my main focus is on one case study, “Hidden Figures” by *Liberate Tate*, (Figure 2) which I analyse in as much detail as this limited research allows. I will only shortly outline a second performance by *BP or Not BP?* (Figure 3, 4, 5) which nonetheless allows for an interesting comparison and can open the discussion to further observations and future research.

Both groups set the goal of ending the partnership with BP, with the aim of challenging the art museums' relationship with the sponsor and its network. Creating awareness and inciting change – in this case, in the policies of the museums, which would then have effects in the audience as well as in the staff and in the artists - previously identified as the main objective of artistic activism. The clear target was to put climate emergency as a priority on the agenda of the targeted art museums, as well as their visitors and audiences, and challenge them to act according to its demands. In the case of *Liberate Tate* this was achieved when in 2017 Tate Modern ended their sponsorship deal with BP. I want to clarify that I will not discuss whether ending the sponsorship is the suitable way for creating awareness and change towards the climate emergency within the space of the art museum. I am aware that a critical position can be taken towards this. However, for the sake of this research, I will merely evaluate how artistic activism was employed and how it relates to the art museum and the challenge of climate emergency and social agency.

In terms of target, both groups clearly address museum accountability, CEOs and curators as well as appeal to the general audiences to participate in the protest and educate themselves

about the topic. Both performances invite everyone to participate and engage, not only in the direct activities but also in the use of the space created for open and critical dialogue.

3.2.1 *Liberate Tate*: BP and Tate Modern

In 2010 the activist group *The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination* was invited for a workshop at Tate Modern called “Disobedience Makes History”. According to co-curator Amber Hickey, shortly after the initial planning phase for the workshop she received an email by Tate curators, reminding her to not “host any activism directed against Tate and its sponsors” (Hickey 2010). This, following her statement, “blatant attempt at political censorship” (ibid.) did not stop the workshop from happening, although it was carried out under “monitoring with high security” and Tate “threatened to cancel the workshop or shut it down if we [the workshop participants] were to do anything that would threaten the peaceful enjoyment of the visitors” (ibid.). Outraged and triggered by this censorship, *Liberate Tate* was formed to end the sponsorship of BP at Tate Modern. In their words: “By placing the words BP and Art together, the destructive and obsolete nature of the fossil fuel industry is masked, and crimes against the future are given a slick and stainless sheen” (Liberate Tate 2011). *Liberate Tate* describes itself as “a network dedicated to taking creative disobedience against Tate until it drops its oil company funding” (Liberate Tate 2011). The debut of the group’s appearance in public was their performance “License to Spill” in 2010: Activists staged an oil spill performance at the Tate Modern summer party which was celebrating 20 years of BP sponsorship while the Deepwater Horizon spill was ongoing (Sutton 2016). While gaining a lot of media attention with their performance, the sponsorship deal was extended for another five years. As Mel Evans, activist and writer for *Liberate Tate* states: “So they issued that five-year deal as a kind of threat to us, saying, ‘well, we’re staying around, you could never last this out’. And I think they really thought at that point that in five years’ time it would’ve all cooled off. That was the challenge that we took [...]” (Evans in ibid.). Over the following six years, the collective staged various performances, drawing attention and awareness to the sponsorship across the art world and beyond. On the 11th of March 2016 their goal was achieved: Tate announced that they would end the sponsorship with BP from 2017 onwards. In their official statement *Liberate Tate* writes the following:

We did this with our determination, commitment, stamina, tenacity, audacity, outrage, creativity, artistic craft, deep ecology and soulful collaboration. We did this with approximately 75 litres of molasses, 25 litres of sunflower oil, 20 helium balloons, 15 whispered hour of court transcripts, 1 tonne of arctic ice, 50 tubes of black paint, one 16.5 metre wind turbine blade, 1 portable toilet, 20 black sleeping sacks, 600 sticks of willow charcoal, 60 carefully selected texts, 60 millilitres of black tattooing ink, 600 black latex gloves, and 100 or so black veils – including one at 64 square metres. We did this together. We did this with Art. We did this as Art (Liberate Tate 2016).

To illustrate some of the previously outlined techniques of artistic activism and to lay the foundation for further analysis of how the collective was able to challenge the museum's decision, I chose one specific performance. On September 6, 2014, over a hundred members and supporters of the art collective *Liberate Tate* got together in the Turbine Hall of London's Tate Modern museum in a performance called "Hidden Figures". A 64 square metre black cloth was taken into the museum and held up by participants around the edges while individual performers entered underneath the cloth, taking various shapes and poses. After two hours, the activists peacefully left the museum. The performance was triggered by the refusal of Tate to publish information on the controversial sponsorship relationship with BP and directly referenced a ruling from April 2014 by the UK's Information Commissioner, which concluded that by refusing to remove black squares covering information about the sponsorship on meeting minutes of Tate's Ethic Committee and Board of Trustees, the museum was breaking information law (Artnet 2014). *Liberate Tate* picked up on this visually, with the use of a large black square that was hiding the audience and visitors underneath it. On 27 January 2015, Tate was forced to reveal the financial record of the BP sponsorship from 1990 until 2006: £224,000 per year, less than 0.3% of Tate's annual income came from BP. As *Liberate Tate* compares: "It would pay for half a tooth in Damien Hirst's artwork 'Skull'" (Liberate Tate 2015). The video of the performance "Hidden Figures" was displayed publicly shortly after in Whitechapel Gallery during their exhibition "Adventures of the Black Square: Abstract art and society 1910-2015" and also at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

This performance has significance on three levels: the space it occupies, the people that participate and the visual language it uses. Entering the Turbine Hall unannounced, the artistic activists use the element of surprise and disruption, placing themselves at the

entrance and amidst the art museum space. The space in itself is highly significant for Tate Modern since it marks the museum's entrance and centre and was also conceptualised as a space for representing publicness and accessibility as a “huge free gift to the public” (Moore in Pinar 2019: 39). Entering such a space immediately gives the performance visibility and puts it in stark juxtaposition to the openness and accessibility of the space with the “closing of doors to information” (Liberate Tate 2015) that Tate is responsible for, by deliberately withholding information. The activists invite the visitors and bystanders as well as museum staff to join, either in asking questions or directly in walking underneath the black square. A participatory atmosphere is created that also reaches people who otherwise might not have paid attention to the subject. This can trigger the observer to circumvent existing barriers, reflect and become aware of the topic. At the time of the protest, Tate Modern had Kazimir Malevich’s work “Black Square” on display. Malevich’s iconic work from 1913 appeared at a time of political unrest, after the Russian Revolution and the dawning October Revolution and whilst World War I was still ongoing. It represented a never before seen abstraction, which many view as a reflection of the parallel social revolution, Malevich himself promoting it as “a sign of a new era of art [...]” and “a symbol of a dawning new age” (Tate 2021). *Liberate Tate* deliberately picked up on this work visually: “Our black square evokes not only Malevich’s gesture towards art and its beyond or its many reiterations [...]. But [...] it is an eruption of the hidden matter of the dark institutional flows that Tate would keep beneath the surface” (Liberate Tate 2015: 80). Furthermore, the protest itself is supposed to mark new beginnings, starting by ending the ties between fossil fuel and culture in order to begin to envision a new, sustainable future (ibid.). Although seemingly duplicating the original and placing the copy in a different, critical context, the activists used the tools of parody, without a desired comical result. This performance does use art and symbolism as their mode of communication, but does not further explore the field of humour often found in other performances. The activists instead chose to pick up on the narrative created by Tate and enter the art museum’s realm of storytelling, which communicates the work of Malevich, deliberately re-contextualising the work and its interpretation. The performance is affective and provides emotional stimuli in the way it chooses its angle and focus: Instead of targeting climate emergency as an abstract overall phenomenon or art sponsorship as a problem that alone concerns the art museum, they put in focus the active withholding of information that audiences have a right to, pointing out injustice being done

to every citizen and every individual visitor of the art museum. This stimulates the discussion and the questioning of the art museum as an institution that people trust in their communication and social agency but which in fact lacks transparency, triggering a feeling of betrayal. This could bring the public to further question the art institution, leading to further impact and engagement for the art activists. This interpretation of the “Black Square” is interesting for understanding “Hidden Figures”, calling out for breaking ties with old partnerships and instead creating space for a future description. But also visually the work seemed to fit: The black squares covering up information, actively withholding it from the public. The campaigners argue that “[...] Tate needs to disclose how much money they are getting from BP so that an informed public debate can take place as to whether the sum of money is irreplaceable” (Liberate Tate 2014). As it says in the official press release of the performance: “Malevich’s “Black Square” was a blank slate, beyond representations of nature. “Hidden Figures” symbolises the black stain oil sponsorship makes on cultural institutions; the black redaction over the BP payment sum Tate won't reveal” (ibid.).

Another interesting aspect about *Liberate Tate*, which also becomes evident in this performance, is that they rarely use the BP logo and aesthetics. On the contrary, their performances as well as their visual content, for example on their website, are tailored closely to the aesthetics of Tate, imitating font, writing style, narrative and artworks of the collection. As Evans explains:

There is a tendency toward taking a target’s logo, taking the BP logo and doing something to it [...] When in fact, I feel like any time that you replicate your target’s logo, your target’s visual identity, you reinforce them. [...] Then what we do instead is embrace the visual identity of Tate, and that’s because we do want to embrace the parts of Tate that we do love [...] (Evans in Sutton 2016).

The artistic activists are showing a critical awareness of what and how they want to communicate: Clearly targeting the BP sponsorship, they approach this from the position of emulating Tate itself as well as Tate’s visitors, highlighting the impact the art museum can have and therefore clarifying the severity of the resulting support for fossil fuel. This will be picked up again in the last part of this chapter when put into the context of the social agency of art museums.

In conclusion, *Liberate Tate* is a great example of a collective of artistic activists that set a clear goal in ending the sponsorship relationship between BP and Tate Modern, which had proved itself detrimental to the art institution's agency and position towards climate emergency. They aim at high levels of participation and inclusivity in their performances to create understanding and awareness for the topic in the broader public and use the effect of site-specific performances to amplify their message. In this specific performance, creativity and artistic symbolism, disruption, surprise and emotional stimuli are used to create a space for criticism, reflection, and re-imagination.

3.2.2. *BP or Not BP?: BP and the British Museum*

BP or Not BP? is a collective centred in London, UK. Launched in 2012, the group originally aimed at challenging the sponsorship of BP at the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC). Picking up on the theatre's work with theatrical performances as well as incorporating Shakespeare's language in their manifesto and work, the group received quite a lot of media attention and many actors as well as members of the theatre company's board joined the protests. In 2019, the group achieved their goal with the RSC dropping BP as a sponsor. They turned then to "freeing the British Museum from the taint of Big Oil" (*BP or Not BP?* 2019), staging since then more than 50 performances inside and in front of the British Museum. Their performances remain deeply rooted in theatre, often incorporating actors, story lines and scripts, using the British Museum as their stage. While consisting of a core of activists, the group continuously accepts all members and participants, whoever is interested and would like to support the mission. Some of their most famous protests were the rebel exhibition "A History of BP in 10 Objects" which displayed items such as tar sand and bullet shells in the Great Court of the British Museum or the construction of a Viking longship by around 200 people in the same square.

The 59th performance of *BP or Not BP?* took place from February 7th 2020 until February 9th and was divided into three acts. At the time, there was a temporary exhibition at the British Museum called "Troy: Myth or Reality – sponsored by BP". The group picked up on the exhibition theme and constructed a large wooden horse that they smuggled into the museum's courtyard on the night of February 7th. Two activists slept inside the horse to ensure it would remain inside the museum. A mass action followed this, Act II of the

performance, which consisted of the occupation of eleven different spaces inside the museum in which more than 1500 people gathered in music, poetry, games, talks and artmaking, centred on the topic of BP's sponsorship at the British Museum. Act III followed during the night of February 8th and into the next day, where 60 protesters peacefully remained inside the museum after its closing hour and started casting several of their body parts in plaster, assembling it into a sculpture called "Monument". They describe it as their visualisation of what BP does to the environment and to humans (BP or Not BP? 2020). All of these three activities were open to public participation and on view for the public as well as museum staff, artists, activists and visitors. Remarkable was the participation in the protest of theatre director Zoe Lafferty whose film "Queens of Syria" (2016) was part of the exhibition (Evans in frieze 2020).

The activists, in this case, use art and cultural symbolism to bring together visitors, participants, the museum, and staff to discuss the climate emergency. They build on the exhibition theme of the myth of Troy, staging theatrical performances and music inside the museum space as well as creating their own installation. By re-enacting the Trojan horse, with an activist hiding inside its body while it was smuggled into the museum courtyard, they created a parody, using humour as a tool to describe the connection between the exhibition at the museum and its sponsorship by BP. It humorously illustrates the connection between oil and art and how it tries to circumvent its dissonance. The element of surprise can be found in the unannounced smuggling of the horse into the museum space, their camping overnight inside it and the occupation of gallery spaces with their performances. This disrupted the museum's "business as usual", putting themselves right in front of the eyes of visitors and museum staff. Act II and Act III were highly participatory in their encouragement of visitors to not just listen to talks but also engage in discussions about the topic or participate in the casting of body parts in plaster.

3.3 Challenging the Agency of Art Museums: *Liberate Tate & BP or Not BP?*

Chapter two outlined the conundrum of the sponsorship between fossil fuel corporations and art museums, highlighting three significant problems: resource dependency, exclusive

networks and the concept of social license to operate. The compromising of art museums' social agency in the climate emergency relates to limited staff autonomy and limited curatorial freedom, limited participation, and a conflict of private versus common values. These problems were traced back to an inherent clash of interests in the principal-agent relationship as well as the art museum's often underlying approach of neutrality. The following and last part of this dissertation will connect these three issues to the tools and methods of artistic activism introduced in this chapter, applying them to the outlined case studies. The aim is to highlight the discussions raised within the context of this conflict of interests and understand what artistic activism can challenge in this relationship. This will shed light on the hypothesis formulated in this research, which claims that artistic activism can challenge the compromised social agency of art museums in climate emergency.

3.3.1 Transcending spaces

As one of the first problems of the sponsorship relation between fossil fuel corporations and art museums, I had outlined resource dependency resulting in limiting of staff autonomy as well as limiting curatorial decisions. An example of such a changing attitude in staff can be found at the Tate Modern: When the workshop organisers, that later founded Liberate Tate, were censored in their objective of discussing activism at art museums, they found it unlikely that the statement was issued directly from the Tate Board of Trustees at the time, and former CEO of BP, Lord Browne Madingley. Rather, Amber Hickey states: "It is more likely to have been a classic case of self-censorship, stemming from fear and conceived of by the curators themselves to protect against any possible criticism" (Hickey 2010). The fear of criticism or getting into conflict internally and externally can have, as seen in this example, strong implications for curatorial processes, knowledge production, as well as the open, democratic platform that the art museum aims to be (Cameron 2010; Cameron and Neilson 2015; Janes 2016; Janes and Sandell 2019; Newell 2017).

At first, I claim that artistic activism can challenge staff autonomy by establishing a new space that encourages and enables people to voice their opinion. This space does not necessarily need to be physically distinct from the art museum. It becomes even more apparent, when placed inside the very institution criticised, contrasting what the museum should be doing according to their social agency – create an inclusive platform for democratic and open dialogue as well as tackling the climate emergency – and what it is

actually doing – partnering with fossil fuel and compromising public trust as well as information and education. As *Liberate Tate* explain: “Rather than a dialectic of critique and containment, in which an isolated critical artwork is inevitably commodified, these practices [activism] confront art institutions without relying on them” (Liberate Tate 2015: 83). Although site-specific to the art museum, their performances occupy and defend a different sphere which can criticize and thematise the art museum with some distance, not stemming from within but rather being tailored to the environment from outside. *Liberate Tate* creates this space at first through their aesthetics: In “Hidden Figures” the reference to Malevich’s work roots the performance strongly within Tate’s narrative and yet opens a new realm for reflection through re-contextualizing the work. The same happens through their own branding: The BP logo decorates the entrance halls and exhibition catalogues of Tate, marking clearly their alliance to the corporation. Instead of picking up on BP’s identity, *Liberate Tate* emphasises the visuals of Tate, focussing thereby on their direct approach to the values of the art museum and the importance they attribute to it. Again, they use these by re-contextualizing them within their own activist framework. Kevin Smith, long term member of *Liberate Tate*, explains in an interview that by avoiding BP logos and branding in their own performances, and by tailoring more towards Tate aesthetics and narrative, they seemingly fit in so well to the museum’s environment, that they are often mistaken as part of the programming. He states: “For us I think that’s quite a fruitful area to be operating in, because it’s that sort of neither this nor that, uncategorizable, weird middle ground, where I think the interesting reactions take place“ (in Sutton 2016). And Mel Evans adds: “Which goes to the heart of the whole strategy in a way, which is that we’re always inside and outside. We’re not so far out that we can be ignored, but we’re not so far inside that we have no leverage – we’re in this powerful limbo” (ibid.). This in-between space offers new approaches to education and controversial discussion, giving the public, visitors and also museum staff an opportunity to inform themselves and voice their own ideas. These can then be taken back to the workplace, into the work ethos and can inform further judgement or decision making (Harrebye 2015), thereby reconfiguring the autonomy and agency of museums staff. This relates to what was previously explained by Graham: Educators, artists and curators can find themselves “para-siting” in the attempt to maintain the cultural institution, depending on and living off financial resources and symbolic capital of their sponsors (Graham 2016). Distancing themselves from their host and actively breaking

through this parasite-host relationship is vital for the art museum to remain a democratic, open and trustworthy communicator. Artistic activism can support this challenge by creating a space between the institution and the sponsor where reflection, re-negotiation and education can occur. Disruption and surprise are vital elements employed by the artistic activists which immediately bring great attention to the site-specific performance: “Through their performances, what *Liberate Tate* achieves is to temporarily transform this non-place dominated by the private financial, political, and cultural interests of corporations into a proper public place of democracy” (Pinar 2019: 31).

Through realising a new space in-between, within and outside the art museum via aligning with museum aesthetics and narratives, creating disruption and surprise, thereby lowering the entrance barriers to this newly established space, artistic activists can strengthen staff autonomy and curatorial freedom. This challenges the social agency of art museums by bringing the discussion on climate change into the art museum and into its own network.

3.3.2 Fostering participation through established spaces

As outlined in chapter two, another result of the sponsorship relation based on interest conflict is the exclusivity of the created network. An exclusive network limits the possibilities for internal and external participation and collaboration, impacting the inclusivity and openness of the art museum as a civic platform and its agency in tackling and educating about the climate emergency.

This can be again a matter of space which, by being re-established or re-claimed, can generate new dynamics and therefore also new levels of participation: not only from staff but also from museum visitors. Participation becomes an issue of staff autonomy and visitor inclusion again. In order to educate civic-minded museum professionals that “seek dialogue, social issues and empowerment into their programs” (Wood and Cole in Janes and Sandell 2019: 42), which can then enable democratic discussions in civic society, I have previously outlined the importance of creating a different space, which can happen through artistic activism. The advantage of such a space is that it does not follow the hierarchies and network structures of the art museum. Instead of “following the lead of the carbon web which extends across every stage of our art museums” (*Liberate Tate* 2015), artistic activists aim to break the exclusivity of influence on knowledge production. This can happen through a plurality of voices coming together, engaging in dialogue and demanding to be heard. As Hollows states:

“It is people who make things happen, through choices informed by their values and beliefs. Museums are simply made up of individual people and processes devised by these peoples. We make it happen, together; not others” (Hollows in Janes and Sandell 2019: 85).

Liberate Tate triggered participation of staff and visitors in their performance “Hidden Figures”. Visually, it marked a gathering point, focussing on the centre space of Tate Modern and emphasising its aim in creating a place for discussion. As *Liberate Tate* explains: “We are the institution. A square is also a point of public assembly. Taking the square is to compose a forum, a town meeting, a spokes council or a citizens’ circle. Our Black Square convenes a counter public around the dark issue of oil in the museum” (Liberate Tate 2015: 82-84). Furthermore, Mel Evans pointed out how they were handing out letters to staff during many of their performances, from floor level staff to curators, explaining what they were doing and why, inviting them to join, ask questions, and engage in dialogue. The activists here openly and actively emphasised participation. Also *BP or Not BP?* aims at inclusion and participation: Through the disruption and humour in their performance of placing a wooden horse in the courtyard of the British Museum, the activists lowered the threshold for people to engage with the topic, being at first triggered by curiosity. In a next step, *BP or Not BP?* engaged with staff and visitors through talks and performances inside the museum, inviting everyone to join and asking questions and engaging in dialogue. This also triggered artists to join the protest: As outlined previously, Lafferty, who was exhibiting at “Troy: Myth or Reality”, joined the artistic activists after writing to the board members of the British Museum, clearly expressing her resentment to the BP Logo placed next to her work: “As many in our sector are now distancing themselves from BP, we feel we have a responsibility to speak out too and make clear that our work should not [...] help artwash the impacts and crimes of BP, a multinational oil and gas company that has wreaked havoc on this planet and its people.” (Lafferty quoted by Evans in frieze 2020) Triggering participation, resistance and even conflict, can be fertile ground for strengthening the social agency of art museums and position them clearly, in the challenge of climate emergency. It can trigger the institution to reflect internally on its responsibilities and capacities. As Lynch advocates: “The museum's role now must be to create an environment of hope and action, while continuously reflecting upon its own role that may, inadvertently and periodically, be getting in the way. The museum may then have hope of helping to harness collective power for change” (Lynch in Janes and Sandell 2019: 124).

Applied to the concept of agency, artistic activism can challenge the conflict of interests by questioning the role of the agent. Does the agent have to follow the lead of the principal without questioning? Through the re-negotiation of space and increased participation, the agent, here the art museum, can question the input and lead of the principal, here the fossil fuel corporation. This can ultimately lead to challenging the social agency of the art museum, strengthening its relationship to the public, another agent in this network. However, this must be also viewed with some caution. When writing about the BP sponsorships, Mel Evans, herself part of Liberate Tate, exclaims: “These companies do not deserve a table at the climate change conversation” (Evans in frieze 2020). One can ask whether excluding the party in question from the conversation is a beneficial approach to the climate emergency. If climate emergency demands participation and re-imagination of futures, would it not be better to include the very corporations who endanger the climate in the conversation instead of trying to exclude them? As mentioned previously, the focus of this dissertation is not evaluating whether the main aim of these artistic activist groups, to end sponsorships, is the best way of fighting climate emergency. The focus is to assess whether their performances can challenge the art museum to take action. But it is interesting to keep this question in mind, when assessing the agent-principal relations at hand. Ultimately, the clash of interests is part of the typical agency problem of information asymmetry. Tate Modern decided not to work on this relationship and find an alternative solution to the problem, instead ending the sponsorship with BP. The British Museum has not yet ended its relationship with the fossil fuel corporation, leaving the possibility of an alternative solution to the asymmetry still open. More conservative and hierarchical in structure, it might approach its role as agent more rigidly, thereby aligning interests and finding a middle ground. If this does happen, it is just as much an important form of communication that hopefully in the end does not compromise the social agency of the art museum further.

In conclusion, artistic activism can challenge close network structures and compromised participation, by opening up spaces, inviting engagement in dialogues and conversation around complex topics.

3.3.3 Awareness, reflection, re-imagination

As a third conflicting situation arising out of the sponsorship relation between the art museum and the fossil fuel corporation, I identified the concept of social license to operate, incorporating the “greenwashing” or “artwashing” of the sponsors’ image, made possible via the art museum. The concept of social license to operate puts the public in the position of consumers, who need to be guided via branding and marketing techniques, instead of approaching the public as active participants and visitors of the art museum, who have an agency and the ability to participate themselves. Language and concepts of the private economy and the public sectors become blurred here, impacting the social agency of art museums. While the corporation might view audiences as rather passive consumers that marketing tricks can influence, they share the public with the art museum, where they are, ideally, encouraged to be active civic citizens with their own voice. When these two perceptions of the target audience clash, it can become difficult for fossil fuel: As noted previously, BP has not only been sponsoring Tate Modern and the British Museum within the cultural landscape of London, but also, for example, the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) where *BP or not BP?* found its origin. Mark Rylance, an actor at the RSC, had been advocating against the sponsorship since 2012 until he ultimately resigned in 2019. However, when young activists announced boycotting the theatre during school trips, the RSC reacted immediately and cut ties with BP just a few weeks after (Evans in frieze 2020). As Evans explains: “This younger generation, politicised by a climate crisis that is so evidently imperilling their future, were able to intervene as they represented the very audience the theatre hoped to attract – making them a powerful constituency” (ibid.). Artistic activist groups such as *Liberate Tate* and *BP or Not BP?* are at the forefront of mobilising this age group: With low entrance barriers they focus on creating access to information and providing necessary tools for a discussion as outlined in the previous two sections.

This also relates to the other part of the implications of social license to operate: As previously outlined, brand association can go both ways. Art museums put their own credibility at risk when associating themselves with fossil fuel while having responsibility in the climate emergency. Furthermore, art museums might end up confusing common and private interests, resulting in approaching visitors in a way incompatible with their social agency:

Where *Liberate Tate*'s open, participatory performance experienced the public gallery as a public space able to initiate new encounters and reflect on social issues, Tate's closed reaction to information requests exhibited a dark underside to the notion of the gallery as public: an institution invites visitors through its doors, but blocks those thresholds swiftly and firmly when too many questions are asked. Tate's remit should be to act in the public interest, but by redacting and withholding they revealed a divide – a split between public and private interests (*Liberate Tate* 2015: 79).

Ultimately, it influences how the visitor perceives the space, its narrative and what it communicates. It misleads the public's trust in the institution and places private values of the corporation above democratic and public values of the art museum. This could possibly be challenged through sensitising the public to the topic of climate emergency and the role fossil fuel corporations play in it. Education and creating a space for reflection and awareness building can be achieved with artistic activism and activists that are able to actively criticise and challenge the role of sponsors at the art museum. Through disruptive performances, activist collectives have gained lots of media attention, increasing their reach and visibility beyond the realm of the art museum. This creates stronger levels of awareness, enabling reflection on the climate emergency amongst a broad public and sparking, possibly, the re-imagination of alternative futures. Hence, artistic activism challenges the art museum's agency in terms of education, awareness building and re-imagination. As *Liberate Tate* describes the process: "Our spills encourage you to follow the oil from performance prop to institutional flows. They make visible the way in which a public museum as a supposedly critical, open sphere has been polluted in the service of oil to become a counterfeit site of mere 'carbon democracy' " (ibid.: 81).

At this point, it's worth returning to what was briefly mentioned in chapter one: the notion of 'the education turn' as described by Irit Rogoff. She explores in this "the possibilities for the museum to open a place for people to engage in ideas differently – ideas from outside its own walls" (Rogoff 2008: 4). Potentiality and actualisation play an important role in her argument since they stress two important aspects of this educational turn: First, becoming active or acting upon what was learned, can or will end in failure, and that is important to accept. Second, "we all function in a complex system of embeddedness – one in which social processes, bodies of learning, individual subjectivities cannot be separated and distinguished from one another" (ibid.). She concludes:

Both these terms seem important for mobilising any re-evaluation of education, as they allow us to expand the spaces and activities that house such processes. Similarly, they allow us to think of learning as taking place in situations or sites that don't necessarily intend to prescribe such activity (ibid.).

Via opening up and challenging space, narrative and communication within art museums, artistic activism can foster such an approach to education, thereby fostering the capacity for re-imagination and showing alternate paths into the future. This is a vital part of the art museum's social agency in climate emergency. As Hickey quotes her co-curator at Tate, John Jordan: "With every act of obedience we remake the world as it is and undo the world as it could be" (Jordan in Hickey 2010).

3.3.4 Museum neutrality and emotional stimuli

The position of neutrality taken up by some art museums has been identified as a contributing factor to the severity of the conundrum at hand. As Suay Aksoy states in her opening speech for the CIMAM annual conference in November 2018 in Sydney:

[...] museums are not neutral. They never have, and never will. They are not separated from their social and historical context. And when it does seem like they are separate, that is not neutrality – that is a choice. Choosing not to address climate change is not neutrality. Choosing not to talk about colonisation is not neutrality. Choosing not to advocate for equality is not neutrality. Those are choices, and we can make better ones (ICOM 2019).

Being neutral in the face of climate emergency has been outlined as equal to supporting inactivity and stagnation, limiting humanity's chance for survival. By stimulating emotional responses in visitors and the public, as well as reclaiming the museum space as a platform for democratic discussions, I suggest that artistic activism can challenge the art museum's position of neutrality. Evans states: "By accepting sponsorship, cultural institutions are giving power and legitimacy to this toxic industry. They may see themselves as outside of the messy politics of civil society, but they are not. Cultural institutions are right at the heart of what makes up the status quo" (Evans in frieze 2020). This is part of what chapter one identified as the art museum's social agency. Agency incorporates certain levels of activity

and engagement. The art museum needs to make use of it in order not to become irrelevant or find themselves in contradiction with its own social agency. Chantal Mouffe highlights the importance of re-establishing art museums as a “crucial site of political contestation” (Mouffe 2013: 210), rather than viewing them as outdated and conservative institutions limiting our future growth. In her agonistic model, the art museum can contest hegemonic order and provide a platform for democratic criticism and change. Similarly, Graham notes the importance of amplifying contradiction in order to become more conflictual, thereby fostering an attitude for activism and change (Graham 2016). Motivating museum staff and visitors to care about and to react to the art museum’s position in climate emergency, can trigger its neutrality and challenge agency. As *Liberate Tate* says: “Notably, when one looks at the history of social change, it is clear that in order to achieve progress in urgent issues, a precarious situation needs to be seen as motivation, rather than as a boundary” (Hickey 2010). Artistic activism is there to spark conflict and controversy by disrupting the museum environment, to tease, through parodies and ironic statements, balance a line between internal and external environments, and represent audiences with various interests and ideas. The performances can provoke responses and statements from the targeted art museums, thereby challenging their position of silence and neutrality.

Concluding Remarks: Challenging Activist Museum Practice

In this research, I began by asking how art museums might be agents for social change in the specific challenge of climate emergency. By looking into the potential social and political roles of art museums in society, I identified the art museum's capacity for communicating, storytelling and knowledge production, connected with community building and participation as essential characteristics, establishing the art museum as a platform for exchange, growth and democratic discourse in the political and social realm. With art fostering creativity and often circumventing established boundaries, the art museum provides furthermore the possibility for re-thinking and re-imagining of the status quo. Establishing climate emergency as a specific social, political, and cultural challenge for the art museum, I highlighted three main demands for art museums' social agency, namely participation, education and communication, and re-imagination. However, in their struggle for financial sustainability, the art museum compromises its social agency: Highly relying on corporate sponsorships from fossil fuels in order to be financially sustainable puts them, as agents to their audiences, in a position of clashing interests, while becoming environmentally and socially unsustainable. Resource dependency, closed networks and the struggle between private and common values impacts art museums in terms of their autonomy and knowledge production, their degree of participation of audiences and staff, as well as their credibility and capacity for re-imagination. A major problem in this conundrum is the museum's assumed position of neutrality which seems to be an impossible task.

In this research, I proposed artistic activism as a way of challenging the social agency of art museums in climate emergency. As the case study of *Liberate Tate* shows, tools such as disruption and surprise, humour and emotional stimuli help in creating an alternative space for participation and knowledge production as well as establish new network structures. These are all helpful factors in tackling climate emergency since they enhance re-imagination, awareness and education amongst audiences, ultimately provoking responses and responsibilities towards the climate issue. This dissertation concludes with the observation that, although financial sustainability and the sources for financial stability at art museums might remain with great influence on the overall processes and structures, art and artistic activism can have the chance of disrupting the flow and create some disturbance, possibly challenging audiences and art museums to re-think and re-imagine the status quo.

However, the ways in which staff and audiences may challenge the museum's agency and position of neutrality remains a contested field with scarce research due to a number of intersecting factors such as the diversity of cultures and contexts of the institutions, the staff, and the audiences across the globe.

The concluding remarks presented here are to be read within the limits of the scope of this dissertation: I do not measure in this research the influence and success of artistic activism in accordance with their determined goal, namely the ending of the sponsorship between fossil fuel and art museum. While this was the case with Tate Modern, the scope of this research is not the place for a full quantitative analysis of how much *Liberate Tate* contributed actually to this decision. Hence, I am not attributing this outcome entirely to artistic activism, I merely highlighted ways art museums' position was challenged due to the performances under analysis. In comparison, *BP or Not BP?* employs a similar methodology to *Liberate Tate*, however, still not reaching their ultimate objective. This indicates that while artistic activism can trigger certain levels of reflection and awareness within the environment of the art museum, the way it is then dealt with and interpreted is still up to the museum itself. Further looking into the case of Tate Modern highlights this point and strengthens also the previous concluding observation: After Tate Modern ended their sponsorship with BP, the main sponsor became the large automobile corporation BMW. Financial resources and their connected networks and power structures do seem to prevail. One can question in this case whether, from an environmental perspective, artistic activism achieved to challenge the position of the art museum, or to what extent their social agency remains compromised due to further sponsorship of a major corporation.

For future research I suggest looking into the role and agency of museum professionals and museum staff in the challenge of climate emergency. In this dissertation I have been only briefly touching on their position in terms of participation and autonomy at art museums, and how this influences the art museum's overall social agency and responsibility in climate emergency. However, it becomes clear how vital the work of museum staff is in setting tone and direction for art museums and thereby also determining the overall platform accessible to audiences. A thought provoking text in this direction comes from Ariella Azoulay, where she explores the idea of museum workers and historians going on a strike. She applies the notion of strike in order to highlight certain imperialist structures and power relations in

society that, according to Azoulay, can be challenged by changing approaches from museum workers as well as historians. She writes:

Imagine [museum workers] admitting that they were trained to believe themselves to have been acting on behalf of the public, but that in fact that public was a very specific one, exclusive and hierarchical, and their commitment actually catered to the interests of imperial actors, including museum directors, boards of trustees, gallery owners, collectors, dealers, statesmen, and corporate stakeholders. All these interested actors tied their hands and prevented them from engaging with their museum's debts [...] to those people whose worlds were destroyed so that the museum and its stakeholders could be enriched (Azoulay 2019: 3-5).

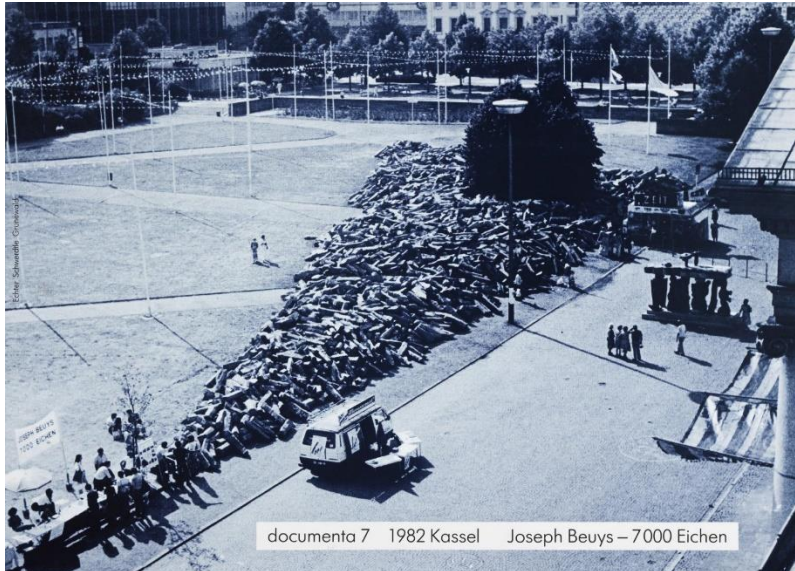
Picking up also on the colonial past of museum collections and the resulting contemporary challenges, Azoulay tries to imagine a different reality where museum workers can trigger awareness, responsibility and accountability within their field towards cultures and environments at risk, instead of catering the needs of a few wealthy individuals. Imagining alternatives is an important methodology in Azoulay's thought experiment. Also this dissertation picked up on the importance of imagination or re-imagination; in order to act upon climate emergency and work towards alternative and sustainable futures, one must be able to envision and re-imagine how these futures can look like. Art, with its capacity to surprise and disrupt, to communicate or portray the maybe unexpected and difficult, as well as to engage various audiences, can support such reflections. Arjun Appadurai states:

The world we live in today is characterised by a new role for the imagination in social life. To grasp this new role, we need to bring together the old ideas of images, especially mechanically produced images (in the Frankfurt School sense); the idea of the imagined community (in Anderson's sense); and the French idea of the imaginary as a constructed landscape of collective aspirations (Appadurai 1996:4).

While the art museum can provide the bridge between the past and the present, connecting old and new ideas and building a base there for imagination, artistic activism can challenge the community, collectively re-imagining alternative futures and goals for sustainable futures.

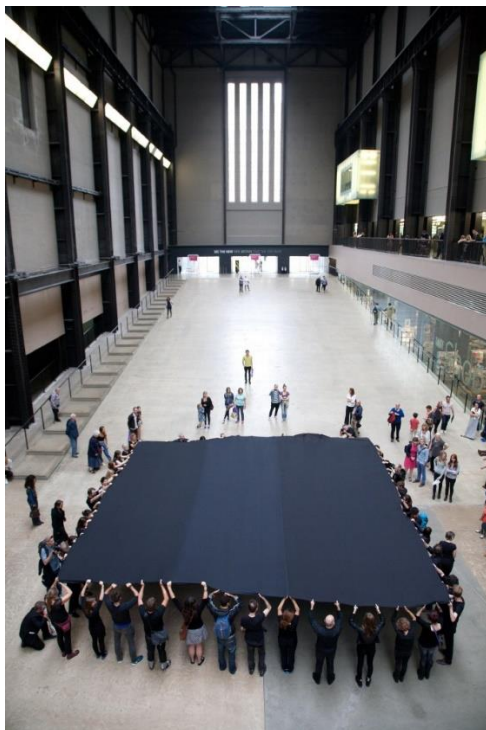
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Figure 1:



Joseph Beuys. 1982. "7000 Oak Trees". Performance. Photo: Tate Modern.

Figure 2:



Liberate Tate. 2014. "Hidden Figures". Performance. Photo: Martin LeSanto-Smith.

Figure 3:



BP or Not BP?. 2019. "Performance 59 – Act I". Performance. Photo: Hugh Warwick.

Figure 4:



BP or Not BP?. 2019. "Performance 59 – Act II". Photo: Amy Scaif.

Figure 5:



BP or Not BP?. 2019. "Performance 59 – Act III – Monument". Photo: Ron Fassbender.

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