

Figure 1. Installation view of *Bauhaus: A Teaching Idea*. Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, November 26, 1966–January 22, 1967.



## **Martin Beck: Episode 1**

The Carpenter Center's gallery entrance is accessible on Level 3 at the crest of Le Corbusier's signature bisecting ramp. The exhibition space was originally an expansive 3,900-square-foot gallery with a rectangular open plan and floor-to-ceiling windows on two sides. Le Corbusier's colorful brise-soleil fenestrations line the east wall. Archival photographs from the 1960s and '70s show a glorious space punctuated by a series of *pilotis*, concrete columns designed to shift weight-bearing responsibilities of the exterior walls to the interior, thus giving way to an open space with walls of windows. The photographs show that the university fully welcomed the challenge of this open plan by using a variety of ambitious and elaborate exhibition designs. The 1966 exhibition *Bauhaus: A Teaching Idea* was one of the most elaborate in conception where curators activated the floor and ceiling (fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> In their inventive placement of objects and arrangement of materials, they embraced the open plan of the space and how to deal with what otherwise would be viewed as a constraint. In 2000, the challenge to respond creatively to the flexible site was squelched when

the university built an enclosed box—a white cube—within the original gallery. The box intervention measures approximately 25 by 50 feet, roughly a third of the available space. Designed by Peter Rose + Partners and commissioned by Harvard’s Fogg Art Museum to host its burgeoning contemporary arts program, it functions accordingly by shutting the exterior world out in order to control light, security, and air quality inside. The functionality of Le Corbusier’s open plan was in turn eliminated. Moreover, the perimeter of the box, which is completely inside the gallery, was wrapped in a dark steel cladding. Numerous 3-by-3-foot panels screwed into the surface gave the appearance of a fortress-like façade. This is what visitors encountered when entering the gallery.

For episode one, *Removed and Applied*, Beck instructed the systematic removal of more than 70 linear feet of metal cladding that defined the exterior perimeter of the exhibition box. Over the course of several weeks, professional builders unscrewed and deinstalled each panel, carefully loading them onto a truck and transporting the heavy pieces off-site to university storage. Plywood panels underneath were exposed. Beck asked that gypsum board be adhered to the plywood surfaces, primed, sanded, and painted a specific flat white. After the new walls were finished, a beveled museum-like label, listing the title of the episode and the materials involved, was produced, permanently installed, and photographed to the artist’s specifications. *Removed and Applied* created a display framework for better exhibiting and inhabiting Le Corbusier’s architecture. The exterior of the box was suddenly turned into a usable, less hostile, more friendly space. The long exhibition wall made the space more functional while rendering more visible the insertion of the box itself, which had been less legible due to the dark metal walls.

Plans for *Removed and Applied* had developed over a series of visits by Beck and conversations with me and administrators. As interlocutor between the artist and campus planning officials, I had to receive approval for a project of that scale, along with the financial resources of the Harvard

University facilities department. A construction project had not been anticipated in the exhibition budget. In meetings, it was necessary to argue the work as architectural, as something more than an exhibition, as a project imbued with a vision to infuse the institution with a more convivial social atmosphere. This could be accomplished, in part, by returning a sense of potential, a belief that something could happen in the space. Walls are an essential part of any physical exhibition apparatus, providing support for two-dimensional works and delineating space for arrangement of three-dimensional objects. They coordinate and order time-based activities, such as performances and artist talks. They are key factors with which artists and spectators negotiate both the presentation and experience of art. The steel on the exterior walls of the box intervention at CCVA prevented this negotiation between artist, artwork, and spectator, thus negating any sense of potential. In addition, the dark color and impenetrable quality of the raw metal surface created an unyielding feeling of coldness in the gallery. *Removed and Applied* became a kind of corrective to the aesthetic and social implications of the intervening white box by Rose + Partners. The regular correspondence and attention by Beck to each and every detail of this inaugural episode set the tone for how he would work with the institution and how the institution would work with the artist.

### **Rewind to Michael Asher**

Beginning in the late 1960s, Michael Asher's interventions in the architecture of galleries, arts organizations, and museums became a pioneering mode of artistic activity that gave rise to what eventually became known as "institutional critique."<sup>2</sup> Asher was interested in the embodiment of power and commerce in the built infrastructures—walls, displays, monuments, architecture—of the art institution. He influenced waves of practitioners whose critique would extend from the physical structures of the art institution to the wider sociocultural and political circumstances impacted by the industrial art complex, such as representations of gender roles, sexuality,

and systems of hierarchy. Instead of working against the institution to wield his critique, Asher worked *with* the institution, often turning the imbalance in the other direction where institutions performed in order to exhibit their own idiosyncrasies and thereby making visible how the institution functions. His keen and tactical attention to details necessary to keep it all moving made his interventions extraordinarily effective, burrowing into their day-to-day administrative functions in order to construct an image of the institution.

Take, for instance, Asher's architectural intervention into two museum galleries at the Gladys K. Montgomery Art Center at Pomona College in Claremont, California. In the fall of 1969, the center's new director and curator, Hal Glicksman, invited artists working in Southern California to participate in a series of exhibitions he titled "Artist's Gallery." Running throughout the academic year, Glicksman's program called for transforming the gallery into a studio residence. Asher's contribution explored the introduction of light and sound into the gallery by making the space accessible day and night for nearly a month in the early spring of 1970. Without the addition of outside objects or equipment, he structurally reconfigured the museum's two galleries into two intersecting triangles that obliged spectators upon entering to pass through a narrow corridor where the triangles met. The installation required the construction of three large walls in the exhibition space and lobby as well as a new ceiling just shy of seven feet, much lower than the original eleven-foot ceiling. The lobby ultimately became compressed into an almost perfect cube. Asher also covered the gallery's linoleum floor with protective tape, and everything, including the floor, was painted off-white. The two glass doors that separated the lobby from the outside were removed, doorjamb and hinges covered to obscure any sign that a door ever existed. To accomplish all this work, administrative and building staff had to take precise measurements, prepare drawings, source materials, acquire estimates, pick up or arrange delivery of materials, file permits and, of course, help Asher build the piece. Every seam and gap between new

construction and the entrance to the building was completely smoothed over. The construction work was essential to allow not only 24-hour visitor access during the course of the exhibition but also to bring the outdoor environmental conditions into the interior gallery space (fig. 2).

Asher was not alone. Ron Cooper, Tom Eatherton, and Lloyd Hamrol also participated in Glicksman's program, which operated like a series of short-term, intensive artist residencies—inside the gallery—where artist and curator moved in synchronicity to change an institution into something other than a space to exhibit objects made inside a studio.<sup>3</sup> The program posed a challenge to the typical means by which art is created, exhibited, and experienced by turning over the architecture of an institution to the artist. Glicksman and the participating artists made visible in the public space of exhibition the stumbling, experimentation, and uncertainty associated with a private studio, demonstrating how those qualities could become—even temporarily—part of an institution's character.

In his essay "Alternative: Space," Martin Beck examines the push by artists beginning in the late 1960s to define an alternative to commercial

Figure 2. Michael Asher, Gladys K. Montgomery Art Center, Pomona College, Claremont, California, U.S.A., February 13–March 8, 1970, view out of gallery toward street from small triangular area. Photograph by Frank J. Thomas, courtesy of the Frank J. Thomas Archives. © Michael Asher Foundation.



gallery and museum spaces, chronicling through a series of case studies an evolution of artist-led spaces into what constituted “alternative” by the late 1980s in New York City.<sup>4</sup> One of the case studies is a look at the nascent days of 112 Greene Street, the independent arts initiative in a cast-iron building in SoHo owned by artist Jeffrey Lew. In 1970, Lew made available the ground floor and basement to artist friends such as Barry Le Va, Gordon Matta-Clark, Brenda Miller, and Marjorie Strider. These artists and others made installations in direct dialogue with the raw qualities of the industrial space, from Strider’s colorful plastic foam oozing out of the windows of an upstairs living area to Matta-Clark’s hole in the basement floor where he planted a cherry tree. Instead of constructing a labyrinth of white walls to transform the space into a pristine gallery, the artists worked with and, indeed, embraced characteristics of the building often accentuating its rawness. Beck points out that not only did artists work to create something other than art for a typical gallery space, the first exhibition transpired without any specific opening dates or even a defined exhibition time frame. There were no set hours for the space. Artworks and artists came and went without notice throughout the approximately three-month exhibition cycle, exposing and thus prioritizing the unpredictable process of making art as an essential part of this exhibition scene. The finished product took a secondary place to process. Comparable to Glicksman’s stewardship of Asher’s work at Pomona, around that same time, Beck writes that what distinguished 112 Greene Street “as an alternative to the regular gallery system was that it allowed artists to work with and in the space.”<sup>5</sup> Lew and the artists found potential in another kind of space, one less weighted with expectations for the production and display of art, a space that, in fact, entailed a direct and immediate engagement with the absence of white walls. This space and the conditions at hand became a medium for making the art.

Another case study outlined by Beck in “Alternative: Space” is an analysis of Michael Asher’s installation *Untitled* at Artists Space in 1988.

Figure 3. Michael Asher, Artists Space, New York, New York, U.S.A., *Michael Asher / James Coleman*, June 2–July 2, 1988. Courtesy Artists Space, Fales Library and Special Collections, NYU. © Michael Asher Foundation.



The installation was part of a two-person exhibition at Artists Space at 223 West Broadway in TriBeCa that also included a slide presentation by James Coleman. For Asher's part, he intervened in the spatial design by architect and sculptor Ross Anderson who, in 1984, adapted the industrial site with an arrangement of partial 12-foot-high walls with finished white surfaces running along the building's walls as well as extending into the open area of the space. The design offered a compromise between the refined aesthetic of a commercial gallery or museum and the raw industrial building (fig. 3).

Asher, comparable to what Beck undertook at the Carpenter Center in relation to the architectural addition by Rose + Partners, added to Anderson's design. Asher extended the partial walls 44 inches farther to meet the ceiling. He chose not to finish the wallboard, however, leaving the gray surface with screws and seams exposed, an obvious contrast to the pristine white walls by Anderson below. His installation, moreover, appeared to question the very mission and even the name of the organization, "Artists Space," by highlighting their decision to use the familiar aesthetic of the white-walled gallery. And, further to the point, as Beck chronicles,

Asher left it to the supervisors of Artists Space to decide for themselves the fate of his installation: they could deinstall the wall extensions and return the design to Anderson's original vision or finish up the job by spackling over screws and seams to create finished wall to the ceiling. They chose the latter. And so, Beck shows us in his text just how difficult it was in the late 1980s (and still today) to pull away from the influence of the white-walled exhibition space, where the function of the wall becomes more than just a practical support for hanging work but, rather, possesses an extraordinary symbolic weight of its own.

### **Martin Beck: Episode 6**

Beck's *Program* at CCVA extended beyond responding to the physical characteristics of the building and the wall he made for *Removed and Applied*. In fact, many of the subsequent episodes emerged from repeated visits to the archive where Beck's study of documents and photographs identified artists, designers, and filmmakers whose teaching, lectures, films, and exhibitions left indelible marks on the institution. Episode six, *Reality Is Invisible*, for example, resulted from Beck's discovery of written references to the experimental filmmaker Robert Fulton's 16 mm film *Reality's Invisible*, which Fulton made while teaching in the burgeoning film program called Light and Communications in 1971. A print of the film is kept in the Harvard Film Archive, housed in the Carpenter Center. The curators of the collection accommodated Beck's request to see the film during a private afternoon screening in the cinema.

The hour-long film comprises brief, straightforward interviews with students in and around the Carpenter Center; these candid recordings show faculty lectures, caressing shots of the concrete surfaces of Le Corbusier's architecture, and the natural environment around Cambridge. Experimenting with the limits of filmmaking, Fulton's layered images and sounds combine into a frenetic and visually lush portrayal of academic life at the Carpenter Center. The informal footage and brilliant editing captures



the pedagogical activities, intellectual pursuits, experiments with visual literacy, and political unease occupying the minds of students and faculty in the early 1970s, a moment in the nascent life of a visual arts institution grappling with its intellectual position in a long history of knowledge production at Harvard.

Beck's *Reality Is Invisible* was a multipart episode that included the screening of *Reality's Invisible*, introduced by Beck on September 10, 2015. The screening, which followed the opening reception of the 2015–16 VES Visiting Faculty exhibition, was a means to welcome returning students and faculty, inaugurating another academic year. This episode also included a digitization of Fulton's film in order to produce a DVD edition that was given as a welcome gift to students concentrating in Visual and Environmental Studies and graduate students in Film and Visual Studies. Screen-printed posters and DVD package designed by James Goggin communicated about the film prior to its screening in September and thereafter. Not only involving students directly, the episode exposed them and the academic community to the important history of Fulton's work and the experimental use of the Le Corbusier building documented therein.

### **Martin Beck: Episode 7**

Beck's next episode, *The Limit of a Function*, was made in October 2015, a full year after initiating *Program with Removed and Applied*. *The Limit of a Function* is a table and vitrine made of powder-coated steel and plywood. Measuring 72 by 65 inches, its wood surface has two rectangular recessed areas covered by glass for exhibition of materials, while the table provides visitors with a place for repose, study, and discussion. It is sited on Level 3 of the Carpenter Center in the area just outside the box gallery. Beck derived the proportions of the table from Le Corbusier's grid pattern incised in the concrete floor, and its height was conceived to be slightly more than a typical table, slightly less than a vitrine. Two benches and several stools serve as movable seating. Their softwood surfaces are stained to match the

warm color of the wood accent panels punctuating parts of the concrete walls throughout the Carpenter Center. Fitted with casters, the table can accommodate different arrangements to coordinate and support programmatic and exhibition activity in the space. *The Limit of a Function* was conceived and designed to encourage opportunities for more convivial and social connections to the space and among visitors while creating a focal point for a bookshop partnership with the Berlin-based Motto Books. It serves, too, as a display space for exhibition materials installed in the two recessed vitrines, sometimes independent but often complementary to exhibitions presented inside the box gallery. The table and seating are valuable cues visible through the plate-glass windows to passersby on the Carpenter Center's ramp. Instead of walking past the gallery, more people now enter the space lured by the simple but powerful welcoming gesture of a table and seating, combined with books. The furniture has become a gathering point for visitors and students where they can peruse books, meet friends, relax, and sometimes attend class meetings.

The episode's title originates from Beck's fascination with the mathematical phrase "the limit of a function," which is used in calculus to argue that behavior of a function continues only if all the limits agree to the function. This title was intended as a reference to my ongoing discussion with Beck about the instrumentalization of the artist figure: that is, when the artist is brought into an institution to respond to a specific issue or topic the institution wants addressed. This wry commentary brings us back to the question, Where is the independence of the artist's practice in this institutional atmosphere where everything on the surface relies on the context of the Carpenter Center? That independence is at first challenging to see. Beck, in essence, became part of the institution, working as a team and creating cohesion with the staff at the Carpenter Center. By embedding himself within the institution, even when physically absent, he staked out a position for speech, not unlike the ways in which each episode represents various speech modalities engaged by the institution. Beck identified

means for the artist to speak from within the institution by inhabiting these forms of institutional address—from the architecture to a press release, artist talk, and exhibition. One can only do that from *within* the institution. Furthermore, Beck undertook a novel form of critique that emerged as a consequence of the project rather than something preconceived. He used the institution's history as a case study in public address, learning the language of CCVA in almost chameleonlike fashion to speak from the same points of address, and yet speak differently. All of the episodes have that form of public address, almost always reserved by the institution to control. So, as one looks closer at a history of critical practices that have made an impact, such as Michael Asher's, the antagonistic perspective assigned to the long search for autonomy (pitting artist against institution) gives way here to a more mutual mode of critique through methodologies applied to the exhibition form and alignment with (but *slightly off*) institutional practice.

### **Toward Functioning Limits**

Martin Beck's *Program* delved into the Carpenter Center's founding mission to be an arts and education institution, and it brought that history forward into a spatial context in the present moment. The project drew attention to the physical, historical, and educational modes of public address used by the institution. We learned a great deal from his engagement with CCVA. Our perspectives changed, as did the Carpenter Center itself. Beck's walls from *Removed and Applied* continually affect the experience of the space. His furniture from *The Limit of a Function* continually adds to the sociability of the Carpenter Center. *Reality Is Invisible* brought forward an overlooked history and instituted a new ritual in the sequence of academic events. These three episodes, along with others outlined in this book, impact the perspective of visitors, students, staff, and faculty who inhabit the Carpenter Center. Beck utilized the open form of an extended residency and the expanded time frame of the exhibition—a context—to explore the social relations with the institution among the curator, administrators,

faculty, students, and visitors, creating a subplot alongside the main plot of *Program*. In this way, the methodologies of exhibition-making shaped a new institutional identity, not from the history trolled for the main plot of *Program* but from the structural conditions of context. A new way of *being institution*.

From this vantage point, how can institutions balance the need to perform institution for the public realm while better supporting artists over the long term? To start, an institution could once again act as a production site as much as a distribution outlet. Just like the Carpenter Center in the early days, we need to unhinge the art institution from institutionalization, from the responsibilities accumulated and put on it over the decades. The route forward to this new institution could be articulated by the artist and the curator working and thinking together as co-conspirators. Our work with Martin Beck at CCVA was a perfect storm in this regard.

1 *Bauhaus: A Teaching Idea* ran from November 26, 1966, to January 22, 1967.

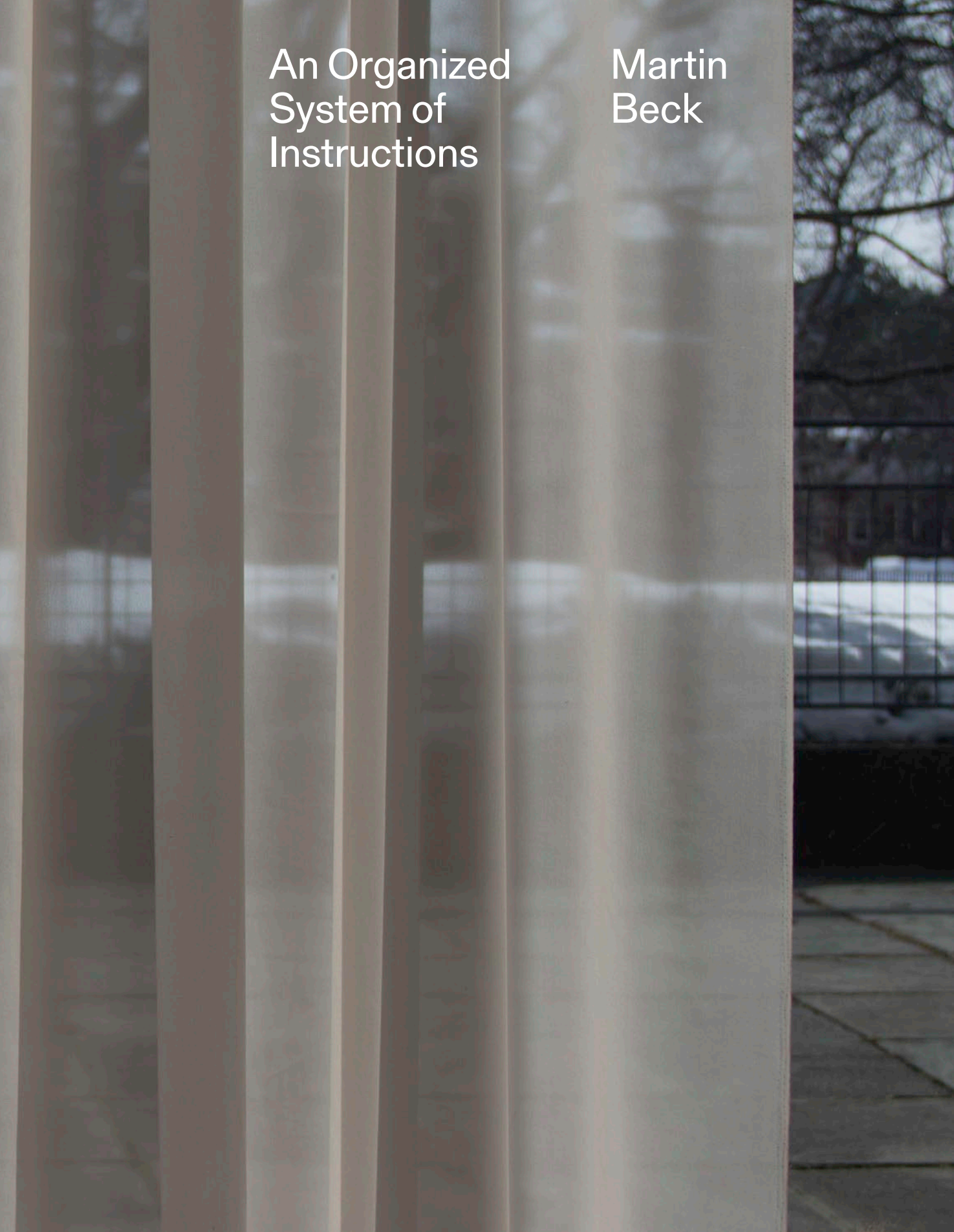
2 The term "institutional critique" first appeared in print in Mel Ramsden's essay "On Practice" (1975). As Alexander Alberro points out in his introduction to an anthology of artists' writings on the institution, Ramsden "criticizes the overall general instrumentalization of art, and in particular the hegemonic dominance of the New York art world." See Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, eds., *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writings* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), 8.

3 In an interview with Rebecca McGrew, Glicksman relates the story that in 1969, after being director at Pomona for one year, he visited the studio of artist Lloyd Hamrol who had made a drawing in space out of red tubing. Glicksman asked him to

exhibit it. Hamrol said he needed too much time, labor, and assistance to make it and that he liked "to do things for the space." Glicksman tells McGrew that Hamrol gave him the idea and Glicksman told Hamrol: "Well, why don't we have a gallery that functions like an artist's residency? And you could come and take all the time you need to do the piece." Quoted in "Hal Glicksman Interviewed by Rebecca McGrew," in *It Happened at Pomona: Art at the Edge of Los Angeles 1969-1973*, Rebecca McGrew, ed. (Claremont: Pomona College Museum of Art, 2011), 100.

4 Martin Beck, "Alternative: Space," in *Alternative Art: New York, 1965-1985*, Julie Ault, ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; New York: Drawing Center, 2002).

5 Beck, "Alternative: Space," 257.



An Organized  
System of  
Instructions

Martin  
Beck

# An Organized System of Instructions

Martin  
Beck

Editor  
James Voorhies

Carpenter Center  
for the Visual Arts

Sternberg  
Press

11		Process document excerpts
<b>Institution Building</b>		Martin Beck
James Voorhies	7	May 22, 2014
21		
<b>Functioning Limits</b>	33	May 27, 2014
James Voorhies	49	June 5-6, 2014
61		
<b>Seven Contemplations on <i>Program</i></b>	57	July 24, 2014
Keller Easterling	71	August 3, 2014
123		
<b>Institutional Sensibility</b>	83	August 9, 17, 2014
A Conversation Between	95	September 4
Alex Kitnick and Martin Beck		December 23, 2014
171		
<b>An Organized System of Instructions</b>	107	March 30
Martin Beck		April 5, 2015
	119	May 27, 2015
	139	September 15, 2015
	147	September 22, 2015
	159	November 2, 2015
		May 18, 2016
	167	December 9, 2015
	193	November 14, 2015
		February 12, 2016

37

Removed  
and Applied

53

1963

75

Integration of  
the Program

87

A Report of  
the Committee

99

Photography  
and the City

111

Reality Is  
Invisible

143

The Limit of  
a Function

151

A Social  
Question

163

An Organized  
System of  
Instructions

197

Fifty  
Photographs

206 Contributors

207 Credits



# An Organized System of Instructions

Editor: James Voorhies

Contributors: Martin Beck, Keller Easterling,  
James Goggin, Alex Kitnick, James Voorhies

*An Organized System of Instructions* is the culmination of Martin Beck's exhibition *Program*. The exhibition was a two-year engagement between Beck and the Carpenter Center as part of an expanded mode of residency called Institution (Building), an ongoing platform founded by James Voorhies with the intent to work with artists whose practices benefit from time and resources for extensive research at a particular site or context.

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# Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts

## **Mission**

Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts is dedicated to the synthesis of art, design, and education through the exhibition of existing works and production of new commissions. It strives to bring people, ideas, and objects together in generative ways that provide unparalleled experiences with contemporary art, ultimately enriching the creative and intellectual lives of our audiences.

## **Program**

The Carpenter Center program fosters meaningful engagement among artists, art, and our audiences. Exhibitions, lectures, residencies, publications, performances, screenings, and informal gatherings are choreographed to create a place where visual literacy, knowledge production, contemporary art, and critical inquiry seamlessly meet.

## **Institution (Building)**

Institution (Building) is a biennial invitation to artists to consider the institutional behaviors and practices of the Carpenter Center and Harvard University. In repeated visits to the university over the course of two years, artists engage through an expanded form of exhibition with various facets related to the archive, architecture, and history of the Carpenter Center. Their work manifests in anything from exhibitions, events, and installations to interventions, tours, and publications, taking shape and changing during the residency. Institution (Building) seeks to critically and thoughtfully recover the history of this institution and situate it within broader contexts of contemporary art, culture, and the extraordinary legacy of the Le Corbusier building.

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