PDF-Documentation

Online compendium of the seminar

Art Production in Restriction. Possibilities of Transformative Art Production and Coalition-Building

4-7 September 2015,
Trondheim

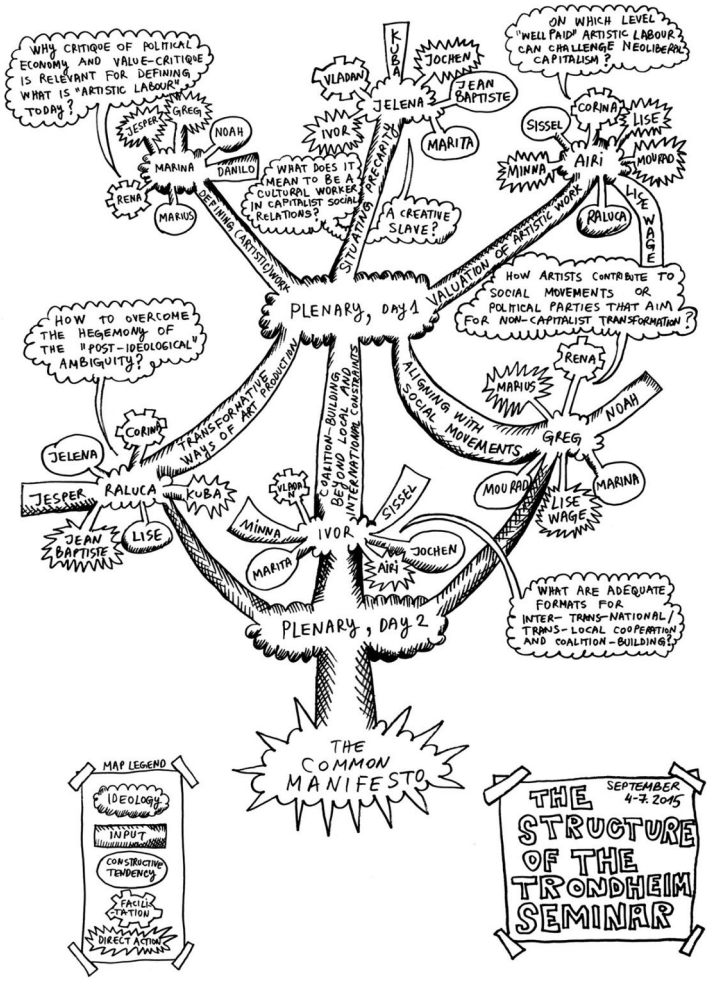
Transformative Art Production

Online compendium of the seminar Art Production in Restriction. Possibilities of Transformative Art Production and Coalition-Building, held in Trondheim, 2015

Content

About the seminar

Art Production in Restriction. Possibilities of Transformative Art Production and Coalition-Building



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This website contains the online compendium of the seminar *Art Production in Restriction. Possibilities of Transformative Art Production and Coalition-Building*. This seminar brings together artists, writers, critics, and curators from Europe and the United States who are active in groups that are struggling for better working conditions in the arts and society at large. The aim of the seminar is to come up with a common method for organizing and coalition-building in the art world and beyond.

Art Production in Restriction. Possibilities of
Transformative Art Production and Coalition-Building
Seminar, 4-7 September 2015
Mini Book Fair, 5-6 September 2015
Nova Kino / Nova Hotell
Cicignons plass
Trondheim, Norway

https://transformativeartproduction.net
http://levart.no

LevArt

Since the neoliberal attack on public institutions of art and art education, artistic work has become an entrepreneurial activity within a restrictive framework conditioned by the expanding art market and hegemonic political agendas prescribing the usefulness of art. The division of labor in the creative and knowledge industries has formed huge masses of artists that serve as a "reserve army" for cheap creative labor.

In recent years artists have organized themselves in new ways, developing strategies to agitate for better labor conditions and certain standards of payment for artistic work.
Major discussions dealing with the conditions of artistic production address the precarity that artistic labor has in common with other branches of "immaterial" and reproductive, or "invisible", labor. In this context, artistic work is seen as a model for highly-exploitative working relations in late capitalism. To understand what kind of precarity is at stake one needs to take into account the whole process of production and the position of the artist within it.

Obviously, we should distinguish between the precarity of Thai berry pickers working in the forests of Finland and Norway and the position of artists that, believing in the idea of liberated work, have to labor under precarious conditions. Less obvious, but no less real, are the different levels of precarity due to the social stratification of the art world. This encompasses artists producing pieces for the art market, artists working in art management and administration, and community and non-profit-oriented art practices.

In examining these differences and contradictions, with conditions varying considerably between the peripheries and centers of capital, between the global South and North, can the general precarity of art production be seen to function as a common denominator in artists' struggles for better working conditions? Or, do we need a different political basis for coalition-building that would be realized in a different model of production? How can this different production model support coalition-building? In such a setting, can the autonomy of artistic production become an emancipatory force, or should artists join social movements and political parties of the new left that aim for non-capitalist transformation?

Seminar

This seminar brings together artists, writers, critics, and curators who are active

in groups that are struggling for better working conditions in the arts and society at large. Throughout the course of two days participants will discuss theoretical conceptions of artistic labor and precarity, exchange local and transnational experiences in confronting the neoliberal entrepreneurial mode of art production, and strategize models of transformative and emancipatory art production and organizing.

Featuring: **Airi Triisberg** (Tallinn), **Corina L Apostol** (ArtLeaks, Bucharest), **Danilo Prnjat** (DeMaterijalizacija umetnosti, Belgrade), **Gregory Sholette** (New York), **Ivor Stodolsky** (Perpetuum Mobile, Berlin), **Jean-Baptiste Naudy** (Ateliers Populaires de Paris), **Jelena Vesić** (Belgrade), **Jesper Alvær** (Oslo), **Jochen Becker** (metroZones, Berlin), **Kuba Szreder** (Warsaw), **Lise Skou** (Aarhus), **Lise Soskolne** (W.A.G.E., New York), **Marina Vishmidt** (London), **Marita Muukkonen** (Perpetuum Mobile, Helsinki), **Marius Lervåg Aasprong** (Trondheim), **Minna Henriksson** (Helsinki), **Mourad El Garouge** (Ateliers Populaires de Paris), **Noah Fischer** (Occupy Museums, New York), **Raluca Voinea** (ArtLeaks, Bucharest), **Sissel M Bergh** (Trøndelag Bildende Kunstnere, Trondheim)

For information about the seminar please contact Anne-Gro Erikstad, Project Leader and Curator at LevArt.

Mini Book Fair

The Mini Book Fair features publications and artists' editions dealing with the topics of art and work. Seminar participants and artists and writers from Trondheim will present their publications to the audience.
Working hours:
Saturday, 5 September 2015, 18-20h
Sunday, 6 September 2015, 18-20h

Exhibition

A Real Work of Art – art, work, and solidarity structures
Exhibition, 2-20 September 2015
RAM Galleri
Kongens gate 3
Oslo

Featuring: **Corina L. Apostol** (ArtLeaks), **Federico Geller**, **Fokus Grupa**, **Nikolay Oleynikov** (Chto Delat?) and **Iulia Toma**

September 2, 6pm
Opening of the exhibition with a promotion of the ArtLeaks Gazette #3. It will be accompanied by the lecture "Art Workers Between Precarity and Resistance: A Genealogy" by Corina L. Apostol (ArtLeaks).

The seminar is curated by **Rena Raedle** and **Vladan Jeremic** (Belgrade). Raedle & Jeremic were invited as guest curators at LevArt (Levanger) and RAM Galleri (Oslo) in 2015 as part of an ongoing project collaboration between the two institutions. The project received financial support from Arts Council Norway.

At RAM Gallery, Raedle & Jeremic present the exhibition *A Real Work of Art*. Please contact Madeleine Park, Director at RAM Galleri, for further information about the exhibition. Preliminary research for this project was done during a residency of the artists at The Nordic Artists' Centre.

Financial support for this project/seminar provided by
Arts Council Norway and Nordic Culture Point.

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Last Updated July 21, 2018.

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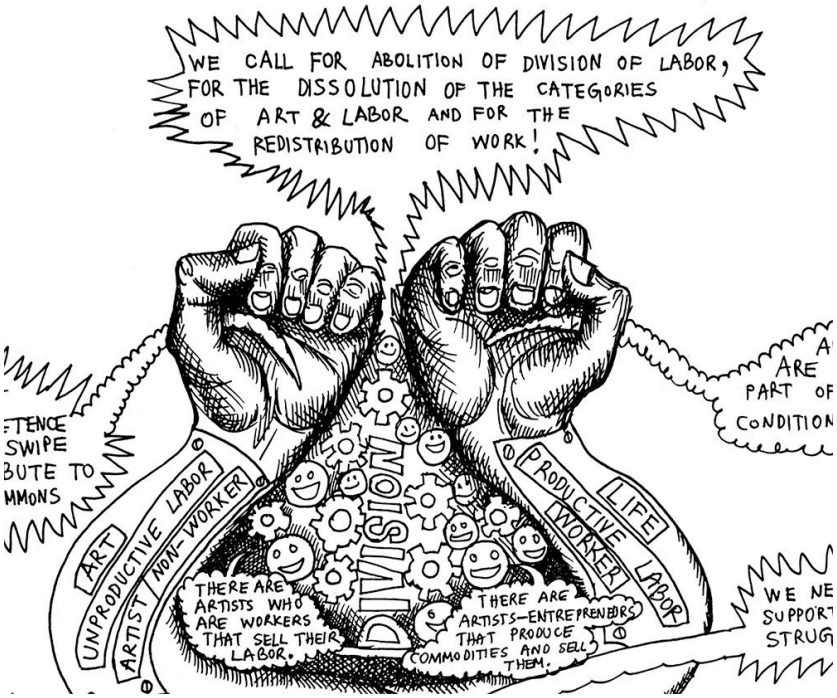
Transformative Art Production

Online compendium of the seminar Art Production in Restriction. Possibilities of Transformative Art Production and Coalition-Building, held in Trondheim, 2015

Contradictions and Transformative Trajectory of Art & Labor

Rena Raedle & Vladan Jeremic



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Conclusions of the Trondheim Seminar

The Trondheim Seminar

This paper presents the conclusions of the Trondheim Seminar on transformative art production and coalition-building, curated in September 2015 by Rena Raedle and Vladan Jeremic as guest curators at LevArt.

The seminar “Art Production in Restriction – Possibilities of Transformative Art Production and Coalition-Building” held in Trondheim, Norway had brought together artists, writers, critics, and curators who are active in groups that are struggling for better working conditions in the arts and society at large. Throughout the course of two days participants discussed theoretical conceptions of artistic labor and precarity, exchanged local and trans-local experiences in confronting the neoliberal entrepreneurial mode of art production, and strategized ways of transformative and emancipatory art production and organizing.

Since the neoliberal attack on public institutions of art and art education, artistic work has become an entrepreneurial activity within a restrictive framework conditioned by the expanding art market and hegemonic political agendas prescribing the usefulness of art. The division of labor in the creative and knowledge industries has formed huge masses of artists that serve as a ‘reserve army’ for cheap creative labor.

In recent years artists have organized themselves in new ways, developing strategies to push for better labor conditions and secure standards for minimum payment of artistic work. Major discussions dealing with the conditions of artistic production address the precarity that artistic labor has in common with other branches of ‘immaterial’ and reproductive, or ‘invisible’, labor. In this context, artistic work is seen as a model for highly-exploitative working relations in late capitalism. To understand what kind of precarity is at stake one needs to take into account the whole process of production and the position of the artist within it.

Obviously, we should distinguish between the precarity of Thai berry pickers working in the forests of Finland and Norway and the position of artists that, believing in the idea of liberated work, have to labor under precarious conditions. Less obvious, but no less real, are the different levels of precarity due to the social stratification of the art world. This encompasses artists producing pieces for the art market, artists working in art management and administration, and community and non-profit oriented art practices.

In examining these differences and contradictions, with conditions varying considerably between the peripheries and centers of capital, between the global South and North, can the general precarity of art production be seen to function as a common denominator in artists’ struggles for better working conditions? Or, do we need a different political basis for coalition-building that would be realized in a different model of production? How can a different production model support coalition-building? In such a setting, can the autonomy of artistic production become an emancipatory force, or should artists join social movements and political parties of the new left that aim for non-capitalist transformation?

The contributors to the seminar “Art Production in Restriction. Possibilities of Transformative Art Production and Coalition-Building” investigated these and other questions with the aim to come up with a joint paper that contains findings, agreed points and recommendations.

The seminar started with a welcome speech by leading curator Anne-Gro Erikstad on behalf of the inviting institution from Levanger. She briefly introduced the activities and mission of LevArt, a project space for contemporary art of the Levanger Commune. Erikstad stressed the urgency of the seminar themes in the times when neoliberal reforms of cultural policies in Norway have serious negative impacts on artists' working conditions. After that, the organizers of the seminar, Rena Raedle and Vladan Jeremić, guest curators at LevArt project space, greeted the guests. They explained the proceedings of the seminar with the aid of a drawing they had prepared.

To reserve as much time as possible for exchange and discussion, the seminar was organized in working groups. Relevant papers and materials were shared during the preparation phase and published at the seminar Online Compendium at transformativeartproduction.net. The results of the working groups were presented in public plenary sessions in the afternoon.

In the evenings, a Mini Book Fair was organized that featured publications and artists' editions dealing with the topics of art and work. Seminar participants and artists and writers from Trondheim presented their publications to the audience: Minna L. Henriksson and Airi Triisberg presented their book "Art Workers – Material Conditions and Labor Struggles in Contemporary Art Practice" covering experiences from Finland, Sweden and Estonia, Kuba Szreder introduced the publication "Joy Forever: The Political Economy of Social Creativity" by Free/Slow University of Warsaw, Gregory Sholette presented his book "Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture" and the brand new publication "The Gulf: High Culture/ Hard Labor" about the campaigns and actions of Gulf Labor Coalition. Anne-Gro Erikstad presented Lisa Stålspets artist book "A home for Artists" and Corina L. Apostol presented the ArtLeaks Gazette No.3.

The installation "10 working days", a re-reading of Peter Weiss's "Ten Working Theses of an Author in the Divided World" from 1968 and contribution by Florian Schneider's research group at the Trondheim Art Academy was at display in the seminar premises. With the idea to get a glimpse of translocal history of the place, the first evening an excursion to the Falstad Memorial center of the SS-prison camp at Falstad in Levanger municipality about one hour bus drive north of Trondheim was organized. The last evening the group was kindly hosted for a beautiful dinner served by Heidi-Anett & Lena Katrine alias Kunstkantina and a wonderful never-ending party at Rake Workcommunity at Svartlamon.

Below we will give summaries of the six plenary sessions, where the results of the working groups were presented and discussed. After that follows a conclusion with findings, agreed points and recommendations that were derived from the discussions during the seminar. The textual conclusion is accompanied by the drawing “Contradictions and Transformative Trajectory of Art & Labor”.

Summaries of the Plenary Sessions

Plenary Session 1, 5 September 2015

Working group 1: Defining (artistic) work: artistic labor / precarious work / unpaid labor / reproductive work / flexible work/ forced labor

Contributors: Marina Vishmidt (presenter), Jesper Alvær, Noah Fischer, Marius Lervåg Aasprong, Danilo Prnjat, Rena Raedle, Gregory Sholette.

The input for the working group on definitions of artistic labor was given by Danilo Prnjat. He reflected the notion of the ‘art worker’ in the context of the avant-garde and posed general questions on participation. In the following discussion, the contradictions in defining artistic labor were drawn up and it was debated what kind of unification and cohesion certain concepts presuppose and what their implications for coalition-building are. There were two aspects looked into, from where artistic labor can be grabbed, the concept of *productive* and *unproductive labor*, and the concept of *division of labor*.

From a capitalist standpoint artistic work is *unproductive labor* as it partakes in the distribution rather than the production of surplus value. The question was put that if artistic labor is assumed to be productive labor, that means **if artists identify as ‘art workers’ and organize as such, do they then just ask for a bigger share of the surplus value produced elsewhere, thus benefiting from exploitation?**

A historical comparison with the 60s generation of political or activist artists in the US and West Europe identifying as ‘cultural workers’ shows that their structural position was actually quite elite compared to most workers, and secured in the context of the welfare state compared to today’s competitive (debt) environment. But workers did not become a driving force for large-scale social change. On the contrary contrary, artists are today structurally part of a general condition of precarity. It was argued that the **identification with the ‘worker’ today could be an attempt to break with this increasingly exploitative entrepreneurial norm, as a class politics acknowledging the class struggle within and outside of the field of art.**

Discussing the second concept, it was stated, that if we want to describe artistic labor from the viewpoint of the *division of labor*, it is hard to say if artistic labor is mental and manual labor, which makes labor politics of art more complex. The question then could be not how to unite with workers, but **how to break with or break the social division of labor that produces art and labor as distinct spaces and categories?** So, the urgency is to break with divisions of labor, – not to re-distribute interpretive power, as institutional critique did. It was argued that we **instead need a re-distribution of work – and we can’t fight for workers without addressing our own working conditions.**
So, if the objective is to **dissolve the categories of art/labor, art/life,**

what do we put in the gap? What kind of gap is it: a terminological, social, ontological, material one? It might be a *theoretical gap* first of all: does 'art' do a certain kind of work that you would just need to find another designation for? Or it might be a *material gap*: how do you then abolish distinctions which are socially operative?

The implications of these concepts for the artistic practice were then laid out in more concrete terms. It was noted that managerial structures and corporate reward structures pervade the art world just as they pervade the non-profit sphere. That means that the speculative value created by the art CEOs, art middle managers, etc. is disproportionally more rewarded than value created by reproductive labor and care work by the art workers, art lumpenproletariat, etc. There are the **class relations within art and the class relation which art reproduces in general**, and we need to see what definition of labor is most adequate for art workers in their political practice. **Art could be seen here as a *tactical space* – people using the relative freedom and resources of art as a means of getting somewhere else.**

It was proposed that if we aim to dissolve the categories art/labor, art/life, **artistic practice could be described as *competence*, as the term translates well across different fields and can be used as a lever for communication with people outside the art world**, albeit it is loaded with neoliberal managerial connotations. Along these lines it was proposed that our competence as artists might then be **our ability to steal and re-distribute: to puncture and rupture the walls of art's bastion of privilege and to steal and re-distribute to the undercommons.**

5 September 2015, Plenary session 2

Working group 2: Situating precarity: Social stratification and increased precarity in the art world / differences in the level of precarity between artistic and non-artistic work

Contributors: Jelena Vesić (presenter), Jochen Becker, Vladan Jeremic, Marita Muukkonen, Jean-Baptiste Naudy, Kuba Szreder, Ivor Stodolsky

The input for the group discussing precarity was given by Kuba Szreder, who presented his concept of *radical opportunism* as a form of engagement within neoliberal conditions of production in culture.

In the following discussion it was stated that the neoliberal model of capitalist production, in which work is organized in short-term projects with changing employers and employees, brings **forward flexible, opportunistic, competitive, short-term working contracts in the greater economy and in the art field.**

It was problematized that precarious working conditions in the sense of freelance jobs have become paradigmatic in the cultural field and they are both, chosen and imposed. Therefore it is necessary to **differentiate various levels of precarity:** for example migrant workers that are deprived of any legal status and flexible and partly self-imposed working relations in project-oriented work.

Furthermore it was stated that **opportunistic behavior and clientelistic networking typical for flexible labor conditions create structural exclusion and hinders the political organization of cultural workers.** On the other hand, the dialectic between the growth of cultural industries and the **growing capacity of self-organization** was stressed, which furthers articulation and development of alternative cooperative economic models.

5 September 2015, Plenary Session 3 & discussion

Working group 3: Valuation of artistic work: problems of quantification of work / Art and economic alternatives

Contributors: Airi Triisberg (presenter), Corina L. Apostol, Sissel M Bergh, Mourad El Garouge, Minna L. Henriksson, Lise Skou, Lise Soskolne, Raluca Voinea

The input for the discussion about valuation of artistic labor was given by Lise Soskolne. She presented the strategy of Working Artists and the Greater Economy (W.A.G.E.), a New York-based activist organization focused on regulating the payment of artist fees by nonprofit art institutions. The organization has developed a certification format for institutions that comply with minimum standards for the remuneration of artistic work, a strategy that relies on the “reputation economy” of the targeted art institutions. Currently W.A.G.E. is working on a

complementary individual certification model functioning in direction of a union-like organization of workers.

During the discussion, two general strategies of framing artistic labor were elaborated, that conceptualize artistic labor either as commodity or as social contribution. The first **subsumes artistic labor under wage labor**, with the possibility to extend the demanded standards of payment to other workers in or even beyond art institutions. The possibility of internationalization of such standards was discussed. Examples of national standardization campaigns and reached agreements in Sweden and Poland were given.
A number of challenges of the "wage labor-strategy" were addressed, especially in a transnational context. The necessity of a relevant **transnational counter-power able to pressure employers to meet wage demands** and the complexity of **standardization of payment** within globalized working relations was emphasized. It was criticized that standardization also might imply exclusion of certain groups that cannot meet the established standards.

The critical distinction was made that W.A.G.E. does not subsume artistic labor under wage labor. A foundational principle of W.A.G.E. Certification is the fact that an artist fee is distinctly not a wage for the work of making art and is defined as payment for the work an artist does once they enter into a transactional relationship with an arts organization.

The group discussed the difficulties of framing artistic labor as wage labor, because there seems to be a strong resistance against that in the art field, and a certain desire to think about artistic labor as an exceptional form of labor. The point was made that **if artistic work is understood as social contribution and not as a commodity it can serve as a model for the reconfiguration of the concept of labor, that would bring about a different model of economy.**

Examples of **alternative economies** were discussed amongst them cooperatives based on exchange economies and their own currencies from Spain and Greece. It was underlined that alternative economies go together with a certain *de-skilling* of individual labor. The discussion ended with the open question how the reduction or even termination of division of labor would affect artistic practice within such economies.

Plenary Session 1, 6 September 2015

Working group 4: Possibilities and difficulties of coalition-building beyond local and international constraints

Contributors: Ivor Stodolsky (presenter), Jochen Becker, Marita Muukkonen, Minna L. Henriksson, Sissel M Bergh, Vladan Jeremic

The input for the group working on possibilities and difficulties of coalition-building beyond local and international constraints was given by Minna Henriksson. She presented a case study about the Mänttä Art Festival in Finland, an annual exhibition project in the Finnish periphery that invited international artists without paying for fees and production. After examining particular problems of this case, general methods of finding common ground for building alliances were debated.

It was stated that for aligning with social movements, **art has to locate itself in the wider social field**. Starting from the universal common

needs people share, more particular interests can be articulated and negotiated in the spirit of solidarity. In a local situation, community building can be achieved through spotting of specific issues, referendums, commoning of resources, building of project groups and collectives. The operaist method of ***co-research***, a research method that intends to erase the border between researcher and the object of research, **was proposed as method to find and define common demands.**

As a central challenge to the communication between different groups the **necessity of translation between different terminologies and "languages"** was emphasized. It was stated that expert terminologies are important but need to be made accessible to communicate with other groups. Local knowledges and languages informed by cultural or social backgrounds need to be reformulated. In this respect it was underlined that **art has the advantage of being a more "universal" form of communication**. The point was made that the translation / reframing / reformulation of needs or problems into political demands is at the core of political empowerment and representation. **Careful reformulation, translation and re-translation is especially important to find common grounds for alliances** in trans-local contexts. This means that existing organizations need to develop the capacity to reformulate their problems, demands and political strategies keeping in mind a trans-local approach.

Another important issue of discussion was the need of adequate spaces for gathering and voicing demands. **Spaces for meeting were found to be a precondition for finding common grounds and aligning of different groups and movements.** In this context the question was raised if the spaces of the art world such as biennials and art fairs, can be at all considered suitable spaces for such purposes. It was stressed that a welcoming public space open to everyone needs to be created. In addition, the fact that one needs to be aware that these spaces are also open to recuperation from other forces was discussed.

In terms of language, the argument was made that for describing international alliances today it is necessary to find alternatives to the words "national" and "global" that stem from the discourse of capitalist market globalization and nation state politics. Instead of "inter-national" or "trans-national" **the terms "trans-local" (rooted in more than one situation) or "pre-mondial" were proposed.** The term "mondial" could be used for naming a 'globalization from below'.

Plenary Session 2, 6 September 2015

Working group 5:
Transformative ways of art production: Artistic contribution as class struggle

Contributors: Raluca Voinea (presenter), Corina L. Apostol, Danilo Prnjat, Jean-Baptiste Naudy, Jelena Vesić, Jesper Alvær, Kuba Szreder, Lise Skou

The input for the group discussing transformative ways of art production was given by Jesper Alvær, who presented examples of his artistic research on art and labor. For the plenary session, the group prepared a collective statement to articulate contradictions and potentials of artistic practice that makes links with subjects positioned outside of the art field.

In the beginning it was stated that the group speaks from the position of artists and cultural workers. The group stressed that the emancipatory force of art can only be realized if art doesn't exploit people in the interest of art but if art puts itself in the interest of the people. It was underlined that **artists can use their privileges and status in a tactical way to support certain causes.**

The **relation to the institution of art was identified as main contradiction** and the group called for the **re-appropriation of the definition of social practice,** but as well the **re-appropriation of the notion of aesthetics** from the institutions. The notion of aesthetics needs to be remobilized in a way that can (1) stimulate he imagination of the oppressed to form a liberating force not limited by conventions, (2) that can change the notion of the real, of what is normal and of what is acceptable. ***Playfulness*** **was proposed as a tactic/strategy to counter rules and expectations.**

In the plenum discussion problematized that **artistic practice nevertheless remains bound and valued within the institution of art**, although rules of the institution can be subverted and institutional space can be used tactically and playfully for non-art purposes and common social or political causes. It was underlined that **artists must be aware of their manifold privileges when they join coalitions for social struggles with other groups.** The artist can go out on the "playing field" of other social struggles and then return and harvest the value of his/her practice in the institution of art. However, the question of accumulation of cultural capital and funding come up. On the other hand, one can also lose, be blacklisted by either an institution or a movement.

The **best meeting place for making coalitions was found to be outside of the art institutions,** in the public space, on the streets. This is the "playing field" outside of safe boundaries of art institutions, where artists can show what contribution they have to offer for a common cause.

Plenary Session 3, 6 September 2015

Working group 6: Aligning with social movements

Contributors: Gregory Sholette (presenter), Airi Triisberg, Lise Soskolne, Marina Vishmidt, Marius Lervåg Aasprong, Mourad El Garouge, Noah Fischer, Rena Raedle

The input for the group discussing alignment with other social movements was given by Noah Fischer. He reported on artists involvement in the Occupy Wall Street movement in 2011. Fischer described forms of organizing that emerged and gave examples of coalitions with social movements that came out from Occupy, such as the Art and Labor Group, Gulf Labor Coalition and G.U.L.F.

It was stated that in recent years a striking growth of coalitions between art and labor and art and justice campaigns can be noted, such as Gulf Labor Coalition, Liberate Tate, Australia, Precarious Workers Brigade, ArtLeaks, Art & Labor or the occurrence of labor strikes at the National Gallery London. It was proposed that the **raise of consciousness about the relation between art and labor can be explained through the global economic crises and capital's turn from generating surplus value based on labor towards pure forms of financialization.**

In respect to these coalitions, the advantages and disadvantages of positioning / identifying the artist as artist or as worker were discussed. Both positions were elaborated.

On one side, art can be defended as a *special kind of labor*, that is useful to non-art political coalitions and social movements. Art helps to get media attention. Furthermore **art and culture can generate and expand the collective embodiment of resistance and help to turn it into objective social forces.**

The other position sees art as *non-special work* similar to any other type of precarious work, because it is part of the "social factory" (Mario Tronti), where all aspects of life are fully subordinated to capital. This **common condition of precariousness and existential risk encourage the artists to build bridges to organized labor unions** outside of the art world.
The need to distinguish **two positions of the artist in the process of production, either as a wage laborer or as an entrepreneur**, was discussed: either as workers that sell their labor or as entrepreneurs that employ others, produce commodities and sell them.

The group concluded that in order to become active outside the prescribed spaces of the art field a certain *naïveté* is required by the artist. The group argued that to operate within a social movement or any other coalition, the artist needs to take the risk of setting herself/himself aside and to **actively forget certain conventions and habits of imminent critique or ever-growing cynicism**. The notion of *active naïveté* by Antonio Negri was proposed to describe this relation towards moments and spaces from where coalitions can arise.

In the plenum, building solidarity was stressed as most important aspect in the process of coalition-building. The **problem of patronizing attitudes** was addressed. It was stated that **solidarity arises from the joint struggle for mutual liberation** and that objective class differences don't need to result in patronization if coalitions are negotiated as partnerships. Within the movement, artists do not need to represent artists-authors, they are members that **use their artistic competencies as part of and in solidarity with the movement.**

We need to be aware that engagement in social struggles can reveal deep *contradictions*: s**elf-exploitation, cooptation by institutions, parties, NGO's, conservative and reactionary political attitudes, discrepancy between an idealized situation and a concrete political reality.**

Conclusion: Findings, Agreed Points and Recommendations for Transformative Art Production and Coalition-Building

1. The Troubles with Artistic Labor

The contradictory character of artistic labor that can be described as both non-work and role model of labor has become paradigmatic for the general position of labor in modern relations of production. Artistic labor plays an important role in social reproduction – amongst many other forms of unpaid labor. To problematize this relation it makes perfect sense that artists redefine their labor as productive labor and, in line with this argument, claim "wage for work". Even more so since the exploitative entrepreneurial norm artists are subjected to, has become a common norm of general precarious labor conditions. Yet this isn't the end of the road. It is futile to differentiate artistic labor as manual or mental labor, as productive or unproductive work or as wage-labor or reproductive labor.

Nonetheless, the question remains: how do we break the social division of labor that produces art and labor as distinct spaces and categories? For that we need a re-distribution of work that represents the link through which artists can get involved in a common struggle, addressing their own working conditions. With the abolition of the division of labor, with the dissolution of the categories art / labor, artistic activity and the value of art would undergo a complete re-definition. Thus, the problematization of artistic labor and the material working conditions of artists is an eligible field where common ground needs to be found with other workers / non-workers.

2. Ways of Labor Struggle in the Arts

Artists' unions and other artists organizations demand the standardization of fees to be implemented by state institutions and non-profit art institutions, based on either legal guarantees or voluntary certification of employing institutions. While the strategy of standardization of wage shows successes within local frameworks, limitations become obvious in transnational working relations of the art world. Standards would have to be relative to local living and working conditions, an institution that could control these standards doesn't exist and localities or groups that don't meet a minimum standard would be excluded from every scope of action.

Instead, individual commitment to dignified standards of labor and solidarity with local social struggles through withholding of labor, organized boycott of problematic art manifestations, solidarity or shaming campaigns and direct action against institutions disrespecting labor rights become powerful tools supporting a translocal struggle for transformation of labor on common basis. The symbolic act of withholding of labor from a biennale is a legitimate tool to support the cause of a local community. The effect of such boycott grows proportional to the cultural capital of an artist. More sustainable alliances with groups from outside the art-world require engagement of artists in the wider social field.
How and on which common ground these alliances can be build and where is the place of the artist within such coalitions?

3. Recommendations for Alliances and Coalition-Building

Finding common ground, from universal common needs to more particular interests, is the precondition of any alliance. Artists can help in the translation and re-translation, reformulation and reframing of needs and problems that are articulated by different groups. Translation between different terminologies and languages informed by social and cultural backgrounds gains importance in translocal approaches to finding common grounds. Art and culture are also powerful means to create cohesion and to form a collective identity of social movements.

In practice, artists share a common continuum with the general precarious condition of labor. Not only in the art world, opportunistic behavior and clientelistic networking typical for flexible labor conditions create structural exclusion and hinders the political organization of workers. A material distinction of the position of artists in the process of production can be made: There are artists who sell their labor and there are artists-entrepreneurs that employ others to produce commodities and sell them.

Another peculiarity that makes troubles in coalition-building between artists and non-art groups lies in the artists' relationship towards the institution of art. It needs to be acknowledged that artistic practice stays

bound and valued in the institution of art and therefrom a number of contradictions come up, when artists link their practice to the wider social field.

Rules of the institution can be subverted and institutional space can be used tactically for non-art purposes to gain visibility for common causes. Artists can use their privileges and they can re-appropriate the definition of social practice and aesthetics. The notion of aesthetics can be remobilized as a space for imagination and liberating force of the oppressed, that can change the notion of the real.

But the emancipatory force of art can only be realized if art doesn't exploit social movements in the interest of art but if art becomes a means in the hands of the people. Alliances and coalitions can only become sustainable if solidarity is developed in a struggle for mutual liberation, and not through patronizing attitudes.

Consequently, the best meeting place for making coalitions is definitively the space outside of the institutions, because here it is where artists can show what their contribution to a common cause really is. To engage in social struggles can reveal deep contradictions: discrepancy between ideal and political reality, self-exploitation and cooptation by institutions, parties or NGO's, confrontation with conservative and reactionary political forces and all forms of repression. For the artist, this might mean to give up certain peculiarities of the arts, such as for example authorship, or maybe an artistic career. And she needs to translate/ reframe her/his practice in the light of particular competencies that might be useful for a certain cause.

To be part of a social movement or coalition, the artist needs to take the risk of setting herself/himself aside and to consciously block out certain conventions and habits of the art world, imposing either its imperative of criticality or omnipresent cynicism.
It is a 'responsible playfulness' or 'conscious naiveté' that allows the artist to be part of a moment and to enter the space from where coalitions towards transformation emerge.

This report was written by Rena Raedle and Vladan Jeremić in Belgrade, December 2015 and reviewed by Airi Triisberg, Corina L Apostol, Gregory Sholette, Lise Soskolne and Katja Praznik.

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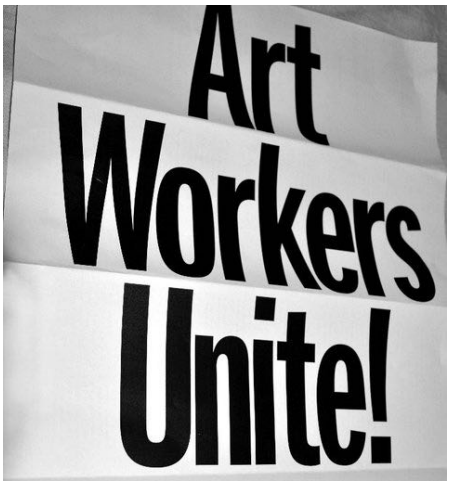
Edit

Art Workers' Movement in Tallinn: The Politics of Disidentification

Airi Triisberg



This text aims to revisit a cycle of struggle that politicised a spectrum of art practitioners in Tallinn and Estonia during 2010–2011. The struggle played out as a collective process of self-organisation, addressing issues related to unpaid labour and lack of social guarantees in the contemporary art sphere. Looking back at this period from the perspective of an activist who was involved in that initiative, I have two objectives when writing this article. First of all, I believe that this short-lived episode of mobilisation represents a significant event in the contemporary art history of Estonia. However, in the heat of self-organisation, very few written documents were produced about the political aims, strategies and activities of the movement. When discussing some key issues that held a central place in our struggle, I wish to fill that gap by contextualising its development. On the other hand, I am also interested in revisiting the process from a critical perspective, reflecting on the challenges that we faced when trying to find political agency in collective action. As I am writing this report from the position of an activist who took part in the collective process, I am aware that my account is a subjective one. Nonetheless, it is important for me to reflect on that experience from the political perspective that I am most affiliated with – even if it is for the sake of setting a frame that can be contested and challenged in the future.

The art workers' movement and its forms of organising

The self-organisation process among art practitioners in Tallinn was triggered by an exhibition that was held in Tallinn Art Hall in winter 2009/2010. The exhibition Blue-Collar Blues, curated by Anders Härm,

was coined as a critical reaction against the new labour legislation in Estonia which had been set in force earlier that year in order to flexibilise the labour market. Within the informal circles of the art field, the exhibition was accompanied by a critical debate, focusing predominantly on the fact that many artists didn't get paid for producing their work. Whilst critically scrutinising the neoliberal changes in the world of labour, the exhibition failed to address the economic conditions of its own production. This obvious contradiction became a catalyst for a wider polemic that problematised precarious working conditions in the contemporary art field.

The event that ultimately sparked off the mobilisation process was a seminar held in the frame of the Blue-Collar Blues exhibition in January 2010. After the end of the seminar, a spontaneous gathering took place in the cellar bar of the Art Hall, in order to discuss issues for which the seminar had offered little space, i.e. the particular position of art workers in relation to precarious labour relations. Approximately 20 art practitioners took part in the first meeting where it was decided to form an alternative artistic association that adopted the name Kaasaegse Kunsti Liit (Union of Contemporary Art). In the following months, the group started meeting regularly in bi- or three-weekly rhythm, and more people gradually joined the initiative. However, the alternative artistic association was never formally established.

In reality, Kaasaegse Kunsti Liit operated as an informal network that was essentially doing militant research – we were primarily mapping and collectivising knowledge about working conditions in the art field, while at the same time politicising ourselves in the course of discussing and analysing these conditions. Occasionally, the network also carried out public interventions, such as writing public letters. Further activities of the network included the seminar Art Workers Unite! in November 2010, the newspaper Art Workers' Voice, which was published as a special insert in the Estonian cultural weekly Sirp in February 2011, as well as several meetings with the representatives of trade unions, artistic associations and cultural policy makers. In support of those activities, a series of related panel discussions were organised in the frame of EKKM Theory Club in winter 2011, somewhat utilising the fact that it happened to be pre-election time in Estonia.

When placing this informal network within the power dynamics of the local art field, it must be noted that, from some perspectives, it may have been perceived as an advocacy group initiated by a small group of like-minded friends and colleagues. Indeed, the main mobilisation ground for Kaasaegse Kunsti Liit was a very particular discursive community, primarily involving younger generation art practitioners who take interest in political art practices. However, as the initiative gained more visibility, it slowly attracted a more diverse spectrum of accomplices. This process was exhilarated especially after the foundation of a Google Groups mailing list in May 2010. Starting out with 20–30 members, the number of subscribers eventually grew to 103, also including art practitioners from other cities than Tallinn. The creation of the mailing list also stimulated a significant shift in the modalities of communication and organising – after an intense cycle of gathering in assemblies in the winter and spring 2010, online debates became more central in the following year. The mailing list, as well as the initiative itself, has been virtually inactive since the second half of

2011. Nonetheless, the mailing list has occasionally still been used for initiating petitions or open letters, mostly addressing issues that are not directly related to the problem of precarious labour any more.

In my view, Kaasaegse Kunsti Liit was neither a failed attempt to establish a new institution nor an isolated advocacy group. I find it much more operative to conceptualise this initiative through the vocabulary of social movements, interpreting it as a collective process of politicisation. Therefore, I prefer to think about Kaasaegse Kunsti Liit as an art workers' movement that was constituted in a particular cycle of struggle which sought to achieve social change in the realm of precarious labour. Whereas it can be debated whether the movement managed to achieve concrete changes in the economic and social situation of art workers, I do believe that its impact was quite far-reaching in terms of changing the discourse how artistic labour is discussed in Estonia.

Mobilisation against unpaid labour within exhibition practice

The initial context, from which the art workers' movement emerged, also set the major tone for its agenda. When collectively mapping material conditions in contemporary art practice, a special attention was turned towards exhibition making. In Estonia, there are only a few art institutions that regularly commission work from artists. As a result of that situation, the task of maintaining the continuity of exhibition practice is largely delegated to artists who take initiative by proposing exhibitions to the programme of non-profit galleries and searching finances to realise those projects. In many cases, the public funding allocated for such exhibition projects only covers the material costs. In virtually all cases, public project funding is not sufficient for covering the labour costs of artists who produce these exhibitions. Ironically, artists occur to be the only players in the exhibition economy who systematically receive no payment for their work. Considering the central role that exhibition making holds in the operating modus of the contemporary art field, this seems to suggest that it is precisely the exhibition practice that should be conceptualised as the key battleground where labour struggles of artists should be anchored and localised.

Many initiatives that have recently emerged in order to struggle against precarious working conditions in the art field, have adopted strategies that are rooted in the working reality of artists. For example, the Reko collective in Stockholm and the W.A.G.E. collective in New York are both largely occupied with monitoring art institutions, in order to advocate for the payment of artist fees. This is a strategy that exercises pressure on the very grassroots level, aiming to trigger a domino effect by forcing art institutions to adopt a different attitude towards contracting artistic labour. In its essence, it is an approach that is largely oriented towards wage negotiations from the position of artists. However, artistic income originates from other sources than exhibition making as well. When placing all cards on wage negotiations within exhibition practice, there is a risk of neglecting other dimensions of the art economy that are also relevant for artists, such as issues related to grant models and social security, or cultural funding and its distribution mechanisms in general. Moreover, in

contexts where artists themselves are the dominant agents who initiate, organise and produce exhibitions, the strategy of wage negotiations implodes. Precarious Workers Brigade has succinctly formulated this paradox in their Bust Your Boss Card, which is also printed in this publication, stressing that the "boss" of a precarious cultural worker can often be the cultural worker itself. This situation seems to set some limits on the strategy of confronting exhibition houses, suggesting that the politics of wage conflict must allow confrontations with funding institutions as well.

That is what essentially happened within the art workers' organising process in Tallinn, even if the mobilisation process sparked off from a situation that could have potentially resulted in a direct confrontation with art institutions that maintain the practice of exploiting unpaid labour. In retrospect, it can be speculated whether such conflict was avoided because some institutional curators joined the organising process from the very beginning, arguing that exhibition budgets depend on funding institutions that regularly refuse to allocate money for expenses that are related to the labour costs of artists. This is certainly true, along with the fact that some art institutions and curators do not even budget artist fees in their funding applications, already assuming that these expenses will not be covered by project funding.

All in all, the newly formed initiative in Tallinn overleaped the division of labour that is somewhat more implicit in the working logic of initiatives such as Reko or W.A.G.E. where artists pressure curators and institutions, so that these would pressure cultural policy makers and funders in order to change the material conditions of art production. As an alternative to that, artists and curators in Tallinn tried to identify conceptual locations of struggle from which they could articulate a wage conflict together.

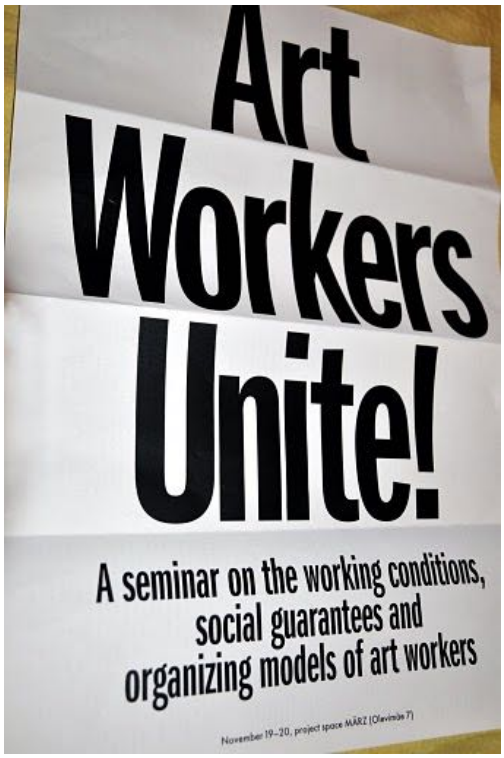
To argue that the avoidance of direct confrontation with art institutions in Estonia was only connected to the objections expressed by institutional curators, however, wouldn't be quite accurate. In the occasional meetings where the strategies of withdrawal, boycott or strike against art institutions were discussed, it was commonly agreed that these strategies would appear powerless in the local situation. The strike scenario was dismissed primarily because the perspective of organising a massive withdrawal from exhibition practice seemed unimaginable due to lack of solidarity among artists themselves. Moreover, when speculating about this scenario in a hypothetical manner, some further challenges arose – for example in connection with the temporality of strike actions that are usually staged within a limited time-frame.

In the context of exhibition making, this would mean that in a specific moment of time, only artists who happen to be scheduled in the exhibition programmes at that particular moment can withdraw or refuse to exhibit, whereas others can support the strike action by doing exactly the opposite – by gathering in assemblies and protest in order to demonstrate their solidarity. The idea of initiating a strike action in the context of exhibition practice thus interestingly seemed to conflate with the strategies of occupying and demonstrating (in fact, some plans for direct action or demonstration were debated indeed, but eventually not realised).

Another concern was related to the legal and financial dimensions of

going on strike – whereas an artists' strike against the exploitative working conditions within exhibition practice would be directed against institutions such as exhibition houses or galleries, the act of withdrawing from an exhibition project would usually imply legal ramifications originating from the side of funding institutions such as the Cultural Endowment of Estonia. This discrepancy results from the fact that even if galleries or art institutions are commonly seen as the employers of artistic labour, there are rarely any formal wage-labour relations, or even written agreements, between the exhibition houses and artists. The cultural funding allocated for exhibition practice is heavily channelled through artists, thus also delegating the responsibility for cancelling a funded exhibition precisely to the artists who have signed the contract with the funding institution.

However, the relationship between funding institutions and artists is not conceived in terms of wage-labour relations. In addition to that, the legislative frameworks regulating the right to strike are closely associated to the modalities of full-time labour and membership in trade unions. As artists have no strike fund from which to compensate the penalties that the funding institutions would potentially require for committing a breach of contract, the idea of strike seemed not only powerless but also very risky. The alternative possibility of boycotting institutions that don't pay artist fees by refusing to exhibit there in the first place, without going into the process of fund-raising or contract signing, was dismissed with the argument that this would mean a speedy end to one's career as an artist. It was assumed that saying no to unpaid labour would result in the out- come of being disinvited from exhibitions rather than getting paid for one's work.



Poster for the Art Workers Unite! seminar which was organised in the context of art workers' movement in Tallinn. Graphic design by Indrek Sirkel, 2010.

The organising process among art practitioners in Tallinn was largely kicked off by scandalising unpaid labour within the context of exhibition practice. However, the economy of exhibition practice was not the only issue that was debated in the emerging movement. In the course of collectively mapping the material conditions in the contemporary art field, the income structure of freelance art practitioners was analysed more broadly. This process required a

close inspection of legislative frameworks relating to cultural funding, labour rights, tax and social security systems in Estonia.

When familiarising ourselves with existing policy and legislative documents, examining the principles of the tax system or scrutinising the differences between various types of work contracts, it caught our attention that free- lance cultural practitioners in Estonia are subjected to income modalities which seem to administer them into a social category that is incompatible with the notion of the working population. A central demand that emerged from this mapping process was thus formulated in the punchline that artistic labour needs to be recognised as such. While increasingly identifying ourselves as workers, we were hoping to find forms of collective agency in the strategic arsenal of workers' struggles.

Trade unions and the challenge of organising

One of the first action plans that emerged in the process of art workers' mobilisation in Tallinn was the idea to form a new artists' union. This ambition was somewhat indicated in the name that the initiative adopted at the very first assembly – Eesti Kaasaegse Kunsti Liit (Estonian Union of Contemporary Art). However, the mailing list founded a few months later carried the name KKL (Kaasaegse Kunsti Liit, or Union of Contemporary Art), evicting the nationalist adjective. In order to elaborate the context from which this name emerged, it is important to explain the "inside joke" that the initial proposal was transporting. An organisation called Eesti Kaasaegse Kunsti Liit would have carried the acronym EKKL, representing another instance in the process of hijacking the names of existing art institutions by adding an extra K for kaasaegne (contemporary). In 2006, for example, EKKM, Eesti Kaasaegse Kunsti Muuseum (Contemporary Art Museum Estonia), had been established as a counter-institution defining itself against EKM, Eesti Kunstimuuseum (Art Museum of Estonia).

Following the same logic, EKKL would have been formed as a counter-organisation to EKL, Eesti Kunstnike Liit (Estonian Artists' Association) which is an umbrella organisation uniting several associations of artists and art historians. Established in 1943, the organisation initially functioned as a trade union. Acting in the largely symbolic manner, that was characteristic for trade unions in the Soviet Union, the Estonian Artists' Association provided health care, studios, flats, vacation vouchers, pension and, not least importantly, status insignia for its members during Soviet time. After the collapse of the Soviet system, it has been rather helpless in terms of re-orienting its practice and political significance. Similar organisations also exist in other cultural sectors and their legal definition is stated in the Creative Persons and Artistic Associations Act in Estonia. Whereas the function of these artistic associations does include trade unionist elements, their legal status is a different one and their operating principles are designed exclusively for the cultural realm.

The organising process in Tallinn never took the shape of formally establishing a trade union or a new artistic association. This was largely due to the fact that the Estonian Artists' Association already existed, even if its passivity in defending the social and economic rights of art practitioners caused a great deal of frustration among the

younger generation of art workers mobilising under the umbrella of Kaasaegse Kunsti Liit. Nonetheless, in addition to the pragmatic considerations on the futility of doubling the work of an already existing organisation, it is important to stress that there were other, and more structural, reasons why the organising process in Tallinn couldn't result with the establishment of a trade union. For example, in May 2010, the small group of art workers met with the head of the Estonian Trade Union Federation and learned an important lesson in civil education – in order to find political agency in the trade unionist approach of practising collective wage negotiations, one needs an employer.

A peculiar hide-and-seek game started when art workers set off to locate their employers. First of all, it was clear that the issue of trade unionising within the art field is complicated due to the fragmentation of work relations in space and time. In the specific constellation of freelance artists, curators and art critics that came together in order to constitute a new artists' union in Tallinn, some major employers were in fact identified. For example, many of us had experiences with short-term teaching jobs at the Estonian Academy of Arts, or with producing artistic, discursive and curatorial work for the major exhibition institutions, or with publishing texts and images in the state-funded cultural media. When thinking back at those work experiences, there was much criticism to articulate.

However, similarly to the discussions around the strategy of strike action, several challenges emerged when trade unionist strategies were being considered. In temporal terms, it occurred to us that we are rarely employed by those institutions simultaneously. Therefore, it seemed hopeless to initiate a collective conflict at the very moment when the wage-labour relationship takes place. From that perspective, the strategies of lobbying and advocacy work seemed more effective, such as exercising public pressure to the most significant art institutions by searching dialogue with directors, curators and decision makers. Another, and supporting strategy, could have been the formation of a guild-like organisation that unites art workers who have agreed on minimum tariffs below which they refuse to work. The idea of minimum tariffs was discussed on the example of the theatre field where such agreements exist among actors and seem to be quite effective.

However, in the context of the art workers' movement, the suggestion for establishing minimum tariffs was put aside due to hesitations whether there would be enough solidarity in the visual art sphere, where people often feel that they cannot afford to refuse badly paid jobs. A related complexity was discussed in relation to the temporalities of cognitive labour which cannot be easily quantified in universal tariffs and rates.

In addition to that, things turned even more complicated when the fragmented nature of our work realities was considered in spatial terms – not only that the perspective of starting simultaneous wage negotiations with the broad variety of art institutions that irregularly employ our work seemed energy-consuming and challenging, but we also identified a certain discrepancy between the institutions that employ our work and the ones that pay for precisely that work. This doesn't only apply to exhibition practice, as outlined above, but also in many other cases – for example when an art history journal or

publisher commissions a text and the payment comes directly from the Cultural Endowment in the form of a grant. On the other hand, a close inspection of the distribution of financial resources in the art field revealed that even if art practitioners' work relations to particular employers are intermittent, fluid and fragmented, the relationship to public funding remains constant.

Drawing a logical conclusion from this evidence, it was tempting to argue that the art workers had already been hired by the society, and paid from the resources that the society puts on public disposal through the tax collection system administrated by the state. However, such a conclusion imposes certain ramifications on the issue of art workers' organising in political terms, suggesting that the strategy of initiating collective wage conflicts in the trade unionist manner would miss the core problem. If art practitioners are workers of society, wouldn't it mean that their precarious working reality can only be changed by transforming the very social relations that define the political and economic conditions in the "social factory," rather than targeting singular employers in trade unionist manner?

In the ongoing debate about modes of organising which formed a dominant issue in the beginning phase of the art workers' mobilisation in Tallinn, the majority of art workers preferred the model of artistic association, even if there was no consensus on the two competing strategies of forming a new association or joining the Estonian Artists' Association, in order to change it from inside. When juxtaposed with the alternative scenarios of forming a trade union or experimenting with new and perhaps counter-institutional forms of organising, this preference indicated a pragmatic desire to step into the existing legislative frameworks that grant political representation for freelance art workers.

However, what seemed to escape our critical scrutiny at that time, was the fact that the model of artistic association, as it is defined in the Creative Persons and Artistic Associations Act in Estonia, is an institution which is modelled to maintain the ambiguous position of art practitioners vis-à-vis their social status as workers. Accordingly, our demand that artistic work needs to be recognised as such, remained closely associated with the specific interests of "professional art practitioners," defining artistic work as a particular type of social labour and art economy as an exceptional economy which demands exceptional regulations from the state.

Becoming art workers – a process of disidentification

Looking back at the art workers' movement in Tallinn from the distance of three years, there are only a few practical achievements to declare. For example, the Creative Persons and Artistic Associations Act was revised in order to facilitate cultural workers' access to the state subsidies distributed by artistic associations, and the tax collection regulations in Estonia are about to change in order to make the health insurance system more accessible for freelance workers (for a more elaborated analysis on these issues, see my article Unwaged Labour and Social Security: A Feminist Perspective). Also the situation, where artists are required to pay rent when exhibiting in non-profit galleries, is gradually changing in Estonia, as discussed by

Minna Henriksson and Marge Monko in their contributions to this publication.

However, even if these changes were introduced in direct response to the demands articulated by the art workers' movement, they are too microscopic in order to have a far-reaching impact on the precarious working realities in the art sector. Therefore, I would argue that the impact of the art workers' movement was actually much deeper on discursive level, shifting the framework how art, labour and economy are discussed in public sphere. In many ways, the self-organisation process in Tallinn was centred on awareness raising and collectivisation of knowledge about the economic structures and problems within the art field. These problems were then addressed in public contexts, initiating discussions with art practitioners, art institutions, cultural administration and policy makers. In the following paragraphs, I would like to reflect on the significance that the term "art workers" held in that process.

I will discuss the self-identification as art workers by referring to the concept of "disidentification" which is defined by queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz as a political position located between identification and counter-identification, as a strategy that works both "on and against the dominant ideology." [1]

At the time of 2010, the term "art worker," or kunstitöötaja, was a neologism in Estonian language. Derived from English, its origins are often traced back to United States, where this term formed an essential dimension in the formation of Art Workers' Coalition which is one of the most well- known examples of art workers' mobilisation in the history of contemporary art. However, as Julia Bryan-Wilson notes in her book dedicated to the his- tory of Art Workers' Coalition, the term was not completely new in the late 1960s – it had also been in use by Arts and Crafts movement in England in the late 19th century, as well as by the Mexican muralists in the 1920s. [2]

In recent years, the notion of art workers has witnessed a certain revival in the Western art world where self-organised initiatives struggling against precarious working conditions have actively taken it in use again as a battle-cry. The self-identification as art workers in Estonia thus indicated a certain intellectual and political affinity with this current cycle of struggles.

When analysed from the perspective of power dynamics within the organising process in Tallinn, the identification as art workers functioned as an inclusive strategy that helped to overcome some symbolic and economic hierarchies that are characteristic to the art field. For example, a reoccurring conflict line within the movement was connected to occupational identifications as artists or curators which were sometimes set in opposition to each other, for instance when the question of unpaid labour within exhibition practice was discussed. However, as the movement brought together a variety of art practitioners, the self-identification as art workers was quite operative in terms of transgressing such divisions – after all, it was agreed that there are many problems that freelance art practitioners have in common. Nevertheless, the movement was initiated and dominated by artists, curators and art critics. These are occupational groups within the professional field of art production, belonging to the upper ranks of the symbolic hierarchy. They are the authors whose names appear in exhibition and publication titles, art history or cultural media

representation. Therefore, even if the self-identification as art workers indicated towards the possibility of creating new political affinities also with the “backstage” workers of the art sector, such as technical assistants, editors, pedagogues, archivists, janitors or exhibition guards, this potential was not lived out to its full extent.

In the context of public discourse, the self-identification as art workers represented a dissociation from two assumptions dominating the common- place conceptions about the economy of art – the belief that art making is a hobby that serves the purpose of self-expression and is not supposed to be a source of stable income, and the somewhat contrasting idea that art practitioners are entrepreneurs who are selling their products in the market. The latter idea had recently gained considerable momentum on cultural policy making level. A few years prior to the emergence of the art workers’ movement, the Estonian Ministry of Culture, governed by the neoliberal Reform Party, had actively started to promote and support creative industries, thus encouraging the commercialisation of cultural practices. Resisting this pressure of becoming entrepreneurs in the newly invented economic sector of creative industries, the counter-identification as art workers emphasised the art practitioners’ subjectivity as workers.

In order to contest the widespread assumption that art is a non-utilitarian activity practised by a group of “bohemians” whose desire for self-expression neglects economic security, the art workers in Tallinn were inspired by post-operaist notion of “immaterial labour.” Most famously conceptualised by Maurizio Lazzarato, immaterial labour is defined as a type of work that does not produce physical commodities but informational and cultural contents of the commodity. [3]

Thus, immaterial work describes activities that are normally not recognised as work, highlighting specifically the affective and communicative modalities of post-fordist labour. In the art workers’ movement, the notion of immaterial labour was recognised as a useful tool for conceptualising the modalities of creative and cognitive labour. In the light of this concept, it was possible to demonstrate how the activities of reading books, visiting exhibitions and exchanging ideas at conferences or exhibition openings are not leisure-time activities, as they are perhaps intuitively perceived in conventional conceptions of work. Instead, the concept of immaterial labour allowed to re-signify such activities as central features of creative working process which is essentially a cognitive and communicative type of labour, founded on the activities of assembling, re- arranging and mediating knowledge.

Keeping in mind that the notion of immaterial labour is first and foremost a critical concept, its meaning is evidently not limited to offering a positive definition for activities that are commonly seen as the opposite of work. The art workers in Tallinn also appropriated this concept in order to scrutinise the precarious dimensions of cognitive work, such as the indistinct borderline between formal and informal work relations, the excessive commitment and personal investment, the spatial and temporal limitlessness of workplace and work hours. Reconceptualising these blurry boundaries between work and non-work as corner pillars of immaterial labour constituted another element in art workers’ strategy of counter-identification, aimed at challenging the dominant ideology that denies to art workers their

status as workers.

When conceptualising the process of disidentification, José Esteban Muñoz stresses that it is a reworking of subject positions which does not annul the contradictory elements of any identity. [4] Thus, disidentification is not only to be discussed in terms of counter-identification, but as a strategy of working both "on and against." Hence, the identification as art workers in Tallinn was a dialectical process that also involved affirmative dimensions. For example, in many ways, the identification as art workers was complementary to the existing occupational identities as artists, curators or critics which were sometimes also perceived as antagonistic to each other. Furthermore, it was occasionally debated whether the self-definition as "professional art practitioners" should be preferred in public discourse, in order to underline the particular class position of artists which, in my interpretation, is discursively situated within the modern concept of artistic autonomy that originates from the 19th century.

If the adoption of the term art workers would have been founded on active non-identification against the dominant modes of conceptualising artists' role in society, one of its potential consequences could have been identification as workers. In the process of organising against precarious working conditions, such identification would then have required that collective agency is searched by forming alliances with other precarious workers in society, and practised by targeting general social policies and labour rights. This didn't happen.

The discourse developed within the art workers' movement in Tallinn remained strongly anchored in the modern conception of art which reserves a specific social status to art and cultural workers. Rather than addressing the conflicts in neoliberal labour market economy at large, the art workers in Tallinn preferred to demand improvements in the particular sector of cultural work. For example, instead of demanding health insurance as a universal right, this issue was addressed solely from the perspective of cultural workers, even though it is not specific to the cultural sector. In doing this, the art workers in Tallinn conformed to the dominant conception of artists' unique status in society, mobilising their efforts towards strengthening the privileges that had already been established in existing policy documents, rather than resisting the subjectivation mechanisms implied in the political discourse that frames freelance art practitioners as a social group that does not quite fit into the category of working population.

Kaasaegse Kunsti Liit in Tallinn was apparently not among the most radical ones in the kaleidoscope of self-organised art workers' initiatives struggling against precarious conditions in the cultural sector. However, I believe that the notion of disidentification offers a useful tool for conceptualising a fundamental political problem that demands critical reflection in the context of art workers' organising more generally – as much as it seems urgent to organise within the particular labour sector of art and culture, there is also a crucial necessity to form transversal alliances with "other" precarious workers in society. In fact, the recent wave of art workers' struggles, emerging transnationally throughout the last decade, should be placed into the wider context of contemporary social movements mobilising against precarious labour. From that perspective, recent art workers'

movements can be framed as a line of conflict within the broader spectrum of anti-capitalist struggles, linked with examples such as the transnational EuroMayDay movement which gained considerable momentum in the beginning of 2000s, or the more recent movements of Occupy, M15 and Blockupy which have constituted themselves in the context of the current financial crisis.

In the context of Estonia, the continuities between art workers' struggles and anti-capitalist struggles are perhaps not that self-evident: in the situation where radical social movements do not have much presence locally, it is easy to perceive the art workers' movement in Tallinn as an isolated one. Nonetheless, this is certainly not the case in other local contexts where art workers do align themselves with fellow precarious workers in a more radical and transversal manner. The Precarious Workers Brigade in London, which is also interviewed in this publication, can be named as one of such examples. In my view, the most exciting dimension in the current cycle of transnational art workers' struggles is precisely the aspiration toward transversal forms of organising, suggesting that there exists a radical desire to re-imagine social relations and resistive practices in the cultural sector as well.

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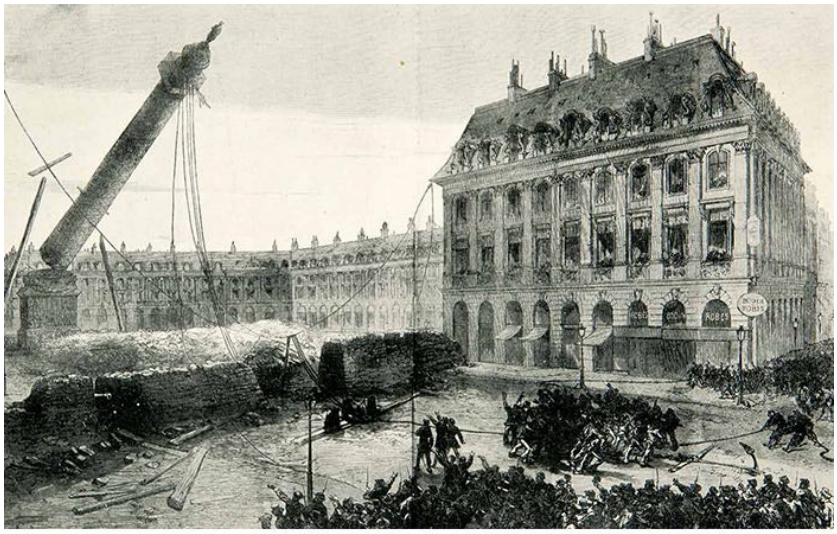
Notes:

1. José Esteban Muñoz, Disidentifications. Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p.11. ↩
2. Julia Bryan-Wilson, Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam Era (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), p. 14 & 27. ↩
3. Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor" (1996), http://www.generation-online.org/c/fcimmateriallabour3.htm (accessed 17 August 2014). [Originally published in: Paolo Virno, Michael Hardt (eds.), Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics (Minneapolis, London: University ↩
4. José Esteban Muñoz, Disidentifications. Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics, p.12. 151 ↩

Edit

Art Workers Between Precarity and Resistance: A Genealogy

Corina L. Apostol



Inspired by Gustave Courbet the communards destroyed the Vendôme column, 8th of May 1871, Paris.

On present-day and historical stakes

In the backstage of art fairs, biennales, shows, before artworks are exhibited, sold, collected or gifted, artists, interns, assistants, handlers, curators research and plan, they acquire working materials, necessary tools, to draw, to write, to build, to rehearse, or to film, to publicize and invite audiences on social media. Performances, graphics, installations, films, sculptures, documents or paintings, are all the result of artistic labor and of creativity. Despite this reality, on today's global art market, artistic labor goes unrecognized while the focus falls solely on the tangible results of this labor. As a result, conditions of artistic labor are summarily dismissed as unimportant, frequently among the upper echelons of the art management, and sometimes even among artists. In some cases, when members of the art community do decide to speak out, they face the danger

of being excluded from an exhibition or a project, or blacklisted from working in certain institutions.

This critical state of affairs is not a sine qua non. The widespread belief that artists are far too independent and focused on their own work to self-organize and participate in social movements is easily contradicted by a substantial amount of historical examples when artists came to work together in unions, communes, associations, guilds, syndicates or collectives. Many of these started in the mid-19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. What is also important is that these artists were not just seeking better pay, legal rights, and life securities, but also aligned themselves with workers' movements that challenged the dominant status quo.

Since the second half of the 19th century, when the terms artist, art worker and activist were used interchangeably in the context of the Artists Union inside the Paris Commune, artists have occupied a precarious and consciously in-between position within the class stratification of society. This lineage of self-reflection and resistance can be traced through international avant-garde movements that followed. Within these groups, which I discuss later in this text, artists and art theorists opposed the notion of "art for art's sake" and attempted to embrace a working class identity even though they widely disagreed about what exactly this entailed. In this sense, we can conceptualize the historical development of engaged art workers as a dialectical relationship between artists and society, wherein the transformation of one cannot occur independently of the other. As I show through my selection of the following case-study examples, collective actions at the macro-level and the grassroots-level could not exist separated from one another.

The artist as art worker and activist: nineteenth century beginnings

In the second half of the 19th century reactionary appeals to an art for art's sake clashed with principles of an emerging avant-gardism. During the revolutionary period in France, artist Gustave Courbet penned the famous Realist Manifesto (1855), [1] immediately after Marx's famous Communist Manifesto (1848). While the extent to which he participated in major historical events has been put into question, Courbert's bold confidence and passionate belief in the artist's role in changing society – broadly conceived – towards a liberated and socialist future were strongly shaped by these events. Those were turbulent times of class and political conflicts, from the moment the working class entered the scene as an autonomous political force – which was brutally suppressed by the bourgeoisie – to the French workers' brief, yet powerful Commune.

In 1871 Courbet called on Parisian artists to “assume control of the museums and art collections which, though the property of the nation, are primarily theirs, from the intellectual as well as the material point of view.” [2] Courbet’s statement responded to the paradigm shift of the economic framework, wherein the transfer of capital accumulated by capitalist organizations created a new class.

This bourgeoisie had accumulated economic means and invested heavily in the salon art production to flaunt their power. Emerging as new spaces for the presentation and enjoyment of art by the bourgeoisie, the salons of the 19th century operated autonomously from the church and the monarchy; while self-fashioned as disengaged from everyday production, they at the same time built themselves as powerful, independent entities in the field of art. Courbet challenged the salon system and the political classes it upheld through his infamous monumental canvases depicting labor, sex workers and peasants, through his support for the communards’ removal of the imperialistic Vendôme Column in 1871, and his role as commissar of culture in the Commune committee.

The transformation of the artist’s subjectivity as art worker and activist during the latter half of the 19th century, spearheaded by the Realist movement, was an initial landmark moment that continues to define the relationship between art and social movements today. Courbet’s appeal was one of the first instances when artists’ aspiration for social change led them to align themselves with a wider workers’ movement and break with the bourgeois institutions of art and the monarchy. Transgressing from artistic praxis into political action, artists could be considered as a counter-power, occupying political functions in a new order, no matter how briefly this lasted.

Art workers, avant-gardes and new social movements

In the following case studies, I show how artist groups from around the world sought affinities and alliances to various degrees with members of the organized Left, in order to frame the concept of “art worker” as a form of recurring artistic subjectivity under which members of the artistic community mobilized in different context and using different strategies, from artistic interventions to direct actions. Thus my analysis of these groups does not rely on historical causality from one cycle of protest or one movement to another, rather it builds a ground for a comparative study of both continuity and change, overlap and dissonance.

While its participants did not express a specifically socialist position, the DADA movement opposed the values of bourgeois society, political conservatism and the senseless First World War. DADA inaugurated a specific, rebellious attitude towards artistic

production, and expressed a set of discontents with the institutionalized nature of the art world. Some members of Berlin DADA sought to identify, at least in theory with the working class, presenting themselves not as artists in service of capital, but rather artists of the working class: art workers. [3] As Helen Molesworth has observed, “Dada’s perpetual return is due to the constant need to articulate the ever changing problems of capitalism and the role of the laborer within it.” [4]

Unlike their 19th century predecessors, DADA was mainly a cultural movement spearheaded by artists who had been displaced and disillusioned by WW1, and who used various forms of creative expression to express their anti-war position. Due to this, there was an affinity between the various DADA movements and the Left political parties, especially in Berlin, although, rather than expressing a socialist position, DADA remained heterogeneous and anarchic. DADA’s importance is that the movement sparked an awareness that an artist’s role in society could no longer be considered according to the antiquated and deeply problematic nature of high bourgeois society.

Just a decade later, in Mexico City the groundbreaking Syndicate of Technical Workers, painters and sculptors demonstrated alongside the local proletarian social movement with creative enthusiasm. Even though Mexico had hard won its independence in 1821 from the Spanish Empire, the economic divide between the rich and the poor, and the social gap between the Spanish and Amerindian decedents were glaring, sparking a decade of civil wars in the country.

In their 1922 Manifesto, the Syndicate grasped the general socialist zeitgeist and addressed to “the workers, peasants oppressed by the rich, to the soldiers transformed into hangmen by their chiefs and to the intellectuals who are not servile to the bourgeoisie.” They wrote: “we are with those who seek to overthrow an old and inhuman system, without which you, worker of the soil, produce riches for the overseer and politician, while you starve. We proclaim that this is the moment of social transformation from a decrepit to a new order.” Their goal was “to create a beauty for all, which enlightens and stirs to struggle.” [5]

Many members of the Syndicate, which functioned as a guild, joined the Mexican Communist Party (MCP). Their activities were invested both in a new type of collective artistic language, which found its expression in the large-scale educational public murals sponsored by the state, and defending artists rights and interests. [6] However, over the course of the decade, the Syndicate members grew increasingly dissatisfied with the government and began criticizing the post-revolutionary realities in Mexico. The government terminated the muralists’ contracts, expelled them from the Party and the Syndicate gradually dissolved as some of its founders such as Siqueiros emigrated.

In the same timeframe, this time in New York, The Harlem Artists Guild was founded in 1928. Its first president, the artist Aaron Douglas, [7] together with vice-president Augusta Savage and prominent members of the Harlem Renaissance movement (Gwendolyn Bennett, Norman Lewis, Charles Alston and others) agitated for the end of race-based discrimination and for the inclusion and fair pay of African American artists in arts organizations. Although an Artists' Union existed in New York at the time, these artists felt the necessity for an organization based on the needs of the Harlem artists' community, that would more effectively represent and lobby for their views and values.

The guild's constitution stated that, "being aware of the need to act collectively in the solution of the cultural, economic and professional problems that confront us" their goals were first to encourage young talent to "foster understanding between artist and public [through] education" and through "cooperation with agencies and individuals interested in the improvement of conditions among artists," and finally to raise "standards of living and achievement among artists." [8] The guild played an influential role in helping artists attain the recognition necessary to qualify them for the WPA (Works Progress Administration) work projects. [9] With the assistance of the Harlem Artist Guild, and the WPA, African American artists succeeded in gaining employment despite the hard times of the 1930s.

Re-adaptations and new cycles of struggle after the second world war

In the post WW2 reactionary period in the United States, The Artists' Equity Association was established at a time when unions were dismantled, factories purged of women, and the government's hostility towards artists left them with very little prospects. The Association [10] faced considerable opposition as the idea of organized artists was looked on with suspicion by conservative critics and lawmakers due to a lingering antipathy to the activism of previous groups as the Artists' Union and the Harlem Artists' Guild and because of the ideological Cold War mistrust of socialist values.

The Association ended up duplicating some of the activities that concerned its aforementioned predecessors putting in place its own grievance committee. It functioned as a collective working platform, which agitated for improved economic conditions for visual artists, and for the expansion and protection of artists' rights. Even though it did not endure for more than a decade the Association was a national endeavor, bringing together artist leaders, museum directors and critics to discuss issues around the visibility of the artists and their financial conditions. [11]

In the turbulent 1960s and 1970s artists were once more among

the first to self-organize, identifying with the workforce under pressure to accept pay cuts, pension cuts and to disband unions. In 1968 France, artists, workers and students, pent up with anger over general poverty, unemployment, the conservative government, and military involvement in Southeast Asia, took to the streets in waves of strikes and demonstrations. Factories and universities were occupied. Atelier Populaire (the Popular Workshop), an arts organization founded by students and faculty on strike at the École des Beaux Arts in the capital, produced street posters and banners for the revolt that would, "Give concrete support to the great movement of the workers on strike who are occupying their factories in defiance of the Gaullist government."

The visual material was designed and printed anonymously and distributed freely, held up on barricades, carried in demonstrations, and plastered on walls all over France. The Atelier intended this material not be taken as, "the final outcome of an experience, but as an inducement for finding, through contact with the masses, new levels of action, both on the cultural and the political plane." [12] Unlike its predecessors from the Realist movement, Atelier Populaire did not seek to become a political party or power, but functioned as a critical cultural frame around the social movement in France at the time.

In 1969, in the same turbulent socio-political global climate, an international group of artists and critics formed the Art Workers' Coalition in New York. Hundreds of art workers participated in the AWC's open meetings. Its function was similar to that of a trade union, engaging directly with museum boards and administrators who had become the façade of the commercial art world. The group which began around demonstrations at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, presented museums with a list of demands. The group invoked its avant-garde processors in posters, flyers and banners, referring for example to the felling of the Vendôme Column in Paris by the communards in 1878 as an inspiration. They also sought inspiration in the Artists Unions of the 1930s that organized themselves similarly to industrial unions, as well as artist's guilds in Holland and Denmark, demanding subsidies for universal employment, rather than support from private capital from wealthy patrons. [13]

In their famous list of demands, the AWC called for the introduction of a royalties system by which collectors had to pay artists a percentage of their profits from resale, the creation of a trust fund for living artists, and the demand that all museums should be open for free at all times, and that their opening hours should accommodate the working classes. They also demanded that art institutions make exhibition space available for women, minorities and artists with no gallery representing them.

In 1970 the AWC formed an alliance with MoMA's Staff Association and by working simultaneously from both inside and

outside institutional boundaries, their coalition of art-activists and the staff members were able to establish PASTA (The Professional and Administrative Staff Association) in 1970. This was one of the most significant official unions of art workers in the United States, as it joined together the interest of artist with those in similarly precarious conditions who are involved in different aspects of artistic production. [14]

Although the Art Workers Coalition folded after three years of intense activities, their legacy of reimagining artistic labor and challenging the unjust and discriminatory institutional models in the United States endured. More recently, with the involvement of the artistic community in social movements such as Occupy, questions of artistic subjectivity and class composition, artists as workers, protest politics and the role or art and artistic institution in the age of the art market have become once again paramount.

Contemporary challenges and new beginnings

Today, it has become clear that artists are pressured to conform to the logic of the art market, even becoming the symbols of the new neoliberal creative economy. As cultural critics such as Gregory Sholette [15] have correctly observed, by coopting the desires and demands of the 1960s and 1970s cultures of protest, businesses and policy makers have transformed the office into more flexible, less hierarchical forms of control, that are increasingly difficult to disentangle and oppose.

At the same time, some artists groups who lead a precarious existence continue to identify as workers, at a time when traditional industries have all but disappeared, when there is no longer the safety net of the extinct welfare states, or as some countries at the periphery of the European Union, where the state has altogether ceased to mediate between the working population and the corporate empire. While the 1% enjoy their prosperity, it is by now abundantly clear that the many have not taken advantage of the trickle-down effect.

In the art world, even blue-chip artists deal with constantly changing occupations, traveling from one art fair to another biennale to another major exhibition, with exhausting networking and publicizing. While even the successful artists struggle, there are also those many artists whose production is invisible, yet completely necessary for the art world to go on spinning. Those young art students, newly graduated from academies and universities, have to deal with not being able to afford a studio, with scrambling for teaching positions, with having almost no health benefits. For the most part these artists end up as manual producers, whose skills such as painting, welding, casting, designing, are employed by the knowledge producers.

This labor hierarchy illustrates the widening divide between the very few artists who are successful and the many that are not privy to the wealth of today's art world. The latter, like other precarious workers continue to struggle to get to the right side of (art)history, to escape their condition of have-nots. In such difficult times, collective political organizing has become once again necessary. On the backdrop of social movements who are tackling the side-effects of the so-called financial crises around the world, the destruction of educational and cultural structures together with the rise of the right wing and nationalist sentiments, some art workers' groups also began engaging with the artistic equivalent of the military-industrial-complex.

Currently there exist international self-organized coalitions, collectives, brigades, forums, assemblies, a loosely united, international art workers front working to disentangle the problematics around the tightening mesh of power and capital gripping art and cultural institutions. These groups are tackling issues around precarious conditions, the corporatization of the art world, the privatization of public spaces, self/exploitation, abuse, corruption, and so on, that affect not only the artists in the exhibition spaces, but also those anonymous many who invisibly labor to keep the art world working, those who clean exhibition spaces, guard galleries, those to build art fairs, underpaid or unpaid interns. These initiatives have managed to demonstrate that art workers are not bound to atomized, agent-less subjectivities, and that there is still a genuine desire for significant change in the art world.

In the United States, the New York based group Occupy Museums was born out of the Occupy Movement in 2011, criticizing through direct actions inside museums the connections between the corrupt high finance establishment and a corrupt and tamed high culture. Occupy Museums targeted important private museums in Europe and the United States, and attempt to hold them accountable to the public via means of horizontal spaces for debate and collaboration. Also coming from New York, the group W.A.G.E. is dedicated to drawing attention to economic inequalities that are prevalent in the art world, developing a system of institutional certification that allows art workers to survive within the greater economy.

In London, the group Liberate Tate have engaged in a continuous wave of creative disobedience against Tate Modern, urging them to renounce funding from toxic oil companies. In the same city, the groups Precarious Workers' Brigade and Ragpickers have come out in solidarity with those struggling to survive in the so-called climate of economic crisis and enforced austerity measures, developing social and political tools to combat precarity in art and society.

In Russia, the May Congress of Creative Workers, established in 2010 in Moscow, have acted as an organizational frame feeling the need to research the motivations, urgencies, approaches and

strategies of cultural workers for survival, in the context of the tenuous production conditions in Russia and Ukraine – characterized by different levels of oppression, abuses of authority and even physical violations. Between 2010 and 2013, the Congress functioned as a tool of exercising the power to formulate grievances about particular working conditions and working towards establishing structures and alliances to improve them. More recently in February 2014, during the Maidan Revolution in Ukraine, a group of artists and activists decided to occupy the Ministry of Culture in Kiev and launched the Assembly for Culture in Ukraine, demanding ideological, structural and financial restructuring of this important organizational body.

While not all its members self-identified as art workers, the assembly continues to work in the same building as an ongoing meeting of citizens who are concerned with how cultural processes in Ukraine are structured and intent on transforming these structures and pressing the Ministry of Culture to shift the vector of influence on culture from government ideology to the masses who are the recipients and creators of cultural products and processes.

When ArtLeaks, [16] the organization I co-founded in 2011 was launched, it was in the larger context of social movements and establishment of several of the aforementioned activist initiatives. Unlike many activist groups, which function under an anonymous, collective identity, it was important to us to use our real names and make concrete demands, to take responsibility and not make it leaderless project, which could provoke suspicions. The platform has maintained an international scope, while its goal has been to unite not just artists, but also curators, critics, philosophers around issues, problems and concerns in different contexts and using diverse strategies from "leaking" to self-education, unionizing, and direct actions.

Similar to our online case archive, Bojana Piškur, of the Radical Education Collective [17] in Ljubljana, together with Djordje Balmazović, a member of the Škart Collective, Belgrade, have put together a research investigation, "Cultural Workers' Inquiry," [18] based on Marx's Workers' Inquiry and concerning the position of a handful of cultural workers in Serbia in 2013. The publication, which is freely accessible online, contains straightforward testimonies of censorship, corruption and discrimination given by the respondents.

Activist groups engaged in similar struggles and activities with ArtLeaks, such as the above-mentioned Precarious Workers' Brigade, [19] Occupy Museums, [20] Liberate Tate, [21] and the May Congress of Creative Workers, [22] have maintained fluid membership and loose hierarchical structures, making a difference without institutional support or funding. It doesn't follow that these groups don't have any resources – if thinking of resources not just as capital, but also as key people, experience, activist know-how, organizational knowledge, etc. They are

reacting against the limits of institutions and the need to re-think them, re-write their missions, fight against proliferating repression and tacit abuse – the cultural side-effects of neoliberalism.

These networks do not necessarily imply a consensus over the self-identification of art workers as part of the same class with common grievances and a common agenda, rather they are grounds for alliances between cultural workers and cultural communities across national borders. Through these alliances, art workers can and do support each other during the creative process and their professional endeavors, which oftentimes unfold in highly unsound or in some context, even dangerous circumstances. The art workers models of organization which I have been discussing here are not the only means by which to precipitate socio-political transformation. Rather, its importance in my opinion is that it embodies the idea of a collective, self-organized, politically concerned project that can lead to the transformation of a society. The concept of "Art worker" is a moniker that helps us recognize the possibility of such a transformation in a historically conscious way.

The future of art workers' movements

One of the biggest challenges these groups face is a yet-to-be-defined overall strategic vision and the precarious ways in which their activities exist, a condition that is also visible in the current fragmentation of socially engaged, politically committed, activist practices. Categories such as activist art, interventionism, social practice, institutional critique, relational aesthetics, etc., are not cohesive in their tactics or demands, neither are they explicitly affiliated with a broader social movement from which to formulate strategies of social transformation. Arguably, this is in itself symptomatic of the effects of neoliberal ideology: heightened individualism, entrepreneurship, privatization, a do-it-yourself attitude. As a counter-example, early 20th century avant-garde movements found a common ground with the organized, revolutionary Left, while the post war, neo-avant-garde was brought together by the oppositional strategies of the New Left.

And yet, some of activist art worker groups are beginning to look back to the late 1960s and early 1970s, and even further to the mid 19th century, as moments of inspiration for the fight for art workers rights, reclaiming cultural institutions, art and/as labor in a global context. Indeed, today's art workers need more of that do-it-together spirit, a greater common interest and a more developed strategy and plan for transformation. Although the genealogy of engaged art, avant-garde movements and institutional critique has been historicized, it still holds relevance and inspiration for many activists, for whom the museum, the exhibition space, are still battlegrounds for struggle and conflict,

which they do not escape from but engage with, challenge, transform into spaces for the common. Undoubtedly, by remembering and relearning from past endeavors, be they successful or not, current generations of art workers, in the broadest sense of the term, can better imagine their own collective evolution and emancipation.

Image: The fall of the Vendôme Column. Inspired by Gustave Courbet the communards pulled down the Vendôme column, 8th of May 1871.

Notes:

1. Gustave Courbet, Realism, Preface to the brochure "Exhibition and sale of forty paintings and four drawings by Gustave Courbet," 1855, republished in T.J. Clarke, *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the Second French Republic*, 1848–1851, (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society), 1973. ↩
2. Courbet, Gustave. "Letter to artists of Paris, 7 April 1871". In Letters of Gustave Courbet, ed. Petra ten-Doessachte. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. ↩
3. See Brigid Doherty, "The Work of Art and the Problem of Politics in Berlin Dada." October 105, Summer 2003, pg. 73-92 ↩
4. Helen Molesworth, "From Dada to Neo-Dada and Back Again." October 105, Summer 2003, pg. 180. ↩
5. David Siqueiros, et al., originally published as a broadside in Mexico City, 1922. Published again in El Machete, no. 7 (Barcelona, June 1924). English translation from Laurence E. Schmeckebier, Modern Mexican Art (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1939), pg. 31. ↩
6. David Alfaro Siqueiros and Xavier Guerrero, some of the founding members of the Syndicate edited a newspaper associated with the organization, El Machete, which included articles by Diego Rivera and others. ↩
7. Through his political activism and artwork, Douglas revealed ideas and values exemplified during the Harlem Renaissance, an artistic movement founded on the ideals of racial pride, social power, and the importance of African culture. During the 1930s, African American history and culture was represented and celebrated through the arts. See: Campbell, Mary, David Driskell, David Levering Lewis, and Deborah Willis Ryan. Harlem Renaissance: Art of Black America. New York: Abrams, 1897. ↩
8. Republished in Patricia Hills, "Harlem's Artistic Community," in Painting Harlem Modern: The Art of Jacob Lawrence, (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2010), pg. 26-27 ↩
9. "Works Progress Administration." Surviving the Dust Bowl. 1998. PBS Online. 6 March 2003, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/dustbowl/peopleevents/pandeAMEX10.html. ↩
10. Yasuo Kuniyoshi was the founding figure of the Association, which he began to conceptualize in 1946 together with like-minded friends. ↩
11. For more information on the Artists' Equity Association, please see David M. Sokol, "The Founding of Artists Equity Association After World War II," Archives of American Art, Journal 39 (1999), pg.17-29 ↩
12. Quoted in Kristin Ross, "Introduction," in Kristin Ross, May 68 and Its Afterlives, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), pg. 17 ↩
13. See Julia Bryan-Wilson, "Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam Era," (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009) ↩
14. For a more detailed history of the Art Workers Coalition, see Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era*, (Oakland, CA: University of California Press), 2011 ↩
15. Gregory Sholette, "Speaking Clown to Power: Can We Resist the HistoricAL Compromise of Neoliberal Art?," in J. Keri Cronin, Kirsty

Robertson, eds., *Imagining Resistance: Visual Culture and Activism in Canada* (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press) 2011, pg. 27-48. ↩

16. More about ArtLeaks on our website: http://art-leaks.org ↩

17. More about the Radical Education Collective on their online archive: http://radical.tmp.si ↩

18. Bojana Piškur and Djordje Balmazović, eds., Cultural Workers' Inquiry, published online, 2013: http://radical.tmp.si/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Workers-Inquiry_English.pdf ↩

19. More about PWB on their website: http://precariousworkersbrigade.tumblr.com ↩

20. More about Occupy Museums on their website: http://occupymuseums.org ↩

21. More about Liberate Tate on their website: http://liberatetate.wordpress.com ↩

22. More about the May Congress of Creative Workers (in Russian) on their website: http://may-congress.ru ↩

Edit

Politics of Representation: Performing the People and Avant-garde Practices

Danilo Prnjat

Historically, the question of the emancipation of the masses through the development of collective power can be seen through two ideas: the communist and the democratic one. Jacques Rancière conducted a critique of both instances in an attempt to bring about the third one, which is based on equality. Yet this kind of equality is a radical one and does not depend on education or wealth.

According to him, knowledge is not a set of acknowledges, but a mixture of occupied positions that are exercised through practice. [1] Rancière does not find the example for this in life but in art. He believes that the paradox of the theater audience is in the fact that there is no theatre without spectators, and that the spectator (the viewer), for that very reason, is not separated from the skills and knowledge of the performance

capabilities. Through the idea that “the theatre remains the only place for facing the audience with itself as a collective,” [2] Rancière is trying to draw attention to the theatre as a representative of the community that is opposed to the trap of representation and that is formed in a way of self-presence.

> “Theatre is an exemplary community form. It involves an idea of community as self-presence, in contrast to the distance of representation. Since German Romanticism, thinking about theatre has been associated with this idea of the living community. Theatre emerged as a form of aesthetic constitution – sensible constitution – of the community. By that I mean the community as a way of occupying a place and a time, as the body in action as opposed to a mere apparatus of laws; a set of perceptions, gestures and attitudes that precede and pre-form laws and political institution.” [3]

Considering Guy Debord’s takes on the society of the spectacle [4] , mainly the idea of spectacle as an empire of seeing, the exterior where a man renounces control over himself, theatre as a live collective to Rancière represents a counterpoint to the illusion of mimesis, thus the stolen essence in the world of spectacle. In theatre, the viewer creates, in a way, his own poem “and he only feels and understands while doing so” [5], and similarly that is also the case with actors, dramatists, directors, dancers and performers. Rancière’s politics of radical equality presumes a detachment from the perception of a schizophrenic world torn apart by keepers of knowledge, specialists and experts on one hand, and a stupefied mass of uneducated and ignorant individuals on the other – a detachment from the law of domination in the name of human autonomy and emancipation, thus in the name of communal participation in the communal world. This is the idea of wholeness, potentialities and creation, opposed to any form of totalitarianism. In that sense (although he is very close to the French left) Rancière is very critical of communism. Stating “the less workers, the more Communism.” [6] Rancière points out that the true paradox of Communism is that it was conceived as a part of the leader’s principle, originally created by philosophers such as Plato. [7] For Rancière, the Communist elites, since they have a “golden soul”, are the only ones who are capable of living in Communism. On the other hand, “Ordinary, dirty people can only be capitalists. Workers must live as capitalists, even when they don’t have the capital, and only those who are the elite are able to live as communist equal people.” [8]

According to Rancière, this is a perverse idea that still survives in the idea of the avant-garde, precisely in the idea of communists as avant-garde that will free the working class from the illusions of everyday life etc. Certainly it is a fact that in historical Communism there were examples of a bureaucratization of the party, a division of minor circles of

leaders from common members of the party and the working class in general, the so called “new class”. But, neither the historical nor the theoretical Communism can be reduced to this phenomenon. Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Mao – all of them pledge for less distance, in theory and practice, between the proletariat and its avant-garde. Lenin’s famous thought on the party is that it should be one step ahead of the proletarian masses. It has to be ahead, because the masses are not emancipated enough in their minds; they cannot be it because of their class position in the social division of labour. In the class society (that we live in today, too), so called intellectual work is a privilege of the middle and upper class. For that reason, it was necessary for the party to be created as an avant-garde of the proletariat. But, the party had to remain *only one step* ahead, in order to remain its avant-garde and not alienate itself from it.

Therefore, the avant-garde is composed of individuals who were recruited, and it seems that it’s the only way, from what could be called in Marxist words petty bourgeoisie. A great majority of party leaders, theorists and artists came precisely from this class. But, they abandoned the interests of the ruling class and embraced the political position of the proletarian class and its interests. This made them into the most progressive and outstanding part of the proletariat, not some other, particular class, as interpreted by Rancière. They too understood the avant-garde nature of the party only as a *transitioning moment* while preparing for the future classless society, which will enable everyone to truly step out with all of their “intelligence capacity”. The oppressed should be emancipated with the help of the party and enabled to lead themselves, as their freedom was determined, but not given for granted.

However, this polemics may serve as a starting point for some more general and I would say more urgent questions concerning the participation as a necessary condition to representational and direct democracy. In fact, starting from the historical determination of the avant-garde as a (military) forefront that informs about the position of the enemy, it would be crucial to understand *if the exploited ones really need this viewpoint or if it is safe to think that they over-view the exploitation well and enough on their own?* [9]

First of all, the avant-garde is not an eternal norm as Rancière sees it, something that is defined by its representatives in a way that is historically unsustainable. The avant-garde is rather a historical fact that serves as an induction. There is a need here to accentuate that in every moment in history, a clear distinction between those who are more and those who are less aware of their own and general subordination can be made. Do oppressed masses produce awareness (and highly theoretically articulated awareness) of their subordination and

the ways of overcoming it on their own? Or, does it come to them from outside, from members of different classes and intelligence who, following the logic of their class position, are in the better place for perceiving and conceptually articulating sources of social subordination and forms of its termination, that is – emancipation?

Or, more explicitly, why do workers and farmers in Serbia, for example, live in poor and humiliating conditions if they are aware of what is good and what is bad for them? Why don't they rebel against these living conditions? Why are the attempts of resistance to privatization so rare and weak, when it leaves huge working masses without basic security in life? Why does a great deal of workers still believe blindly in the idea that privatization will save them, the one that will be "fair", even though such does not exist? Why are their trade-unions so weak and defensive, and strive to attain a peaceful dialogue with the exploiters (the government and the owners), when it is clear from the beginning who will win that fight due to stronger elements of power?

Karl Marx and Marxism favoured the idea of the workers' revolution, which Rancière for some reason dismisses. Secondly, even if the will for domination was the only motive for the avant-garde, that only explains why it stands by the working masses, but it does not explain why the masses stand by it. It is hard to believe that these masses only changed their ruler after the revolution. They also changed considerably the character of the authority, because the new authority was more "close to them", to their interests, certainly more than the previous one.

Thirdly, the matter of social division remains unresolved. Although Rancière denies a division between bourgeoisie and proletariat today we can still make a distinction, in liberal democracy, between, for example, democratic oligarchy and those who, as Rancière, disapprove of it at least on an intellectual level. However, this way of pointing out things would only benefit the avant-garde. Furthermore, very severe criticism of Jacques Rancière's work and the postmodern inheritance as such, that I want to relate to, came from the American art theoretician Hal Foster. [10] Foster determined that the possibilities of a critique historically gradually disappear and vanish. First of all the judgment [11] is dismissed, as a moral position that provides a standpoint for critical observation, then the authority [12] is dismissed, as a sort of critical privilege that enables a critic to speak in the name of others, and in the end the distance, which is so distinctive for the critical position and provides an independent point of observation for practice or events, is well shaken.

As Foster points out, these accusations against critique (avant-garde) are led by two ideas. The first one is that the critic is an

ideological patron who dislocates a certain group of people or a class that he represents from his critical position [13], and the second one is that a critical discourse is predominantly perceived as a scientific one, which provides it with a particular legitimacy in the matters of truth, so we cannot see the thing that potentially remains hidden (ideology). [14] According to Foster, there are two more ideas that helped the process of extracting legitimacy out of the critical position in a historically-philosophical sense. The first one is the critique of representation that suppressed the value of truth as such, encouraging moral indifference and political nihilism. The second one is the critique of the subject based on the critique of identity as social construction, encouraging consumerism of positions of subject –– identities. [15] As we can see, this rough division illustrates how postmodernism is seen today.

Postmodernism is closely associated with neoliberal capitalism, thus, postmodernism can be interpreted as a culture of liberal capitalism referring to the deregulation of culture that finds its match in the deregulation of economy. [16] Refusing critique and the critical seems to have led to a position that has nothing to offer, with no possibility to criticize. In the field of theory the "distribution of sensible" [17] is offered instead, "general intellect" [18], "art in gaseous condition" [19] , glorifying the aesthetic… The art world of today is being cluttered by works of engaged art, most of which is based on participation, joint work that tries to avoid any kind of hierarchy (the same strategy is applied on curators' projects, following the principle "Let's do something together").

In short, the concept of the redistribution of the sensible (that Foster criticizes) and the politics of dismissing authority and promotion of equal participation (Rancière), according to Foster, worked in favor of the fetishization of the object in a way that it becomes interpreted as quasi-subject:

> "Recent art history shows a marked tendency to do much the same thing: images are said to have "power" or agency, pictures to have "wants" or desires, and so on. This corresponds to a similar tendency in recent art and architecture to present work in terms of subject hood. [20] Although many practitioners aim, in good Minimalist fashion, to promote phenomenological experience, often what they offer is the near-reverse: "experience" returned as "atmosphere" and/or "affect", in spaces that confuse the actual with the virtual and/or with sensations that are produced as effects yet seem intimate, indeed internal, nonetheless (…). In this way the phenomenological reflexivity of building seems to do the perceiving for us. This, too, is a version of fetishization, for it takes thoughts and feelings, processes them as images and effects, and delivers them back to us for our appreciative amazement. As such it calls for antifetishistic critique." [21]

But, as I see it, a matter of a great relevance that should be mentioned here, besides the fetishization of the object, being interpreted as a fake subject (by what the concept of reification has been re-actualized), is the much bigger *phenomenon of fetishization of events, acts of participation, presence of the individual in society, in a way that all of these become interpreted as quasi-presence*. In other words, contemporary cultural practice (art), expanding the field of representation into the wide field of social activism, has become the perfect tool for the transfer of the mechanism of deception that traditionally belonged only to the art (fetishization of objects – a quasi-subject) to the whole society (fetishization of events – a quasi-presence). Or, as Rancière, affirmatively, points out:

> "We need to identify knowledge in action in uneducated and activity in viewers. Every viewer is an actor in his own story, every actor and every person of action is a simultaneous viewer of the same story." [22]

Specifically, substituting virtual for real is becoming a predominant practice in the production of the social today. In the field of culture, we witness the expansion of our presence in public, the expansion of jointment and action, in forms of different quasi-subjectivizations, conquering the public field and providing visibility for everyone (participation in art [23] , workshop projects of NGOs, media phenomena like *Big Brother and Facebook*, a wide range of activism struggling for availability of information on the Internet as the struggle for *piracy* and open source systems, etc). In other words, it looks like if the presence of an individual in communal and public space has become a matter of course. The public space is being permanently redefined, conquered and ever more available. However, what is actually happening is the *privatization of public material space, rapid decrease of citizens' involvement in activities of general matter*, and the growth of urban and industrial zones (districts that are most commonly rich with resources) and large portions of land, that due to privatization become absolutely unavailable to citizens.

So, we can say that the neo-liberal ideological concept undoubtedly makes a foundation for most of these, so called "emancipatory" practices of today in a way that they increasingly move the presence of participants into the virtual realm. These theories and practices are actually a great way of covering up the fact that public space is becoming less and less ours. Perceived in this manner, these models of activism gain a new social function: they act as a way of subjectivization and de-traumatization of the potentiality of conflict, that would arise as a result of the increasing confiscation of the common and the public, seen in the broadest economic and political sense of the term.

What is set as a major task of a new avant-garde practice today

is primarily to figure out the exit from this formalist representational deadlock. It is urgent to find a different way to achieve the idea of horizontal participation. In order to keep the prefix "emancipatory", the emergence of citizens in society and in the political struggle in general will need to contain a completely redefined relationship toward representation, as well as a Benjaminian [24] awareness of it. The avant-garde practice should not necessarily depart from representation as such, as the field of social action is, at least in the Western cultural heritage, so closely attached to it that the field of political struggle is almost unthinkable without it. However, what avant-garde practice will have to achieve is to get out of its formalist framework and secure a "solid" and "real" content of itself, by being subversive in relation to itself and connected to the *material conditions of production*.

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Illustration: A meeting during the neighbourhood project Local Politics and Urban Self-Gouvernment (detelinara.org), organized by Center for New Media kuda.org and Center for conceptual politics. Photo: Danilo Prnjat

Notes:

1. Rancière, Jacques. *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (originally published as *Le Maître ignorant: Cinq leçons sur l'émancipation intellectuelle*). Translation by Kristin Ross. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991. ↩
2. Rancière, Jacques. *The Emancipated Spectator* (originally published as *Le Spectateur émancipé*). Translated by Gregory Elliott, 5. London: Verso, 2011. ↩
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4. Debord, Guy. Društvo spektakla (originally published as La Société du spectacle). Translation by Aleksa Golijanin. Belgrade: Anarhija/Blok 45, 2001. ↩
5. Rancière, Jacques. *The Emancipated Spectator* (originally published as *Le Spectateur émancipé*). Translation by Gregory Elliott, 5. London: Verso, 2011. ↩
6. Jakić Ljubomir, "Platon Invented Communism." Interview with Jacques Rancière, daily newspaper Politika. http://www.politika.rs/rubrike/Kulturni-dodatak/Platon-je-izmislio-komunizam.lt.html, 11/10/2012, 11am (my translation). ↩
7. Platon. The Republic. From http://www.idph.com.br/conteudos/ebooks/republic.pdf, 10/12/2010, 2pm ↩
8. Jakić, Ljubomir, "Platon Invented Communism", Interview with Jacques Rancière, daily newspaper Politika. http://www.politika.rs/rubrike/Kulturni-dodatak/Platon-je-izmislio-komunizam.lt.html, 11/10/2012, 11am (my translation). ↩
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10. Foster, Hal. "Postcritical". *October*, Ltd. And Massachussets Institute of Technology, Winter 2012, 3–8. ↩

11. Kant, Immanuel. *Kritika moći suđenja* (originally published as *Kritik der Urteilskraft*). Translated by Nikola Popović. Belgrade: BIGZ, 1975. ↩
12. Almost the entire postmodernist philosophical tradition can be comprehended by this key. ↩
13. Benjamin, Walter. "The Author as Producer" (originally published as "Versuche über Brecht"). Translated by Anna Bostock. *New Left Review*, I/62, July-August, 1970, 1–9. ↩
14. Althusser, Louis / Balibar, Etienne. *Kako čitati Kapital* (originally published as *Lire le capital*). Translated by Rade Kalaj. Zagreb: Izvori i Tokovi, 1975. ↩
15. The best example for this is the multicultural advertisement for Benetton with the slogan: United Colors of Benetton. ↩
16. Jameson, Frederick. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.* London: Verso, 2001. ↩
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18. Virno, Paolo. Gramatika mnoštva: Prilozi analizi suvremenih formi života (originally published as A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life). Translated by Jasna Jakšić. Zagreb: Naklada Jesenski i Turk, 2004. ↩
19. Michaud, Yves. *Umjetnost u plinovitom stanju* (originally published as *L'art à l'état gazeux: Essai sur le triomphe de l'esthétique*). Translated by Jagoda Milinković. Zagreb: Ljevak, 2004. ↩
20. Graw, Isabelle, ed. *Art and Subjecthood: The return of the Human Figure in Semiocapitalism.* Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011 (Hal Foster's footnote). ↩
21. What was condemned in Minimalism as a concern with objecthood was really a concern with objectivity – the objectivity of structure, space, bodies in space, and so on. This concern drove the primary line of work out in Minimalism, but now a secondary line has become dominant. On this reversal, see "Painting Unbound," in my *The Architecture Complex*, London: Verso, 2011 (Hal Foster's footnote). ↩
22. Rancière, Jacques. *The Emancipated Spectator* (originally published as *Le Spectateur émancipé*). Translated by Gregory Elliott, 6. London: Verso, 2011. ↩
23. See: Bishop, Claire, ed. *Participation – Documents of Contemporary Art.* London: Whitechapel, 2006. ↩
24. Benjamin, Walter. "Umetničko delo u veku svoje tehničke reprodukcije" (originally published as *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*). In Eseji, translated by Milan Tabaković, 114–151. Belgrade: Nolit, 1974. ↩

Let's Talk About The Debt Due: Art and Debt in The 21st Century

Gregory Sholette

I

As early as 1984, the art historian Carol Duncan pinpointed a fundamental, though typically overlooked feature of high culture: that the majority of professionally trained artists make up a vast surplus whose utter redundancy *is* the normal condition of the art market.

> We can measure the waste [of artistic talent] not only in the thousands of "failed" artists–artists whose market failure is necessary to the success of the few–but also in the millions whose creative potential is never touched… This glut of art and artists is the normal condition of the art market. [1]

Within our highly entrepreneurial contemporary "art world" the majority of artists appear to be an underdeveloped resource like an army of surplus talent, especially when viewed from the

perspective of major museums, gate-keeper galleries, art fairs, biennials, magazines, journals and so forth. As students we are "pre-failed" artists, as artists we are like an inert mass of dark matter that invisibly anchors the bright constellation of €47.4 billion industry in art and antiques. [2] This alleged failure is portrayed as "natural." It is said to be the inevitable result of too little talent or a bad luck or an absence of hard work or whatever bogus filtering mechanism you wish to invoke. But in reality we know what it really is. Failure drives the asymmetrical political economy of art, which in turn is predicated on the uneven remuneration of ideas, aspirations, expectations, affects, labors and services contributed into it. (In financial terms, many provide deposits; few are granted loans.) Despite the "natural" invisibility of most participants ––and I would add here keeping pace with Carol Duncan and Antonio Gramsci- also many other informal and amateur "creatives" seemingly situated beyond the "borders" of institutional "high culture" –– these shadow players play a central, aggregate role in reproducing the actually existing art world. (Imagine the immediate financial consequences if, even for just one month, no artist purchased art supplies, read online art blog or cultural journals, visited museums, paid fees for lectures or workshops, fabricated somebody's project, installed a museum exhibition, handled a shipment of paintings, taught an adjunct art class, or even mentioned the word "art.")

II

A few years before the global financial crash a 2005 policy study by the California based Rand Corporation reinforced and updated Carol Duncan's observations by reporting that while the number of artists had greatly increased over previous decades, the always-evident hierarchy among artists "appears to have become increasingly stratified, as has their earnings prospects."

> The number of artists in the visual arts has been increasing (as it has in the other arts disciplines), and their backgrounds have become more diverse. At the same time, however, the hierarchy among artists, always evident, appears to have become increasingly stratified, as has their earnings prospects. At the top are the few "superstar" artists whose work is sold internationally for hundreds of thousands and occasionally millions of dollars (Rand Corporation, 2005). [3]

The origins of this highly redundant art workforce no doubt go back to the entry of the artist into the capitalist economy. Consider the Dutch art market of the 17th Century that allegedly produced by the late 1600s "between five and ten million works of art" of which "perhaps less than 1%, have survived." [4] Much closer to our time historian John A .Walker

informs us that there was on average 850 art school graduates annually in Great Britain throughout the 1970s, with some 7000 painters active in the UK at about this time. [5] Notably there was also a wave of art school occupations in London during this time, and in 1972 artists initiated an Artists Union that was chaired by American Mary Kelly. The AU lasted several years and paralleled the efforts of Art Workers' Coalition here in New York and in Canada, as well as Artists Meeting for Cultural Change (AMCC) a few years later. In the mid-1970s AMCC plastered the streets of SoHo with flyers proclaiming among other slogans: "Who Benefits When Artists Compete?"

All of which is to say that on more than one occasion in recent decades artists have stumbled into a kind of self-awareness, or proto-consciousness about their own conditions of production. And just as we find today regarding the certification W.A.G.E. (Working Artists and the Greater Economy) is seeking to implement similar issues emerged in the past including: who gets to be included in an Artists Union? Should all types of creative labor be compensated equally? How does the collective reward or punish cultural institutions that violate agreed upon rules of conduct? Thus the present moment is a repetition, as much as it is also a mutation of this process. Why a mutation? I want to suggest five reasons, four of which have to do with structural changes in the production and consumption of contemporary art, and the fifth relates to the broader political economy of neoliberal capitalism whose fetishization of entrepreneurship and personal risk have been a topic of discussion today.

III

The first aspect of this mutated art world is the astounding size of its global market, an expansion that has accelerated since the great recession began in 2008. According to the European Fine Art Foundation average fine art auction prices have increased by 82 percent in Britain and 100 percent in the United States from 2009 to 2013, "far outpacing the growth rate of many professional salaries since the 2008 financial crash." Clearly the stakes involved for both artists and those who profit from their work has also grown accordingly, if we look at this from a market perspective. [6]

The second factor is the enormous growth of professional artists already discussed by the bfamfaphd group. To reiterate, The National Center for Education Statistics indicates that over the past three and a half decades "the number of Master's degrees granted in the visual and performing arts *has been rising every year* in the last decade." According to http://bfamfaphd.com/ some 100,000 students in the US graduate per year with advanced degrees in fine art, which is clearly many times greater than the figure for Britain in the 1970s that

Walker reported with foreboding. And of course with this growth comes the expansion of academic institutions for training new artists as well the rising tide of indebtedness at issue in this conference today. That said, with the growth of artists and the growth of art sales comes an enhanced level of power artist's possess that is operating directly inside capital: a new reality simultaneously disturbing as it is full of potential. [7]

Thirdly, works of art in themselves have radically changed form. They have morphed from being a relatively fixed capital asset just a few decades ago that were typically owned by well-heeled elites, to investment instruments that can be bundled together by hedge fund operators for maximum profit and available for purchase by anyone with enough cash.

Fourth, and a bit less obvious is a process outlined by Marx called the real *subsumption* of past forms of production by capitalism. Regarding art and the emergence of the "art worker" in the 1960s theorist Kerstin Stakemeier writes:

> It is the real subsumption of artists under capital which transforms them into producers of contemporary art. And it is this process that in turn gave rise to the independent artist organizations of the 1960s and 1970s, while implicating artists in the dramatic social struggles of their time, including most notably the anti-Vietnam War movement. They participated in these political confrontations as one kind of 'producer' amongst many. [8]

This subsumption has in turn led to the *thorough* socialization of artistic labor, something that I would argue we can see evident in the rising number of artists' collectives today, as well as with the prominence of relational and social practice art. But this condition of socialized production is evident even with the loneliest of painters who depends on Google for visual reference materials or art supplies, Facebook for posting new exhibitions, and cellular and digital networks for other forms of support including such things as babysitters or rideshares or other services necessary for producing art today.

Finally, a fifth factor in this mutation of the actually existing art world is the radical transformation of the *image* of the artist and of artistic labor, which has shifted from the figure of a marginal producer within capital to that of the ideal worker within the post-Fordist economy.

IV

By now we are all pretty familiar with the notion of the so-called creative class, the cognitariat, the knowledge worker and what Andrew Ross referred to as the knowledge economy earlier today. And we have observed –though not without a

degree of irony- the seemingly *pivotal role* artists play within this paradigm of post-industrial, networked labor. It seems that when it comes to the movers and shakers of *capitalism 2.0*, the deregulated economy celebrates deviant practices and eccentric frames of mind making the insubordinate image of the contemporary artist into neoliberalism's sexy *doppelgänger*. We know that French sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello argued in their study *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, that Post-fordist manufacturing requires horizontally structured organizations and flexible work environments, both of which they insist stem from a cultural critique of capitalism taken up by artistic circles in the 1960s. This "Bohemian" resistance to the market Boltanski and Chiapello opposed to traditional demands by organized labor focused on expanding workers social benefits, shortening work hours, and increasing wages. To whatever degree this analysis is correct or not, one thing does seem clear: artsy bohemians (or neo-bohemians if you prefer) today represent a convenient model of the anti-authoritarian, flexibly employed, self-motivated producers – or in our case, speaking now as an artist– of underemployed over-producers, because once again, *redundancy* is as central to the art world as is talent or originality or any of those elevated qualities that supposedly anchor artistic value and ultimately prices within the multi-billion dollar art market.

But there is another, less obvious homology between the surplus army of underemployed artists on one hand, and the anarcho-capitalist dream of a peer-to-peer perpetual motion machine that is wired directly into the networked economy. What if it is not the alleged cognitive and organizational radicalism of artists that makes them such an attractive model to the priests and priestesses of neoliberalism? What if it is a more mundane quality that does not belong to any individual artist, but involves the accumulated productivity of art as a compound sphere of activity, one that uniquely transforms its inherent overproduction and redundancy into an asset? In other words, maybe post-Fordism is less interested in the supposedly transgressive, risk-taking, scrappy non-conformity, and all that out-of-the-box allure that artists allegedly possess, than it is the way we handle our collective precariousness while generating an astonishing level of aggregate productivity including installations, theories, performances, participatory projects, mock-institutions and so forth? What a model for 21st Century capitalism. Everyone contributes, a few are rewarded, capital is enriched. And if this is so, then the next point is obvious. *Why are we not leveraging our redundant competencies to satisfy our own collective needs? Perhaps we first need to turn around the normative rhetoric associated with debt.*

Lets Talk About The Debt Due for...

Lets talk about the debt due for…teaching countless thousands of students studying accounting and management and medicine and law who are exposed to critical thinking, art and aesthetics as they go on to become doctors, attorneys and hedge fund operators…

Lets talk about the debt due for… lining the walls of museums, galleries, art fairs, biennials, kunsthalles with a continuous flow of cultural products, most of which are handed over by artists for institutional display far below cost if not virtually free of charge…

Lets talk about the debt due for…adorning the offices, lobbies, board-rooms, hallways, and cafeterias of corporate headquarters with “avant-garde” art works that as one CEO put it: assist his employees to ‘get outside of their box.’…

Lets talk about the debt due for… providing Hollywood producers, book publishers, music video designers and Madison Avenue’s Mad Men with visual reference materials for their mass cultural handiwork…

Lets talk about the debt due for… giving the US State Department and the Central Intelligence Agency ideological weapons for waging their Cold War against communism…

Lets talk about the debt due for… hundreds of years of producing persuasive religious icons…

Lets talk about the debt due for… giving people indelible images of death…but also lust, hate, envy, adoration, justice, honor, childhood, and so forth…

Lets talk about the debt due for…helping the propertied class visualize their assets.

Lets talk about the debt due for… the tuition dollars, magazine subscriptions, art supplies, museum memberships, fees for workshops, seminars and lectures …

PLEASE FEEL FREE TO ADD TO THIS LIST.

Postscript Quote:

Capitalism without opposition is left to its own devices, which do not include selfrestraint. The capitalist pursuit of profit is openended, and cannot be otherwise. The idea that less could be more is not a principle a capitalist society could honour; it must be imposed upon it, or else there will be no end to its progress, selfconsuming as it may ultimately be. At present, I claim, we are already in a position to observe capitalism passing away as a result of

having destroyed its opposition—dying, as it were, from an overdose of itself. [9]

A version of this paper was first presented at the conference *Artist As Debtor*, The Cooper Union, NYC, December 2, 2014. Organized by Noah Fischer and Coco Fusco. http://artanddebt.org/hello-world

Image: G.U.L.F. and Gulf Labor Coalition occupy the landing dock of the Peggy Guggenheim Museum during the opening of the 2015 Venice Biennial protesting substandard working conditions for migrant laboreres building the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, UAE.

Notes:

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3. Kevin F. McCarthy, et al., *Rand Report: A Portrait of the Visual Arts: Meeting the Challenges of a New Era*, Rand Corp., 2005. www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2005/RAND_MG290.sum.pdf ↩
4. See the website: http://www.essentialvermeer.com/dutch-painters/dutch_art/ecnmcs_dtchart.html #.VMPLbMaXT4s and John Michael Montias, *Vermeer and His Milieu: A Web of Social History*, Princeton, 1989. ↩
5. John A. Walker, *Left Shift: Radical Art in 1970's Britain*, I.B.Tauris, 2001. P 25 ↩
6. "The Great Divide in the Art Market" NY TIMES: APRIL 27, 2014 http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/28/arts/international/the-great-divide-in-the-art-market.html?_r=0 ↩
7. See: M.F.A.s: "An Increasingly Popular, Increasingly Bad Financial Decision", Bourree Lam, The Atlantic online, Dec. 19, 2014. http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/12/mfas-an-increasingly-popular-increasingly-bad-financial-decision/383706/ ↩
8. Kerstin Stakemeier from *It's The Political Economy, Stupid: The Global Financial Crisis in Art and Theory*, edited by Sholette and Ressler. Pluto Press, 2013. See also John Roberts in the same volume. An excerpt is available at: http://www.gregorysholette.com/?page_id=1724 ↩
9. Wolfgang Streek, "How Will Capitalism End?" New Left Review # 87 May/June 2014. p. 55. ↩

Edit

When Politics Becomes Form. The Venice Biennale, 2015

Ivor Stodolsky

On Karl Marx's birthday this year, a six-month public reading of *Das Kapital* was iniated not far from a video-installation documenting the thoughts of two leading Marxists of our time – Stuart Hall and David Harvey. On the same day, the same artist who initiated these politically-charged projects launched a preview of a new film. It features a *Spirit of Ecstasy* Rolls-Royce car and was commissioned by this luxury brand whose eponymous sister corporation was recently the 16th largest defense contractor in the world. [1] Welcome to the Venice Biennale where, as the wisdom of Leonard Cohen has it, "everybody knows." Even critical reviews register paradoxes such as these with rarely more than a passing remark.

But, halt! – even if only for the fashionistas. Wasn't Cohen's *bon-mot passé* long ago – a relic of *fin-de-siècle* "po-mo"? [2] This *laissez-faire* cynicism does not do justice to a new generation of re-engaged art and politics of the moment. Why is Okwui Enwezor, who as its curator has filled this year's Biennale chocker-block with political art, so "tone deaf" as one journalist

put it, as not to feel even the slightest burning in the ears at such blatant contradictions? [3]

In 1969, shortly after the uprisings of 1968, Harald Szeemann curated his (in)famous "When Attitude Becomes Form". Its radical attitude created such an artistic rupture of form, and an equally horrified reaction from the establishment, that after-shocks were felt for years to come. The exhibition was shut down, despite its sponsorship by Philip Morris Cigarettes, and Szeemann resigned. Drawing parallels, Okwui Enwezor has curated what is slated as a highly political show in the midst of uprisings which stretch from Tahrir Square to Thessaloniki. Contrary to Szeemann, however, Enwezor is the darling of the establishment. The direction is reversed: politics seems on its way to becoming *mere* form.

For some at the Venice preview, that was not enough. When radical art and political theory can be hyper-commodified – as the fetishistic facsimile of near forty-pages of *Das Kapital* in the Biennale's €85 catalogue amply demonstrates – *direct action* seems one of the last possible ways, in such "spectacular" contexts, to make uncompromisingly clear this difference between politics and its mere form. At least this was the rational of Perpetuum Mobile, the curatorial vehicle run by Marita Muukkonen and myself.

Although having come to Venice not to work, but to observe for the first time in many years, we were fast drawn into the heart of an operation initiated by friends and colleagues from the Gulf Labor Coalition based in New York and the local activist space S.a.L.E. Docks, along with many friends and fellow-travelers.

The task: **occupy the Venice Guggenheim**. Hashtag: **#GuggOccupied**.

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The use of what amounts to bonded labour in building the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi is at the core of the concerns of Gulf Labor, a growing coalition of engaged artists, researchers and activists with links to international art and labour associations. Its origins overlap and were inspired by the "Who's Building NYU Abu Dhabi?" campaign, initiated by professors and students of New York University. The new NYU campus – as well as a new branch of the Louvre, among many other infrastructure projects in the UAE and the wider region – is being built under the same exploitative labour regime, which often goes under the name of the "Kafala System". [4]

In the US, awareness of the harsh abuses of the labour regime in the UAE date back to at least 2006, when a Human Rights Watch report on the topic was published. [5] This report was given wide distribution by initiators of the NYU campaign, such as such as the sociologist Andrew Ross, gradually leading to a wider movement. [6] The issues raised centre on working conditions and

the manner in which migrant labourers are tricked into a system whereby their first years in Abu Dhabi amount to forced and nearly unpaid labour. With the cost of travel to the UAE covered by the building companies up-front, the workers are usually deprived of their passports and hence the ability to travel, until it has been repaid. This can take more than two years, with hardly anything gained by those trapped in the system. Kept in sub-human factory-town conditions, workers live in slum dwellings with multiple persons crammed into prison-cell like rooms. Predominantly male, they are commonly de facto forbidden/ unable to see their wives, girlfriends or partners for extended months or years. Comparison to slavery is hard to avoid. Labour conditions are appalling, with laws against working on high-rise scaffolding at temperatures above 40 degrees Celsius regularly flaunted. Deaths on-site are a feature of everyday life. Wages are abysmally low.

With the inception of the **Guggenheim Abu Dhabi** project, awareness of the responsibility and complicity of the art world in these abuses became evident in the US. Like the NYU campaign in the case of education, art practitioners believed they could have some degree of real leverage through activism in their own professional field. Headed by artists such as Walid Raad, a new group under the name of Gulf Labor brought the issue to the attention of the art world around 2010-11. [7] Since then, a variety of strategies and tactics have been tried and developed – from letter-writing campaigns, to developing fake Guggenheim websites to occupations of the NY museum. It also involved art itself, with a weekly series of art works circulated, criticizing the harsh labour regime and the Guggenheim in particular.

In recent years, the Guggenheim Foundation has done much to discredit its remarkable collection and history. The flagship of the neoliberal agenda, it stands at the forefront of turning art collections into corporate franchises. As a Helsinki and Berlin based organization, Perpetuum Mobile had already been witness to its deleterious business strategies in the Finnish capital at first hand. In a procedure in preparation behind closed doors since 2010, the Guggenheim Foundation received 1.2 million in tax-payers' money, topped up by corporate-friendly Finnish foundations to almost 2 million euros. This slush-fund was offered to the corporation to finance a "feasibility study" for new Helsinki Guggenheim. In a clear conflict of interest, this study was carried out under the auspices of the Guggenheim Foundation itself. [8] It didn't take long for the millionaire-studded working committee to respond with a self-serving "yes" to its own idea. [9]

The methods of the "feasibility study" were also dubious. From the point of view of the local art scene and administrators, the public face of this operation was a handful of young college graduates – just out of elite business schools, judging by their age and designer suits. Personal reports describe their research as consisting of highly superficial interviews with local art

officials, lasting no more than 20 minutes in some cases. Deeper discussion was off limits. When the issue of financing the new Guggenheim franchise was raised, the young men were clearly under orders: “We don’t talk about that.” [10]

Alongside the neoliberal Helsinki mayor, an elite clutch of Finnish museum circuit operators formed the core supporters. The director of the public City Art Museum, Janne Gallen-Kallela-Sirén was so enthusiastic as to offer shutting down his own museum, proposing to merge it with the New York corporation’s enterprise. (When this was rejected, he soon found himself with a consolation prize as the director of a museum in Buffalo, upstate New York.)

Given the size of the City budget, let alone art budgets, the feasibility study’s figures were staggering. The new jewel-box building was slated at 130-140 million euros, excluding another 30 million in VAT. Starchitects were set on alert. The costs of the planning and founding phase were set at 11.2 million and the annual operating costs put at 14.5 million. The Guggenheim thus would create a “funding gap” of 6.8 million a year, with its expenditure comprising 7/8 of the Helsinki City art museum’s budget. Best of all, the project would charge a “licensing fee” for the Guggenheim brand of 30 million dollars over 20 years – that is, 1.5 million a year for the Guggenheim’s logo. [11] It comes as no surprise then, that the “study” proposed that almost the entirety of the financing for this corporate enterprise was to come from the public purse.

Projections were made in all seriousness for closing down primary schools to foot the bill. Artists were dumbfounded by the figures, and rightfully came to expect that their still half-decent Nordic-style funding system would soon be put to the axe. Asked about their appreciation of the Finnish art scene and its place in the new building, the Guggenheim’s directors offered that, in fact, they had a taste for Finnish architecture and design. While the local tax payer was set to pay for the lions share of the museum, the Guggenheim intended to reserve for itself the right to organize its program as it pleased – at least for the first three years. The board composition was to be approximately half-half.

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Back in Venice, shortly after Karl Marx’s birthday, things were gearing up for an eventful day. A press-conference was scheduled for 10 a.m. at the Cafe Paradiso in front of the Giardini. News was spread by work of mouth – for fear the police would catch wind of the action and intervene immediately, stopping the flotilla of boats from disembarking. The plan was to float with fanfare and protest-banners out into the Laguna and down the Grand Canal, to land at the Peggy Guggenheim’s grand water-side entrance and to occupy the museum.

The day before the occupation a series of talks were held under

the name "*Abstrike* – Let's Strike! Towards an inter-continental platform for art and cultural workers." [12] The presentations at S.a.L.E. Docks included many of the upcoming action's participants. Among them were Marco Baravalle (S.a.L.E. Docks), Andrew Ross, Nitasha Dhillon, Amin Husain, Noah Fischer and Gregory Sholette (G.U.L.F – Gulf Labor), Luigi Galimberti (European Alternatives/Transnational Dialogues), Roberto Ciccarelli (Il Manifesto – La Furia dei cervelli), Cooperativa Crater Invertido and Art Collaboratory, Gluklya (Natalia Pershina-Yakimanskaya) and Anna Bitkina (TOK Curator), Emanuele Braga (MACAO) and Ivor Stodolsky and Marita Muukkonen (Perpetuum Mobile).

The planned occupation was not publicly announced, but an expectant enthusiasm was in the air. The artist **Joulia Strauss** worked tirelessly throughout the proceedings on a large banner in the adjacent space. Yet that night, at an assembly with members of the Gulf Labor Coalition, S.a.L.E. Docks and Perpetuum Mobile, it became clear that the proposed plan was flawed. Under a law which forbids protests on the Laguna and Grand Canal, the police could stop and easily detain the flotilla before it reached the Guggenheim, given the long distance to be covered. So a new two-pronged strategy was developed. The press conference was to be held parallel to the occupation, which would be launched directly from S.a.L.E. We at Perpetuum Mobile took on a special task: to enter the museum early in the morning, to survey the landing-dock and security arrangements prior to the flotilla landing – that is, to occupy the museum from within.

Aside from a knee injury – incurred as a guard smashed the wrought-iron gates we tried to hold open as our fellow activist-occupiers disembarked from their boats – the occupation went surprisingly smoothly. Indeed, having noticed a party on the roof-terrace before opening time, we found a way upstairs to this breakfast-bonanza organized by Christie's auction house. Fresh-pressed orange juice aside, it made for nice shots of the Grand Canal landing-dock to be occupied. The conversations, however, were appalling. As if straight out of a 19th century novel, elegant breakfast guests were overheard averring that, "if you give the workers a finger, they'll take your arm!" More up-to-date chit-chat included, "Diamonds are on the down, I am investing in contemporary art…"

The plan to occupy the Venice Guggenheim was initiated by **G.U.L.F.** (Global Ultra Luxury Faction), the Coalition's activist section. A few days earlier, on 1st of May, G.U.L.F. had occupied the rotunda of the Guggenheim's famed spiraling Frank Lloyd Wright building in New York, demanding direct talks with the corporate leadership. Their demand was refused and the museum was closed instead. As the sociologist-activist Andrew Ross, a senior member of the Gulf Labor Coalition explained, the occupation of the Venice Guggenheim on the 5th May was a follow-up on these unmet demands for direct talks.

S.a.L.E. Docks and a variety of local and international groups played an indispensable role in planning and carrying out the action initiated by the New Yorkers. Nevertheless, because the Gulf Labor Coalition was officially invited to Venice by Okwui Enwezor to participate in the Biennale with a large banner-work in the Arsenale, a certain sense lingered of the occupation being part of an artistic, rather than a distinctly political process. Perhaps this is what lead some in G.U.L.F. to take on the role of *primus inter pares* – a "verticalization" of organization which marks a change in approach for those of them who had advocated a far more horizontal structure as part of the Occupy movement.

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This shift from the principles of assembly-based decision-making to a more "democratic centralist" approach was not reflected on in public, although it deserves separate analysis and discussion. Only a few general issues can be raised in the scope of this article. On the other hand, to what extent can or should one effectively counter a 1% corporate oligarchy with a not-dissimilar elite organizational structure? Considering the specificity of the field of art, to what extent is this structure inherited from the traditional artistic model in which the "artist" has the final word on the (in this case, political) "work"? In other words, can the political message and impetus be effective through or despite an elite institutional form?

On the other hand, considering mass roots-level democracy, there is no doubt that Occupy's forms of consensus-oriented decision-making processes have proved problematic. Not only are such procedures at times difficult and cumbersome in practice, but many have criticized the form of the assembly for masking and reproducing multiple hierarchies while claiming roots-democratic legitimacy. In the first place, participation itself requires the privileged position of having the resources of time, money, health and the institutional knowledge and positioning to be present. Furthermore, many social inequalities and power relations are inevitably imported into the assembly form itself. [13] Without such self-critique – and while paradoxically rejecting the traditional democratic practice of *representation* outright – many assemblies' claims to *represent* "the 99%" were highly problematic. [14] However, one should bear in mind that these very issues also apply to organizational forms which do not claim or strive for equality or consensus, such as elite institutions or operational groups.

A different, semi-traditional form was taken by the movement against the Helsinki Guggenheim: the art-workers association. What came to be known as "Checkpoint Helsinki" started as a movement of artists, curator and art-workers against the use of tax money for building the corporate museum, mobilized by a few active voices and joined by hundreds of others. It resulted in well-attended public assemblies which added to the debate in

civil society and the mainstream media. As a voice of art-workers against the proposed art museum, this “anti-Guggenheim movement” played a visible role in turning the tide against the Guggenheim Helsinki. Due to a combination of factors, the City Council of Helsinki voted against the project in May 2012 by a margin of one vote.

Although Checkpoint Helsinki’s assemblies dwindled significantly following this victory in 2012, they maintained a public profile. Proposing alternatives to the Guggenheim project, they argued that a city which seriously considered spending 180-200 million on a corporation should have some funds to spare for locally-organized, smaller-scale alternatives. After considerable delays, they were funded with a modest budget of 200-300 thousand per annum for an initial three years. In this process, the “anti-Guggenheim movement” was transformed into a regular institution with a degree of oversight by the City funders, loosing some of its political edge. Nevertheless, it commissioned critical and radical art projects, including *Back To Square 1* and *To The Square 2*, with revolutionary artists from Cairo to Moscow, curated by Perpetuum Mobile – to provide disclosure of my own involvement. [15]

Unfortunately, that was not the end of the story. Not very long after the Guggenheim Helsinki’s defeat, it was found out that despite the City Council’s decision, the Conservative Party major was preparing an architectural competition for a new building behind the scenes. No clear financial model was presented, but somehow a new urban space for the revived Helsinki Guggenheim project was allocated in December 2013. A privately financed architectural competition was officially revealed in 2014, and the results have been recently announced in 2015.

Due to the current politics of austerity and harsh cuts to all social and cultural sectors, the odds seem against the project being realized any time soon. However, the once strong anti-Guggenheim movement is not its former self. Checkpoint Helsinki is, for the moment at least, taking a quiet wait-and-see approach, unwilling to be affiliated with a protest at the opening of the architectural competition. [16] However, they have been part of co-sponsoring a playful counter-competition for the redevelopment of Helsinki’s public space under the title “Next Helsinki”. [17] In any case, institutionalization always brings with it a certain degree of constraint, especially when the City funding model is up for renewal.

Creating new models of association and sustainable livelihoods is perhaps the crucial issue of our times. Older forms, such as unionization, cooperatives and collectives – long in decline – are in the process of being re-imagined and wedded with new conceptual frameworks, such as the project for a “commons transition”. [18] Experimental new forms are in evidence across the world. The case of the Cooperativa Integral Catalana (CIC), an “integral collective” which brings together hundreds of highly

diverse groups, gives hope to ambitious plans for interconnecting the plurality of different forms. Based on these multiple experiences, combining the proliferating technologies of liquid democracy (such as Loomio or Wezer) and the development of the non-speculative ethical economic ecologies (such as the blockchain currency FairCoin) projects like FairCoop are emerging. These ambitious yet realistic, bottom-up democratic movements are taking their first pre-mondial steps.

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New parties which have grown out of the protest movements of 2011, such as Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain, are crucial tests for how the question of political form can be answered on the level of grand politics. Podemos, of course, is the new Spanish party which grew out of the 15-M Movement – whose practices, as many know, provided models for Occupy. An important in-between stage to forming the political party, after the 15-M demonstrations lost their force, were the so-called *Mareas* – "the 'tides' or 'waves' of spontaneous organization against the Eurozone austerity measures: the anti-eviction movement, the hospital workers, the teachers and so on" – that is social movements, many of whose leadership figures became prominent members of Podemos. [19] Although the issue of leadership has been hotly debated, the public leader of Podemos Pablo Iglias argues that: "If anything has made us strong, it is that we haven't allowed militant nuclei to isolate us from the wishes of society, to hijack an organization that is—over and above the identities of its political leaders, cadres and militants—an instrument for political change in Spain." [20]

The development of Podemos is certainly worth more detailed study, and its action when in power will be the true test of the party as a political form in our time. The case of Syriza, so courageous and full of hope, yet now seemingly having betrayed its entire program in a shocking capitulation, is a stark warning.

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Returning to Venice once more, one can see that, as in all politics, good timing is of the essence. Once the Venice occupation had closed not only the canal-side grand entrance, but also the entrance by land, the Guggenheim's leadership was in a trap. Not only were they forced to close the museum, but the US's Venice Pavilion's party – the highpoint of the Biennale for the Guggenheim, scheduled for that evening inside the museum – was on the point of being cancelled. The pressure was on. Desperate to avoid a police intervention and the ensuing violence and scandal, an immediate meeting with the occupants was accepted. A small delegation was issued into the halls of power. Here they met senior members of the board, as they had demanded, and quickly received assurances that recently published studies reporting on the dire situation in Abu Dhabi would be read and responded to.

Exiting like victors through the wrought iron gates, the delegation declared the mission accomplished. As the remaining occupiers were informed, the delegation had reached the conclusion to clear the occupation. Their grounds were, on the one hand, that the delegation had achieved its ends of meeting the directors; on the other, that a violent confrontation with security forces would harm the delicate unspoken memorandum of understanding local activist partners had with the police – a balance which they needed to preserve for another direct action scheduled for the next day. Within less than two hours of being shut down, the Guggenheim was open for business again. It is hard to say, but an hour longer of occupation may have put the action on the front page.

The effectiveness of #GuggOccupied remains to be seen. Since May 2015, Ashok Sukumaran, Walid Raad and Andrew Ross of the Gulf Labor Coalition have been denied entry into the UEA. This shows the Guggenheim and its partners are willing to harden the battle lines, regardless of the stringent criticism drawn from leading figures in the international artistic establishment. [21] Whether or not the public-relations strategy of naming, shaming and occupying it again and again provides a big enough threat to the Guggenheim to force it to change its malign practices is an open question.

PR strategies have their political limits. The ambitious but compromised political statement of the Venice Biennale, mentioned at the beginning of this article, have made a show of this truth. To institute genuine change, the structural and financial underpinnings is where to look, not the rhetoric. And this requires far wider socio-political transformation.

If one thing is clear, one cannot imagine a wider political sea-change without new political forms. These are fully possible as is evidenced by the rise of Syriza and Podemos, as well as the ambitious experiments for integrating the legions of self-organized cooperative associations into self-sustaining social ecologies. If art can contribute on this historical level, it is in imagining the presently unfeasible. For it is through acts of the imagination that forms that are truly impossible under the corrupt old paradigm, are made imaginable on the pre-mondial horizon.

This text was presented at the Jan Van Eyck Academy Conference (Berlin, July 2015) and was first published in the ArtLeaks Gazette #3.

Notes:

1. See http://www.myartguides.com/venice-art-biennale-2015/events/item/5073-isaac-julien-stones-against-diamonds and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rolls-Royce_Holdings. ↩
2. “Po-mo” was a favourite short-hand for “postmodernism” used by the

renowned anti-Thatcherite sociologist Paul Hirst. ↩
3. http://www.vulture.com/2015/05/why-is-the-2015-venice-biennale-so-out-of-date.html ↩
4. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kafala_system ↩
5. http://www.hrw.org/report/2006/11/11/building-towers-cheating-workers/exploitation-migrant-construction-workers-united ↩
6. http://fairlabornyu.wordpress.com/faqs/ ↩
7. See http://gulflabor.org. ↩
8. Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 1.12.2014 Nr. 279, p. 15. ↩
9. Headed by Richard Armstrong, whose annual salary is well over half a million dollars according to the activist-architect office Aibeo (http://www.aibeo.com/#!no-guggenheim-in-helsinki/c18dj). ↩
10. Cited by Marita Muukkonen, who was Curator at Helsinki International Artist Programme at the time. ↩
11. http://www.hel.fi/hel2/kanslia/guggenheim/ps/economic_summary.pdf ↩
12. For video documentation see "Ab-Strike: II° Panel 'Scioperiamo! Verso Una Piattaforma Intercontinentale per I Lavoratori Dell'arte E Della Cultura.'" Global Project. Accessed July 27, 2015. http://www.globalproject.info/it/produzioni/ab-strike-ii-panel-scioperiamo-verso-una-piattaforma-intercontinentale-per-i-lavoratori-dellarte-e-della-cultura/19120. ↩
13. As an example of many such critical comments from within the Occupy movement at the time see, " 'Consensus' and Its Discontents." Libcom.org. Accessed July 27, 2015. http://libcom.org/library/consensus-its-discontents. See also Chapter 6 of Jodi Dean, The Communist Horizon. London; New York: Verso, 2012. Thanks to Andrea Liu and Vladan Jeremic, respectively, for the suggestions. ↩
14. For more on the debate surrounding representation, see Teivo Teivainen and Ivor Stodolsky, "Reclaiming Democracy Through the Square" in *THE SQUARE* Issue #1, p. 11 (http://issuu.com/ivorstodolsky/docs/tsq2_newspaper_hr) and the forthcoming contribution of Teivo Teivainen "A State of Pre-, An anthology of art and theory from the Re-Aligned Project" (http://www.re-aligned.net/state-pre/?lang=en/&lang=en). See Dmitry Vilensky's article in *The Moscow Art Journa*l 2008/2014 (English Digest) for an unforgiving critique of Occupy (found in Russian here: http://permm.ru/menu/xzh/arxiv/xudozhestvennyij-zhurnal-%E2%84%9685.-nashe-novoe-budushhee.-chast-2/okkupaj,-kotorogo-vse-tak-davno-zhdali.html). ↩
15. See http://www.re-aligned.net/programme-b2square1/ and http://www.re-aligned.net/tsq2-concept-programme ↩
16. http://www.aibeo.com/#!no-guggenheim-in-helsinki/c18dj ↩
17. http://www.checkpointhelsinki.org/en/projects/the-next-helsinki ↩
18. See the highly interesting work of Michel Bauwens, the P2P Foundation and many other on this and similar concepts, first developed as a large-scale commission for the government of Ecuador: http://commonstransition.org/ ↩
19. Iglesias, Pablo. "Spain On Edge". *New Left Review*, II, no. 93 (June 2015): 23–42. ↩
20. Iglesias, Pablo. "Understanding Podemos". *New Left Review*, II, no. 93 (June 2015): 7–22. ↩
21. http://gulflabor.org/2015/letter-from-sixty-curators-critics-and-museum-directors-to-uae-art-institutions-and-their-affiliates/ ↩

Edit

“Administration of aesthetics” or on underground currents of negotiating artistic jobs; between love and money, money and love

Jelena Vesić

> “Paint what you love and love what you paint”
> Tom Roberts, 1890

“Your money or your life!” – was a threat or a false pick that the 19th century bandits, just about the time when Roberts wrote his credo, used with unguarded passengers on picturesque English countryside roads or in the wilderness of British colonies. A different linguistic plot for this potentially lethal choice might be

something like: “your love or your money!” – in which case the selection with equally surprising effect is put before contemporary passengers, before a caravan of mobile and flexible “culture workers”. The meaning of this blackmail in the domain of cultural production finds its roots far back in history but, as we are about to see, it is never explicitly nominated or pronounced remaining implicit and suggested.

In this overview we will try to analyse different ways in which the concepts of “love” and “money” inhabit the context of production and interpretation of art. In their complex and often violent interplay this dialectics of passionate and lethal embrace allows for a discussion about historically dense relationship between the autonomy of art and heteronomy of labour, as well as various ideological structures of new-old blackmails contained in the binomial *love vs. money* operating within this domain. Nevertheless, people producing artistic content encounter such choices every day.

In our case *love* will appear in a very specific and linguistically very heterogeneous form – as an idea or as an ideal, also as historical and human responsibility, the essence of what we tend to recognize as “spirit”, or even as “soul itself”, as the ultimate meaning and validation of human nature. The concept of love, in this sense, results from Platonic norm of *love of art* [1] and continues evolving in various directions of aesthetic idealism, all the way to the issue of *social responsibility* of a public intellectual, socially useful work or public good. In a contemporary, flexible and self-organized context of content production love plays a key role in a different way – as the field of transactions in the domain of emotional affects or a post-Fordian currency for friendship and social capital.

On the other hand, the concept of money emerges as an empty place of speech, as something making that non-productive (artistic) labour stutter. Money is hiding behind representation of art; it is uneasiness itself and to mention it in this context is nothing but “mercantile kitsch” that is allegedly at odds with any true artistic intent, political responsibility and social engagement. However, as opposed to many incarnations of the concept of love, i.e. linguistic, logical and semantic, it seems that “money” is an actor entirely insensitive to context and transformation of all those relations. In other words, while Mr. Money tends to anonymity and invisibility, Miss Love remains in the spotlight and on stage, trying to disguise, frequently changing its masks and wardrobe.

It is precisely this interplay or “dance of language” that allows the situation to invite its analysis from the perspective of terminology, definition, nominalization and communication practices by means of reconstruction of various struggles and pacts it has with the logic of capitalism. This apparently dynamic but actually rather consistent interaction takes place within a broad and expansive field of art – for the actors in this field, contemporary life is marked with nominalization of key words and phrases, tag cloud mentality and the quantity of communication turning all its actors into “linguistic animals”, formed and limited by the linguistic matrix.

Prologue: why do you say “Money” and mean “Spirit”? Why do you say “Spirit” and mean “Money”?

In *The Artworld* by Arthur Danto, a text that can be considered a turning point in relation to classical and modern discourses on art connected with the theory of imitation (*mimesis*), the truth and the meaning of art lie in the institutional consensus that separates the ordinary world from the world of art [2]:

> “The artworld stands to the real world in something like the relationship in which the City of God stands to the Earthly City. Certain objects, like certain individuals, enjoy a double citizenship, but there remains, the RT notwithstanding, a fundamental contrast between artworks and real objects.” [3]

At the first glance, alike the anachronisms of idealistic philosophy, Danto initially lays down the foundations of what art is to be, which he defines as “the world”, certainly – in the spirit of the 1960s art and philosophy, not the world for itself but the world which positions itself in relation to and in dialogue with life, society and institutional and human constellations. Danto’s “world” is bringing together the three historical moments – establishing of the Academy of art, emerging of aesthetics as the independent sphere, and of forming the institutions of art in both senses: as ideological state apparatuses and as the networks of interpersonal relationships, interactions, historical dialogues. [4]

What appears to be relevant for the development of contemporary art, for which Danto’s text and its consequences may be the reference point or *interface*, is not a reformist approach to the idealistic philosophy, or a duplication or separation of the worlds. Instead, Danto does not interpret that duplication as a product of a particular ontology of art, but as an institutional agreement generating the modes of production, meaning, interpretation and communication, even the market value of art. Danto does not address any other implications in his text, but the theory and practice of contemporary art will demonstrate the unfixed and flexible character of this world – its expansion and power of assimilation, its gaps and leakages into reality, and its osmotic connection to societal realities.

What is the impact of “the duplication of worlds” on the object of art and its market form? Danto takes the example of the difference between the *Brillo Box* authorised (branded) by Warhol and the *Brillo box* produced by the detergent factory of the same name. [5] In fact, the difference between production of art and mass-production established herein [6] draws a dividing line between “sacredness” (eternal life) of artwork and “profanity” of mass- produced goods, the meaning of which is totally exhausted in market economy. The institution (or the world) of art may transform the artist into a powerful, yet tragic, figure, not unlike that of King Midas, who turns anything he touches into gold, only for this miraculous gift to boomerang on him (with King Midas, the punishment of “the divine

gift" leads to too much gold and too little life, whereas in the artist's case – it leads to too much "spirit" and too little money or pay). The institution of art appropriates the divine prerogative of creation as its own, at the same time using that same prerogative to open up space for denying something, i.e. material body (the artist's life), his or her relationship with the real world etc. and this is something that critical art practice would file under artistic work (or artist's labour) or the social function of art.

Within the concept of creation and creativity, as the key element of the ideology of art [7], the work is replaced by free and almighty flow of inspiration that is the hallmark of a artist-genius – accordingly, the outcome of this free process (read: the work of art) is solely defined by immunity or the author's trademark, uniqueness and singularity. And precisely in the concepts of authorship or originality in the contrast between the divine attribute of creation (creatio) and worldly production (productio) lies the ideological opposition between arts and goods, which has been constantly and confidently perpetuated by the institution of art. For this very reason, mercantile character of art has always been a neuralgic point, unease itself, something that has always been a dead end for aesthetics and history of art.

In the contemporary "Enterprise Culture" art has never been represented as a market, not even when it has been nominally, legally and institutionally constituted as the market. Let us take the example of very popular contemporary art fairs such as *The Freeze Art Fair* in London, a manifestation that without any doubt exhausts its function and meaning in art sales and trade although its (self)representation refers to something completely different. In function of representation and "experience" this manifestation frequently employs vast symbolic capital of communication, aesthetization, intellectual work, creativity and, finally, money in order to dissuade visitors, art lovers, collectors and even the actors of this operation, at least for a moment, that it is all just about money, goods and trade.

Brand new ambience commissioned for the occasion guarantees "new" and different experience where visitors are invited to enter a maze of gallery stands: such stands are much more than that – they are curated rooms with exhibition concepts and carefully designed atmospheres. [8] Education and entertainment are also part of this, i.e. there are numerous lectures, discussions, promotions of books and magazines, VIP and open parties, self-organized presentations (and sales) of young artists' works, advertised and unadvertised performances, actions, curator initiatives, counter-fairs and alternative fairs and so on and so on. This assembly of various art events, this scenography of "spirit", makes an uninterrupted continuum of camouflage that is positioning art market operations behind the scene and outside of the visible domain.

With this "game of hide and seek" involving labour and money with the aid of even more money and investments various culture industries transfer a distanced reflex of "truths" rooted in modern aesthetics and history of art, seeking in them their own legitimization, no matter how absurd and paradoxical this venture

might seam. Lessons on distinction between high art and its public function on the one hand and commercial art as the synonym for low on the other had been provided by the 18th century Academy and that heritage has more or less played a constitutive function for the institution of art in all it later stages of (self)transformation.

Ever since Vasari's calls for perfection in art that is alienated from any other form of production and Winckelmann's postulate on "noble simplicity and quiet grandeur" connecting antiquity and modernity as well as Diderot's review of the Paris Salon in 1767 as "corruption of taste by luxury" where he nominated "money destroying beaux arts" there is one thing that stands out – the Industrial Revolution, emergence of bourgeoisie and placing art at the core of capitalist relations, that is the establishment of a direct link between money and taste was confronted with systematic resistance in the framework of emerging institution of art. How has "true art" historically managed to divorce from money? All trade or production of art defined by demand was simply equalized with decorative arts from which it wanted to detach. In ideological but also in very practical sense, the academic system served to liberate art from medieval associations of guilds, which, in our case means liberation from the immediate purpose of "luxurious decoration".

Joshua Reynolds, one of the founders of the British Academy, observed that art attributes as "intellectual dignity … that ennobles the painter's art" and "draws a line between him and pure mechanic who does not produce art but mere ornament". Thus the institution of art at the moment of constituting the aesthetical as a separate sphere establishes the attributes of uniqueness, originality and authorship introducing a difference between high art and commercial culture of luxury craftsmanship (or art as the expression of commercial culture).

In such contrasting, antagonistic and variable attempts to remove money, labour and labour relations from the stage of art representation, there are obvious consensual efforts to explain that art cannot be understood as business as usual, as labour or work – but rather as something completely different. At this point, money appears as creative shame.

Administration of aesthetics and its dramaturgy

However, what happens with the transfers of *love* and *money*, if we are to try – from the perspective of contemporary art – to approach the very production apparatus, the terrain of everyday life where various practices of administration of aesthetics take place? What will we find if we try to get closer to economic reality of "workers" active in the ever expanding "world of art" in all its domains of (self-)critical negations, transformations, excesses, inclusions and exclusions only to focus on the very moment when projects and collaborations come to life? How does art-as-ideology inhabit speech used on such occasions?

The term *administration of aesthetics* has been forged for such

needs as an allusion to or inversion of Buchloh's term *aesthetics of administration*; the inversion in terms of difference between the exhibition mode or the moment when art is presented (on which Buchloh focuses) and the process that precedes it, i.e. agreements, negotiations, communication, all those things that have been categorized as too banal and therefore set behind "the stage" for exhibiting and presenting art. At the time, Buchloh's *aesthetics of administration* emerged from subversive appropriations of bureaucratic and institutional forms in conceptual art practices of the 1960s and 1970s, better known as the *art of institutional critique*. [9] In analogy with labour negotiations, which are the focus of this paper, the term was introduced to mark art which reveals the relations of production, pacts and deals that are usually covered up, eluded or decorated with the experience of "real art".

How are modes of production established by the means of speech and communication? How do individual actors position themselves in their role of employers or employees? Unofficial, para-legal agreements on art production, often founded in peer-to-peer bases, figure as dominant forms of negotiation about "the delivery" of content or participation in various cultural events. We can even say that production forms find their sources precisely in this para-legality and one-on-one relationship, [10] whereas institutional "officialdom", mobilization of the representative apparatus, legal verification of the agreement – all this represents mere administrative confirmation of something that has already happened, which has been concluded and which served its function. [11]

The dramaturgy of the whole process of contracting works of art mainly relates to the field already operated by protagonists who live at the bottom of the economic ladder of the "Enterprise culture" – freelance writers, guest lecturers, experimental curators, critically oriented visual artists, left wing intellectuals, alternative theatre companies, independent critiques, essayists, in other words, all those who are answering to various institutional calls (to be more precise, those who produce content for institutions, or, which is a relatively new phenomenon, who work in place of institutions). We will dramatize characteristic communication involving authors or culture workers who collaborate in various self-organized initiatives behind the curtains of immediate production of glamour and success – those subjects that Gregory Sholette calls *dark matter* [12] in the sense of their voluntary (political) decision to leave the place with the most exposure and immediate connection with the "star system" and market demands.

In this "adventure" of going down to the field of production or a kind of scenario overview where every similarity with real actors is intentional, the accent will be put on several types of para-contractual relations, in which the relations between "love" and "money", "play" and "labour" become apparent in the speech registry.

Although such arrangements are para-legal and unofficial and imply talks and negotiations behind which, in most cases, there are no contracts signed between the two parties, in terms of the process

and verbal practice there are two dominant players: the One who calls **(A)** and the Other who is being called **(B)**. [13]

1. PARADE OF LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, OR NOBILITY WITHOUT PROTECTION

The title might come in handy to illustrate the conversational atmosphere in which the "world of art" is observed as something isolated from the outside world and even existence itself (the artist's life). In such atmosphere there is a presumption about chains of equivalence [14] based in mutual love for creation and knowledge, so that business relations between **A** and **B** are intentionally "erased" from speech. The presumption **A** (and sometimes even **B**) is that the biggest ideal in art is actually "to create out of ideal" and that "we" (always, in that case, "we") are driven only by ideas and idealism and never by money (which could, in this case, be understood as "interest"). On the one hand, creative work is perceived either as a natural urge and emanation of talent, or as a spontaneous manifestation of civic or social responsibility of public intellectuals – almost as some kind of biological growth or metabolic process of creative personae. On the other hand, the word "money" is perceived as something dirty and (although, in most cases, no one has ever questioned receiving compensation for one's work; quite the opposite. However, the issue of proper pay is in this case something unconsciously presumed)… "Dirtiness" and "ugliness" related to the perception of money also results from paradoxical fact that words such as "amount", "compensation", "author's fees" and "expenses" come down to some sort of financial gain (or cupidity, or maybe even, and let us be very silent about it, –– some "profit"), which true art supposedly surpasses. [15]

Examples in speech: [16]

A – Would you like us to do …; I have a great idea for … Will you join me …; We officially inform you were chosen to …. The date is this and this …; I am calling you to write a text for me, you are the only one who can do it; You are invited to give a lecture there and there, then and then; I started a project – I only want to do this with you …;

B1 – (a person who accepts the game unreservedly) … Please, let's not talk all the time about budget issues – this should be left to managers – let's talk about the content – this is why we are here, writing should not be a profession; I do not want to talk about money, I am not doing this for money, I am doing this because I am interested in it … and then, if something comes out of it – good; However, I would do this in any case, because I believe the matter is important in itself.

B2 – (a person who still tries to make a living, but not to question certain "unspeakable" issues thereby) … Thank you a lot for your invitation – could you tell me about some organizational details; I like the idea a lot, but I am also interested in hearing about the exact plans regarding the

production; I would really love to do this – is it possible for me to find out more about the whole project …

The rhetoric of the inviter – the initiator, the undertaker, the project manager or the institutional representative – displays a discourse of intimacy, relationship erotisation flattering tributes and praises are spoken (*like, have an idea, join, be officially chosen, be invited, be special, be unique*…). At first glance, such invitation can easily be replaced by an invitation for playing, having fun, hanging out, an affair… As if the topic were spending free time together, and not working. Understandable, such rhetoric nurtures the idea of the specificity of the "world of art" and "love for creating and knowledge", the other side of which can only be the banality of the brutal capitalism and the motif for profit making.

The rhetoric of the invited content providers, **B1** and **B2**, will differentiate from one another, although they will both nominally reflect accepting the noble aristocratic game of the disinterestedness and such gentleman-ladylike agreement. **A** person who refuses to engage in "vulgar" economical and organizational aspects of creative work, and is willing to talk only about noble matters concerning sense and content, probably enjoys the "luxury" of being situated in an institution, receiving a regular payment, or has some other (perhaps family) background enabling him/her not to live from his/her own work exclusively.

The second voice also accepts this hegemonic discourse, although the person standing behind it is obviously someone (trying) to make a living through his/her work, someone who cares about the precise production parameters, in order to incorporate them into the "production line" of their *living-work-time-self-sustainability* costs. Regarding such "**B2** person", the rule says they will, almost without exception, decide to (once again) make peace with their well-known destiny of volunteer professionalism, although the answer to their rude question "how much?" will often be "well, nothing".

2. TRIPARTITE LETTER – SHORT RECKONINGS MAKE LONG FRIENDS (closed code vs. open code)

At the moment, the *tripartite letter* format slowly naturalizing as a canonical form of conversation about the art work usually involves the shorter or longer information blocks:

— Information on the *content/scope of the project*.
— Information on the *nature and scope of involvement, place and time of the content "delivery"*.
— Information on the *fee*.

While in the first case of the *gentleman-ladylike* agreement we encounter constant discomfort in phraseological, and sometimes also inventive tries to leave out the word "money", in the case of the tripartite letter we find that discomfort originates precisely in the

directness of its reference. In this speech register there is no mystification of creating, no concealing, no suppression, no costuming, and no detour strategies of linguistic politicking. There is, however, a shock because of the brutal purchasing of something that – as history taught us – "is not for sale" or, at least, "cannot be 'pure trading'".

In the **closed code** of the *tripartite letter* para-contractual format, **A** and **B** are clearly positioned in the field of power – **A** buys labour or administers a "purchase" in the name of the buyer, while **B** actively operates in the labour market and is ready to sell his/her time and expertise. **B** can be treated either as a qualified worker (in culture: specialized for certain subject matters), or as an unqualified, or all-qualified worker (in culture: the one replying to general and wide-spectrum invitations for creating contents being offered). [17]

Examples of correspondence:

A – Dear XXX,
I received your contact details from YYY. Are you interested in writing a text concerning the topic of MMM for the ZZZ magazine? Kindly find attached the concept (attachment: a brief general description). The text should have X – Y words, the length of the text is standard and strictly limited.
Unfortunately, the deadline is tight – all texts have to be ready for layout no later than 0.0.1. (date). In case you are interested in cooperation, kindly send us the draft of the text you would be writing by the end of the week. We can provide 000 (the sum) for the author fee, that will be paid a month after the volume is published, and this is planned for 6.6.6. (date, usually 3-6 months after the text is submitted). I hope to hear from you soon, XYZ

B1 – (thinking for themselves, or discussing with friends…) – I really prefer working for a capitalist. At least everything is clear here – what you see is what you get. They exploit clearly and publicly, and not "under the table" like state institutions or "our friends".

B2 – (always a sharp commentary) – The thing I hate the most is when someone talks to me like this – as if writing a piece of text would be twisting screws on the assembly line, as if you would not engage your whole mind and body in the process in order to say something, to send a message. This is pure intellectual prostitution. Mechanical sex. At least in prostitution you get the cash immediately, and here you get it only when you forget you ever worked for it. What should this mean – that writing a piece of text is not the most important part of magazine production? I wonder if they are going to pay the printing house only after they sell all the copies…

The letter written by the person who commissions work establishes relations of production that are alienated beforehand. Such relations involve what Marx addresses in his early work as "real subsumption", and Camatte and Negri address the same issue as "a complete or total subsumption of labour", or rather "a total

subsumption of society" – standing here for the expropriation of workers from the production process and a magical formula that will make the value of labour decreasing constantly, while the productivity should always increase. "I received your email from XXX" even says that **B**, addressed in this situation by the client who orders labour, was not their first choice, but was actually a delegated successor of someone more attractive to the labour provider, a subject more intensely tagged on the cultural scene, who refused to do the job for some reason, but was kind enough to pass it on to someone who they have a friendly relationship with, or someone whose expertise they believe in.

Having in mind that the draft of the text should be sent, so to speak, immediately, this is probably the second, third or fourth time the job is being passed on, and the content provider is reduced to a replaceable executive instrument of isolated, mechanized, time- limited, and somewhat standardized operations. The person who commissions work does not address her as an author with a certain *oeuvre*, a defined and constructed profile they wish to place on the market and to support, they address her as an intellectually equipped cognitive mechanic who needs to fit insinuated, unclear, or extremely vague and undefined expectations. Descriptions of concepts and content are brief and general, and a cynical observation might conclude that in this sense they receive anything other than what they do not receive.

It seems here as if it were much more important to produce the matter successfully and pack it up as a project, to make sure the content gets its attributes defined in contracts, regarding the person who orders, produces, sponsors, administers, and "owns" it, than to take account of preliminary details of that content. [18] In other words – it seems as if these legal documents might exist meaningfully even without that one document representing the very text that is ordered.

On the other hand, in the case of an **open code**, [19] there is an attempt of a differently motivated cooperation that is still primarily based on ideas and contents. Such conversation will try to oppose to the hegemonic production apparatus and its strictly defined roles through more democratic, interactive formats that are more open to a critical thinking. In the *open code*, **A** and **B** already are in a kind of comradeship, counted on through a (political) friendship and love in "the common good" and "socially engaged contents". This *comradeship* also stands for a mutual understanding and trust regarding the organization of the production apparatus, with the aspirations to affect the apparatus tactically in the direction of an envisioned transformation or change. The para-contractual conversation in the form of a *tripartite open-code letter* is characteristic for the so-called non-profit project sector or – in the post-Yugoslav territory – most often for the work of "independent cultural protagonists" and the development of what is called "the independent cultural scene" – something that, in a broader sense, could be recognized as a format of self-organized initiatives and cooperatives with, naturally, certain shared socio-political and aesthetic aspirations.

Examples of correspondence:

A – Hello, my dear XXX,
Long time no hear. We finally got the money to realize the ZZZ project I told you about last year, remember when we talked in the breaks at the BBB conference? The instructions have slightly changed in the meantime, because we had to make some adaptations, and to connect with YYY after all (project/ institution/organization) in order to receive an EU grant, but the team is fantastic – you'll see. We managed to make a draft of the concept I am sending preliminary – of course, if you have any comments, remarks, or similar – they are more than welcome. We are really interested in what you have to say about all this, but bear in mind that this is still just a draft … We haven't had much time to focus so far due to all the bureaucracy, you know how it goes.
It is suggested that we organize a series of events during November – pls let me know if this suits you and what terms you would be able to join us. We should know the exact dates within the upcoming weeks, and we are contacting many people, who are all "all over the place" … You know how things are … Actually, we can postpone the whole thing for as far as the beginning of December, but no longer that that, because at the end of December the reports need to be prepared as well, uh-huh :).
Also, we shouldn't forget "what keeps the mankind alive" – we can offer fees of 001 (the sum) to our collaborators – they might be small, but at least they are coming from the heart :)
We are aware this is not much, but you are familiar with our working conditions. If you think this is not enough, considering the engagement in question, don't hesitate to complain, maybe we could do some magic and squeeze some more euros from the production, and increase the sum for 50 euros or so … In any case, you can count on standard *per diems*, friendly meals, dinners and good atmosphere … That isn't that bad either :)

kind regards and talk to you soon, your X

Here the text of the response sent by **B** would be mostly a direct reflection of text **A** – accessory and consensual.

The case of the *tripartite letter open code* (which is certainly never completely open because, for example, it does not put a comprehensive insight into the development of the project and budget allocation in the common field) reveals two sides of the discourse of love and care:

On one side, such processes can be perceived from the perspective of power, from the recognition of the effects of supra-state ideological apparatuses that project work is exposed to (international foundations, project networks, etc.), their subordination to totalizing tendencies of a neoliberal social order. In that case, such para-contract would mean an accessory agreement of **A** and **B** to be "beaten" by the hand of humanism (a kind of warmer, but also a creepier version of the previous model). This extended hand of an "active effort" (regarding the selling of

their own labour) and “firm bonding” (in friendly forms and contents) is subtly coloured by the situation where everything is in the air, in the process, negotiation, agreement, flexible arrangement, and yet restrictively defined by the *project form* characterized by a lack of available time, tight deadlines, competitive networking, and self-precarisation. [20] In *project forms*, individuals put themselves into cooperation and interdependence, determine and reduce their own incomes, while the factor of modern technology speeds up this communication and production; the number of projects is increasing, as well as the amount of work, while incomes are decreasing or, in the “most successful” cases, they remain the same.

On the other side, individuals have certain autonomy in project management – they have the opportunity to intervene in the field where “worker does not apply working conditions, but working conditions apply the worker”, and to convert this classical form of suppression into its opposition. A good manager, like a train switchman, is in the position to reroute paths and direct the movement/thought/tendency into another direction (let us remember the character of a diversionist in partisan movies!). The possibility of intervention and action now opens towards a wider community as well, and refers to a collectivist, and a more democratic model or approach. Love would be the unifying element of such collectivization.

Here we can find the particle of continuing the thought brought by revolutionary feminism, and this is an attempt to create micro-communities, modern cooperatives in which interpersonal, working and social relations are organized differently. In her time, Alexandra Kollontai, a Bolshevik feminist, was inviting for a certain parallelism, a simultaneous construction of both the new social apparatus and the change of personal and interpersonal relationships, believing that the end of capitalism lies not only in an “abstract” organization of the state apparatuses and laws, but also in a concentrated and organized effort to transform personal and interpersonal relationships. [21] This invitation can also be seen as an invitation to revolutionize relationships based on p2p, in line with the struggle for integral social changes.

However, it is not that straightforward, or without a paradox, to use past experiences in a “handy translation” for the needs of a reformist politics of creating better and more equitable communities. Without any doubt, a full force of realization of this type of project is possible only through overcoming the capitalist system. Inside capitalism, it remains a tool of subordination or an inner transformation of the already-existing… while a true revolutionary practice strives precisely for the realization of the non-existent.

Creation, entrepreneurship, artistic labour/non-labour

How to conclude the consideration of this ideological transfer between *creatio* and *productio*, between the Spirit and Money,

whose manifestation is mediated by various “parades” of love – interested and disinterested, with a vision or with calculation. What is the presumed terrain on which these relations unfold?

Still, the issue of creation, entrepreneurship and artistic labour cannot, in the historical sense, be reduced to a clear-cut and unambiguous opposition between *art* and the *production of goods* in some sort of totality. [22] This relationship has, rather, become the foundation for bifurcations and stratifications, conflicts and struggles occurring within art itself. The positioning takes place in the naming alone. Whether we recognize a certain artistic gesture or practice contextually and materially as creation, entrepreneurship or artistic labour/non-labour, says something about the practice – it introduces demarcation lines on the body of art-as-ideology, which are often the lines of the “class struggle within art”.

Through examples, analyses, dramaturgies of events and sketches of relations, we have touched upon three wide conceptual terrains on which artistic positioning is carried out – the terrain of *high art*, *market art* and *critical artistic practices*, which we have given special attention. [23]

The concept of *high art* or *art commission* was originally developed as an aristocratic invention, only to later find its new iterations in modernist aestheticism and formalism. In the Keynesian welfare states of the 20th century, high art played the role in the state ideological apparatus [24] of the organized space of autonomy (the so-called *relative autonomy of art*) and was juxtaposed with the alternative culture (as the critical margins of society) and popular culture (often equated with the cultural industries). [25] Its connection with terms such as the public, politics or state, and occasionally the society (in socialist states), most often presumed connections with the dominant public, or “the public of the class in power”, which changed through different orders, just as art itself has changed.

The concept of *market culture* or market-oriented art appeared as an alternative to the academic dictate, primarily the dictate of the French and British academies and their production apparatus established according to the model of *art commission* or commissioned works of art. Art, as an already established (institutionalized) practice, entered a contractual relation with capital and responded to the market demand under the slogan of liberated individuality. The concept of art as a matter of individual taste was created by the rising middle class, *bourgeoisie*, emancipating itself from the public, policy and state, whose ideology at a given historical moment was dictated by the aristocracy and clergy. Today, this concept is the dominant mode of existence of art, which best reflects the logic of the *1:99* order.

Finally, the concept of *critical art* [26] opposed this binary pair of high art and the arts market. Critical artistic practices have developed from the doctrine of self-reflection and self-criticism of the artistic system, the *Artworld* (as Danto would say) or *art-as-institution* (as Peter Bürger formulated it [27], relying on the experience of the

historical avant-garde).

One of the main goals of critical art was to return art, through criticism of the institution of art created in the liberal civil society, to everyday life and social practice, thus returning to issues of the modes of production and consumption, relying on the approaches of political economy and Marxist theories of art. [28] Various avant-garde policies of negating and provoking institutions of art in different contexts and situations attempted to create and defend a new and different public. By questioning the form and context of phenomena, and by questioning the relations between the content, form and organisation, critical art often returned the focus to the issue of artistic labour in different forms. In the historical development of art in the 20th and 21st century, we faced different manifestations of ideological interventions in the field of creation (*creatio*) through concepts the artist-worker, worker-as- artist/ creator, through the slogan "everyone is an artist!", through the concept of art as everyday life or everyday life as art.

However, what happens today if we return to the concept of artist-worker and we begin to think of art as labour?

On the one hand, the entry of the field of self-definition via the declaration "I am a cultural worker" represents a tactical operation, a mobilization call to the precarious cognitariat faced with neoliberal processes of the decomposition of the social sphere and welfare states, sending everyone it can to the market. To say "I am a cultural worker" is to reclaim the linguistics of broken socialism for the purposes of an existential struggle of artists that have been made redundant, just as many other industrial and social workers, who have lost their position in the general restructuring of the economy and politics according to the neoliberal dictate. "I am a cultural worker" is a signifier of the cultural solidarity with the contemporary working class, which results in the active denial of the ideology of art and the canon of *creation*. Such a declarative de-auratization of artistic distinctiveness represents an attempt to shift the focus to artistic and intellectual activity as labour that deserves social recognition and material compensation.

On the other hand, the opposition between *artist-genius* and *cultural worker* only accentuates the rupture between the autonomy of art and the heteronomy of labour, between the "ethereal existence" of an artist creating out of love and (social) ideals and the cultural worker immersed in the material existence, who creates motivated by external factors – profit and wages. Paradoxically, to say art=labour and to be a cultural worker is to consent too easily to the oblivion of all great dreams of autonomy and freedom in exchange for a little safe existence here and now. What does it mean to be a cultural worker in capitalist social relations? A creative slave? A freethinking hireling?

To accept capitalist labour and the principle *Make Whichever You Find Work* [29], as Marina Vishmidt and Anthony Iles demonstrated, is just another form of affirming contemporary market expansionism. To say "I am a cultural worker" means the same as "I am not an artist-social parasite", [30] some sort of confirmation via negation or a

boomerang effect of the neoliberal dyad utilitarity-redundancy. Cynically – the system could reply "if you are a worker – sell yourself, work and earn some money", if the other industries are closed, at least the cultural industries are open – "apply your creative craft as a worker and work in the industries"…

There is something in disinterestedness that capitalism finds very disturbing, but it certainly does not mean a return to the same struggle for the autonomy of art initiated by enlighteners, philosophers of idealism and founders of academies. In any case, it is interesting to notice that the paradoxical struggle of cultural workers invokes an image of future society as a "society of workers", whereas in the revolutionary situations of the 20th century one would dream of a "society of artists". This is why the dramaturgies of the para-contractual conversations, which were the subject of this text, manifest numerous schisms, anxieties, contradictions, wants and frustrations of the contemporary protagonists of the art world, imprisoned like voices in the mind as a result of the inflated (im)possibility of self- realisation.

As an open ending – one true anecdote that formalizes and performs the claim that *money represents the shame of creation* through a paradoxical coupling of cynical conceptualism and tactical functionalism. After many years of discomfort over the struggle for his own worker's and existential rights in the midst of discussions about beautiful and creative artistic matters, the artist X from Western Europe finally found a "Solomonic solution". He gave form to this deafened schism by creating the fictitious character of his female manager Y, with an e-mail address and Southeast European origin. The artist X only discusses artistic creation, and the manager Y only discusses money. The same person is behind both e-mail addresses, simultaneously delegating tasks to both his "elevated" and "banal" half, conducting himself – as necessary – sometimes generous and sometimes restrictive, sometimes immersed in the content of the art and sometimes in the production needs, at times struggling for ideas and at times for money and subsistence.

Rather than as a convenient method for "ridding oneself of the sins of interestedness" with "disinterested ideas", the anecdote is more intriguing for the way it situates, through gender, geopolitics and ideology-art, the schisms in one body and in "the right location". This schism confirms the rule that today a true artist is only the artist who can say: "For everything else, please address my manager".

Translated from Serbian by Mirna Herman

This article was first published in "Art & Money", *Frakcija* 68/69, (Zagreb: 2013).

Notes:

1. The norm of love of art is derived from the Plato's concept of *love* (love of philosophy) as transcendescence of human existance through self- realization, self-improvement, knowledge, creation, thinking, aspiration to immortality.

See: Plato, *The Symposium* (London: Penguin Books, 1999). ↩
2. See: Arthur Danto, "The Artworld" (1964) Journal of Philosophy LXI, pp. 571-584. ↩
3. *ibid*, p. 582. ↩
4. Andrea Fraser wrote about the internalization of the institutional apparatus and biopolitical understanding of institutions in *From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique Artforum*, 44.1 (2005), pp. 278-285. ↩
5. Danto underlines the issue of recognition, distinction and not so much the issue of economy and status of goods that are in the focus of this text: "To see something as art requires something the eye cannot decry – an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld.", Danto, "The Artworld", p. 580. ↩
6. There is something blatant in Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* – that repetitive and reproductive creation of series of objects, very similar to factory making with an element of aesthetization or, as Benjamin said, "auratization" – with an approach from, of course, cynical side of "aura" which equalizes spirit, love and money – functions as the artist's brutal comment on the production of artistic values in the era of optimism linked to capitalist consumer society (Warhol dedicated many of his works to fetishist character of money). Paradoxically, and with the same brutality and cynism, nowadays, in the era of political and economic pessimism the dominant discourse of contemporary art seems to go back to the old arguments related to spirituality, grandeur and relevance of creativity, overshadowing money and putting capitalist relations aside. ↩
7. The concept of *ideology of art* or *art-as-ideology* originally belongs to Goran Đorđević, former artist, active on the territory of former Yugoslavia and internationally in the period 1973-1985. For Đorđević, *ideology of art* is characterized by concepts such as *creation*, *genius*, *autorship*, *originality*, *uniqueness* and *distinctiveness* resulting from "religious consciousness". As opposed to art practice as the reflexion of religious consciousness, Đorđević's (counter-) artistic works are based in negation of creation through exploration, negation of originality due to copies, negation of autorship through anonimity. See: Goran Đorđević, "Umetnost kao oblik religiozne svesti" (Art as a Form of Religious Conciousness), *Oktobar 75* (Beograd: SKC,1975) and Goran Đorđević, "On the Class Character of Art", *The Fox*, 3 (1976), New York. Also, Branislav Dimitrijević, "(Ne) mogući umetnik: o nestvaralačkim istraživanjima Gorana Đorđevića" and Jelena Vesić "Igrati na terenu umetnosti, ne biti karakter u priči, govoriti pozajmljenim glasom", *Against Art, Goran Đorđević – Copies (1979-1985)*, exhibition catalogue (Belgrade: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2014). ↩
8. Very often in the stands in the galleries selling works of art disguised in *curated rooms* it is impossible to discern markets with exclusive objects bearing price tags. The price is never there, not even if a particular work of art has been sold. If that is the case, the object is marked with a subtle, coloured dot to be noticed only by those for whom this piece of information is intended. For everyone else, this might be just another mega exhibition of contemporary art. ↩
9. Buchloh actually talks about artistic intervention in the field of the institutional revealing the very mechanisms and politics behind this representational field – instead of exhibiting theme works, objects, something created previously, what is being exhibited is the intervention in the given and complex institutional constellation where the artist is found. In such aesthetical domain art embraces the tools of bureaucracy: paperwork, documentation, work with advertisments and other papers – only to use them against the representative and repressive (institutional) apparatus producing the criteria for evaluation, aesthetical confirmation and introduction of values. The historical moment in art described and articulated by Buchloh also represents a moment in which he linguistically and politically reaches a certain turnabout in the field of artistic production – the paradigm of *piece of art* is replaced by the paradigm of *work of art*... or the *artist's work*. See: Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetics of Administration to the Critique of Institutions", *October*, 55 (1999), pp. 105–143. ↩
10. By all means, productional form is always established as a kind of response to, as Althusser said, a call "hey, you" of the (dominant) ideology. Therefore, productional form is by no means some exterior, previously constituted rule existing outside of the practice itself, but rather the manifestation of productional form co-exists with its inception within the very

practice. ↩
11. Classical, legally binding agreements rarely appear in the contemporary world of art, or, if they do appear, this happens only after everything has been done. Legally binding agreements in art and culture have a life of their own; they are autonomous in relation to negotiable reality in which works of art actually come to life. In that sense, they are separated from life as well – they are born dead and their only purpose or aim is to remain in institutional or bureaucratic archives (as *post festum* legitimation and not actualization). This very fact explains that there are certain problems related to understanding art as work and, consequently (and especially so) paid work. ↩
12. Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 2011). ↩
13. It is also important to note that positions A and B remain fixed and unchangeable only in the framework of the predefined institutional relations in force within the system of the so- called social or welfare state, whereas in the times of projects, collaborations and flexible work, positions A and B can be very easily exchanged and altered. In that case, we are no longer talking about a pair composed of two elements and univocal relationship between the two, but rather about the entire chain of production and art creation ranging from macroeconomic policies to individual stakeholders. ↩
14. The notion of *chain of equivalence* and *chain of difference* is explained in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (London: Verso, 1985). ↩
15. 15. In the first "case" stakeholders come to such positions through passive internalization of idealistic aesthetic, although most examples of project-based work and sometimes even some exchanged money (proudly avoided, erased and suppressed in conversation) serves for pure reproduction of life far from any kind of profit. ↩
16. Examples in speech found in this text are a product of dramaturgical research and close empirical encounter with various culture workers rather than "objective" scientific methods of research in sociology and anthropology. Scientific research methods involving tables, questionnaires, target questions as well as other forms of standardization together with alienated relations between the researcher and the surveyee together with the lack of reference to the topic, the exterior, objective position of the researcher are purposely avoided. Such research position is herein interior, emphatic and empirical and all individual experiences are generalized through multiannual extensive and intensive dialogue with different colleagues and friends sharing same, similar or different experiences. I would like to thank for their comments to the Kontekst collective, the Uzbuna initiative, the WHW curator collective, the TKH collective, Bojana Piškur, Vesna Vuković, Vladimir Jerić, Zorana Dojić, Radmila Joksimović, Svebor Midžić, Mirjana Dragosavljević, Darinka Pop-Mitić, Andrej Dolinka, Dejan Vasić, Jelena Petrović, everyone who has participated in discussions about the intiative called "the other scene", Engine room project at the Cultural Center Rex, the Workers Inquiry in Reina Sofia project and David Berge. ↩
17. One of the examples of such relation would be the so-called *open call* invitations from editors for texts in thematic editions of glossy art magazines, participation in thematic panels, specialist publications, etc. ↩
18. Most often, this will reflect in the allocation of large amounts of money for equipment, promotion and marketing of the project, while small amounts of money will be used for content creation and payment of collaborators whose work presents the backbone of the project. ↩
19. Here I use the software term *open code* also connected to the term *open institutionalism*, referring to more recent attempts to reshape cultural institutions, common resources, and the cultural public sphere in an attempt to resist to austerity politics or placing the culture on the market. See: Tomislav Medak, "Open Institutions and the Reform of the Cultural System", *Frakcija*, 60/61 (2011) (Artistic Labor in the Age of Austerity), pp. 50- 54. Also, contributions from the Open Institutions Conference http://zagreb.openinstitutions.net. ↩
20. For a (self-)critical analysis of project work and NGO forms see: Prelom kolektiv (Dušan Grlja and Jelena Vesić), "The Neoliberal Institution of Culture and the Critique of Culturalization", http://eipcp.net/transversal/0208/prelom/en [accessed 3 September 2014]. ↩
21. See: Teresa L. Ebert, *Alexandra Kollontai and Red Love*, http://www.solidarity-us.org/site/node/1724 [accessed 3 September 2014]. Certainly,

Kollontai linked these issues to the question of emancipation of women and socialization of childcare, but I believe the request for a change of social relations on the "molecular" level of interpersonality can be set as a universal request – through a transformation of human consciousness. ↩

22. See, for instance, the text by Stipe Ćurković "Heteronomy of Labour/ Autonomy of Art" in *Frakcija*, 60/61 (2011) ("Artistic Labor in the Age of Austerity"), pp. 50- 54. This valuable and exhaustive analysis of human labour and social relations from Marxist positions obviously retains an external view of art and artistic practice, approaching them from a sociological point of view as some sort of ahistorical phenomenon. In a short review of issues concerning artistic labour (the last chapter of the text, pp. 30-33), Ćurković speaks of art as a "block", a monolithic structure without internal differentiation, historical development, class oppositions and political struggles. In other words, he sees art as a structure lacking, to paraphrase Althusser, a class struggle in the cultural production (a paraphrase of Althusser's definition of philosophy as a class struggle in theory). ↩

23. In reality, these three provisional structures – *high art* enclosed in the ideosphere of idealism, *market art* determined by pragmatism and *critical artistic practices* determined by a materialistic approach to art – do not exist, as is always the case, in ideal isolation or conceptual purity. Rather, they throw into question the vision of art as a single uniform block levitating separately above the field of social events. The world of art, in all of its expansions, transformations and mimicries (as discussed above) is not an enclosed territory, but rather a broad spectrum of approaches and a terrain of struggle – a landscape of conflict, different positions and constructions. ↩

24. See: Luis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses", in: Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays (New York, Monthly Review Press, 2001), pp. 127-188, http://www.marx2mao.com/Other/LPOE70NB.html [accessed 3 September 2014]. ↩

25. It should be pointed out that many artistic movements, groups and individual artists who were active in the domain of modernist formalism had political and social utopian aspirations, most frequently related to the coexistence of the universality of modern art and the anticipated universal human emancipation. ↩

26. The proliferated term critical art probably means little today because every art represents itself as somewhat critical and political in the regulated domain of "appropriate" and "moderate" requirements. However, regardless of this proliferation, I would like to re-claim this term within the historical continuity of critical artistic practices as a continuity of points of discontinuities, cuts and ruptures with one of the dominant tendencies in a specific historical moment or specific circumstances. In this sense, criticism does not have to mean only negation as such, but also negation as the other side of affirmation of something never affirmed before. ↩

27. Peter Bürger, Theory of the Avant-Garde (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984 [1974]) ↩

28. This return to the modes of production, as stated by Terry Smith, is used to differentiate between "natural processes of formation of minerals" from the "mechanical production processes", which actually demonstrates that production is the ultimate issue of cultural development and the development of social organization. Also, Smith pays attention to the specific *modus operandi* of art that concerns both the mode of production, and the production of modes, for instance in the case of the development of historical realism of the 19th century – the production of truths about social relations of production. See: Terry Smith, "Modes of Production" in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. by Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). ↩

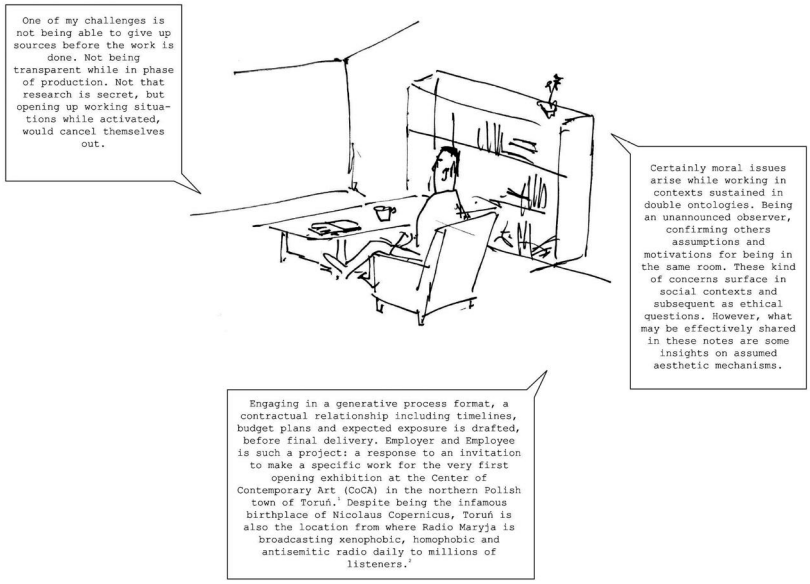
29. Marina Vishmidt and Anthony Iles, "Uposli sve što ti dođe pod ruku", Umetnik/ca u (ne)radu (Novi Sad: kuda.org and MSUV, 2012), and "Make Whichever You Find Work", http://www.variant.org.uk/41texts/ilesvishmidt41.html [accessed 3 September 2014]. ↩

30. In the full swing of budgetary cuts, it is precisely the autonomy of arts that has been cut. In the most extreme discussions, in the Dutch context, culture and arts have been declared "parasites of the honest working people paying taxes to the state". See Jack Segbars, "The Dutch situation", 10 February 2014, http://www.platformbk.nl/2014/02/the-dutch-situation-2/?lang=en [accessed 3 September 2014]. ↩

Edit

Staging Dislocation: Notes on Finished and Unfinished Work

Jesper Alvær

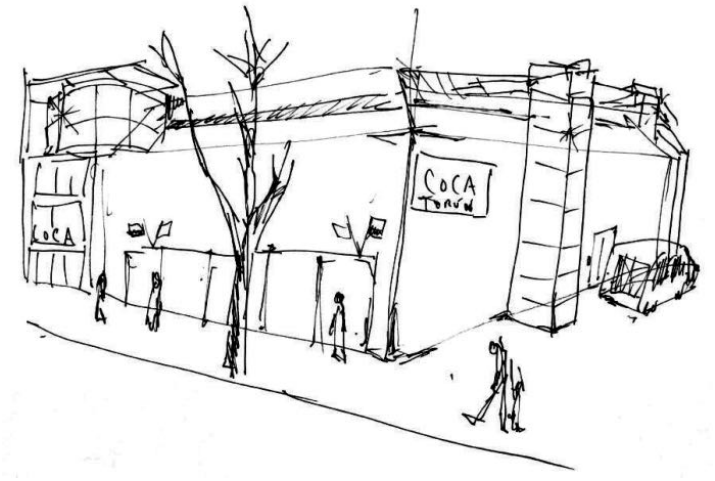


([1]), ([2])

It seemed necessary to describe a few personal works and approaches towards a given logic of production, embedded in common formats. The projects *Employer and Employee* and *Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday* will serve as examples. Often artistic production is initiated based on a response to a call, typically from an authority entitled to ask for a work for a specific context.

Several times, when he was visiting Toruń for research purposes, the responsible secretary at the CoCA Toruń showed him around and at some point after taking a taxi, explained to him a feeling that the whole town knew that she was divorced and a single mother. In the conservative

Catholic context of Toruń, she described this as a *stigmatised* position. To make a long story short, below is a description of how his conceptual response to her story was communicated to the small staff in the office. We can try to imagine the following:



Employer and Employee was still a work in progress when for the first time it is presented to the leadership of the institution by the curator of the show.

The secretary (mentioned above) is in the office of CoCA Toruń and the director is there with her, both standing and busy discussing some details. The curator is there as well, since she has her temporary office desk in the same location. The whole new building complex including the CoCA is to be opened in less than 6 months and they recently moved into these offices. A technician is finalising some network installation in the corner of the room.

It is a small work group – at this point there isnobody apart from this core administration, the curator, and a board of directors. Everyone is working under pressure to get various infrastructures of the building ready and there is an even more intense focus on preparing for the very first opening exhibition, entitled *Flowers of Our Lives*, the main responsibility of our guest curator. [3] The guest curator walks over to the secretary and director. The director looks up in a welcoming manner, naturally taking the lead and asks:

([4])

Meeting a temporary dead end in the office, extensive lobbying succeeded in pushing *Employer and Employee* through another channel. The intervention into the employment process of the CoCA Toruń was facilitated though members of the board, made possible under strict regulations. Engaging initially in screening processes and durational negotiations after employment interviews, they found ways to interpret and bend the juridical issues to enable the project.

The private consultant company working for the city of Toruń [5] managing employment to the public sector, accepted legal responsibility for an overall employment procedure that resulted in 11 single household divorced mothers getting a job at the CoCA Toruń. A rather high number considering all the applicants being screened initially and then interviewed for, in total, 47 mostly part-time positions.

The artist's agreement with the board of CoCA Toruń, the managing director and the curator in order to implement the project was to maintain a very low profile in terms of dissemination. *Employer and Employee* was, further, not to be formally presented for the first 4 following years, as a kind of

quarantine of sorts. This to avoid legal misunderstandings, repercussions or other trouble for any of the persons involved on both sides.

New staff members employed under the particular criteria of being a single-mother by the time of employment (in addition to fulfilling the general qualifications for the job) should not be informed about the special circumstances in which they actually got their job. However, they realised early on themselves the large quantity of single-mothers within their small work force and shared interests in discussions during lunch and coffee breaks.

Employer and Employee is in practical terms still rendered by the employees themselves, in simply showing up at work, not knowing that their job constitutes a form of artistic labour, embedded within the structure of general public employment at the CoCA Toruń. The result is a dislocation of artistic production, within a non-artistic workforce. Using *Employer and Employee* as an example illustrates the importance of how information is distributed and the questions of visibility and transparency in allowing this work to come into existence.

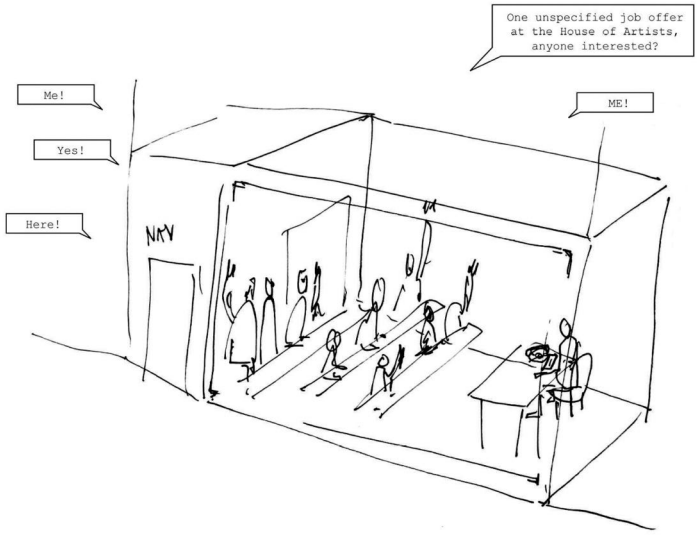
Employer and Employee would not have been possible to carry out if the essence of the project had been announced before, during or immediately after realisation. Another point is the relation between a necessary critical distance to an observed conservative social reality and the decision to intervene in order to have an impact on this particular situation, rather than diagnosing the obvious through a critical, but merely formal installation. Care, beyond criticality.

Further, what kind of validity would *Employer and Employee* translate if we choose to interpret this as a model of locating artistic labour within a non-artistic work environment? An invisible employer being exposed while invisible employees (for the viewer) are performing the (invisible) work without knowing it. At the moment of writing, 5 of the 11 initially employed are still working at the CoCA Toruń. What keeps them going? [6] When does the work end?

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday

As the title suggests, this negotiated set of five successive working days was first associated with his participation in the Oslo based international residence program, W17.

The project *Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday* set out to examine current perceptions about the type of work and logic of production associated with artistic practices. The idea was to locate specific working experiences in relation to artistic production per se. The project was elaborated in collaboration with the Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration (NAV), formally serving as supplier of temporary staff. [7]



The Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration (NAV) day job distribution centre was recently closed down due to few available jobs. The distribution centre was not widely known since state run institutions of this kind were not allowed to compete on the market with recruitment agencies like Jobzone, Addecco, Manpower etc.

([8])

A systematic framework was put in place: a person would show up individually from the NAV day job distribution centre to the studio in W17, more or less every day. Not informed in

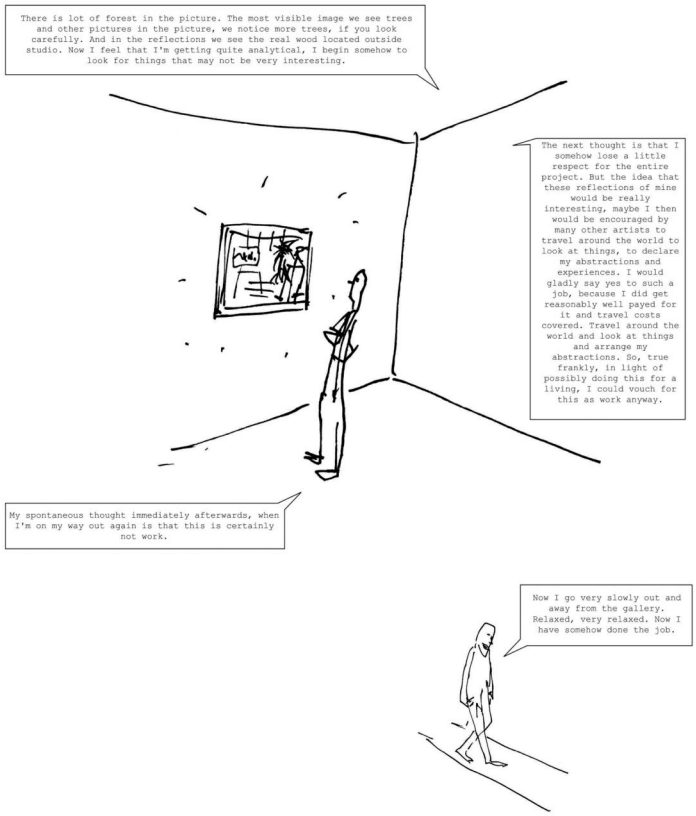
detail on what the job actually would consist of, the meeting normally started by having a coffee or tea. During the first hour he would normally describe the open ended idea and a particular interest in contractual relationships. Then, more concretely about the project and the job itself; to discuss different aspects of work and to perhaps use this series of conversations if something (extra-) ordinary came out of all these meetings.

So, they talked, associated and articulated experience. Just sitting in that room. Apart from written notes, no documentation was done and they followed no schematic approach. Each meeting depended on that unique person and his own mood as well. If people did not like to talk after a few hours, then they wrote some poems, made drawings or just coloured some white sheets of paper. Basically, a group of random people hired to discuss understandings of work articulated in their own words. Overall, this resulted in 42 in-depth conversations with a variety of people over a period of 4 months. After their 4 hours, they each received their payment in cash. [9]

Later, six conversations stood out for him as special after absorbing the 42 meetings. One photographic image was then conceived with a photographer for each of these, as a kind of extension of that particular conversation. The images depicted specific geographic locations functioning as a reference points, as a continuation of the conversations, translated into another modality. [10] The same people were contacted again and asked if they would be interested to continue the work from last time. To see “their” image, based on the previous conversation. This was almost a year later but the people hired at first all remembered well the previous conversations and accepted the proposal to continue “the job”.

So, six people were individually hired in again, but this time to visit an exhibition. To see their own image, now hanging in a gallery. The exhibition was in Paris, so in order to see the particular image from the conversation, the task was to fly to Paris and “certify the image”, to use the terminology applied in the gallery context. [11] Thus, the display of the photographs in the exhibition was adapted to accommodate these individual visits, one at the time, changing images accordingly within a period of time of six weeks. Nobody had seen the images beforehand and the task was simply to travel alone, stay in a hotel, go to the gallery and see their specific photograph. Then reflect on their travel experience and finally hand in a report of their thoughts and their experience on return to Oslo.

Reporting from Paris, a few excerpts:

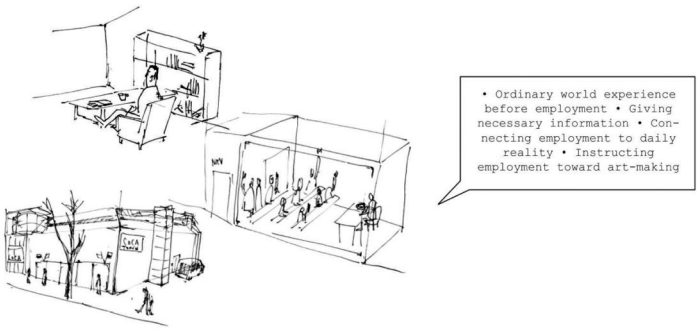


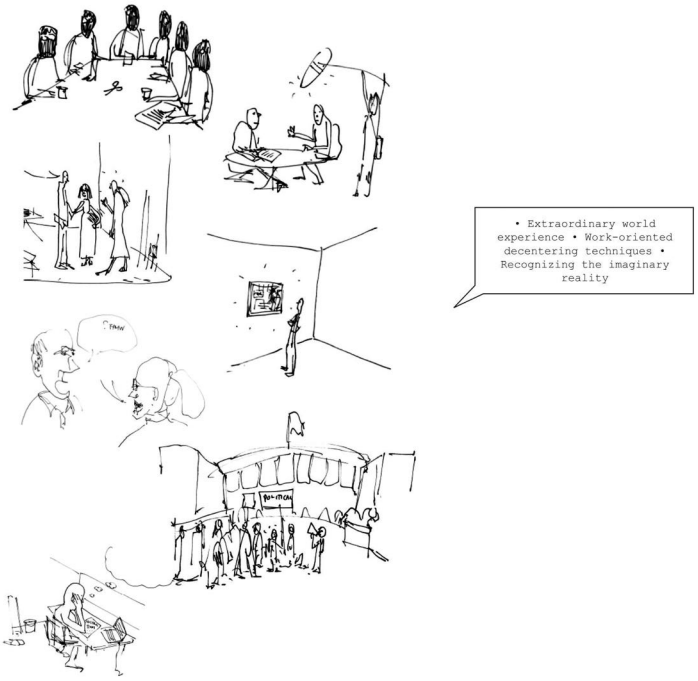
Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday may cast confusion in terms of locating the artwork. Is it in the image? Or is it rather in the subjective experience of the person travelling, in the report? Or is it perhaps taking place in the reader as the story unfolds?

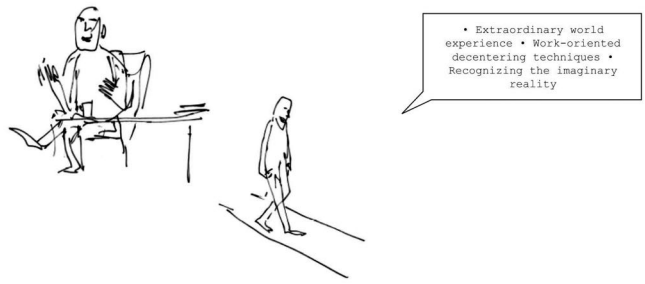
Notions of delegation, imagination and care may be foregrounded in the descriptions above. Delegation of performance in *Employer and Employee* takes place without consent and without obvious impact. Delegated authority and responsibility presented in *Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday* was given form by reflecting aesthetically without being trained to do so and having to report on it. It is not a question of doing it well, succeeding, failing or performing. Whatever the outcome, to what degree is it rich or limited in articulation? What are their capacities to imagine? Why is that so? How is the travel experience communicated at home, over dinner, in the pub with friends?

Exploring modes of engagement within employment may be described as intermodal decentering. [12] Travelling to Paris to observe one single image, as in *Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday*, involved a radical departure from most of the workers' ordinary life situations. Doing

extraordinary work tasks abroad and articulating these. First from conversation to image. Then from image to journey and finally from travelling experience to report on reflection.







Working methodically with material from one modality to another, these transitions constitute a common framework, or pattern illustrated in the centre of this page. As well in the following described case studies, we find a setup for open-ended engagement, presented as possible sites for production. Common for these work-related case studies or

proposals below, are their particular dislocation and limited information, making them difficult to describe.

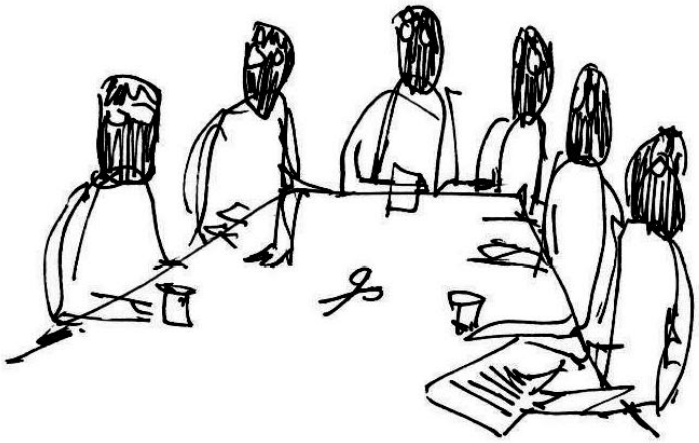
Partly because they are in the making and not really «cases» to be studied from a distance or the outside. Partly because full transparency would make these situations vulnerable. Partly because the nature of the research remains uncertain, indicating a displacement from artistic practice to artistic research practice. Under these circumstances, to what degree is it possible to avoid being project-formatted, predictable and ultimately delusive?

Often descriptions of methodological approach seems to be misleading in terms of being misrecognised as topical frameworks.

The main focus is therefore rather to emphasise common grammar and aesthetic mechanisms, paying attention to inner perspectives and lived experiences. Central are how these situations are intended and influenced by the context and forums in which they eventually will be exposed and experienced.

Notes on unfinished work case study A: Anonymous work group

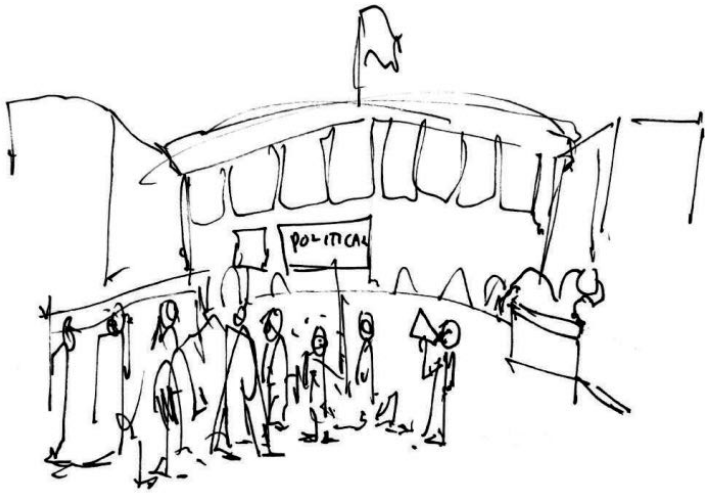
Developing a capacity to imagine things together as adults, or to take part in forming ideas or concepts is directly employed in this anonymous work group. Members of the group responded incognito to an anonymous ad in the main newspapers in Oslo.
For the last 8 months, this work-group has been meeting on a 4 to 6 weeks frequency, providing a continuous concrete feedback and developing a reflection on an artwork not yet made.



The individual members of the group are offered payment for their effort to engage. The intention is to keep this discussion group ongoing until the last phase of the formal quest in the project Work, work. [13] This group main target is to challenge the typical artistic practice accompanied by a complimentary critical reflection, being constitutive components in the Norwegian Artistic Research Programme. Will it prove productive to reverse reflection in which employment constitutes a significant role? If so, what kind authority does this question of co-authored research formally imply if when presented anonymously for assessment?

Notes on unfinished work case study B: Political membership

Mother, Dear Mother is a title of a research exhibition held at House of Artists in Oslo. [14] The work presented was based on systematically becoming a member of every major political party in Norway. This involved being engaged in social and political activities in the respective parties, both prior to and after the national election in 2013.



Mother, Dear Mother encapsulated an attempt to describe emotional experiences of a nation undergoing a political shift with a special focus on transformation of work. Through taking part in activities based on assumptions of a shared political commitment, spread out on the political spectrum, a sense of personal dishonesty developed, in not sharing project-driven motivations in the nomination of political representation and collective work undertaken in various political organisations. The entire exhibition is currently being configured into a film.

Notes on unfinished work case study C: Delegated autonomy

Employing two students with non-artistic bachelors to obtain a Master in Fine Art. Who is trained to produce and entitled artistic authorship? Is it possible to pay someone to undertake such an artistic process? If so, at what point do the employed (current MFA students) gain authentic ownership of the work, since interpretational efforts are central in all delegated work tasks?

From a sense of alienation in making someone else's art as a job, to developing a personal ownership and possible autonomy including forms of negotiated resistance along the way. Currently operational and not published in detail to protect the students as workers and the case study in itself for not being interrupted. The engaged students are reporting on a regular basis both their experience as process and how they actually imagine their work to develop. Expected graduation will be in 2016 and afterwards the complete archive will be made accessible to the public.

Notes on unfinished work case study D: Dismissed competence

Dismissed competence is a series of narrative inquiries in form of interviews. The study includes a group of older people who all studied to become professional artists in a national art academy, but abandoned their profession and never pursued a career as artists. One focus is on how this particular competence may have leaked into other activities.

Another focus is to locate epistemological layers, not chronologically but through practicing an improvised emotional archaeology. This happens through language in addressing the experience of hosting personal and specialised competence never applied. How can competence be identified, articulated and described alternatively to the obvious narration the subjects already settled with? Outcome of these mutually constructed and repeated interviews will be made presentable and in some cases in collaboration with the interviewees themselves. [15]

Notes:

1. http://www.csw.torun.pl/?set_language=en&cl=en ↩
2. http://www.radiomaryja.pl ↩
3. http://www.csw.torun.pl/exhibitions/exhibitions-db/flowers-of-our-lives ↩
4. Elastic Medium As a Wave http://www.google.no/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CCIQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fcsw.torun.pl%2Fwystawy%2Fbaza-wystaw%2Fkwiaty-naszego-zycia%2Ffiles%2Faudioguide-mapa.pdf&ei=TJsYVNmcHOO7ygOitYH4CQ&usg=AFQjCNEVDJLi7PCrDB7snJY07r28vh2m2g&bvm=bv.75097201,d.bGQ ↩
5. http://www.klgates.com/pl ↩
6. September 2014 ↩
7. http://www.nav.no/en/Home ↩
8. http://tv.nrk.no/serie/nasjonalgalleriet/MKTF03002511/28-11-2011#t=16m17s ↩
9. The video work *Konkret* was as well elaborated from these 42 sessions, commissioned by Henie Onstad Kunstsenter (HOK) Oslo for the exhibition *Arbeidstid* (2013) curated by Milena Hoegsberg, including the related publication *Living Labor*. part 1: http://drive.google.com/file/d/0B4VNFWy-1c1eNklndmluY2R6WDQ/edit?usp=sharing, part 2: http://drive.google.com/file/d/0B4VNFWy-1c1eblVJSmpjYjVDdDQ/edit?usp=sharing ↩

10. In collaboration with Eline Mugaas, a series of 6 photographs. ↩
11. Exhibition NORSK; http://www.galerie-poggi-bertoux.com/en/expositions/presentationarchive/88/norsk-une-scene-artistique-norvegienne-contemporaine ↩
12. Intermodal decentering was deveoped by Paolo Knill and Herbert Eberhart. It was invented within the frame of education to create a structure where art making could unfold its capacities in a restricted amount of time. http://www.egs.edu/arts-health-society/about/ ↩
13. http://artistic-research.no/?page_id=2490 ↩
14. http://www.kunstnerneshus.no/kunst/jesper-alvaer-2/ ↩
15. Research exhibition is being prepared in collaboration with Isabela Grosseova and Jiří Ptáček for Prague Fotograf Gallery, January 2015. http://www.fotografgallery.cz/vystavy/2014/00/?lang=en ↩

Artist as Slave

Edit

Jochen Becker

Slave 2 The System
Slave Lyrics

Artist: Prince
Album: Emancipation

CHORUS:
Everybody keeps tryin' 2 break my heart

Everybody except 4 me

I just want a chance 2 play the part

The part of someone truly free

Like candle slowly burning, I can feel my world unravel

Hemisphere upon hemisphere lie beneath my soul, soul

My enemies kept it turning, but now they pound the gavel

And judging me accordingly, I know, I know

CHORUS
Hey! {x3}

Oh
Burning slowly candle, handle careless they did

Merrily down 3 heartbreak boulevards

Like fashion statements, they lie “U be lookin’ so good 2night, kid”

I do my best 2 party, it’s just that everybody keeps tryin’ 2 break
my heart

(CHORUS)
Except 4 me (Except 4 me)

I just want a chance 2 play
(Just wanna be free)
Slowly candle burns, where’d they learn hypnosis?

How’d they keep me under 4 so long?

Break the bread I earn, just keep me far from closest

I need their kind 2 illustrate what’s wrong – what’s wrong?
Well, I’ll tell U they just keep tryin’ 2 break my heart (CHORUS)

They just keep tryin’ 2 break my heart, ow!
(Everybody) {x2}

CHORUS
But I can’t let U break my heart
(Everybody keeps tryin’ 2 break my heart)

Slave! (Everybody keeps tryin’ 2 break my heart)

Slave! Slave! (Everybody keeps tryin’ 2 break my heart)

Slave!

++++++++
(Slave) {repeat in song}
Slave, yeah {x2}
Slave 2 the system here before I was born

Slave 2 the master, workin’ me till I’m worn

The only penthouse I can count on’s a big black ball and chain

Slave 2 the system, the future’s all arranged
Oh, U better fetch that water, boy {x2}

Slave 2 the system
Thompson’s my last name, but my daddy’s name is Lloyd

The farther back I trace it, the more it becomes null and void

All my life I’ve struggled just 2 be called a boy

Slave 2 the system, oh what a joy
Oh, U better fetch that water, boy

Hell if I do!

(Oh, U better fetch that water, boy)

Oh, I'm just a slave 2 the system
Here before I was born

Slave 2 the master, workin' me till I'm worn
Slave 2 the system

++++++++++
Slave 2 the system here before I was born

Slave 2 the master, workin' me till I'm worn

The only penthouse I can count on's a big black ball and chain

Slave 2 the system, the future's all arranged
Oh, U better fetch that water, boy [x2]

Slave 2 the system
Thompson's my last name, but my daddy's name is Lloyd

The farther back I trace it, the more it becomes null and void

All my life I've struggled just 2 be called a boy

Slave 2 the system, oh what a joy
Oh, U better fetch that water, boy

Hell if I do!

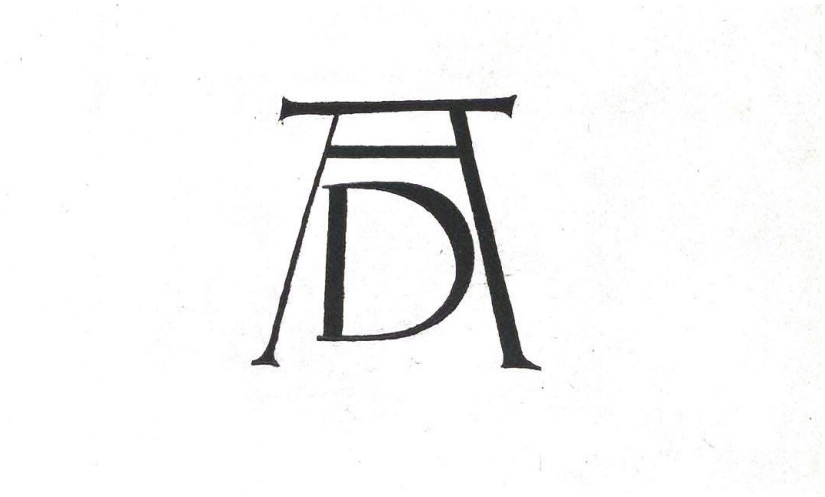
(Oh, U better fetch that water, boy)

Oh, I'm just a slave 2 the system
Here before I was born

Slave 2 the master, workin' me till I'm worn
Slave 2 the system

Cruel Economy of Authorship

Kuba Szreder



Let me start this reflection about reputational economies with a telling example. In 2011, together with my fellow collaborators from the Free/Slow University of Warsaw (F/SUW), [1] I organized a conference titled "The Labour of the Multitude? The Political Economy of Social Creativity." Afterward, F/SUW published a post-conference publication, which was coedited by the core group of conveners.
[2] The book's editors are named and listed, every published paper is clearly authorized, all the quotations are attributed, and the credits due are paid. All the customary publishing rules were followed and all the editorial boxes were ticked. And yet doubt lingers. During the conference we discussed the "labor of the multitude" as creativity that is diffused throughout the social —in art scenes, intellectual circuits, and creative milieus. But when it comes to the moment of publishing, all those multitudes vanish from the list of contents. There are listed only clearly identified names of individuals.

A vast majority of books, texts, or art pieces that are published have clearly identified authors. In the current state of publishing, the act of authorial attribution is self-evident. That's what we do when we publish: we authorize. It does not matter if we are critical practitioners, established academics, or commercially oriented artists. We all follow similar patterns. Authorial attribution saturates all sectors of the contemporary art world. It underlines the operations of the competitive art

market, public institutions, and the small, informal, critical art initiatives—despite their seemingly opposite stances toward intellectual property.

As I will argue here, authorial attribution is one of the fundamental mechanisms underlying the cruel economy of the arts, to use Hans Abbing's framework. [3] The problem is located in the structural injustice of reputational economies that perpetuate contemporary symbolic production. They are founded on the invisibility of the labor of the multitudes.

As critical cultural producers, many of us lean on and frequently refer to the notions of diffused creativity. But our own acts of publishing rest on a lack of recognition of the plethora of inputs that thrive beyond narrowly understood authorial or artistic attribution. Our stance toward intellectual property plays only a secondary role. It counts less whether we use creative commons or other public licenses. What matters most is the fundamental act of individual appropriation. Licensing and limiting copyrights might, but does not have to, be used as a way of safeguarding previously acquired privileges. But the efficacy of authorial attribution derives partially from its wide acknowledgment as a customary way of doing things, entrenched in worldviews, habits, and values, rather than in legal formulas.

Let me make a short methodological note. My understanding of cultural production relies on the legacy of a materialistic analysis of the art apparatus. Among many others my method is intellectually indebted to Walter Benjamin. In his seminal essay "The Author as Producer," he shifted the focus from the author and his oeuvre to the social totality of the apparatus of symbolic production. Following Benjamin, I reject the notion that the apparatus is a neutral infrastructure, a form of institutionalized enablement that simply facilitates production, dissemination, and ownership of artifacts. On the contrary, in my opinion, the main function of the apparatus is to produce and reproduce social conceptions that define artwork, author, public, act of reception, or intellectual property.

From this perspective, I will attempt to disentangle this problematic bundle, dissect the creative economy, identify its structural inconsistencies, and even risk sketching some future prospects. At first, though, let me briefly introduce some of innovative business models developed recently in the creative industries, as they cast interesting light on reputational economies in the arts.

Property Models in Late Capitalism

The most commonly recognized form of profiteering in cultural industries is based on the aggressive copyrighting and

safeguarding of intellectual property through rigid licensing. This practice is founded on a fundamental contradiction. The innovation and creation of symbolic contents derives from an unhampered flow of ideas. But if they are to generate profit, the ideas become, by definition, scarcities, and are transformed into commodities through copyright. However, in the world where every symbol has an owner, the creation of new content simply becomes too expensive. [4] For this reason, intellectual property owners have to exploit the "tragedy of the commons" [5] for their own advantage. They need to appropriate and exploit the non-copyrighted reservoirs of symbolic imagination that can be sourced at small costs. [6]

Another business strategy is adopted by service providers in information-technology (IT) sectors: Tiziana Terranova refers to specialized programming enterprises for which replenishing intellectual commons enables their commercial operations. [7] They participate in open coding to secure access to common pools of knowledge. Their profits are made through providing highly sophisticated programming services. They lower their research and development expenditures by sharing the costs of pooling knowledge with the open source programming community. Moreover, through working for the common benefit, those enterprises establish their reputations, which later attract commercial clients.

Other models characteristic of late capitalism depend on what Yann Moulier Boutang calls the "work of pollination." [8] To explain, Boutang provides the following example: a majority of people believes that the main economic function of bees is to produce honey. But this conviction is misleading, as the true role of bees in an economic cycle is to pollinate orchards and plantations. Honey is only a byproduct of an economically much more significant process. Similarly in cognitive capitalism, the symbolic product emerges only as a result of long and demanding processes of multifaceted exchange—as an effect of a socially dispersed "work of pollination." The ideas and symbols have to be carried, exchanged, reworked, undone, redone, spoken over, and discussed. In this business model, characteristic for Web 2.0, getting a grasp on a product is much less important than capturing socially produced values "on the move." What matters is a control over the social processes of valorization and distributed symbolic production. The main mode of profit making is crowdsourcing: attracting communities of users who do unpaid work. They pollinate portals, web pages, blogs, and search engines, creating values harvested by their owners and administrators.

Project Making as Dominant Mode of Production in Contemporary Culture

The models that I outlined above respond to the demands set by the mechanisms of flexible accumulation in late capitalism. These transformations are mirrored by the changes in the art world, and, more generally, in the changes that cultural production has gone through in recent decades. To understand them, one needs to dissect the apparatus of project making and its impact on the reputational economies perpetuating the contemporary art world. In this regard I follow sociological analysis of Pascal Gielen, [9] who points out how the art world was reconfigured by following the mechanisms, patterns, and ways of doing things characteristic to what Luc Boltanski calls a projective city. [10] The theoretical model of the projective city was introduced by Boltanski and Ève Chiapello in their seminal study, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. [11] Historically speaking, the projective order of worth emerged between the 1970s and 1990s as the result of tectonic shifts in Western societies. According to Boltanski and Chiapello, it originated in the new management discourses accompanying the rise of neoliberalism, the spread of globalization, the crisis of Fordism, and the financialization of the economy. [12]

The implications of these transformations are felt across the whole art field, as the general conditions of cultural production have shifted according to the specific logic of the projective city. They unfolded not only in the metropolises of the art world, but also in its peripheries, impacting equally major institutions, biennales, art fairs, independent cultural initiatives, and critical practitioners.

Apparently, the core element of the projective value regime is the very project itself.

A project is a temporary undertaking. Generally speaking, projects emerge and recede. As managerial formats, projects enable flexibility and adaptability, while maintaining a satisfying level of efficiency, accountability, and control. Every project is always a projective endeavor; it projects itself into the future. Due to their short-term character, projects favor tactics over strategies, affairs over relationships, loose ties over friendships, migrations over stiff arrangements.

Projects bind together agents, institutions, things, spaces, pools of resources, channels of distributions, and audiences. A project is an efficient way of investing resources by concentrating them on those undertakings that promise the highest rate of symbolic or economic returns. The resources and agents are assembled on a temporary basis, just to leave and migrate to another nod of the network after the project is done. Projects partially level professional hierarchies, as they have to constitute temporary cooperative environments. The success of any project-based undertaking demands full and creative involvement of its participants. They are encouraged to contribute to a collective brainstorming regardless of their specializations or positions. As

a managerial tool, projects have been invented to crisscross corporate bureaucracies and stimulate the flow of previously compartmented knowledge. The aim of a project is to release potentials otherwise contained by rigid divisions between sectors, disciplines, or branches.

Every project provides only temporary employment, which wanes after the task is executed. Projects are always collective undertakings, but their teams often dissolve afterward. Every project maker moves between projects as an individual, whose ability to conduct new promising projects is tested when previous project is already executed, but a new one has yet to begin. [13] The majority of project makers works as freelancers, and is involved and engaged for a limited period of time. In the ideal scenario, cultural producers behave like global "joyful riders" migrating from one project to another, roaming the globe in search of new exciting opportunities. [14] Existential and professional precarity is the reverse side of flexibility, freelancing, and "independency." Cultural producers as project makers are free to take individualized risks, but their main responsibility is to remain employable. They need to be always ready for new challenges, constantly searching for new opportunities.

In the projective city, the network provides a particular kind of flexible security. It fills the gaps between projects. The network connects together institutions, agents, pools of resources, and audiences. It is a reservoir of latent power. As a hub of communication, it secures conditions for new projects to emerge. The network provides access to accumulated opportunities and stored resources. It endows selected cultural producers with a raw potency, a power to change reality without even "owning" anything. The power of every project maker is to command, assemble, and mobilize resources depends on his position in the network. For this reason, property issues are of secondary importance in projective polity. What matters is the access to opportunities, as mediated by the network. But as the access is limited, the network is a field of fierce competition and intensive struggles.

The Coopetition

If we compare business models in late capitalism with the structural tendencies of the projective city, it becomes quite clear that contemporary cultural producers resemble rather innovative IT service providers than intellectual property holders. They simultaneously participate in a collective production of common values, and need to capture a creative flow for individual benefit. The essential mechanism of the projective apparatus is a cooperative competition—a "coopetition." Projects are successful only if they stimulate the extended cooperation of an engaged collective. The network operates based on intensive, multifaceted, and cooperative

exchange. But the success of every project maker is accounted on an individual basis, which encourages fierce competition.

The basic principle of the project economy results from this paradox: though concepts are created collectively, eventually they have to be attributed to individuals. This is the way to guarantee individual motivation, create competitive advantages, reproduce hierarchies, secure the fluidity and continuation of the network, and enable new projects to emerge.

The ability to link seemingly contradictory strategies of cooperation and competition constitutes the backbone of any successful career in an art field dominated by the "new spirit of capitalism." Cultural producers, willingly or not, have to capture, reformulate, and publicize "good ideas." [15] They are generated and accessed through cooperative exchange and intensive communication—in which cultural producers need to partake. Additionally, they hone their personal skill sets by exercising on collective training grounds and participating in an extended social collaboration.

But despite their participation in a cooperative nexus, cultural producers are eventually obliged to build their own reputations. Being individually recognized (for abilities or "good ideas") is the main way to move between consecutive projects and secure access to opportunities.

To illustrate this, it let me come back to Free/Slow University of Warsaw. F/SUW is not an exception to this coopetative economy. Every project of F/SUW is the result of extensive cooperation and an intensive flow of ideas. Simultaneously, though, everyone from our team follows individual careers and strives to secure personal stability. In the context of our individual professional tracks, we are assessed according to specific and differing sets of criteria. Something else counts for academics (quantifiable peer reviewed publishing), other factors matter for careers of curators or artists (less tangible, but not least important reputational gains). What links us all is that unless we want to cease to be cultural producers, we are assessed on an individual basis, whether we like it or not.

Authorial Attribution and "Being Seen on the Scene"

"The access to opportunities depends on one's position in a reputational economy. Every cultural producer needs to be recognized and is ranked according to his own individual reputation. [16] A "good idea" has to be attributed to an individual, regardless of its collective origins. In this way, the cultural producer is able to secure future remuneration and professional progress. It is important to note that in order to establish reputations, ideas do not need to become anybody's property—

much less do they need to be copyrighted. The networked acknowledgment of an authorial link is much more important.

The process of authorial attribution is not a smooth operation. It is based on a structural inconsistency between demands for extended cooperation and individualized competition for access. Moreover it is underpinned by symbolic violence between (unrecognized) exploited and (celebrated) exploiters of symbolic production.

The network secures authorial attribution by linking it with the specific regime of visibility. As Gielen says, individual authorial rights are secured by "being [17] Only communicating openly and announcing ideas in public, in front of a peer group, secures recognition. In this way, ideas become more or less formally attached to their announcers, prompting and propelling their reputational advances.

The louder the announcement is, the more people hear it, and the greater the chances are that the act of attribution will be appreciated. Some project makers have fewer opportunities to properly announce their ideas. The ones who occupy central positions and are already recognized as authors are much more eligible to promote "their" "good ideas"; moreover, they cherish access to publishing channels that grant global recognition of their proliferation.

In this system, gatekeepers are able to extract their toll by regulating the flow of communication. Global institutions, publishers, or electronic communication providers guarantee the public staging of ideas, rubberstamping authorial assertions and personal reputations. For this reason, they are able to either charge directly for their services or exhort free contributions from project makers. As this model depends on a skillful capture of a commonly created value, it resembles strategies of Web 2.0 giants, but I will not dwell on this in detail, as it needs another study.

The gains are never distributed equally. They do not directly relate to the workload, but rather to a professional profile in the network, which is reciprocally based on access and visibility. This structural tendency of the projective city prompts the reoccurrence of the freeloader syndrome and of the "tragedy of the commons." From the individual's point of view, instead of being involved in the long process of a demanding collaboration, it is more essential to indulge in self-promotion and extensive self-attribution. Of course, such individualization of gains is possible as long as there is a cooperatively constituted resource to be exploited, directly depending on the constant and hidden labor of the multitudes.

The hanging on to the authorial figure results in an automatic feedback loop. If we think about the art scene, it is almost

impossible to spot unattributed ideas, though every concept originates in primarily cooperative circumstances. To illustrate how fundamental and unavoidable this mechanism is, I refer again to the example of F/SUW's publication. In response to attributive demands and customs, we coauthored our book. This, in my opinion, was done for good reasons: if we named ourselves as a collective entity and remained individually anonymous, none of us would receive any credit.

But, even more importantly, if, as a collective of editors and conveners we remained anonymous, the credits would have been distributed anyway. We simply would lose any remaining control over the process of attribution. The symbolic capital would be spread through informal channels, and would go to either a charismatic leader, to a "face" of the collective, or to those from our group who travel most extensively and cherish access to a larger network.

Cruel Economy of Attention

"Being seen on the scene" is perpetuated by the cruel economy of attention. It is a winner-takes-all economy, founded on an unequal distribution of links and visibility. [18] In the same moment as a tiny minority of globalized "joyful riders" flourish due their reputational gains, the vast majority of artists and cultural producers remain not only poor, but also invisible. According to Abbing, the level of poverty in the arts is astonishing—as much as 40 to 60 percent of artists live below the poverty line. [19] The projective city reinforces the causal link between poverty and a lack of recognition, which has traditionally haunted artistic careers. Currently, the projective apparatus utilizes the labor of "unsuccessful" (or simply unrecognized) cultural producers for the benefit of a few and for the sake of its own social reproduction.

Due to this cruel economy of attention, a majority of cultural producers find themselves below the radar, trapped in what Gregory Sholette calls "the dark matter of the art world," which "includes [...] all work made and circulated in the shadows of the formal art world, some of which might be said to emulate cultural dark matter by rejecting art world demands of visibility, and much of which has no choice but to be invisible." [20] Moreover, it is based on a "structural invisibility of most professionally trained artists whose very underdevelopment is essential to normal art. Without this obscure mass of 'failed' artists the small cadre of successful artists would find it difficult, if not impossible, to sustain the global art world as it appears today." [21] Furthermore, as Sholette points out, "while astrophysicists are eager to know what dark matter is, the denizens of the art world largely ignore the unseen accretion of creativity they nevertheless remain dependent upon." [22] In my opinion, dark matter is a repository of dispersed labor of pollination, indispensable for the reproduction of a project-

based art world. It holds the art world together by maintaining its social gravity, symbolic economy, and creative ecology. Still, it hovers below the threshold of authorial attribution and remuneration. Dark matter perpetuates the same economy that robs it of the fruits of its own creative toil.

Labor of Pollination and Labor of Love

Generally speaking, multifaceted, frenetic, and informal exchanges constitute the core of cultural activities or intellectual research. At F/SUW we team up, pool our knowledge, and create collective surplus value—for our existential satisfaction, research interests, and professional progress. What is essential is that we do not do it in the closed team, but in the more diffused networks. This labor of pollination exceeds what can be formalized and attributed to the group of identifiable individuals. The flow of inspirations that allows us to define the field of research and pose sensible questions never happen on the lonely island—be it in the mind of genius or in the collective of supremely talented creatives.

We need a variety of situated exchanges, links, contacts, relations, flows, chats, readings, seminars, summer camps—formal and informal, authored and anonymous. And yet when it comes to the moment of publishing, as I have already hinted in the introduction, the obvious challenge is to decide who is named and who is not. A text (and, much more rarely, an artwork) can have two, three, even five authors. There are always limits to the amount of individuals to whom any work can be attributed. Attribution loses its main social function when it ceases to distinguish between authors and others. Loose networks of cooperators and their labor of pollination are simply not accounted for. Those contributions are possibly individually less significant. But taken together, they constitute an enormous body of creative input, indispensable for the formulation of any sensible project or idea.

The situation is even more nuanced, as the majority of those exchanges are not stereotypically accounted for as “creative.” George Yúdice provides the following account of the role played by support personnel of large-scale art event: “staff members also make an enormous personal investments into the projects and the artists, including ferrying them to sites and suppliers, having long discussions with them into the wee hours, and investing the unmeasurable labor of love (of art) and the labor of producing process. This investment includes critical work that does not always surface in the exhibition materials like the catalogue and guide.” [23]

More often than not, as the reputational economy grows, enthusiastic engagement and under- or unpaid labor (especially

the one of interns or assistants) is shamelessly exploited. In any case, no authorial credits are attributed to the support personnel. The complete disregard of the input of all the non-authorial contributions to creative processes has a long tradition in the art world, as convincingly presented by Howard S. Becker. [24] But in the project-based production, like site-specific commissions, public art projects or any new artistic endeavors, support personnel do not only organize and support, but also participate in the creative exchange. They engage into all those "long discussions […] into the wee hours," crucially impacting the artistic success of any project, which is rarely accounted for.

Moreover, the labor of love is not limited to the inside of any particular project. It is an anonymous work of "significant others" (often female) that keeps projects intact. They labor on the margins of a project, maintaining its context. They emotionally stabilize otherwise disruptive working patterns, and are the first ones with whom "good ideas" are exchanged, edited, and formulated.
To reiterate and summarize: the artistic economy recognizes neither the socially diffused and distributed labor of pollination, nor the labor of love. Resources flow only to those who are successful in their reputational attributions. The collective toil remains both invisible and unpaid.

What Is To Be Done?

The questions remains: how to recognize, evaluate, and reimburse the dispersed laborers of pollination and love?

My argument up to this this moment might seem rather pessimistic, continuing the general feeling of entrapment, compromised agency, and lack of possibilities. Yet I have not referenced Benjamin in vain. According to his argument from "The Author as Producer," one needs to first position the author in relation to the products of his period in order to overcome them in later stages. For Benjamin, the author needs to abandon his own privileges and turn from "reproducer of the apparatus of production into an engineer who sees his task as the effort of adapting that apparatus to the aims of the proletarian revolution." [25] Such a revolutionary task would consist of the "socialization of the intellectual means of production," the "organization of production process" by the "intellectual worker himself," and of "transforming the function" of literature. [26] The process of sublation, encompassing all those revolutionary transformations, needs to start with the thorough dissection of the apparatus and its position in relations of production, which, here, means an understanding of the apparatus of project making and a "new spirit of capitalism."

It is important to position our current urgency in a historical perspective. Zygmunt Bauman compares our confused period

with the beginnings of modernity. Following Reinhart Koselleck, Bauman calls our period a "threshold time" or a "saddle time." [27] That is, it is the epochal moment when humanity, after a long climb, begins to reach a mountain pass—here, it is already too late for us to turn back, but we still are not able to glimpse beyond the narrow line of the horizon. The threshold is the time of rapid change and profound confusion, or, to use Immanuel Wallerstein's notion, of "systemic bifurcation." [28] It is the moment when old solutions are not able to contain new dynamics; institutions of the past are faced with problems of the future. We reiterate already tested solutions while facing different challenges. But we spot the glimpses of what might be in what already is, inventing responses on the move and testing them in action, without relying on existing manuals.

Taking this into consideration, my main question would be: could the labor of pollination and the labor of love be better accommodated in other apparatuses? Or, rather, how do we reinvent and revolutionize the current one?

I believe that the process of sublation is already deep in historical (re)shaping, consisting of a multiplicity of struggles. They constitute a "chain of equivalence" [29] informed by the acceptance of basic principles, such as the promotion of expanded models of authorization, the appreciation of the structural role of invisible labor in the arts-based economies, and the equalization of gains for a multiplicity of cooperators. They all repose the postulates of justice, sustainability, and equality in relation to the specificities of coopetative economy.

This is not only a theoretical endeavor, as there are plenty individuals and collectives (F/SUW among them) that identify these problems, develop solutions, and test them in practice. [30] They exercise forms of expanded authorship, balance the division of socially necessary labor, struggle for the recognition of invisible work—either of love or of pollination—and institute mechanisms of self-defense against exploitation. All of them utilize the structural inconsistencies of projective apparatuses, reframing coopetition for the benefit of the multitudes and not only for the gain of the few.

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Notes:

1. As I will lean on example of F/SUW, it is important to present it briefly. F/SUW is a project-based mock institution. It came into being as a result of a cooperation with Bęc Zmiana Foundation, a small but vibrant NGO in Warsaw. F/SUW's program consists mainly of research-oriented activities, both publically funded or not funded at all. F/SUW is run by a collective of

fellow cultural producers, of whom it is important to mention Michał Kozłowski, Janek Sowa, Bogna Świątkowska, Szymon Żydek, Agnieszka Kurant, and Krystian Szadkowski, among many others. ↩
2. The book was co-edited by Michał Kozłowski, Janek Sowa, Agnieszka Kurant, Krystian Szadkowski, and Kuba Szreder, see Michał Kozłowski et al., eds., Wieczna radość: *Ekonomia polityczna społecznej kreatywności* (Warsaw: Bęc Zmiana, 2011). ↩
3. Hans Abbing, *Why Are Artists Poor? The Exceptional Economy of the Arts* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2002). ↩
4. Marion von Osten, "Such Views Miss the Decisive Point… The Dilemma of Knowledge-Based Economy and its Opponents," in *On Knowledge Production: A Critical Reader In Contemporary Art*, eds. Binna Choi, Maria Hlavajova, and Jill Winder (Utrecht: BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, 2008), 120–32. ↩
5. Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," *Science* 162 (1968): 1243–8. ↩
6. For more general view on capturing of socially produced values see Christian Marazzi, *The Violence of Financial Capitalism*, trans. Kristina Lebedeva (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2010); on specific enterprise strategies related to culture see George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003). ↩
7. See Tiziana Terranova, "Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy," *Social Text* 18, no. 2 63 (2000): 33–58. ↩
8. Yann Moulier Boutang, *Cognitive Capitalism*, trans. Ed Emery (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 117. ↩
9. See Pascal Gielen, *The Murmuring of the Artistic Multitude: Global Art, Memory and Post-Fordism* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2010). ↩
10. Luc Boltanski uses a couple of synonyms for the concept of the "city," by which he means a "polity," a social "order of worth." The projective city is one of the several orders of worth that perpetuates social (like inspirational, domestic, industrial, civic, and reputational) polities. See Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, *On Justification: Economies of Worth*, trans. Catherine Porter (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006). ↩
11. See Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2006). ↩
12. Ibid. ↩
13. See ibid., 161. ↩
14. Gielen, *The Murmuring of the Artistic Multitude*, 36–38 ↩
15. Pascal Gielen writes about "good ideas" in the following way: "A good idea in today's art world should still be understood according to the axioms of modernity, as a new or innovative thought [… it] constantly renews itself [… and] responds to the geographic or social context, the client, the artistic setting. […] The point is that today a good idea has to be appropriate as well as innovative: it takes into account the local artistic, economic and/or political circumstances. A good idea, in other words, is opportunistic." Gielen, *The Murmuring of the Artistic Multitude*, 38–39. ↩
16. Rankings can be formal like already mentioned academic assessments, market ratings, formalized accounts of professional carriers (like www.artfacts.net), or results of Google searches; they can be based on more subjective accounts like various "Top One Hundred" or "The Best Exhibition of the Year" rankings published by art media—or they can be totally informal and based on a networked understanding of someone's position in the art world. ↩
17. Gielen, *The Murmuring of the Artistic Multitude*, 50–54. ↩
18. See Abbing, *Why Are Artists Poor?* ↩
19. Ibid. ↩
20. Gregory Sholette, *Dark matterMatter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture*. (London; New York: Pluto Press, 2011), 1. ↩
21. Ibid., 2. ↩
22. Ibid., 1. ↩
23. Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture*, 327–28. ↩
24. See Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). ↩

25. Walter Benjamin, “The Author as Producer,” *New Left Review* 1, no. 62 July–August 1970), http://www.newleftreview.org/?view=135. ↩
26. Ibid. ↩
27. See Zygmunt Bauman, “Pięć przewidywań i mnóstwo zastrzeżeń,” in *Futuryzm miast przemysłowych: 100 lat Wolfsburga i Nowej Huty*, eds. Martin Kaltwasser, Ewa Majewska, and Kuba Szreder (Krakow: Korporacja “Ha!art,” 2007), 74–85. ↩
28. See Immanuel Wallerstein, *Utopistics: Or Historical Choices of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: New Press, 1998). ↩
29. Chantal Mouffe, “Artistic Activism and Antagonistic Space,” *Art & Research* 1, no. 2 (2007), http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v1n2/mouffe.html. ↩
30. The list is included in the collective bibliography of the book. ↩

Edit

A Hidden Exchange

Lise Skou & Bonnie Fortune

"Does the rational man think only of himself? Or of the community?
Is it in his self-interest to build a stronger community?"

Adam Smith's best-known work was *The Wealth of Nations*. Its concepts of rational self-interest and the invisible hand of the market have persisted for many years forming the basis for the contemporary study of economics.
Smith "marveled at the efficiency and specialization in the factory but never in the household. In his writing, he seldom mentions women's work in the market or in the home. Smith developed categories of productive and unproductive labour – these categories ignored both paid and unpaid domestic work. Material production alone could produce a surplus and thus spur on the economy. Service, or care work, devoted to others was essentially irrelevant.

Although many professional economists might disagree, Smith took a wrong turn with the indefinite notion of progress. Smith recognized that only economic growth could sustain high wages and widely diffused prosperity without society-wide planning and cooperation. Unsurprisingly, he failed to recognize that there were inescapable limits to growth. [1]

By framing society as a unity in which inequalities of property and class were both a requisite and a guarantor of greater social well-being, Adam Smith was not only achieving his political

objectives but set the stage for the emergence of "the economy" as a bounded and unified social instance.

How to disassemble precarious existence:

In our work we are committed to ongoing experimentation to find forms of collective activity needed to build a world beyond this concept of economy, beyond capitalism, beyond precarious existence. Around 2012 we began a collaboration based upon a common interest in moving away from the singular narrative of Capitalism and turning our heads towards the plurality of economies to negotiate a rupture in capitalist hegemony.

In our lecture performance *Adam Smith's Mother* (Thealit – Frauen, Kultur, Labour, Bremen (GER), 2012) we attempted to return to the household of Adam Smith as he was writing the foundational text on the study of contemporary economics, *The Wealth of Nations*. Smith's writing took place in the safe space of his mother's house – his domestic needs, cooking, cleaning, etc. were taken care of by her labour.

We were interested in returning to this theoretical oversight – the point where Smith neglected to account for the hidden economy of the household while developing his ideas on free market economies that continue to shape today's economic theories. We wanted to look at the hidden economies of the home as non-capitalist sites and discuss how focusing on these hidden economies might shape an understanding of a future beyond capitalism, or at least produce a more nuanced understanding of contemporary economics.

This led to the organisation of *Hidden Economies – a seminar on economic possibility*, which we co-organised in collaboration with Brett Bloom in Copenhagen, October 2014. The seminar brought together artists, activists, and scholars to discuss hidden economies – existing within, next to, beside, and around capitalism. The seminar was inspired by the work of feminist, economic geographers JK Gibson-Graham (Julie Graham and Katherine Gibson). Gibson-Graham worked on several publications and projects that sought to destabilize and introduce ruptures in the "monster" of capitalist economy. Our guiding questions in putting together the seminar were: Capitalist processes shape our daily experiences but do they define them? How and where are people creating economies that ignore the dominant economic system? How do these economies – shared, exchange-based, micro-local, etc. – function and what do they look like? Are they temporary or are they sustainable? The foundation laid by Gibson-Graham frames how we understand and perceive the economic realities that shape our everyday lives and our larger social structures. We were interested in how cultural work may contribute to shedding light on economic difference and articulating new economic realties. Central to this project is the idea that economies are always diverse and in the making.

Building on the seminar, we are organizing Trade Test Site, a series of cultural events in Aarhus, Denmark combined with a booklet series (*Trade Test Site #1-4: Your Money or your life – on feminist economics*) to look deeper into the concept of "hidden economies" as articulated by Gibson-Graham. Because these economies always already exist, they are proof that Capitalism is not an impenetrable and inevitable economic system. Each hidden economic reality, below the iceberg, [2] means that there are other possibilities for generative economic realities. The booklet series will include texts by and about scholars and artists: Katherine Gibson, Kathrin Böhm, Renee Ridgeway, and Silvia Federici. The Trade Test Site project is focused on both researching and creating practical experiments in identifying and strengthening hidden economies.

Both Skou and Fortune have been part of art communities involved in implanting cultural experiments in creating alternatives to capital. Lise Skou with Swop Projects and rum46 and Bonnie Fortune with Mess Hall in Chicago, IL. Though we are part of these international communities of artists working on projects that look at ways to develop different forms of economic exchange, we still find these practices marginalized with alternatives to capitalism being regarded as just that "alternatives."

If we truly want to discuss art's opportunities for establishing a plurality of economies that are not subject to capitalism, we should really be taking about economies that exist on an equal footing with capitalism. Only then can we bring about a final break away from the hegemony of capitalism. It is not enough to document existing "alternatives" to capitalism, nor to launch new ones. The key issue is to open up a discursive space where such "alternatives" are regarded as viable, successful and transformative. And real transformative power requires us to think in new and different ways about economics and politics in the production of conditions for change.

In spite of the many excellent initiatives and projects launched around the world in local communities on varying scales, it is still clear to see what impedes these transformative ambitions: An over-familiarity with capitalism that leads us to perceive it as a natural and dominant kind of economy, or even as a complete economic system that coincides with the social space.

In the light of such preconceptions, non-capitalist projects are still regarded as mere interludes; as tiny temporary ventures that offer a source of amusement to the general populace.

It is with this mindset and the desire to engage in these things from a feminist perspective, that we begin Trade Test Site. The first booklet will be printed in Autumn 2015.

The following is a detailed example of one element of Trade Test Site from Lise Skou. In this section she explains, how she is

taking the concept of a hidden economy, in this case exchange between friends and acquaintances and the model of a cooperative, user owner workspace.

Explaining the Trade Test Site as an artistic research project:

Demystifying Capitalism – or, How do we get out of this capitalist place?

> *Most people get up in the morning wanting a job – and if not wanting one, feeling they need one, rather than creating an entirely new way of organizing social relationships*
>
> Silvia Federici

Over the course of the last decade, artists have claimed trade as a socio-cultural space by producing their own shops, stalls, barter centres, chains of exchange, and distribution systems. Art suggests and adopts forms of trade that remind us of the opportunities and complexity of the society in which we live; a society where we have become used to the idea that everything must be "worth something."

Exchange Library – an example:

As part of Trade Test Site, I, Lise Skou, am organizing Exchange Library a membership-based lending, exchange and distribution business launched in Aarhus, Denmark, in 2015. It is a platform for discussing artistic efforts in collaborative economies, for rethinking trading cultures, economic practices and distribution in collaboration with artists, shop owners, businessmen, activists, students, retailers, local communities and so on.

At our premises, members have access to a 'library' of high-quality children's clothes, books, and locally produced organic foods – such as bread, jam, juice, home-made chocolate spread etc. – that they can either borrow, barter or enjoy in our Exchange Cafe.

This is to say that in our Exchange Library you can borrow or exchange e.g. the children's clothes you need, return them, and exchange them for something else. You can swap and borrow as much and as frequently as you like – but you can only borrow a given item for a maximum of four weeks.

The Exchange Library (EL) is grounded in a cooperative model, which means that all its activities are based on worker-owner membership. It is run by members, who own and run EL and its activities in a democratic manner. The enterprise is intended to be of maximum benefit to the members rather than to create an economic profit. This also means that the membership fees are used exclusively to cover remuneration for Co-Workers and Co-Distributers and day-to-day operation.

What is important for the EL is to create a business where members receive payment for the work they do, and that everybody receives equal pay for equal work – regardless of education, seniority, background etc. It is also important to build a framework for establishing jobs, and any member can at all times book their own working hours to the extent they wish.

A Co-Worker is someone who tends the "library" and the Exchange Café. A Co-Distributer is someone who, when traveling from e.g. Aarhus to Copenhagen or Berlin, takes along goods that someone in that city wishes to borrow so that all shipping or transport of goods within the EL setting is carried out through personal and social networks. All such journeys *must* be journeys that would have taken place anyway.

Exchange Library App:

An important aspect of building an efficient borrowing and exchange system is the development of an **Exchange Library App**. The **ELApp** offers a borrow and exchange function that allows everyone, regardless of where they live, to use the EL borrowing and exchange service. All goods borrowed via the App will be distributed via social networks, specifically by the so-called Co-Distributers.

The ELApp also contains information and guidelines on how individuals can launch an EL in their own local community. If you set up your own local Exchange Library, you can add your branch so that the app no longer contains goods from just a single Exchange Library, but from several different local libraries. We have a great wish to see the creation of a network of Exchange Libraries throughout the world – and we will expend great effort in seeing that wish realised.

Space and surroundings

The city of Aarhus is currently undergoing extensive change and renewal. A Light Rail project is cutting right through the city – prompting a large number of old buildings to be torn down; the city has a new Mediaspace (which might more accurately be called the municipal citizens' service); the harbour area is completely changed; and an entirely new, centrally located neighbourhood called Frederiks Plads is being established, full of shops, cafés and posh dwellings in tall buildings that overlook the harbour. To this you may add a wealth of smaller projects prompted by the overall *Aarhus 2017 – European Capital of Culture* project, which has caused a widespread desire to "clean up" the city. As a result it has become rather difficult to find just a single tiny refuge in Aarhus where no new buildings are being constructed. It has become more than difficult to find old houses and shop premises that can be rented at affordable rates. Such intensive monopolisation and mono-use of the public space in urban settings does not invite rethinking. It does not allow for collective visions about potential changes to the ways in which

public spaces are used, nor for dreams about how new spaces might be created as a result of collective actions.

However, Aarhus still contains a centrally located piece of fallow land, right behind Godsbanen, a culture hub of event spaces and artist studios and workshops, built in an old railway in the former railyard. The local authorities still own this land, and there are currently lively discussions on whether this area should be the home of high-rise buildings and high-end flats or a new Art Academy / School of Architecture. On this plot of land a handful of initiatives focusing on recycling, urban space design and communal restoration have settled in. Here you will not – certainly not at first glance – come across the usual sense of negativity where co-optation and failure seems to be expected.

We have acquired two old shipping containers that have been placed in this – as yet still empty – piece of land. We are currently in the process of remodelling the containers in order to enable them to house the Exchange Library, the Exchange Café and a sequence of public lectures and workshops on the economies that exist within, parallel to, alongside and around the capitalist economy. And how different forms of trade might offer future potential scenarios for the world economy.

The containers were initially a stop-gap solution because we were short of funds and unable to find suitable premises in town. However, the containers have proven the ideal solution. They are free, and we can go straight in and take over the space we need without the need for expensive permits from authorities and site owners. We don't have to pay rent. It would be possible to move the containers to a different site. Rather than being bound to a static site, one of the official objectives of the Exchange Library is to disseminate its activities throughout the city. We want to use a range of potential spaces – whether public, private or in-between – as spaces for coalition building and collective building.

Thus, the containers will be moved after their first year in their current location. Our objective is to relocate them to Frederiks Plads, the aforementioned new central neighbourhood with offices, flats and shops currently being built in the heart of Aarhus. There are many interactions, interventions, and obstructions that can arise when placing this project in a range of different public, semi-public or private spaces.

Lise Skou and Bonnie Fortune

Further reading:
The Newspaper: Hidden Economies
The Book: Swop Projects

http://www.hiddeneconomies.net

Illustration: Lecture performance *Adam Smith's Mother,* Thealit – Frauen, Kultur, Labour, Bremen (GER), 2012

Notes:

1. http://www.the-utopian.org/post/3438970744/adam-smith-the-mensch ↩

2. The Gibson-Graham “iceberg poster” was originally drawn by Ken Byrne. The image shows an iceberg top and the submerged iceberg below. The iceberg above states only economy methods associated with the dominant capitalist economy while the submerged iceberg is printed with various other hidden economic methods. ↩

On Merit

Lise Soskolne

W.A.G.E. is an activist and advocacy organization currently focused on regulating the payment of artist fees by the non-profit arts organizations and institutions that subcontract artistic labor.

W.A.G.E.'s myopic focus on artist fees has sometimes been the subject of criticism by those who would argue that artists have always been unpaid, or that the sum total of W.A.G.E.'s efforts will result only in minor increases in quality of life for a limited number of artists, and that these efforts are ultimately reformist and fail to deal with the super-structural problem of economic inequity and exploitation engendered by capitalism, and most alarmingly, that calling for the remuneration of cultural value in capital value in fact operates in collusion with said super-structure.

This may all be true. W.A.G.E. is essentially a reformist organization because we advocate for reform within an existing economy. But we believe that this economy—the non-profit economy—is worth reforming and it's through a myopic focus on fees that conditions fundamental to the Work of Artists in the Age of Speculative Capitalism become visible.

The very simple but critical question, *why don't non-profits pay artist fees*? has regularly been posed to W.A.G.E. and over the years we have answered it different ways. These have included drawing attention to a lack of government regulation, a lack of transparency, their omission as a line item in budgets, the assertion of exposure as a fair exchange, and quite simply, because they don't have to pay them. As it turns out, these

answers only tell us how fees aren't paid, but they don't actually tell us why, which means that they're symptomatic of a larger structural issue.

So, after 7 years of thinking and talking about this question, I'm going to re-pose and re-answer it here, again, now. *Why don't non-profits pay artist fees?*

The short answer is: because artists don't think they deserve them; because non-profits don't know what they're doing in this regard; and because the philanthropists who support the non-profit sector know exactly what they're doing, and they always have.

The long answer is more nuanced. It addresses the contradictions that are intrinsic to the work of artists and to the non-profit economy itself. It addresses how the nature of charity defines the relationship between artists and non-profits, and between non-profits and their funders—and by doing so poses a significant challenge to the valuation, buying and selling of artistic labor.

W.A.G.E. was invited to participate in this conference [1] in part because we recently proposed a tool that could guarantee artists a minimum income in the non-profit sector. The tool is W.A.G.E. Certification. It's a program initiated and operated by W.A.G.E. that 'certifies' those non-profits voluntarily paying artist fees that meet minimum payment standards. These standards were established by W.A.G.E. in consultation with artists, administrators, curators, sociologists, labor historians, writers, and others.

W.A.G.E. chose to establish compensation standards within this sector because none previously existed. Not only were there no guidelines for what artists should be paid, there remains no consensus within the art field itself, even and especially among artists themselves, about whether we should be paid at all beyond the sale of art commercially. This lack of consensus comes as no surprise since it's consistent with the contradictions that, in the privacy of many artists' own personal logic, sound something like this:

- The real value of my work is non-monetary but I want to be paid for my work because my work requires time + labor and I need to earn a living.
- I only exhibit my work in non-profit and artist-run spaces in order to remain critical of the market economy, so getting paid means I'm not being critical of the market economy.
- I have to build up my social and cultural capital in order for my work to be perceived as worthy of compensation, but the more cultural and social capital I accrue, the more I appear to not need compensation.
- People think artists are penniless radicals who live off the state. People think artists are privileged networked gentrifiers

who readily profit from the excesses of the art market.

These thought bubbles describe a common condition. They describe what it feels like to embody the contradictions endemic to being a contemporary artist—namely, that the radical social or political potential of art is compromised by its commodity or market status, including that of labor, and that there is no way out of this condition.
With no way out, we have to find a way to live within it. We also have to find a way to get paid for our work—not only within this condition, but also despite it.

From W.A.G.E.'s perspective, embodying a contradiction does not justify non-payment for services rendered and content provided, although many believe that it does. If we were to agree with them, we might also believe that the few artists who appear to have found a way out have somehow passed through the eye of the needle into another dimension where the radical social and political potential of art production is seamlessly compatible with living well from selling that which is produced, and that these artists are exceptional.

By exceptional I mean that they are successful, and that the success of these artists is due to their exceptional talent, toil, and savvy—in other words, that their success is based on *merit*. But I also mean that they are the exception and by being the exception, they also prove the rule. And what is the rule? Again, the rule is that the contradictions inherent to being a contemporary artist under neoliberal capitalism are not resolvable, and as such the conditions under which we work are just that: the conditions under which we work, and nothing can be done to change them.

W.A.G.E. asserts otherwise, and we believe that insisting on payment for services rendered and content provided is wholly unrelated to the paralysis we all experience and which is endemic to living within a contradiction.

As we define it, an artist fee is not a reward. It's payment for subcontracted labor which is the work that you do when you enter into a transactional relationship with an arts organization to produce an exhibition or program. This makes the artist fee the closest thing this sector has to a wage. And because W.A.G.E. mandates that fees should be the same for all artists, it is therefore understandable that advocating for their equal distribution threatens the belief some artists have in their own exceptional status, which they may also believe was earned on a level playing field where it was all equal opportunity, all the time.

But in truth, we're all invested in this meritocracy, and the standardized payment of fees based on labor and not merit threatens our need to believe in the possibility of being the next exception, one that the simultaneous increase in critical and

market value would confirm. Thus we find ourselves competing with each other for impossible success in a system that's basically rigged.

So you can see how the contradictions we work within as artists are also divisive and as such they pose real obstacles to building consensus and have tended to shut down whatever potential we have as a labor force to bargain collectively for adequate remuneration. Add to that a vested interest some theoreticians and academics may have in maintaining the status quo because their work depends on the perpetual treading of theoretical water, and you have a labor movement that will tend to do the same: tread water.

The good news is that the contradictions inherent to being a contemporary artist are compatible with the contradictions at play within—and which are also definitive of—the non-profit art economy, governed as it is under the veiled logic of charity. And while it can reasonably be argued that charity is a transaction like any other, doing so would undermine a relation that has been carefully defined in the most pious of terms over a period of centuries: we understand charity as the redistribution of wealth, from the rich to the needy, as it should be, because the needy merit the charity of the donor, and the charity provided is an expression of the donor's belief in social and economic justice.

Suspended between the high-minded generosity of the donor and the desperation of the needy is the *non-profit organization*. The non-profit organization is by definition a public charity. In demonstrating that it serves the public good, it also enjoys a special moral status signified by its 501c3 designation as a tax-exempt organization. Instead of contributing to the tax base, it is eligible to receive taxpayer money to serve the public good, in effect aiding the government in doing its work, and as some would have it, in aiding the government to fulfill its responsibility to provide public goods.

Charitable status also enables the non-profit to give tax write-offs to the private foundations and individuals who support it through grant making and cash donations. This means that, instead of paying into the tax base, donors bypass the state and pay directly into the causes they are personally or politically invested in while also getting a tax break. The rules of charity have been written to incentivize giving but they also have been written to benefit the wealthy and this should come as no surprise.

To be clear, 'non-profit' does not mean that making profit is prohibited—it simply means that if profit is made it must be reinvested into the provision of future services and not redistributed to officers, directors, or members. In other words, this rule, known as the "non-distribution constraint", protects

the organization from the potential of individual greed to degrade its mission to serve the public good. For examples of such degradation we need look no further than the compensation package of Glen Lowry, director of MoMA who in fiscal year 2013 earned close to $2 million ($1,856,954), or Lisa Phillips who made $614,000, nearly 5% of the New Museum's total operating budget and more than three times what its other highest paid employees earned that year.

Taken together, the defining mechanisms of the non-profit—its tax-exempt status, its ability to receive subsidies, and the restriction on personal gain—appear to locate it outside of the commercial marketplace where its moral standing is clear and consolidated and secure. But as it turns out, the moral standing of the non-profit serves two important functions within the marketplace itself.

The first is by providing an alternative to it. In the free market there are of course no restrictions on personal gain, so shareholders and owners have both the incentive and the opportunity to increase profit by providing lower quality services and by exploiting workers. In the art field, the for-profit entity is none other than the commercial gallery, within which the role of the art dealer is none other than that of someone who takes advantage of consumers for personal gain. This is to be expected, and in this equation the radical social and political potential of art is usually negated, or at the very least, declawed.

By contrast, the non-profit sector's restriction on personal gain provides consumers with an alternative in which they can trust that they are not being taken advantage of. Bound as it is by its charitable status to operate educationally, and often to provide institutional support for artists, as well as for practices that are less saleable, more immaterial, and perhaps more likely to destabilize or eliminate completely their own market value, when the non-profit offers art as pure radical social and political potential, it is apparently not doing so for private gain or for profit, and this is what gives it its moral authority.

Ironically though, it is precisely the non-profit's moral authority that *increases* the monetary value of the art and artists that pass through it in the form of exhibitions and programs. The logic is that if it's exhibited in a non-profit institution, it serves the public good and therefore must have value beyond commerce—and it is exactly this perception that adds economic value to art when it reaches the commercial auction and sales markets.

So, to summarize what we have so far: on one level we have a constituency of artists who are ambivalent about whether they should be paid at all, and whose potential to form consensus and organize around remuneration is constricted by the divisive contradictions inherent to being a contemporary artist under

neoliberal capitalism.

On another level we have the non-profit arts organization, whose status positions it outside the commercial marketplace, thereby concealing its central role in imbuing art with economic value. At worst the non-profit is a tax shelter for the wealthy, and at best it is the mechanism through which some of our most beloved institutions provide critical support for artists in a context that retains the radical social and political potential of art.

Now place the socially conscious but ambivalent artist in front of the fun house mirror that is the non-profit and it's not surprising to find a serious distortion in the valuation and transaction of artistic labor. Now add a third level: private philanthropy, the primary source of funding for non-profit arts organizations in the United States.

Philanthropy is characterized as "private initiative for public good, focusing on quality of life." Although very much connected, the distinction between charity and philanthropy is that, where charity "relieves the pains of social problems", philanthropy attempts to "solve social problems at their root causes." As the Chinese proverb goes, it's the difference between giving a man a fish so that he will eat for a day and teaching him how to fish so that he will eat for a lifetime.

Philanthropy defines itself as a form of charity that would prefer to teach a man how to fish. Fine, but not only does this imply remarkable hubris on the part of the philanthropist, it also points to the pathetic and bitter irony on which the entire system is based.

While it's true that private philanthropy established some of the country's most important educational institutions; advocated for the secular development of the humanities and sciences; and pushed government to implement and deliver social programs on a federal level, the source of its leverage to do these things came from the wealth it derived from the mass exploitation of labor during the emergence of industrial capitalism. In its exploitation of working people, the philanthropist produced the very so-called social problems it purports to try to solve. In other words, the exploitation of labor is likely the root cause of the problem and a lifetime of fishing isn't going to fix it.

On top of that, profound tax breaks incentivize the creation of private foundations within which philanthropists store their wealth, requiring the dispersal of only a minimum of 5% of its assets annually. Put another way: tax law makes it advantageous for industrial capitalists to become philanthropists because, in addition to amassing wealth by exploiting labor and resources on an industrial scale, it is also financially beneficial for them to appear to solve the very social problems they caused in the first

place.

Testifying to the efficacy with which wealth and power are consolidated and perpetuated over the long-term in this way, and in other ways, is the legacy of ur-capitalists like Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, and Henry Ford which lives on through their private foundations whose assets remain in the billions of dollars.

Activist and professor Ruth Wilson Gilmore posed the critical question "what is a foundation?" and has answered it in this way: "A foundation is stored wealth. A foundation's funds are stolen value created by working people around the world in factories, mines and fields. That's what foundations are. And most foundation money goes to universities, where it's held in trust for the very thieves who stole it in the first place."

And while this is unarguably true, it is also true that philanthropy, in coordination with reformers, was responsible for identifying a need and forcing government to step up and provide for it, as it did with arts funding. The New York State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts were founded in the mid-1960s at the behest of the Rockefellers, under Nelson Rockefeller's governorship, shortly after which the alternative space movement of the early 1970s began, giving rise to now established non-profit institutions such as The Drawing Center, The Kitchen, Artists Space, PS1, and so on.

So, while it's as simple as philanthropy benefiting from trying to fix the social problems it caused in the first place, it's also as complicated as philanthropy now being an indispensable ancillary mechanism to government in the support that it provides. One of the consequences of a government deeply dependent on philanthropy is that the more money philanthropists are incentivized by federal and state tax law to store and gift through their foundations, the less money there is in the tax base for the government to redistribute into causes that have been collectively determined as worthy of support.

Thus, the fewer tax dollars collected by the government, the fewer public goods it can provide and fund, resulting in the proliferation of non-profits to fill the gap, where they serve as *private* producers of public goods. At this point, not only has the government handed over the provision and funding of these goods to the non-profit sector, it has caused fierce competition for funding within it, making it function not unlike a market economy in that sense. Within this equation, instead of requiring the non-profit to justify its programming on the basis of its educational value, which is what defines its 501c3 status, the non-profit receives funding on the basis of how well it will serve the agenda of the philanthropist.

In the arts, the current philanthropic agenda supports programs located at the intersection of art and social justice, where artists act as economic engines and agents for social change. Also known as social practice. Also known as the instrumentalizing of artists to clean up the mess that capitalism made. Also known as using artists to perpetuate and spread a global neoliberal agenda through things like 'creative place-making'. Also known as the orchestrated displacement of working class people. Also known as gentrification.

The funding of these initiatives, and for the less innocuous ones, happens through a highly formal and somewhat ritualized application process between grant maker and grantee. Mysterious as it sometimes is, the process makes sense given that it's necessary for the grantee to demonstrate reliability and accountability in its use of the funds in accordance with the grant-maker's wishes, but it's ultimately a ritual based on a charitable relation through which the donor derives utility and retains power.

In other words, in order to receive *charity*—a sum of money based on the discretion of the donor—it must prove that what it does *merits* funding. Does this sound familiar? If so, then the answer to the question, *why don't non-profits pay artist fees?*, is probably starting to become clear.
The non-profit doesn't consistently pay artist fees based on anything resembling the actual value of cultural labor today because it redistributes funds to artists on the same basis that it receives them: as *charity*, and on *merit*. The problem is that artists are not charity cases. And compensation is not based on merit.

By insisting that the work of artists in the non-profit sector be exchanged not as charity but as subcontracted labor, and not on the basis of merit but on the basis of services rendered and content provided, what I hope is also becoming clearer, is how this insistence disrupts the chain of contradiction that places all of our work in the service of maintaining the status quo in the for-profit sector.

But it's going to take more than reforming the payment of artist fees to cause any real disruption to the order of things, so I'm going to conclude with some thoughts about what it might look like to extend reform into something more disruptive and more organized. If artists are a labor force, and if non-profits are instrumental in determining the value of the labor that artists provide, then non-profits are a critical ally to artists, particularly because they are subject to the same conditions of charity and merit that determine their survival.

So I wonder if it's in response to precisely these conditions that we're seeing the emergence of the Common Practice franchise, of which there are now three, in London, New York and L.A. In

total there are 23 small and mid-scale arts organizations that have come together to make the case for their value and for the deferred value they generate within the art economy. This is no doubt occurring in response to increased deregulation and corresponding increases in competition for funding within the field. But whatever the reason, their organizing in this way and at this point bodes well for W.A.G.E. Certification because if we can certify one, there should be no reason why we can't certify them all. If they're united in making the case for their own value and survival, then they can't reasonably exclude the role of artists in that, and getting W.A.G.E. Certified would acknowledge it.

By next month there will be a total of 10 W.A.G.E. Certified organizations, which is pretty good for a program that was launched just over 3 months ago. At this rate we could have 30 to 40 signed on by the end of the year. But what if we wanted to go faster than that—what if we wanted to accelerate the formation of, like the Common Practice franchise, something that starts to look like a union of organizations?

Here is an outlandish idea: what would happen if W.A.G.E. began certifying individual artists on the basis of their commitment to exhibit only with W.A.G.E. Certified organizations? On its face this idea might seem divisive, but over time it could result in the emergence of a unified field—albeit one compromised by the contradictions of the system within which it operates, but at least unified in its commitment not to operate in the same way that the system itself does.

(This text is dedicated to Randy Martin)

http://wageforwork.com

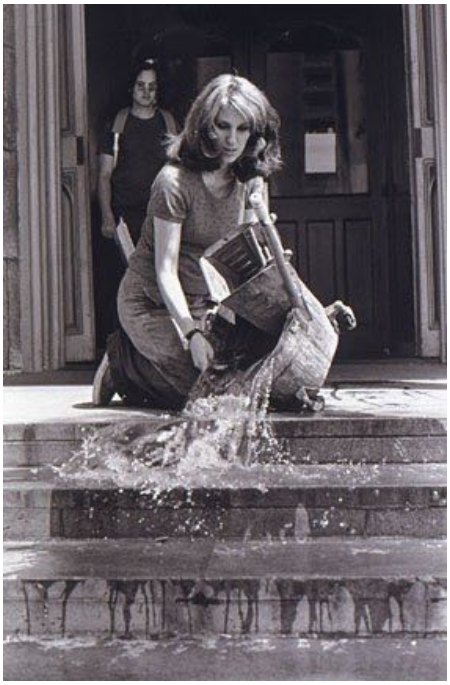
This article was published for *The Artist as Debtor Conference* on http://artanddebt.org, which was organized by the artists Noah Fischer (member of Occupy Museums) and Coco Fusco to discuss the art and the debt economy on January 23 2015 at The Great Hall of Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, New York.

Notes:

1. *The Artist as Debtor Conference*, held on January 23 2015 at The Great Hall of Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, New York, http://artanddebt.org ↩

The Politics of Speculative Labour

Marina Vishmidt



In this essay, I will endeavour to outline the connection between the contradictions of the social development of artistic labour in capitalism and the formation of the aesthetic subject in modernity as the displacement of labour from the category of art, bringing it into closer affiliation with the speculative forms of capital valorisation. I will start with a brief survey of how artists have approached and appropriated the politics of labour, following the role of labour within artistic practices in a historiographical and analytic key. Then we will see how the speculative category of real subsumption can function in a discussion of artistic production, allowing us to trace the emergence of the aesthetic subject as a displacement of labour and a reification of an oppositional space – though not necessarily an antagonistic one – to the social relations of capital accumulation and the society of work. This is a space of autonomy that, however, has significant affinity to the 'autonomisation' of capital from labour. Whereas capital and art once confronted each other as heteronomy and autonomy, now they seem to share a certain utopian vision of an 'automatic subject' that can valorise itself indefinitely. This affinity of course has certain limitations – art can at best be a flattering self-image of capital, which is actuated by profit and is thus as far as can be from the core aesthetic principle of

'purposiveness without a purpose'.

Crucial to the determination of how the dialectic between autonomy and heteronomy for art is displaced in the present is the status of the concept of 'real subsumption'. 'Real subsumption' plays a central role in accounts of the restructuring of the valorisation processes of capital and their relation to labour as it has developed over time. While we can start by thinking about how artistic production has been differentially 'really subsumed' by the industrializing circuits of art markets, fairs, biennials, urban branding strategies, or even education and social services, this should be situated as part of a broader trend. The annexation of art by 'culture' and 'culture' by the economy has been seen as a symptom of the 'seizure' of previously 'untouched' areas of subjectivity and social life by the valorisation process, or, conversely, the socialization of capital in cultural consumption. Processes such as these have been theorized in terms of the periodisation of phases of capital accumulation and of the relation between capital and labour within them. [Endnotes 2010: 140] The developmental tendency, then, for the relation between capital and labour is that labour not only appears more and more, but is experienced as, a moment of capital. This registers both in the objective parameters of reproduction mediated by financial rather than welfare state institutions and in the subjective parameters of "human capital" ideology. Some theorists have also suggested that debt represents a concrete instance of the change in the class relation wrought by financialization. Insofar as debt has the effect of individualizing the subject's relation to capital – whereas the wage once served as a common basis for struggle – it disguises the capital relation of exploitation as "self-investment."[Federici 2012] Thus, the term "human capital" is hardly an ideological vector pure and simple; it simply describes the structural condition of workers in the era of financialization.

The status of class antagonism in this era of "self-investment" also undergoes a significant change – labour can no longer be affirmed as a positive counter-pole in a vision of a non- or post-capitalist future. We now need to construct an account of capital formation "from the inside out," that is to say, when capital is presupposed at the affective and operative level of the individual subject insofar as she constitutes a free individual, rather than a worker or any other socially determined role.

To do this, we will need to revisit the autonomy/heteronomy nexus as it has played out in the emergence of the artistic subject as both the emblematic and oppositional figure of modernity, internalizing the abstraction of the capital relation as the innermost truth of its existence in the world. Beyond the "death of art" (Hegel), the artistic ("creative") subject takes on the self-expanding dynamism of the 'automatic subject' of

capital and is advanced as a role model for all labour. At the same time, the artistic subject marks the division of social labour which produces art and labor as socially, and even ontologically, distinct institutions. It could even be said that it is precisely through the dissolution of the artwork into the field of wider social relations (social, participatory, relational and "invisible" forms of art) that the recuperation of this dissolution as individual artistic capital is upheld most forcefully, with the artist emerging as both a de-skilled "service worker" and manager and curator of social creativity or the "general intellect." [Fraser 1997: 111-16; Buchloh 190: 105-43; Mattin 2011: 284-307] The artist as both not-worker and utopian model of labour which mediates these shifts in productive relations serves as an analogue of capital's boundless creativity and transformative agency, even or especially in times of crisis and decline, when this figure takes on oppositional contents within forms which remain very much the same. As Adorno has noted, "A contradiction of all autonomous art is the concealment of the labour that went into it, but in high capitalism, with the complete hegemony of exchange value and with the contradictions arising out of that hegemony, autonomous art becomes both problematic and programmatic at the same time." [Adorno 2005: 72].

In this sense, the challenges to art's autonomy which have themselves solidified into an orthodoxy in the past three or four decades have by and large accommodated themselves to the results of these challenges, that is, a conception of artistic practices and artistic institutions that are more and more defined by the heteronomy of the market.

Artistic autonomy thus becomes a style, a form of "taste" that positions art as a refined consumption of objects and social relations, whose relationship to art's heteronomous conditions of existence must be disavowed. These disavowals can take the form of registering unjust material conditions on a discursive level while reproducing them in the practico-inert everyday of the institution. The conservatism which generates these disavowals is often framed as a pragmatic defence of art's independence and ability to nourish its socially utopian potentials, a stance which underpins many recent defences of the "bourgeois art institution" from the depredations of the market. The artist, meanwhile, seems to retain a commitment to autonomy as a professional standard, though it is now mediated by the character masks of the manager, the researcher, or ethnographer. This quick typology of the objective parameters of how autonomy appears in the field of art today centers on the figure of the artist as a figure exempt from the relations of exploitation that obtain elsewhere in society. The artist is a figure who can be "autonomous" because she belongs to a productive structure that allows her to appropriate and produce cultural material as the expression of

her subjectivity rather than for profit or survival. She is beyond the capital relation; she has the enviably protean nature of capital itself – as close as "human capital" can get to the idyllic state capital imagines for itself as an entity unencumbered by labour, regulation or deflating asset prices. In this way, the formal autonomy of the artist aligns with the "automatism" of capital as engine of accumulation and self-valorization that both includes and expels "alien" labour.

The autonomy of art arises with the autonomy of capital as a central phenomenon of modern experience. It invents a category of social relation which is not one, a social relation of exemption – aesthetic judgement or "taste." [Kant 1987: 43-95] This forms a central thread of what I call "speculation as a mode of production" because it is through aesthetic judgement that we can come to perceive more clearly the oppositionality of art in its separation from labour and use-value, an oppositionality very different to the negativity posed by labor, in its character as the "enemy within" for capital, with a subversive content predicated on its affirmation of use over exchange. But it may be precisely this under-determined form of social negativity belonging to art which becomes pivotal when that antagonism is dissolved by the re-structuring of the relations between capital and labor, when the ascendancy of finance sees the very "use-value" of labor put into question by its main consumer, capital.

Concomitantly with the loss of definition for labor, art assumes a new economic centrality as its indeterminacy is put to work in the more "speculative" modes of accumulation. This encompasses both the market and the public institutions of art, although the socially reproductive role assumed by the latter is increasingly de-stabilized as the legitimation art supplies for speculative capital is "de-leveraged" through austerity programs.

Is Art Working?

For an adequate understanding of the role of labour in current artistic production, the idea of the artist as a manager, an engineer of social processes which she may capitalize, needs to be thought in conjunction with the increasingly pervasive politicization of the artist as a worker: a notion with many historical antecedents which cannot be explored fully here. The question here would be what happens when labour becomes not just a thematic or image for artistic production, but when artistic production is re-imagined as itself a form of labour, and the kinds of political forms this produces. Artists and cultural workers assuming the organizational forms and demands of the labour movement such as fair pay and equitable working conditions can be briefly encapsulated in the history of Artists Unions in the U.K. and U.S in the 1970s, the Art Workers

Coalition in New York in the late ’60s – mid-70s, as well as current groups such as W.A.G.E. (Working Artists and the Greater Economy) and the PWB (Precarious Workers Brigade). There is also a sub-rosa tradition of artists ‘withdrawing’ their labour, such as the Art Strikes initiated by, respectively, the Art Workers Coalition (1970), Gustav Metzger (1977-1980) and Stewart Home (1990-93).

There are many paradoxes thrown up by re-defining artistic production as wage-labor (however the wage is calculated). One of these might be that the division of social labour that produces the artist as a separate kind of “non-professional” professional cannot be reconciled with a simple agreement that art be valued through the same metrics as all other kinds of work, particularly when capitalist work across the board is being rendered precarious, contingent and self-realizing for everyone on the classically reactionary model of the autonomous (starving) artist. Yet this fragile homology between artistic labour and labour in general does furnish the political core of initiatives by artists and cultural workers to organize on the traditional lines of labour politics. These initiatives seem to multiply at a time when artistic production increasingly does not result in object commodities, but in ‘services’. As Hito Steyerl writes, what that means is that such services are instantly commodified themselves. [Steyerl 2011] But are they? While remaining art? Here we can recall Marx’s comment about labour which does not produce use-values: “If the thing is useless, so is the labour contained in it; the labour does not count as labour, and therefore creates no value.” [Marx 1990: 131] If it was use-value producing labor, it wouldn’t be art; and, come to think of it, a great variety of waged labor these days hardly produces use-values either. It is in this light we would have to re-interpret the late conceptual artist Hanne Darboven’s statement:

> I have a good conscience; I’ve written thousands of slips of paper. In the sense of this responsibility – work, conscience, fulfilment of duty – I’m no worse a worker than anyone who has built a road.” [Darboven, quoted in Adler 2009: 106]

In other words, it is no longer self-evident that the type of artwork Darboven was doing – obsessive and repetitive, logically motivated hand-writing – can or should be deemed tantamount to manual labour in its usefulness, just because so much wage-labour looks and acts like Darboven’s (though perhaps not as much as Bartleby’s the scrivener’s would) and has no pretence to either diligence, duty or social utility. Thus labour solely quantified by wages, without a narrative of social utility apart from ‘servicing’ the financialized infrastructure, cannot be ‘qualified’ by such traditional virtues, and nor can art ennoble itself by drawing an analogy between its dedication and the commitment of workers.

Aware of the thorny conceptual and practical issues besieging the task of quantifying artistic labor, a group like W.A.G.E. focuses their campaign on the distribution of resources in public institutions. Dealing with technologies such as contracts, budgets, and certificates of good practice (and wielding the threat of sanctions from funders) WAGE is programmatically challenging the mystification of artistic labour as an 'investment' which may recompense its maker in the future. They set out to break the cultural tie between artists and (financial) speculators by re-positioning artists as workers: a gesture of another kind of speculation, that is, speculating about a state of the world different from what it is.

This bears directly on the relationship of art-making to speculation as a form of production. Besides artistic work – whether it is recognized as 'labor' or not – unpaid labor in the cultural sector (typically internships, as well as the more humdrum self-exploitation characteristic of this work) is paradigmatic of speculation as a mode of production since this kind of labour is presented as a speculative investment in one's human capital, with its hallmarks of affective excess, self-management, and submissive auto-valorization. However, it should not be disregarded that the prominence of unpaid labor in the cultural sector is more than anything else pointing to the larger de-valorization of labour in the economy: that is, it is very much an index of a structural problem of dwindling resources and aggravated social inequality.

The strategy of organizing around the means of compensation for artists and cultural producers reveals a number of paradoxes when seen through the filter of labor politics. The artistic mode of production is so mystified and individualized that labor regulation could indeed only be performed by a much more omnipotent state than we are ever likely to have, and even that would hardly touch on the opaque and unregulated primary and secondary art markets. W.A.G.E. proposes a form of certification or voluntary code of best practice that arts institutions can sign up to, indicating their commitment to pay cultural producers properly. What this misses is first, that an unregulated market like the sphere of art production and mediation does not voluntarily self-police and second, that art institutions operate within a capitalist social space whose iron law is that the rewards of the powerful few come at the expense of the weak many; a structural fact not amenable to moral pressure. The professionals at the lowest rung of the ladder are unpaid so that institutions can function on inadequate budgets; artists don't receive fees so that there's more money to pay salaries to administrators to fund-raise from wealthy donors. If one of the distinguishing features of art production is that – by and large – it is not organized through the same structures as nor accessible to the same forms of measure as other kinds of labour, then it is difficult to see how

the political forms of labour organization can play more than a metaphorical role in pointing out certain social injustices of this kind within the institution of art. [Passero and van den Berg 2011: 174-5] Further, this kind of pointing will swiftly need to point to itself, as the expansion of the art world, however unequal the distribution of its rewards, is a symptom of extreme wealth inequality, a symptom of vast amounts of money being accumulated and invested in e.g. the art market and not e.g. in social reproduction. [Fraser 2011: 114-127] Additionally, as John Roberts and Gregory Sholette have written, art increasingly functions as a sink for disguised un- and underemployment, as statistically larger numbers of people try, with varying degrees of success, to monetize their free creative activity in a hostile economic landscape. [Sholette 2010; Roberts 2011]

Besides the paradoxes from the side of labour and the commodity, there are also paradoxes to be found on the side of art. If what is most characteristic of progressive art since Modernism is to desire the end of art, to dissolve into life, then re-defining art as wage-labor fits into that tradition, while continuing to insist on the cultural exception that determines a price for it as far as the state and market are concerned – and to accept the power of capital, which ensures the existence of divisions of labor and classes which defines the whole social existence of art in its current form. As already noted, this move can mean that the real class divisions that underpin the maintenance of regimes of paid and unpaid labor, mental and manual labor, art work and 'shit work', are obscured. Also, the move of construing art as labor reduces art to one of its dimensions, namely what it shares with all capitalist work: the commodity form. A labor politics of art boils down artistic production to the 'absolute commodity' Theodor Adorno speaks about [Adorno 2007: 28; Martin 2007: 15-25] or to abstract social labor in its generality, vitiating the critical inflection art still possesses as "the antithesis of that which is the case." [Adorno 2007: 159]

However, raising the issue of the links between art and labor in the speculative mode of production can have other, equally if not more urgent, critical and political consequences. Art's role in social reproduction – the "concealment" of labor Adorno mentions in our epigraph – is problematized when this role is re-defined as labor, that is, as production. This is also the lesson of the 1970s feminist Wages for Housework movement, and indeed any instance when a social relation accepted as natural and exceptional to the laws of market exchange is re-defined as labor, thus alienated, and alienable: political. It is not only a matter of recognition: once the disregarded is revealed as fundamental, like unwaged labor for the system of waged exploitation, the relations in that field can be configured anew. On the terrain of art, probably still the most elegant and

symptomatically precise gesture of this kind was the feminist conceptual artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles' "Maintenance Art Manifesto" and artwork. Laderman Ukeles dramatized the nominalist protocols of Conceptual Art when she performed domestic labour as an artwork, what she called "Maintenance Art."[Lippard 1979: 20-21] Ukeles would bustle around exhibits with a duster and cleaning fluid, wash the steps of the museum, and hound the administrative staff out of their offices on her cleaning rounds. The point was that the work of maintenance made all other kinds of work possible – waged labour, artwork, even "the revolution." In proposing a world in which "maintenance" activities were just as legitimately a part of the art as the objects or even the more ephemeral propositions or documentations that announced conceptual art, she was suspending the division of symbolic and physical labour that ensured work and art remained matter and anti-matter, autonomy without a taint of heteronomy. If the daily uncompensated labor performed mainly by women in the household could migrate to the museum and seek legitimacy as art, then it was no longer self-evident that this labour was any less "creative" than the kinds of activity hitherto enshrined as art, and no less public than socially necessary wage-labor. It could even be said that her work synthesized the political stakes of identifying with "work" at that time (late 1960s and early 1970s) for art and for the feminist movement, since identifying with work was a way of reaching for some sort of political collective agency (and, inversely, the political stakes of upgrading housework to artwork). The debates around art's relationship to work sounded very similar to the domestic labor debates; both were seen as taking place outside the social contract of waged labor. This was correct on one level, a descriptive one. Yet both feminism and radical cultural politics like the Art Workers Coalition drew their strength from either disproving this premise or mining the marginality for political effect.

As one of the driving forces of Wages for Housework, the Marxist feminist scholar and activist Silvia Federici, wrote in 1984:

> Yet, the demand for wages for housework was crucial from many viewpoints. First it recognized that housework is work—the work of producing and reproducing the workforce—and in this way it exposed the enormous amount of unpaid labor that goes on unchallenged and unseen in this society. [Federici 2012: 56]

As soon as an activity, and the identity of those who perform it, is alienated in this way, its stability as a social relation is suspended. In the field of cultural production, it allows the question to be posed of what it is about the organization of society that impels some to work for no money whatsoever because the alternatives seem even worse. Considered in a

purely formal manner, it is here that the question of "self-abolition" – of the proletariat, of social existence under the category "woman" or "homosexual" or "black" – also becomes a question for artistic labor. The relations between the negativity of labor for capital and the political affirmation of labor within capital can be seen in analogy to art's heteronomy and autonomy. Art cannot affirm itself as art within the relations of capital – its autonomy – without using that autonomy to disclose the horizon of its own erasure, whether that means merging with life (heteronomy) or wider social transformation (overcoming the autonomy/heteronomy contradiction). It is clear that the analogy between the self-abolition of art and the self-abolition of the proletariat, or other forms of social self-abolition, is questionable at a greater level of concretion, which would bring into focus the class relations of art and its "exceptionality." However, there is the formal correspondence in the relation of art to capital and unpaid domestic work to capital that looks like a relation of the 'supplement', that which is necessary but must be depicted as incidental. The constitutive exception, whether it is reproductive labour in the home or the unquantifiable reproductive labour of the cultural worker or the serviceable artist: the "under-laborer" who is the condition of possibility of the system's ability to reproduce itself as a whole, the "work" that must disappear in order for "the work" to appear, whether that work is the waged worker or the art installation. A further question here would be how the participatory, post-conceptual and relational art practices of the past several decades have sought to internalize and exhibit this 'work' as part of 'the work' that emerges thereby.

How does the social relation of capital mobilize and valorize the desire to be "not-labor" that is the founding moment of art in the capitalist modernity? How does the artist emerge as a subjectivity which allegorises the real abstraction of capital, equating ceaseless flux, change and competition with personal and social freedom? At the same time, this alignment generates a negativity which seeks its content in opposition to capital's rule, if not always to its logic, as the above indicates. As Adorno sketched it half a century ago: art de-functionalizes subjectivities but only as an exception which proves (even if it on occasion contaminates) the rule. Art is where the use-value that legitimates social production in a capitalist society elsewhere are suspended. Such a suspension of use value is performed within the limits set by the accumulation needs of capital, within and beyond the workplace. It can be contended that it is precisely art's micro-alienation from productive labour and commodity relations that in the age of creative work, creative industries and creative cities, acts to socialize capital on the macro-level, fulfilling art's oft-cited role of being "the commodity that sells all others." Thus, the affect of emancipation and critique that comprises the "surplus value" of art in this schema is not simply or merely ideological, but

wholly structural, flourishing as it does in an era of seemingly indefinite capitalist crisis.

Concomitantly, we might look at how art practices and art parameters have globally become aligned with the restructuring of labor into ever more arbitrary, placeless, transient and performative modes of generating value, including even the value of its non-reproduction. By "non-reproduction" here, I refer to brakes put on expanded social reproduction by debt in the case of labor (and capital), or, in the case of art, its self-referential continuation beyond and by means of, its own exhaustion and ambiguity. So here we can approach real subsumption as the restructuring by direct integration into capital of arenas of social life that had been principally, though contestably, separate instances from value accumulation – social reproduction as the consumption of use-values, art as the production of useless or "higher" values. This heralds a loss of mediation on the one hand and its proliferation on the other, when capital's mediations – financial and managerial mechanisms – expand into and reshape in their own image instances of relative autonomy where this autonomy has recently become a barrier for further accumulation, a barrier that comes to seem ever more intolerable in periods of crisis. Thus the separation of art and labor, premised on the self-consistent identity of each, is transformed by real subsumption, with the decomposition of the sites and senses of work on the one hand, and the untenability of proper places and pursuits for art on the other. Hence, the politics stemming from each also – use versus exchange in the traditional iterations of labor politics, and the criticality of useless art against reigning use-values in social reality – themselves are hollowed out by the rationalization that come with real subsumption. This was already the case in the previous global socio-economic crisis, the one which heralded the onset of the "neoliberal" era. In the speculative mode of production that has prevailed since then, art's attempts to model or embody greater social utility itself relied on a vast expansion of debt-financed social spending and culture-led urban development. A vast array of types of 'social speculation' pursued by means of contemporary art thus claimed critical purchase in the midst of this abundance, inequitable as it was. The current crisis punctuates, though it cannot be said to introduce a sharp break into, the self-understanding of such practices. The kinds of supportive infrastructures that social practice art has dedicated itself to prototyping in recent years seem objectively more urgent than ever, now joined to an invigorated activist and collectivist impulse in the wake of Occupy. But if the respective erosions of art and labor come as symptoms of a crisis, can there be a contestational as well as a palliative reflection on the current situation, and can those struggles also potentially disclose a re-composition, precisely around the crisis of "value" that the social forms of art and

labor manifest in their own ways?

Here, we must be careful to distinguish art's relationship to real subsumption from the claim that art itself is really subsumed; or, stated otherwise, art's conceptual or "imaginary" subsumption and the real subsumption determining labour must be held apart if we are to track how art and labour converge and diverge in the recent period of capital accumulation, and the shift in the mechanisms of subsumption this has brought with it. If we refer to the exegesis given by Marx of the category of subsumption (in its formal and real variants), it will be clear that the production process of art is not subsumed at all, neither really nor formally. I have previously discussed this in terms of art having a relationship to the value-form while itself not being determined by the law of value; it is this condition of difference which allows it to have a relationship to the social instance that is thus determined, namely abstract labour and its concrete articulations. And this, in turn, is what allows us to really situate art within the speculative mode of production as 'speculative labour'. As John Roberts writes in a recent essay:

> Artistic praxis certainly plays a part in the accumulation of capital, through opening itself up to interdisciplinary and environmental forms of situatedness – as I have said. But as speculative labour art lies outside of the value process: most artists, most of the time, don't have to work harder and faster in order to produce a range of prototypes to a given template and to a deadline. [Roberts 2012]

My hypothesis is that art's non-compatibility with the category of real subsumption is clear when the category applied to the characteristic production processes of art, and that this is important for reading the specific political potential of art in the speculative mode of production and in capital in general, with regard especially to its relationship to general "social technique," as Roberts also writes. However, if we refer instead to the broader application of real subsumption that has been outlined so far in this essay, it is equally clear that we can discuss art as pivotal – again, due to its specificity as a "non-labour" – to real subsumption seen as a tendential process of capital investing the whole of social reproduction with its value imperatives.

Conclusion

This essay has proposed a constellation – with pretensions to a narrative – between the concept of real subsumption in Marxian theory, and the place of art in social reproduction. I have further tried to develop what is distinctive about aesthetic subjectivity as it comes to represent the central character in speculation as a mode of production, once this latter concept

has been articulated with real subsumption as the re-shaping by capital of the processes of social reproduction as well as production and consequently the role art is called upon to play. Art as a form of "speculative labor" comes both to serve as the model for all kinds of work while providing a distinctive and desirable prototype of liberated – non-capitalist – labor which can either be antagonistic or conciliatory. These are two outcomes whose premises are not determined by the concept of art itself but precisely by what "role it is called upon to play." The "politics" of speculative labour, then, inhere both in this and in the detachment of art from use-value and useful labour, which can only be attained in their capitalist modalities to the same degree that art and labour can only be irreconcilable in capital, however "speculative" this capital may become in its operations.

We know that capital tends to externalize its costs, and that unwaged and unmeasured labor is not only the source of value for it (the process transpiring in paid work which expands across the whole of society with gendered and raced division of paid and unpaid labor, work and non-work) but the central mystification that traps people in compulsory activity as an expression of autonomy. The critical, as well as positivist, division between production and reproduction in art and in other kinds of labour can obscure this systemic tendency, and end up calling for an economic recognition that would measure and support both equally, or revalue one at the expense of the other, ignoring that it is in the interests of profit as a *social* as well as, or rather than, an economic relation to keep them apart only to bring them together, that is, to eliminate payment across the board and replace it with a speculative approach to one's own activity as (possible) commodity more like that of the artist. Therefore, bringing a feminist analysis of reproduction to art, reminding us of its formal symmetry with the pure form of value and thus with capital, is only a first step: to show what it excludes. We need to take the further step, though one that was often left implicit in the historical instances of reproduction politics in the feminist movement, such as Wages for Housework. That step would have to be a destructive one: a challenge to the wage-relation that homogenizes all activity with money, a challenge to the division of labour that produces art – art as a refusal of work that ends up sustaining the rule of exploitation as exception, and which itself increasingly is organized according to an industrialized, customer-facing model. If, as Adorno writes in *Aesthetic Theory*, "only what is useless can stand in for the stunted use value," then it is the distorted and attenuated form of art's autonomy as a *speculative intransigence to the* existing, including work, that can be the source of its political powers. And yet, identifying with work, especially with the disregarded and disposable subjects of that work, can indeed be the first step for such a politics of artistic inquiry and making, since capitalist work is

structurally the antithesis of capitalist art, even if practically they sit on the same continuum.

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Illustration:
Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Hartford Wash: Washing, Tracks, Maintenance: Outside*, 1973 performance at Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT, part of Maintenance Art Performance Series, 1973-74

Edit

A STATE OF PRE- 21st Century Re-Alignments in Art and Politics

Marita Muukkonen

"A State of Pre-" is a pluridisciplinary investigation into the conditions, subjectivities and agencies provoking a realignment of art, thought and politics in the 21st century. Drawing on the contributions of its diverse participants we would like to share some of the basic theoretical concepts and art related to the past three years of the *Re-Aligned Project*.

As a thematic umbrella-project dedicated to art and political movements advocating change, resistance, rebellion or revolution in their respective societies, the *Re-Aligned Project* has been defined by an ongoing series of workshops, exhibitions, artist-in-residencies, seminars, conferences, street and public art festivals. An interactive map of the project is found at www.Re-Aligned.net, which documents three years of engagement across Europe, Russia, the Middle East and Northern Africa.

Future historians will judge whether the wave of revolts of our time bear comparison to 1640, 1789, 1848, 1968, or perhaps, following further major convulsions, will be seen as the capitalist antipode to the communist collapse of 1989. What is clear today, is that we live in a time of worldwide instability, where hegemonic

government by consent is under intense pressures due to the crises of transnational elites above, and the discontent of vast majorities below, which are forced to bear the brunt of the ensuing problems.

Next to the economic and ecological crises of mondial scale, there are political conflicts being played out in widely differing arenas which show remarkable structural similarities. The notion of a **non-aligned** positionality, which invokes the refusal of multiple mainstream positions, describes one such common structural feature. An Egyptian, Russian, Chinese or Cuban oppositional intellectual, for example, will reject (local) authoritarianism while often simultaneously maintaining a highly critical stance vis-a-vis (global) western forms of historical and/or current expansion and oppression. A European or US Occupy activist, as much as an African or Latin American intellectual, will similarly reject an authoritarian conception of communism while fighting the rapacious logic of neoliberal capitalism. In all cases, concomitant with a clear *non-alignment* with the outmoded mainstream social paradigms of the 20th century, we see what we call *re-alignments* of the 21st. Although a term kept deliberately open to multiple readings, **re-aligned** initially describes a re-engagement with and re-merging of activist and intellectual currents that are replacing the apathy and disillusionment, apolitical irony, particularism, single-issue and identity politics of the previous epoch. It describes the “third”, “fourth” or “fifth” ways being sought between vertical and horizontal forms of organization, between particularist identities and unarticulated hybridities, between difference and universalism.

The period preceding our current era, sometimes called *postmodernity*, saw a sustained focus on cultural-ethnic issues, post-colonial and national-independence narratives, post-communist nation-building and religious revivals, gender related liberation movements and also numerous new ways of reading popular and commercial culture and society. While subverting and superimposing and making these configurations clash, many power relations which *postmodernist* theory and art engaged with and critiqued, however, were often paradoxically strengthened and reproduced in this same period, rather than overcome.

Explanations for this require a re-orientation of perspectives. It has been argued that precisely postmodernism’s aversion to “meta-narratives”, the “universal”, “reality” and similar overarching conceptions furnished the “conditions of ignorance”, so to speak, for the macroeconomic neoliberal depredations of the past decades. Discussion of general social and political structural movements remained out of fashion, suspect, even unspeakable, in an environment where collective convictions and ideals were ridiculed as simplistic, dangerous and antiquated, often forced to be couched in obscure jargon, while the power-relations they decried took their heavy toll.

Over the past years, the clarity of the need for common agency has led us to speak of the re-aligned approach as engaged in

multilectic thinking. Careful to avoid reversions to single-issue, single-culture, single-tradition thinking, that is, abandoning diversity or falling into undifferentiated universalism, this likewise multivalent term describes the aim, amidst the maddening multiplicity of our times, to redevelop models for holistic worldviews. The plethora of currents and movements which constitute re-alignments we speak of, are a type of globalisation 'from below'. Due to their undeveloped, still-localised nature, we hence describe them as having a **pre-mondial** agency. This is an agency for which politics, art and thought are only now beginning to imagine structures and give a language to.

Following the near-collapse of global markets in 2007-8, multiple waves of resistance and rebellion against diverse forms of oppression, enslavement and injustice have washed the world. From dramatic battles for basic freedoms and human rights, to forceful anti-corruption movements, to rising rejection of corporate and state control and disenfranchisement, to angry demands for advanced forms of equality and justice, not dissimilar grievances and claims have been brought to "the square" in a wide range of societies. Although nothing is certain, the chances are these grievances, and bold proposals for solutions to them, will again cross critical thresholds with the amplitude of ongoing ecological, financial, social and cultural crises.

In short, we wish to investigate the horizon which lies before us. We are in a *state of "pre-"*. Contrary to the fin de siècle pessimism of what may be called the *non-aligned generation of the "post-"*, re-aligned movements are part of a quest for a wider mondial commons. Going beyond the ubiquitous "post-" of the outgoing epoch (post-war, post-modern, post-Soviet, post-communist, post-ideological, post-history, post-colonial, post-human, etc.) what may be called a *re-aligned generation of the "pre-"* – naturally defined not by age but vision – seeks the proliferation of common orientations, desirables and initiatives in face of mondial crises. The *Re-Aligned Project* has set its focus on these currents of our antecedent, not to say antediluvian predicament.

Ivor Stodolsky and Marita Muukkonen

Illustration: From the opening of "To the Square 2", 2014. Photo credit: Jani Ahlstedt/Checkpoint Helsinki/Perpetuum Mobile

Edit

Artistic work through a working-life-research lens: A preliminary introduction to a possible research project

Marius Lervåg Aasprong

A story about what can happen when ideas meet across fields

This essay is based on my encounter with the art-scene in Trondheim, and the reflections I have made both personally as well as through my academic lens as a researcher in the field of working-life studies. I will present my personal rationale and interest in artistic work, and show an outline of what a study of artistic work might look like from the fields of sociology of work and organizational theory. This involves looking at structures and practices that form and define artistic work. Core questions are: What is “work” in artistic work? How does artistic work compare to “regular” work? Which structures and activities shape artistic work? How does this look from a sociological perspective?

There are two main rationales for undertaking this task: Firstly

because sociological theory of work has a strong bias towards the industrial sector and such an investigation can challenge and further the development of sociology. Secondly because artistic work represents a model which in many ways indicates how future working-life might look like, if the current trends continue. In addition there seems to be a need for a study that goes beyond the reports on working-life-conditions within artistic work in Norway. But there is one important premise: I am not an art-sociologist, I am a working-life sociologist. I consider artistic work as principally equal to other types of work. My definition of work is not based only on economic activity, but rather activity which is geared towards any type of value [1]. Housekeeping is work, begging is work, accounting is work, gardening is work, wrestling with ideas is work. The only difference is that in sociology work has traditionally [2] been defined as that which gives measurable economic output. I disagree with this position. Nevertheless, this distinction has real effects on society, and does lead to social inequality as well as unequal distribution of rights and resources. As I will argue in this text, I believe that if we aim to transform anything, we must also accept our own fields and the contributions we can make within them. Change requires movement from within as well as pressure from without.

I am a working-life researcher, and I want to contribute to wrestling with ideas which go beyond the categories of art, sociology, economy or politics, while still respecting their inherent perspectives and positions.
This is not an academic article, and as such you will not find references, correct formatting according to journal requirements or sufficiently analyzed data. It is my reflections and observations based on approximately five years as a “hangaround” to the art-scene. Therefore, there might be factual errors and statements that can be stronger than there is academic ground to directly back up. I welcome any feedback, corrections or input. The art-scene has influenced me to be more critical to the straightjacket of academic writing, and I think it is huge challenge that the form of the scientific article is limiting the possibilities for sharing subjective positions, styles and political perspectives. This text is at times polemic and exaggerated since I find that this can be a very useful way of provoking reflections and discussions [3]. Many of these points will be further addressed in the following text.

On the need for changed assumptions

The sociology of work has, in my opinion, been based on an assumption of work as that which is paid and regulated. The classical image is of the blue-collar worker, in a factory or similar organization of work which is stable and predictable. Of course there is research on work that does not fit these descriptions – air-stewardesses, managers, prostitutes (or body-workers), and now there is also the concept of the precariate which is gaining momentum. But even much of this research is still based on the assumption of the classical image of work:one might perhaps exchange one or two of these assumptions, such as stability for

chaos and within the sociology of work, these alternative approaches are often firmly placed within “critical studies”, and thus in a place of relative obscurity. They are less cited, and as citations are so important in academic work (that is how the value of our labor is measured), and thus less important.

I must admit that I am also a child of these assumptions. In fact, it is only quite recently that I’ve realized how strongly these assumptions have guided my understanding of work. It is mainly through three encounters that this has become clear to me.

1. My theoretical education failed to give me a realistic understanding of actual working-life challenges. In other words, the map given to me did not fit the terrain it was depicting.
2. Getting introduced to the local art-scene and those who work within it: realizing that there were almost entire continents missing from the atlas of work.
3. Introduction to meta-theory/integral theory. The core learning of this is simply the necessity of multiple perspectives in order to gain a more complete understanding.

I see a need within the sociology of work for broadening the perspectives and approaches, and indeed the assumptions that it is based on in order for it to have the impact sociologist often want, and that I personally hope for. This is based on my first encounter. We need a broadened perspective of labor, we need multiple approaches, even though sociology is a field much more defined by the types of questions asked rather than the approaches taken. To paraphrase the introductory text to the seminar which this text is written in connection to [4] We need to stop seeing work as an entrepreneurial activity within a restrictive framework conditioned by an expanding market and hegemonic political agendas prescribing the usefulness of work.

I see the field of artistic work as a promising area for this undertaking. Through my second encounter, that with the local art scene, I saw a field where work was nothing like the theories and descriptions I had learned to know. As I will return to later, there were huge discrepancies with the classical industrial work which was the basis for much of my education, but also striking similarities. This is restricted to the organization and structure of the artistic work which I saw undertaken. In addition, the richness of approaches, both theoretical and methodological was almost stunning. Although the explicit form which regulates academia into an all too often boring article-oriented output was lacking – no need to explicitly state the page of which book where which idea was found, or the minute details of how and whom one has spoken to or observed – it was clear to me that artistic work was equivalent to academia at its best. Artistic work and academic work is idea-work. Idea-work is about going face to face with an idea, wrestling some sort of understanding out of it, and giving it form.
Following this, dissemination is the most important aspect of the work. I do appreciate intellectual challenges for my own satisfaction, but I believe that what we are striving for is impact beyond ourselves [5]. This requires that the idea I work with is spread in some way or another. This is something which can only be partly

under my control, both because I require outside structures in order to reach others, and because the interpretation of my idea is subjective to the recipient. Dissemination is a distinctively social activity, and if our goal is change, then dissemination is of the essence. A point which leads to the core of this essay, and what can be my contribution; how can a sociological approach to artistic work be supportive to working with the idea of transformative art production?

On the possibility for transformation

Transformation is only possible through reciprocal change. Sociology cannot transform art to sociology, and art cannot transform sociology into art. When art influences sociology, it becomes sociology, and vice versa. Sociology of art is not art. Art can be sociologically influenced, but it is not sociology [6]. This is mainly because of the categories by which we make sense of the social world, and not necessarily because of the contents with which we fill these categories. So how can these different approaches meet? This is where the third encounter comes in, with meta-perspectives and integral theory. These approacheshave in common that they aim to work with ideas that are recognized as crossing one or more categorical borders. They are in a way multi-disciplinary, although they often in practice end up being dominated by one discipline or approach.
However, this “trap” is avoidable. Firstly, by rejecting the statement that it is a trap. When working with an overarching idea, many approaches are necessary, and in order for the idea to disseminate to a broader public than that one can reach within one’s own field one has to accept that in order to communicate with other “systems” one must use their language, or let somebody else do the communication. I must do what I am good at, and try to influence those I can reach. I must also let others do the same. Change doesn’t happen overnight, and ideas travel slowly. Idea-work requires trust and cooperation, especially cross-categorical idea-work. Secondly, by seeing the idea worked upon as content, and not it’s category. The idea of transformative art production is not an artistic project, it is not a sociological theory or analysis, it is not a political project, it is all of these, and more. Working with the idea, developing it, giving it forms and disseminating it requires that we reciprocally and in collaboration wrestle with it. In such a way the idea will become stronger, and our mastery of it will improve.

A preliminary study of artistic work by the perspective of a sociologist of work

So far I have only presented my perspective on how to approach the idea at hand. Now I must present some of the content I can bring to the table. I will entitle this: a preliminary study of artistic work by the perspective of a sociologist of work.
Adhering more closely to a standard article, I will firstly tell you a

little bit about how this study has taken place, and from which perspective(s) I've looked at the phenomenon at hand. I will then present some of my findings – differences and similarities within artistic work compared to an ideal-typical stereotype of a Norwegian employee. I shall thereafter put these findings into a larger perspective, and more specifically relate them to the issue of transformative art production and coalition building.

I will again emphasize that this is not a rigorous study; it is rather reflections I have made as an observer in the local art-scene in Trondheim. This approach is ethically dubious at best, as none of those I've spoken to have been informed that I have secretly been thinking about what they are doing and speaking to me about, in a sociological manner. It has been an explorative study, based on participatory observation. It is explorative in the way that I haven't had any clear hypothesis and haven't been looking for anything in particular. It is participatory observation because I've been attending openings, been to various studios, cooperated with artists and a curator [7]. I've also gotten to know a lot of artists within various fields, and have had informal and friendly talks with them where the issue of artistic work has either been a specific topic, or I've interpreted it as such. In other words, I've been a 'hangaround'. I have in no way attempted to become an artist, nor have I ambitions to do so.

My main perspective is based on sociological (Scandinavian) institutional theory, systems theory (mostly based on the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann) and the more specific lenses of industrial relations and critical management studies. In other words, I look at the structures and activities that shape and recreate modern working-life. Such structures can be the economy, access to resources such as information, rules, regulations and norms as well as more ideological structures such as politics, religion or science. The activities observed can be meetings, exhibitions, openings, preparation, research and discussions. It is about what the daily tasks are, and the context in which they occur. It is again of importance to mention that this stems from a perspective largely based on assumptions and theories developed from research on blue-collar industrial workers, predominantly from Taylor to Mayo (ca 1920s to 1960s). This is important because they still influence teaching, theory-development and identified challenges today. These perspectives can be valuable – either as examples of how artistic work can be seen from that perspective, or as an alternative perspective.

The Differences between Artistic work and Blue-collar work

When I first was introduced to the art-scene, it was like entering a totally foreign land. The language was different. Or rather, the language, Norwegian or English, was of course the same, but the meaning ascribed to the words, as well as the way how they were used was different. For example, 'post-modern' didn't mean for

them what it meant for me and the word ‘structure’ was a word that held many different meanings. But these are simply linguistic issues. The form the language took was the truly major difference. I mostly used written language and speech to communicate, at least those were the forms I was most conscious about. The form of communication in this new world was much richer, using many more senses: Sound, imagery, touch, feelings, time, smell – all were acceptable carriers of information rather than just context. I am now of course talking about the art, and not the artists.

It was also interesting to see that the art-scene had been right in front of me all the time, I just hadn’t noticed it before. There were suddenly galleries and studios where I before had walked right past. There were exhibitions, shows, lectures, and parties. A fairly thriving scene I had been oblivious to. It is worth mentioning that Trondheim is a fairly small town, and there is much interconnection between the various cultural and art workers. Poets, writers, musicians, actors, riggers, carpenters, light and sound technicians, curators, painters, sculptors, contemporary artists etc. are all to be found. In other words, it is somewhat puzzling that as a working-life sociologist I hadn’t noticed this scene before. The analysis of this fact is simple – most people are limited to their own sphere, and the rest of the world is of little direct importance to them. In systems-theoretical terminology this would be stated as their psychological system not having been sufficiently irritated by an external system.
After the initial acclimatization I could start making sense of what I saw. Those I met often lived quite different lives compared to most “average” Norwegians. Politically most were well to the left. Many were critical of capitalism. Quite a few had low and unstable incomes. A lot had strong personal opinions and tastes, and seemed comfortable to resist social pressure to “normalize”. Most of the artists are not related to the art market business and rather situate their artistic practice in non profit or communal activity. This type of stereotyping probably occurs to anybody who meets a new scene, such as Wall Street, the gym, the police or politics. But beyond the stereotype there are actually quite strong structures.

An important difference between the blue-collar worker and the artist is the lack of of the kind of regulations for the latter which enables the blue-collar worker to lead a fairly stable and predictable life. Yes, many artists pay their dues to a union, but this union doesn’t do the same thing as the industrial unions do [8]. It also works differently. Where the blue-collar union is focused on regulation of rights and the enforcement of these, the artistic unions are seeking the implementation of rights in the first place. Blue collar unions have paid union representatives at the local level, as well as full time union employees (lawyers, accountants, consultants etc.). Artist unions are to a larger degree based on volunteers at the local level (with little or no pay). But most importantly, Blue collar unions have a direct counterpart, such as the company, or an organization representing the employer. This also means that the blue collar union is much more professionalized. Artist unions are a general representative body with no direct counterpart.

I was quite baffled to hear about some of the differences between the organizing of representatives in the art-world compared to my experiences in the university or elsewhere in organized work. I've personally held many positions as a representative myself, chaired boards with union representatives as well as interviewed many union representatives as a part of my research. This has therefore also been a topic which I've discussed with several artists, both holding such positions themselves as well as being the represented party. In broad strokes I would say that there are two storylines which this can follow: the more or less randomly recruited, and the long term engaged. The randomly recruited representative "happens" to be at a meeting where new representatives are elected and lacking other candidates they agree to (or are encouraged to) take the position. Without much further information, a month or two later they are called in to their first meeting. When I've asked what has been given of information or documentation before this, they often say that they have assumed that this would be given at the meeting. On occasions, they haven't even been called to the relevant meeting, as the body which held the meeting wasn't aware that the representative had been changed.

Although I've not attended these meetings myself, I know that most decisions made in any board are based on ongoing discussions, developed over time, and being cast into such decision-making processes can be bewildering. If you do not know the background, premises and positions on the topic held by your predecessor, it can be very hard to change the direction of a decision, and if you are only given a few minutes to scan the documents the safest route is often to abstain or 'go with the flow'. If the representative finds this experience disillusioning (as is understandable), they will often hold the position for their allotted term, and with a sigh of relief hand over the responsibility to the next person. Since they had no briefing themselves, they don't see the necessity to brief their successor. Based on what I've been told I would say that about half of the representatives write a report of their work, but the fate of such reports are somewhat unclear (either sent in but not shared, sent in and added as an appendix to a board-meeting or delivered to the successor).

The long term engaged representative on the other hand has often started as randomly recruited, or been politically engaged for a longer time, and therefore know more about the governing structures. They demand papers and documents to be delivered at least a day or two before the meeting, they know what their opportunities and rights are, and some of the procedural standards which should be held. They demand (or produce) written minutes, insist on putting topics on the agenda and follow up on previously made decisions. But even in most of these cases (out of those I've spoken to) these individuals have had to figure these things out for themselves, or have relied on previous training or experience. Not a single artist I've spoken to, who held a position of any sort, said that they have been given any such training. However, when discussing such issues, those I've spoken to haven't addressed this as a critique to the artists unions, most of the time where artists unions are explicitly discussed it usually based on content, such as which positions a union should hold on any given issue or which topics needs to be addressed. Formal or procedural topics are rarely

addressed. Hopefully I'm wrong, and my selection of informants is most certainly skewed, but the image I see is not a positive one.

All representatives should have access to some form of training, as well as access to relevant rules and regulations. Important documents and files should also be handed over to the one who is taking over a position. In short, there should exist a basic bureaucratic structure as well as the basic support-functions for this structure. This is a safeguard for the representative, as she/he might be legally accountable for the decisions made, but also a safeguard for those who are represented – it gives a basic transparency to the activities which are taken on behalf of those who are represented.

Unionizing and the function of unions is one of the classical "guardians" of a regulated working-life. But unions aside, and continuing the comparison of the Norwegian blue-collar worker and the artist, there are also other structures that differ. The amount of working-hours is strikingly different, both in terms as what counts as "work", and what the total amount of time spent on activity related to work is. I have still to meet an artist who follows a regulated work-week. There is no "working nine to five". There is no overtime-payment. Often it seems like artists are lucky to make money at all – and even those who have "made it" wouldn't compare to anyone who has chosen a "regular" job. Often there is a "bread-job" [9] or two, which often seems to be too small to give any permanent benefits such as social security, pension-savings or sick-leave. The stereotypical artist who drinks wine and waits for inspiration has surely no real manifestation.
Every single artist I have met spends much more time working than any average employee. This is also perhaps a reason for the survival of the stereotypical artist. Most non-artists meet the art-world at openings or exhibitions. There they see artists who are drinking, nibbling on free snacks, and chatting with friends. What they often don't see is that these artists are actually at work. Many times I've overheard artists talking about an upcoming exhibition stating that they do not have the time or surplus energy to go, but they have to in order to stay up to date, catch up with contacts who are in town for the exhibition, see and be seen. The drinks are often one of few possibilities to save some income and enjoy a glass of wine anyways. This is not to say that openings and exhibitions aren't important arenas for socializing and meeting friends, only that they are much more. Likewise a CEO rather wouldn't attend yet another business-lunch in favor of relaxing and doing what she wants, and a researcher would quite often rather not attend the conference-dinner because it is a chore, but they do so because it is relevant for work.

There is no clear demarcation line between what is and what is not work in terms of artistic activity. In a traditional working-life work is spatially and temporally delineated. Work is all activity which goes on at a specific place at a specific time. It is also formally accepted as work, both by regulation as well as by appreciation by others. Work can be counted in some way or another (or at least to the degree where your superior could identify if you are working or not). Work can also be disconnected from productive output, such

as maintenance, supervision, or the repair of equipment. If a factory-line breaks down, and the factory workers spend two days repairing it, nobody questions whether they have been working or not, regardless of the fact that nothing has been produced. In artistic work everything except the outcome is largely invisible. Planning, research, maintenance, repairs, freight, accounting, marketing – almost any activity which you can find a department for in large companies is activity which the artist must do, but stands solely responsible for. Yet once the final product is shown, all this is invisible. My personal view is that this is also frequently invisible for the artists themselves. Not that they do not do these activities, but they do not consider it work.

According to the traditional understanding of work responsibility and especially value-adding activities are valued extra. If you have additional responsibility you get more money. If your contribution is vital to the end product, and in addition is difficult to replace, you get more money. This seems to be turned upside-down in the art-world. Organized support-functions like gallery maintenance, required professional assistance in the construction or creation of an art-work (such as carpenters, metal-workers, councilors etc.) require a regulated fee. This fee is based on pre-agreed rates, and regulated in terms of hours and where and when it is supposed to be done. The artist, who carries the entire responsibility, is vital to the end result, and in practice irreplaceable, gets the leftovers. Even when there is a pre-agreed amount of money to be given as payment to the artist, my impression is that this sum nowhere near allows the artist be left with a larger hourly rate than the support-workers. Often it seems like the artist considers this sum a “buffer” in case some unexpected expenses occur (as they often do), and end up spending much of their “income” on wages for those who are employed or on material costs. In this manner the only fair comparison to the artist is the entrepreneur – with the important difference that the entrepreneur has an end goal of profitability. My core point here is that from an industrial sociological perspective artistic work does not work. My point is to show how this looks from this perspective, and it is not to say that artistic work should become more industrialized – that is a completely different discussion. But needless to say, no project-manager or blue-collar worker would accept such wage-conditions. The end result would not be a strike, or quitting the job, it would be a court case on the grounds of illegal working conditions, exploitative structures and lack of rights.

From the traditional perspective it is clear that artistic work is faced with severe challenges, and to a large degree these descriptions do not fit with the safe and regulated picture which Nordic working-life is often is presented as. The Nordic welfare states, and perhaps Norway in particular, has had a very strongly regulated working-life, and the regulations have mostly been in favor of the workers: strong protection from exploitation, high degree of permanent employment, high degree of unionization, long traditions for union-owner-partnership and cooperation, mutual trust and a very well developed and universal security-net for those who lose their jobs. But this map is not up to date with the globally influenced changes in the actual terrain. Even though we are only seeing indications of

the precarity which is hitting the global working-life, the direction is clear. We are also seeing an increased use of temporary employment, decreasing union membership, loss of rights and increasing unemployment. Where the precarious condition has been the norm in artistic work, it is now also the direction "regular" work is heading towards. Precarity is becoming a common denominator for artistic and non-artistic work alike.

On the Similarities

Concerning the interrelationship between artistic work and general working-life, the comparison often has the direction of comparing artistic work against the stable measuring unit "regulated classical working-life" (as largely done above). An alternative perspective is that artistic work is becoming more and more a model for "regular" work, as has long been recognized in art-related social theory. Although I'm not familiar with this perspective, it is interesting to note that this conclusion can also be reached from a sociological perspective, based on the growing economic and social individualism, in which the individual is considered to be solely responsible for his or her own situation. In addition, the pressure for unique-ness and apparent individual success creates a highway to precariousness. Artistic work can be seen as the promising mirage on the horizon.

Individual, creative, self-regulated and inherently rewarding work is the model of modern working life. This mirage is a working-life where you decide yourself when and where to work. You use your creative and intellectual capacities. You are master of your own fate, and you get to share it on facebook. You don't work for pay or security, you work for the inner feeling of mastery and happiness your work gives you. You don't work for the gold-watch given after 25 years of service, you work for your golden CV; your own personal badge of honor. You don't have a permanent contract (it is way too restrictive), you have a website with your great projects, a linked-in account and a personal development coach (these two last ones aren't my findings from the art-scene, rather the modern CEO). For example, if we look at unions without clear counterparts; there is a growing number of unions who explicitly do not offer wage- or rights-based advantages, rather, they offer "membership"-advantages such as cheap insurance, good banking-deals, travel offers, telephony and internet-rebates and such. The union membership cannot in an individualistic economy come in the way for individual wage-bargaining, and thus it changes its form and contents. Furthermore, union membership is declining in most sectors, while in industrial and public sectors it still remains the highest. But even in these sectors there are changes. In industry the blue-collar worker is becoming replaced with white-collar workers due to automation, and traditionally those "above the shop floor" have been unionized to a lesser degree. The public sector is becoming privatized, and the private sector is traditionally less unionized. In short, more and more workers, as well as managers who have mostly never have been unionized, are in the same situation as the art worker: being without a strong regulative union behind them.

There is also an anti-bureaucratic tendency, in which individual treatment is valued above collective and equal treatment. This individualism shakes some core structures found in traditional working-life. Transparent wages, clearly defined authorities and responsibilities, equal rights and predictable contracts all require a certain degree of collectivism.
Concerning flexibility, or the self-regulation of the context of work (where, when and what), it is quite clear that the independent worker is the new role model. Home-office, smart-phones, flexible hours, video-meetings; this makes the boundaries between work and private life disappear. Accessibility 24-7 is the norm in many professions today. This has also been addressed by some German unions, who restricted the possibility for employers to require that their employees answer emails and phones after working hours. There is a battle going on between collectivism, and the structures supporting it, and individualism (which grows by tearing down collectivist structures).
But the comparison between the new worker and the art worker is striking. Most artists I know identify themselves by their work, it is an intrinsic part of them. Most would frown upon the idea of a 40 hour regulated working-week, saying it would be impossible to be an artist under such conditions. The same situation can be found in any classical vocation-based work – work which is based more on an individual calling, rather than just a "bread-job". Farmers, academics, architects, doctors, priests. But this model is also being applied to new groups of professions: real-estate, nurses, engineers, teachers, even bureaucrats. Not that you can't find examples of academics working nine to five, or doctors who think of their job purely as a means for money, or that you cannot find nurses that have a vocational calling. But take a look at how these jobs are marketed [10]: "Become a part of creating tomorrows so-and-so. Flexible working conditions. We are looking for a creative, independent new colleague. We offer personal development and the possibility for shaping your own future. Do you master the art of caring/farming/selling/teaching/etc.?"

The boundaries between work and non-work are blurred also in contemporary working-life. I've attended dinners where I have felt out of place because I do not master the lingo of ski-preparation, bike gears and dietary recommendations for doing a 20 mile run. Not only have such activities (it actually also includes salary-drinks, after office-hours parties and less physically demanding activities) been occupied by a career-logic, but you are also required to fund these informal job-demands yourself. To be successful you have to be at the right place, see and be seen. There are exhibitions and openings in most fields, but what is exhibited are careers and CVs. And these openings do not take place in a white cube, but in a new office location, a friends new start-up business or at the local conference centre. Many of those who were actively engaged in sports or activities ten years ago, did so because they found it intrinsically rewarding. Today they argue that it makes them perform better at work, or it has become an arena for "team-building" and networking.

But there is a slight difference when it comes to what is valued as work and what is not. In some jobs this is still quite clear, especially

as project-based and short term contracts are becoming more and more common (even in academia, where tenure or lifelong employment has been the norm, this is eroding). Such contracts require a fairly clear definition of what is supposed to be delivered at the end of the project, and the content of this is still quite clear. Of course, you have to compete with others to get these projects, and you should preferably be cheaper and better than your competitors. This probably leads to under-reporting of actual costs, which again leads to making cost-driving activities invisible. You have to cover such activities out of your own pocket. However, for those in the fortunate position to sit with the upper hand, such costs are added as necessary expenses. CEOs, workers with unique skills (a rare position to hold today), or workers in high demand can still require such costs be covered. Indeed they can often add more expenses to their proposed project and this will make the proposal look better. More expensive equals better. This situation often leads the latter to positions where they can influence structures, and they see individual bargaining as a strength for themselves. Those who are in the former position must believe that this development is what secures their golden futures, and further support it. Individualism erodes collective structures. I think this is also quite similar within the art-world, once you are “up there”, you can add to your demands and your price-tag. The more expensive the better (at least by the economic logic). If you are not one of those you cannot expect to get reimbursed for your costs.

Art workers and blue-collar workers unite?

I see a world where the model for the working-life of tomorrow is inspired by a field where stability, equal rights, predictability and communality is very bleak compared to the traditional sociological image of the industrial blue collar worker. However, as I stated initially, this image has probably been based on false or skewed assumptions. Probably blue-collar work was not as idyllic as some of the models depict (indeed much of critical sociology has shown this very clearly). But I also believe that much of the structures regulating working life, still today make a huge difference in strength and value between those working in regulated industrial and public jobs and those working outside of them. The only difference is that I do not believe that it should be confined to those established categories. We need to look beyond the categories, identify the core values and ideas we find important, and disseminate them. And in order to do this, we must recognize that if we are to collaborate and cooperate across category-boundaries, we must find a way to translate our ideas into a form which can be understood by the recipient. Such ideas must transcend art or academia. We cannot reject or destroy any of these categories, be they economy, art, science, religion or even family. But I believe we can sufficiently irritate them in order to initiate transformation from the inside. At the beginning of this essay I stated that I have had to let go of some of my assumptions, and only through that been able to identify overarching tendencies or ideas. This is also how I see a possibility for achieving change. It requires that we not only identify the other systems which fill the

environment around us, but that we are able to, and willing to, treat them on equal terms. There is no place for an enemy. Each must be strong where we are, and trust in the strength of those around us.

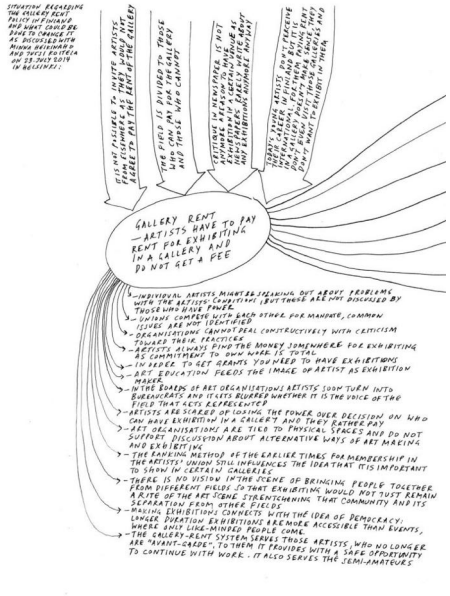
Notes:

1. In a systems-theoretical perspective the goal of the economic system is based on the operational logic of profit/no profit. This logic is dominant in most definitions of work, and as such does not recognize activity based on other systems-specific logics, such as religion (immanent/transcendent), the legal system (wrong/right) or science (true/false).
When I state that I see any type of activity geared towards a specific value, I mean that for instance what you do for love, idealistic reasons, self-development, altruism, art, friendship or whatever else could also be seen as "work". It should also be noted that an individual can be undertaking activities which are structured by the economic system without doing this with a goal of generating profit for themselves (they can even be exploited and receiving less than what is considered as a basic need), but by the logic of the economic system they are still contributing to creating profit (or loss). An example can be a veterinary who is driven by a care for animals, but it is still considered "work" as it is creating profit for the company who has employed this person. ↩
2. This position is heavily influenced by classical economics. ↩
3. This position is also based on a strand of post-modern sociology, for example represented by Mats Alvesson, where it is considered that a vocabulary encouraging defamiliarization and friction can uncover new insights and perspectives. ↩
4. The original text is as follows: "Since the neoliberal attack on public institutions of art and art education, artistic work has become an entrepreneurial activity within a restrictive framework conditioned by the expanding art market and hegemonic political agendas prescribing the usefulness of art." ↩
5. Undisseminated academic work as well as artistic work, refers to work which we do not share the output of with any others and is inaccessible and as such only possible to discuss on a meta-level. That is not to say that such undertakings do not have their own intrinsic meaning, or that they do not have value. But it is at the very least not of direct sociological interest, as it does not enter the realm of the social. Discussion of such work is however a social undertaking, although again only on a meta-level. ↩
6. This is based on systems theory as described by Niklas Luhmann, but I will not present this theoretical backdrop in this text, rather try to let it influence my analysis. Instead of stating the background and interpretation of what I want to share, I will simply try to share my thoughts. ↩
7. My thanks and appreciation goes to Edvine Larssen, Anne-Gro Erikstad, Rena Raedle and Vladan Jeremic amongst others. ↩
8. Norwegian union membership has traditionally been very strong, and the Norwegian unions have held a very important and influential role in local as well as national working-life issues. ↩
9. When I had heard this expression before it was meant as a job that one isn't really interested in, but that still makes enough to get by on, or even live comfortably on – no other job needed in addition. For artists it seems to mean a job necessary to cover basic needs, which is done in addition to artistic work. ↩
10. These are ficticious examples. ↩

Edit

Gallery Rent Model: Owner-Tenant Relations in Exhibiting

Minna L. Henriksson



During the recent years in Sweden, one of the major issues discussed regarding artists' conditions has been the MU Agreement, which guarantees payment to the artists for the work done in the framework of exhibitions. This is not just an exhibition fee, but also an hourly pay for all work that the exhibition requires. In this model an artist working for an exhibition is regarded momentarily as yet another paid worker in the art institution. Of course, a totally different question is whether the agreement is being followed according to the rules, or to which art institutions this agreement even applies to. These questions have been interestingly mapped by the Reko collective and are discussed by Erik Krikortz in this publication. In Finland, however, a similar regulation does not exist, and the situation is quite the contrary.

In this contribution I include interviews with active freelance artists in the field, Elina Juopperi, Jussi Kivi, Raakel Kuukka and Marge Monko, as well as a diagram-drawing made on the basis of discussions with artist Minna Heikinaho and artist / freelance curator Jussi Koitela. My aim is to describe the problematics of the situation, whereby making an exhibition can be an enormous economic burden for the artists themselves. I will try

to propose ideas how the practice should be changed in order to improve the precarious living and working conditions of artists and art workers. I do acknowledge that in these times of budget cuts of art and culture, any critique toward the structures of art is extremely risky: it can be used as an excuse to transform the existing institutions – which can be seen as remains of social democracy – into neoliberal creative hubs and clusters. In the scenario desired by the advocates of neoliberalism, public funding is reduced to the barest minimum, and strategies of the corporate world are adopted as a necessary precondition for the existence of cultural institutions. Thus, in these risky times, we have to acknowledge the good sides of the present structures, and try to do our fullest to improve them even further. This is my aim in this contribution.

The Way of Finland

Traditionally Finland and Sweden have shared many characteristics of the famous Nordic Social Democratic Welfare structure that has been developed since the World War II. Ever since the mid-1990s, this model has been thrown into question and dismantled bit by bit; in fact, some argue that the paving of the road toward increasing privatisation already started in the 1970s. Nevertheless, the reputation of Finland and Sweden, as well as other Nordic countries, as countries with highly equalising social security still remains. Many people, including many artists, think that this is still the case. In Finland, the freedom of art is declared in the very constitution, which states that sufficient material conditions must be guaranteed for practising art professionals. However, art policy researcher Pauli Rautiainen explained to me in a private conversation that in 2008 private funding for individual artists surpassed the amount of public funding in Finland. [1]

After having steadily grown since the World War II, public cultural funding in Finland began its first decrease in 2014. This means that private money, which is usually invested in equities, has become more significant than the public. Whereas private money is gaining more dominance in cultural funding, public money is gradually becoming complementary to that. We can only hope that private funders, who rely on profits from the capitalist system and don't have any obligation to support independent or experimental forms of art, do not get bored with it or move their support somewhere else. It is also a matter of hope that the private funding would respect some basic principles of "democracy" in terms of distribution mechanisms, not privileging only certain disciplines, contents, institutions, or even ethnicity, gender or age groups of artists who receive funding.

In Finland, the situation regarding artists' income is, and has

been, less prosperous than in the other Nordic countries. According to the research by Tarja Cronberg, artists in Finland have less income than their colleagues and peers in other Nordic countries: the grant system is remarkably weaker, lacking for example long-term grants. [2] In Norway and Denmark, there is an "income guarantee," which secures a certain level of income to artists who are granted with this guarantee. In Sweden, a similar principle was also practised until the previous centre-right government abolished it, and channelled the funds into multi-year working grants instead. However, in Sweden, there are still some older artists, who have an income guarantee. Proposals for artist salary and income levelling programme were also discussed in Finland during the 1970s, but the Oil Crisis of the 1980s halted the discussion. As a compromise, 15-year grants were introduced in Finland in 1982. However, they didn't even survive the first grant cycle – during the recession in 1994, the Finnish Parliament decided to put an end to the long-term grants of such duration. The decision was mainly justified with the argument that artists' work needs to be re-evaluated regularly, while 15 years of steady income is too long period away from control. It was also claimed that long-term grants can result in unproductive activities, or even alcoholism.

Currently, the longest artist grant in Finland is limited to the period of 5 years. A renowned artist can also be granted with an artist pension. This so-called "extra artist pension" is granted by the Ministry of Education and Culture upon the recommendation of Arts Promotion Centre Finland. In 2014, it was given to 59 persons (from all disciplines), whereas the number of applicants was 492. According to a report by Kaija Rensujeff, published by the Arts Promotion Centre Finland, visual artists had the lowest annual average income within the arts sector in 2010: it was 16 000 euros, out of which 8 000 was grant income. [3] When public institutions exhibit the work of an artist in Finland, they pay a copyright fee. The fees are collected by Kuvasto, the Finnish Visual Artists' Copyright Association, and distributed to the artists in annual instalments. Very often the Kuvasto fee is confused for an artist fee by the museum representatives. However, the Kuvasto fee is clearly a copyright fee for each public use of an image or artwork, but not the remuneration for the work done. Furthermore, it is quite a small fee, and comes very late, so it hardly counts as wage.

> Kuvasto rates for exhibition fees in 2014:
> Performance 231 € / performance
> Installation 116 € / work made in a given room or space, not solid, also land art
> Video, CD-ROM 116 € / piece
> Sculpture, painting, photograph 58 € / piece
> Drawing, graphic print 58 € / piece
> Medals 23 € / piece

> The fee relates to an exhibition duration of 30 days, calculated according to the time when the exhibition was open for public.
> When the exhibition time is extended, the rate raises in the following way:
> Until 60 days 20 % addition
> Until 90 days 50 % addition
> Until 120 days 100 % addition
> When the same artist has many works in the exhibition, the exhibition fee is determined as follows:
> Minimum fee 116 € / artist
> Maximum fee 1 575 € / artist

Currently the Artists' Association of Finland and the Finnish Association of Designers Ornamo are lobbying for an equivalent of the Swedish MU Agreement in Finland. In their announcement, the Artists' Association of Finland stated that in 2012, 447 exhibitions took place in the 55 art museums of Finland, but Kuvasto fees paid to artists during that year were only 107 306 euros in total. [4] That sums up to the average of 240 euros of Kuvasto fees paid per exhibition, or to calculate it another way, of 1 951 euros of fees paid per museum during the entire year.

The situation of artists in Finland becomes even more peculiar and precarious when the gallery-rent issue is considered. In Finland, it is customary that artists and other freelance art workers are not only working without payment, while contributing to the programme of art institutions, but they even pay for it from their own pocket. Most of the contemporary non-profit art spaces in Helsinki charge rent for exhibiting. Almost all spaces, other than museums or commercial galleries function with this logic. The rent starts from 200 euros in small artist-run spaces, and can reach ten thousands euros in the bigger spaces, such as Kunsthalle Helsinki. For more details about the costs related to exhibiting in the Kunsthalle, see interview with Raakel Kuukka.

Commercial galleries in Finland do not charge rent from artists who are exhibiting. A commercial gallery in this case refers to a space, where an artist is invited to exhibit. It also often entails an ongoing relationship and long-term commitment between the artist and the gallery: the gallery represents the artist, actively aims to sell their work, and takes a certain percentage of all sales, also including the works sold from the artist's studio. The commercial gallery scene in Helsinki is very small, and the ones that somehow manage to run a profitable business can be counted on one hand. The art market is nearly non-existent and museums don't have many possibilities to collect. As far as I know, there are no public or private collectors in Finland who would have a substantial impact on the income of artists. However, Frame Visual Art Finland, an organisation that used to fund the participation of Finnish artists in important international art exhibitions, now seems to

be thinking that commercialisation is the solution to problems related to artists' income. After suffering from serious budget cuts during the recent process of restructuring, Frame's primary interest now appears to be oriented at promoting Finnish galleries in international art fairs.

History Behind the Gallery Rent

The first artist-run gallery in Helsinki was Cheap Thrills, which was run by a group of artists known as Elonkorjaajat (The Harvesters) from 1970 to 1977. The gallery was in the very south of Helsinki in a jugend-style house in Huvilakatu. During its seven years of existence, it hosted some 70 exhibitions. Among the artists exhibiting there were for example Per Kirkeby, Douglas Huebler, H. G. Fagerholm, and Olli Lyytikäinen (his first four exhibitions were in Cheap Thrills and they were each sold out). According to one member of the Harvesters, artist and art critic Jan Olof Mallander, Cheap Thrills already functioned with a sort of artist-pays logic. However, the rent was very low, and the artists could pay it with an artwork if they didn't have money for rent. Mallander was himself living in the back room of the gallery and paid half of the rent, 200 FIM (approx. 33 euros) out of 400 FIM (approx. 66 euros).

There was a sort of arte povera or fluxus attitude present, as he describes it. Mallander remembers that he once sold London Knees, a multiple piece by Claes Oldenburg that he owned, to the State Art Museum Ateneum in order to cover for the unpaid rent at Cheap Thrills for an entire year. This sort of flexibility in paying rent was possible, in the words of Mallander, largely due to love for art by the "civilised and humane" property owner. [5] As I understand it, having talked with several art workers active in the field in the 1980s and 1990s, the gallery rent policy started as a kind of democratisation of the scene. Artists were fed up with the elitism of the big institutions which would only work with their favourite artists.

For others there were not many opportunities to present their work. In the 1990s, artists in Finland still needed to collect points by making exhibitions in certain approved places and participating in particular annual exhibitions which were considered eligible for the ranking system. A certain amount of points opened the doors to membership in the artists' associations. It also guaranteed entry in the respected artist directory taiteilijamatrikkeli which functioned as a status indicator. The ranking system with its connected privileges used to be the mechanism of measuring professionalism in art. Needless to say, professionalism is a precondition for getting grants. Thus, artists who were left out of the system, or who just did not want to follow the institutionalised path, founded

their own spaces, where they could show their work independently from big institutions. Hannu Rinne writes in Taide (3 / 1995) about the founding of interdisciplinary artists' association MUU ry in 1987, summing up the purpose for the association: "most important was to create collective spirit and to give home to homeless artists, whose artworks were not necessarily even understood as art. […] The [MUU] gallery commenced with a series of changing exhibitions and the idea was to operate as spontaneously as possible, without heavy mechanism of selection committee." [6]

Thus, starting one's own gallery was also seen as a possibility to act more spontaneously. Initially, the rent was often low in these spaces, but has gradually climbed up hand-in-hand with the gentrification of "artistic" neighbourhoods. Forum Box is one of the oldest artist-run galleries that still exist in Helsinki. It was founded in 1996 as a non-profit space and co-operative for free art of all kinds, with the goal to promote Finnish cultural life. Artist Pekka Niskanen remembers in a Facebook post that during the 1990s, when the Interdisciplinary Artists' Association MUU ry's gallery was at Rikhardinkatu, the associated artists didn't need to pay rent for the space. [7] At that time, also a printed newsletter was produced. Nowadays MUU ry has two exhibition spaces, and in both they charge rent from artists. Also they co-host an art fair together with the Union of Artist Photographers, where artists pay 20 euros participation fee, and the organisers charge 30 % commission of sales.

The exhibition spaces of the artists' associations as well as the independent artist-run spaces usually cover their rent expenses by charging it from artists who exhibit. Pauli Rautiainen explains the "twisted role" of the gallery rent system from the perspective of artists as a mechanism of building merit rather than selling. [8] When earlier the purpose was to collect points, more recently it has been to invest in one's career, hoping to find financial compensation for it one day. It is a vicious circle: artists need to exhibit to be able to receive grants, and they need grants in order to exhibit.

There is no doubt that running a gallery space at a prestigious address in the city centre of Helsinki takes a lot of resources, as property prices are high. All artists' associations have their gallery spaces in the very centre of Helsinki. They all function according to this logic, despite getting public funding. There also appears to be no reflection about the obvious contradiction that some of those associations define their purpose in terms of defending the professional, economic and social interests of their members. I argue that this bad policy introduced by the artists' associations has been uncritically adopted by many new artist-run spaces which mostly also charge rent from the exhibiting artists.

Some Bad Examples

In Finland there are five artists' associations: the Association of Finnish Sculptors, the Union of Artist Photographers, the Interdisciplinary Artists' Association MUU, the Association of Finnish Printmakers and the Finnish Painters' Union, which are all members in the umbrella organisation the Artists' Association of Finland. The artists' associations' galleries accept exhibition proposals usually twice a year, and the prices are lower for members than for others.

> Prices of galleries run by artists' associations (December 2014):
> Gallery Sculptor 3 weeks 3 150 € (members 2 750 €) + 35 % provision of sales
> Gallery Hippolyte 4 weeks 2 700 € (members 2 300 €)
> Hippolyte Studio 4 weeks 660 €
> Gallery MUU, entire gallery (front space and studio) 6 weeks 2 280 € (members 1 995 €)
> Gallery MUU, front space 6 weeks 1 915 € (members 1 680 €)
> Gallery MUU, studio 6 weeks 840 € (members 735 €)
> Gallery MUU, Cable Factory 6 weeks 650 € (members 500 €)
> TM-gallery 3 weeks 1 886 € (members 1 550 €)

The TM-gallery rent is conditional, and the lowest price compared to other galleries listed here is dependent on the state grant toward the rent costs. If funding is not granted, the rent is 2 900 euros for members and 3 236 euros for non-members. The argument that TM-gallery would need to raise the rent price in case their application for the state grant should be denied, can be understood as a strategic pressure that aims to secure the continuation of received support.

The Printmakers' gallery stresses in their rent conditions that a possible increase in rent prices during the exhibition period will be added to the rent price charged from the artists. Furthermore, in case that the activities of the Association of Finnish Printmakers become VAT eligible, the VAT is added to the rent price. This signals a direct equivalence between the total rent expenses of the gallery and the amount that is charged from artists. It also indicates the attitude of refusing to carry any financial risk, while transferring all uncertainties to individual artists.

It is interesting that when lobbying for the equivalent of the MU Agreement in Finland, the Artists' Association of Finland and the Finnish Association of Designers Ornamo are not mentioning the gallery-rent issue. One cannot help but wonder whether they see the link between these two issues – how is it possible to introduce an artist fee for exhibitions in a situation where artists are paying rent? Of course, Ornamo and the Artists' Association of Finland are calling for artist fees in the context of exhibitions in publicly funded institutions only. However, the artists' associations do receive direct annual

(discretionary) funding from the state, and at the same time they charge rent from artists. In these cases, would the artist fee of several hundred euros then be reduced from the rent price of thousands?

It is also questionable whether such scenario wouldn't just increase the gap between the big institutions, where artists usually do not need to pay rent anyhow, and the small initiatives, where most often artists pay rent. Wouldn't this gap be reinforced even more, when there is a fee for making exhibitions in big institutions, but the small spaces would still continue to charge rent? It is interesting to note that artist-members of the Finnish Association of Designers Ornamo have recently founded a small 28 m2 gallery space on the " gallery street, " the Uudenmaankatu in Helsinki. The O gallery (of artists from Ornamo) was opened in May 2014, around the same time when the discussion about the necessity of the MU Agreement was launched in Finland. It charges 1 100 euros from artists for three weeks (no provision of sales is taken). The use of the gallery space is limited exclusively for the members of Ornamo or other artists' associations.

Jussi Koitela, artist and freelance curator, wrote about the problem of gallery rent in the Mustekala internet magazine [9], where he noted that the recently opened gallery spaces run by artists' associations (such as the above-mentioned MUU ry and the Union of Finnish Art Associations) are also operating with the same logic of " artist pays, " and thus, do not even attempt to change the policy. Koitela also pointed out that the galleries presenting mainly Finnish art in Berlin, Gallery Pleiku and Gallery Suomesta (the name of the gallery contains a cute word play in Finnish language: suomesta can mean both "the swamp place" and "from Finland"), also charge rent from artists. These spaces do not mention the prices on their website. In the online discussion following Koitela's well-articulated and provocative text in Mustekala, the people running Suomesta clarified that in fact they are not charging rent, but a participation fee. Koitela concludes that although operating outside of the borders of Finland, these two galleries remain part of the extended Finnish art scene rather than the international one – not only because they are clearly focused on presenting art practices from Finland, but also because artists from elsewhere would not agree to pay rent for making an exhibition.

> Prices of some independent artist-run and co-operative organised galleries in Helsinki (December 2014):
> Myymälä2 gallery 815 € / month (exhibitions are for 3 or 4 weeks) [10]
> Forum Box, whole space 4 weeks 4 200 € 1 / 3 of space 1 550 € , 30 % provision taken for sales (+ 24 % VAT)
> Huuto! gallery Uudenmaankatu 3 weeks 1 450 €
> Huuto! gallery Jätkäsaari 1 3 weeks 1 350 €
> Huuto! galleryJätkäsaari 2 3 weeks 1 350 €

On top of the gallery rent, the rental costs of audio-visual display equipment are often not included in the deal with the gallery. Art spaces prefer not to own much equipment, because the digital technology develops very fast and the equipment gets outdated in a speedy manner. Thus, artists are often required to supply the necessary equipment. In addition, some galleries have a rule (or at least a preference) that the equipment must be of the best quality, the latest technology and ultimate professionalism, which is provided by, the one and only, Pro Av Saarikko. Therefore, part of the public grant money for exhibition practice is likely to end up in the pocket of one private business. A few years ago, AVEK (The Promotion Centre for Audiovisual Culture) opened their eyes about this situation and stopped covering the expenses of equipment rent in galleries through their grants. They now try to pressure the galleries into buying their own in-house equipment. Alongside these expenses, there can be the additional costs of printing and posting exhibition cards, or in relation to the opening expenses. In some spaces the artist needs to invigilate the exhibition, at least partly. Some spaces even require a professional translation of the press release in Finnish, Swedish and English. The artist pays!

It is needless to say that when exhibition spaces charge rent from the artists, they do not pay an honorarium to the artists. Thus, the artist needs to find grants not only for all the production and exhibition costs of their artwork, but also for the remuneration of their own working time. In the ideal situation this happens, in reality rarely.

Museums are a safer choice for exhibiting in Finland. Even if they are not always paying artist fees, they at least are not charging rent from exhibiting artists. Museums often follow some kind of artist fee principle, but usually there is no standard fee, as it depends on the overall budget. Sometimes it is only a Kuvasto fee, while on other occasions it is also a proper artist fee. But even if things look nice on paper, it is not always guaranteed that the fee reaches the artist. I can bring a personal example from the Oulu Art Museum, where I participated in a group exhibition in August 2013. For this exhibition, artists were asked to make new works for the public space within the park surrounding the museum. A fee of 1 200 euros was promised in the contract for the new site-specific work, which, from my experience, is quite generous in the Finnish context. Months later, when the work preparations were under way, the curator of the exhibition mentioned passingly in an email that the fee is also supposed to cover all material expenses that exceed the 500 euros that had been budgeted for each work by the museum. This meant that we were expected to use our artist fee to cover the production costs of temporary artworks in an outdoor exhibition which is

vulnerable to vandalism and to the rainy weather conditions of autumn months. Most likely there would not be much left of these artworks after the exhibition closes – neither to be exhibited again, nor to be sold.

In recent years, I have also heard of cases when museums announce an open call for exhibition participation, such as the young artists' biennial. However, because open calls impose that artists offer their work by themselves, museums often reason that they are not obliged to pay the usual artist fees or Kuvasto fees in such cases. There might even be a small submission fee for project proposals, and no production budget offered. At the same time, the museum might charge an entry fee from the audiences viewing the artworks, and profit with it. For more reflections about the experiences of exhibiting in museums, see interviews with Elina Juopperi and Jussi Kivi. The gallery rent model, as it is practised in Finland, is unknown in most of the Nordic and European countries, and I suspect in the rest of the world too. However, it has been well-established also in Estonia. The gallery rent prices in Estonia are more modest, but so are the rental prices in general, as well as the wages and the volume of cultural support. The impact on the art scene has been probably just as severe as in Finland.

However, the situation in Estonia has recently changed quite significantly in regard to this issue. In the beginning of 2014, the Ministry of Culture introduced a new rule which prohibits galleries to take rent from artists, in case they receive (limited) support from the specific funding scheme, the "gallery programme" of the Ministry. This affected primarily the galleries of the Artists' Association, forcing them to apply for additional rent money directly from the Cultural Endowment. Until then, the task of fund-raising for supplementary rent costs had been delegated to artists. It was eventually agreed between the Ministry of Culture and the Cultural Endowment that the rent money is granted directly to exhibition spaces, instead of circulating it through artists. Thus, the galleries did receive the funding for rent after all, but the administrative work and stress for artists was reduced. Artists still apply for support from the Cultural Endowment for production costs and working grants, but the rent of the gallery space is no longer their direct concern. Perhaps this kind of redirection of the cultural money circulation could also become possible in Finland, if attitudes were changed. In the summer of 2014, I interviewed Estonian artist Marge Monko, currently living in Ghent, about the principles of gallery rent policy in Estonia. See interview with Marge Monko.

Good Examples & Exceptions in Helsinki

Sinne gallery, run and completely supported by Pro Artibus Foundation, an independent organisation affiliated with the Foundation for Swedish Culture in Finland, previously charged a low rent for the exhibition space (up to 600 euros in a large and beautiful, recently renovated space). In recent years, the gallery has become increasingly active also in producing exhibition projects with international artists, while the remaining exhibition slots are distributed with an annual open application call. The practice of charging rent from the artists who are included in the programme through the open application call (mostly local), but not from the invited guest artists (mostly from abroad), became an obvious contradiction. Hence, from the start of 2014, Sinne gallery stopped charging rent from artists, aiming to give a good example to other spaces as well. Now they are hoping to be able to pay a fee to artists instead.

Helsinki City Art Museum has been running Kluuvi gallery in the city centre of Helsinki. Kluuvi has been located in beautiful premises specifically designed for displaying artworks since 1968, but on the decision of the Helsinki City Art Museum Board, the gallery will be moved within the expanded Helsinki City Art Museum in autumn 2015. The website of the Helsinki City Art Museum states that Kluuvi gallery " focuses on experimental and non-commercial works of Finnish artists, offering opportunities to projects, which would be difficult to realise elsewhere in Helsinki. " There has been an obvious conflict with their exhibition policy and the fact that they charge rent from these non-commercially operating experimental (usually younger generation) artists, even if the museum has considered the rent price as modest: " The City of Helsinki sponsors the gallery financially by charging a very low lease and taking no sales commission. " The rent price in the Kluuvi gallery has been 505 euros for 3 weeks (incl. 24 % VAT). Compared with the total annual revenues of the Helsinki City Art Museum, approximately 600 000 euros, the rent policy in the Kluuvi gallery seems to have been a matter of principle rather than a serious contribution to the budget. Anyhow, now that Kluuvi gallery is moving to the new location within the premises of the museum's main venue, they will stop charging rent from artists.

To mention a few other good examples, I would like to point out some smaller organisations which are much more precarious than big museums or galleries run by foundations. Artist-run galleries SIC, Oksasenkatu 11 and the Third Space are among those spaces which have a clear position against charging rent from artists and would rather close the gallery than ask artists to pay for it. To elaborate through these examples, SIC gallery has developed an international "high quality" exhibition programme and has become a venue for some of Kiasma's side-projects. It has also been quite lucky with receiving significant grants from private foundations.

Previously they received an annual grant of 35 000 euros in two successive years from the Finnish Cultural Foundation, and for 2015 they have a grant of 50 000 euros from the Kone Foundation. The Kone grant enables them not only to pay rent and realise their programme, but also to hire an executive director for the gallery. Less secure, perhaps, is their location, which is currently in an old storage building near Länsisatama harbour, next door to the construction site of a new hotel.

Similarly to SIC gallery, the artist-run Sorbus gallery, which is also located in an area of the city that is currently transforming, received 34 260 euros support from the Kone Foundation in 2015 for the project titled *Opening the Gallery Scene of Helsinki for New and International Artists – Gallery in Vaasankatu That is Free for Artists*. Oksasenkatu 11 gallery is an artist-run space located in Töölö neighbourhood which is a bit more remote from the interests of the city developers than SIC and Sorbus. It is in the same location and premises as the legendary Kuumola gallery that also did not charge rent from the artists. In Oksasenkatu 11 the rent is quite low, and when there are no grants to cover the amount, the group of initiators would pay it collectively. A minus point at Oksasenkatu 11, however, is that the artists themselves need to sit in the gallery during the opening hours, although those hours can be freely defined by the artist.

Another collectively organised and funded space is the Third Space at Viisikulma in Punavuori neighbourhood. The small space manages with low means. In the absence of grants, the people involved share the rental costs, including internet and water. Most of the people running the space are students of Aalto University, so they can borrow equipment from the university. The programme of the Third Space is very discursive and more event-focused than in many other spaces. Curator Ahmed Al-Nawas from the Third Space wrote to me in an email: " We have applied for a fund to pay the rent last year, but nothing. Next year we hope we would get something at least to pay the rent. But let's see. It seems that in order to get funding as a gallery here, we are forced to become an institution. " [11]

Impact on the Scene

The consequences of the gallery rent policy on the art scene are highly negative, as elaborated below in following points.

First, the artist takes an economic risk when committing to make an exhibition. There is a long process between the first step of submitting an application to the exhibition space and the final stage of realising the exhibition – usually it takes one or two years. During this time, the artist has to fund-raise for all the expenses, including the gallery rent, while at the same time making artworks for the exhibition. This atmosphere is far from

encouraging experimentation, because the economic risk and pressure is constantly looming in the background of creative work. In a private conversation with a representative of one of the artists' association galleries, I was told that 90 % of artists receive an exhibition grant which covers the gallery rent. But how do the remaining 10 % cover the rent costs? And even for those 90 %, is there anything left from the grant to cover the production costs and other expenses in addition to the rent amount?

Secondly, the artist, by accepting the exhibition time that they initially applied for and thus committing to the exhibition, is likely to end up in a situation of complete self-exploitation. The most pressing expense to be covered becomes the gallery rent. In the lack of funding, other costs are avoided by working for free, asking friends to help out, borrowing items, reducing the quality of the materials, and possibly even taking a bank loan.

Thirdly, the relationship between the artist and the gallery staff is regulated by a contract which offers a strict definition of what the gallery provides and what is the responsibility of the artist. In these negotiations and transactions, there is rarely space for discussion about the content of the exhibition. Often it is not seen as appropriate from the side of the gallery to do so, as the space is essentially being bought by the artist (see interview with Raakel Kuukka). The gallery staff provides certain services, and the artist takes care of the artwork, including writing the press release and theorising the work. Although many of these spaces are artist-run, the relations have professionalised to such an extent that there is not any curatorial content-related collaboration. It resembles more a relationship between the tenant and the landlord.

Fourth, the gallery rent policy is harmful for the galleries due to the simple fact that it is impossible to have a curated program, an exhibition policy, or a high quality programme, when you cannot invite artists and projects, but you just have to select from those applicants who are ready, willing and able to pay the rent. With this system it is impossible to organise exhibitions of artists from other countries where the artist-pays model is not practised. No-one is so desperate to exhibit in Finland that they would pay for it, when they can do it for free elsewhere.

Fifth, the grant givers have total power over the art scene. They not only decide which artist is getting living and production grants, but they also decide whose exhibition project is worth the support for the gallery rent. If the gallery staff were able to exercise curatorial tasks by actively looking for new interesting productions in the scene, for example by visiting artist studios, and inviting selected artists to the spaces, the grant givers would not have the sole power of determining whose work deserves to be shown. This would undoubtedly make the art

scene livelier and bring content-related discussions into it.

Lastly *sixth*, the atmosphere with the gallery rent system is not encouraging experiments. Rather than that, it pushes artists to make conventional exhibitions. It motivates the production of artworks that artists hope to sell, in order to get the invested money back at the end of the process. This even takes place in a context where the art market is almost non-existent, and where the galleries which charge rent are usually rather passive regarding selling of works from exhibitions. Moreover, the artists' dependency on grant givers inevitably influences the content of artworks as well. I would argue that it encourages forms of non-political, non-harmful, instrumental, bureaucratic and nationalist art. The gallery rent model is in conflict with the arms-length principle, where the specialists on the field are supposed to decide on the content instead of the funders.

What Could be Done?

One of the biggest headaches for any art organisation in Finland is that there is not enough support given to art spaces as general funding for their core functions. Instead, the cultural support is mostly given as short-term, project-based funding, ear-marked for a specific purpose. The distribution principles of cultural funding often exclude the possibility of investing it in the "walls" (i.e. the maintenance of the art space itself), and the funding is often defined by a theme, duration, medium, geographic focus, expected goals, public impact, etc. *The public funds should contribute to the general functioning of the organisations, and more precisely, directly to the rent of the spaces, so that the system of gallery rent, which exploits the artists and destroys the art scene, would become defunct.* This would leave it up to the organisations themselves to decide what kind of programme they want to realise, instead of trying to respond to the wishes of the funders.

Another option, of course, is to become more inventive in terms of finding exhibition spaces. Artists could *abandon the expensive galleries and go for alternative spaces,* such as temporarily empty shop fronts, private apartments or artist studios, public spaces, etc. However, there are several arguments against this: even in the galleries, which are in the very centre of the cities, the audiences tend to be small, often dominated by other art practitioners from the scene. Moving away from the centre is likely to make the scarce connection with general audiences even worse. The position of artists in the society is anyway very marginal, and when pushed to the outskirts of the city, it is likely to become even more so. Also, artist's work can be very solitary, and for many, the galleries are the contact zones with different publics and colleagues.

From a more critical perspective, it should also be

acknowledged that artists are often motors of gentrification, taking over new spaces in the cheap areas of the cities. They help to transform areas of the city which were previously undesired. By turning these uncool areas into the “boheme,” artists trigger a domino effect of rising rent prices which first forces the poorer population to move out. Eventually, once the process of gentrification is under way, the artists cannot afford to stay in these areas either.

The gallery-rent issue has been discussed quite a lot locally in Finland, but without much concrete solutions emerging from the debate. One contribution to this discussion was made by a group of students from the Academy of Fine Arts in Helsinki, as an outcome of a course which I was running together with Irmeli Kokko in spring 2013. In response to the suggestion by the director of the Arts Promotion Centre Finland, the students drafted a proposal to this funding body, recommending to conduct thorough research on the structural problems in the visual arts field and to develop the grant system in accordance with the various organisations operating in the scene. The proposal was very well drafted and expressed strong arguments, many of which are repeated in this text. As far as I and the students know, however, there has not been any response to this proposal whatsoever. Many artists have addressed the issue of gallery rent. One of them was Susana Nevado who declared a “ one-woman protest ” against exhibiting in galleries where the artist needs to pay rent. This was written about, at least, in the Turun Sanomat, a local newspaper in Turku. [12] In discussion with Minna Heikinaho and Jussi Koitela (see the diagram in the end of this contribution) one of the conclusions was that young artists do not accept the artist-pays policy any more. The artists from younger generations do not necessarily relate to the galleries in Finland, but they see their work career as international. For them it is rather irrelevant how the rental galleries in Finland function.

I see it as a problem that critical discussions about art policy often take place in the semi-private contexts of social media, such as Facebook. The readership on social media is limited and old discussions disappear under the mass of new information after a while. The discussions are momentary and limited to a small circle, not addressing the ones who would have the power to change things. They do not have any official status or actual weight, operating more in the register of rumour. This is what happened to the discussion that followed the writing by Jussi Koitela in the Mustekala internet magazine, which started as public commenting in the Mustekala website. Furthermore, since the Mustekala website was redesigned, the comments to Jussi Koitela’s writing in the Mustekala website are not visible any more. Elina Juopperi is calling for more “synergy” between artists and institutions on the art scene. She says that “ we should work together with the institutions for

common aims, to put pressure on politicians, as we have the same goal and aim. " [13] She also proposes that " the state grants should not be given any more to artists for exhibiting (private foundations do what they like anyway): not to museum exhibitions and not in 'gallery / rental spaces. Instead state grants should be given to artists only for production costs and living expenses." [14]

This is what was done in Estonia from the start of 2014, and it seems that it is working out just fine. Nevertheless, it is too early to estimate the influence on the programme of these galleries. It seems that there are (at least) two registers that the art scene is constructed of, and which exist independently from each other. One of them is about doing artwork and getting the work to be shown to others. The other is related to participating in the value production of the institution and prestige. The rent policy in Finland apparently came about in reaction to the second one, out of the need to democratise the field. Should it be a rule (a bit like in the MU Agreement of Sweden or now in Estonia) *that organisations which get state funding cannot charge rent from artists?* Is there a risk that this would create a hierarchy between different galleries, where the established galleries get their rent money covered, and have artists queuing wanting to show there; while the less respected ones (which could aim to be more grassroots, alternative and interesting) still have to charge rent from the artists, as they do not get enough financial support, and this is reflected in their programme with less artists wanting to pay for showing work there?

It is characteristic of the impact of neoliberalism in arts policy, that funding for some special individuals, the chosen geniuses, or the "crazy innovative ideas" is plentiful, and the rest of the scene lives in poverty. Similarly, there could emerge a hierarchy between the few selected galleries that get the support, and the rest, which do not get it. But one can also ask: isn't the whole art field constructed of similar hierarchies? The choices would become more visible and then we could perhaps begin to talk about them and about the principles that the funding of art spaces is based on.

In many ways, the current system is spreading "democratic poverty," where almost everyone faces the same costs equally. It is a paradox that it is the rent cost which is supposedly guaranteeing the democracy, as in fact some have more resources than others. If the decision about the programme selection was given completely to the galleries, and galleries were able to invite artists to exhibit, it would create more heterogeneity within the gallery field. In fact, more artists would get a chance to exhibit, even those who do not have the financial means, and who are not favoured by the grant givers. Also it would enable curated thematic programmes as well as other kind of discursive and thematic long-term programmes to

be developed. Now the situation is such that the galleries are dependent on the exhibition proposals that they receive and they can only make selection within the constraints of the received applications. In other words, they have to choose from the pool of artists who are ready to pay, or to take on the task, and the risk, of trying to raise the rent money.

However, as the gallery rent policy change in Estonia proves, and the fact that the gallery rent is unknown to most art scenes, it is not so difficult to change the situation. Perhaps in the end it is a question of whether artists are in fact ready to hand over the power of decision making to the galleries and curators about who can exhibit and who cannot.

Interview with Raakel Kuukka: https://transformativeartproduction.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/interview-with-raakel-kuukka.pdf

Interview with Elina Juopperi: https://transformativeartproduction.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/interview-with-elina-juopperi.pdf

Interview with Marge Monko: https://transformativeartproduction.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/interview-with-marge-monko.pdf

Interview with Jussi Kivi: https://transformativeartproduction.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/interview-with-jussi-kivi.pdf

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Illustration: Part of a drawing by Minna Henriksson

Notes:

1. Private conversation with Pauli Rautiainen, 30 September 2014, Helsinki. ↩
2. Tarja Cronberg, Luova kasvu ja taiteilijan toimeentulo (Helsinki: Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriöntyöryhmämuistioita ja selvityksiä, 2010). [Creative growth and artists' income, Expert review by Dr Tarja Cronberg, Reports of the Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland, 2010]. ↩
3. Kaija Rensujeff, Taiteilijan asema 2010 (Helsinki: Taiteen edistämiskeskus, 2014). ↩
4. Announcement published by the Artists' Association of Finland, "Ruotsin MU-sopimus takaa kuvataiteilijalle korvauksen taiteellisesta työstä," 7 April 2014. ↩
5. Phone conversation with Jan Olof Mallander, 16 June 2014. ↩
6. Hannu Rinne, "Lyhyt historia: Ei muuta vaihtoehtoa," Taide 3/1995

[translation by Minna Henriksson]. ↩
7. Pekka Niskanen, Facebook post on Jussi Koitela's profile, 20 January 2014. ↩
8. Pauli Rautiainen, "Suomalainen Taiteilijatuki: Historia, nykyisyys ja tulevaisuus kuvataiteen näkökulmasta," speech at Oulun taidemuseo, 4 February 2010. ↩
9. Jussi Koitela, "Taiteilija maksaa? Kuratoinnin uhka ja muut pelot," Mustekala, 16 January 2014, http://www.mustekala.info/node/36031 (accessed 17 February 2015). ↩
10. The rent in Myymälä2 gallery used to be 300 euros / week for artists. But now that there are increasingly more artist-run spaces not charging rent from artists, they are also forced to rethink their policy. The aim of the Myymälä2 gallery, where rent price is 1 240 euros / month (which is much higher than in many other artist-run spaces, such as Sorbus with 300 euros / month), is also to reach a situation with grant support, where artists are not charged the rent. ↩
11. Personal email from Ahmed Al-Nawas, 26 November 2014. ↩
12. "Kuvataiteilija Susana Nevado haluaa palkan työstään," Turun Sanomat, 23 May 2014. ↩
13. Interview with Elina Juopperi, 6 August 2014. ↩
14. Personal email from Elina Juopperi, 12 August 2014. ↩

The Dark Arts

Noah Fischer

May Day 2015: Occupation of Guggenheim in New York Photo credit: Margaret Singer

Prologue

Imagine that you are in your studio, or at the desk of the office where you work, or in the classroom where you study. You are temporarily lost in thought about your creative process, thinking about what you will work on next, trying to make something of value. But how do you settle on a system that constitutes quality? How do you reconcile your own vision with the jury of institutional gatekeepers who curate artistic quality and keep score on your art practice?

Further, underlying this tug-of-war between vision and being viewed are the details and anxieties of your own condition as an economic self. Your time is limited due to work, or the process of looking for it, while the pressure to achieve the kind of production that will produce results fills every remaining free moment. Finally, if you are like the great majority in this situation, debt trails you, adding to your urgency, and translating into real-world pressure.

You're trying to navigate the waters of success and freedom while managing the anxiety of your economic reality, shaping the way your artwork looks and operates in order to ensure that it fits into a perceived class context which can financially support your practice and pay off the very education that taught you to question authorities and experiment at will. It's a

creative narrowing based on a gamble that pulls you ever deeper into systems of extraction. What's needed to break this cycle is to rethink the dynamics of artistic success.

Art as Extraction

There is a trap hiding behind today's prevailing idea of success in art, and the only way to evade it is to begin visualizing it. In order to do this, we must take a step away from the figure of the artist, and a step closer to this thing that we now call a "market," so that we can look deeper into the mechanics of support. The contemporary art market is one of the largest deregulated transaction platforms in the world—a space where Russian oligarchs launder money, real estate tycoons decorate private museums for tax benefits, and celebrities of fashion, screen, and music trade cash for credibility. It is a domain in which pyramid schemes are dressed up in the highest cultural trappings, and a speculative concoction of inflated valuation and hedge-fund impatience feeds an elite a sliver of art's current practitioners—the upper tier of which embodies the luxury end of today's gaping economic divide.

It might at first seem that this art-and-money party is just a festival of excess feeding on nothing but hot air and hyperbole. However, value in the art world is not built up from nothing, as many might argue. Rather, it is built from the captured labor of a nearly invisible lower class that is either meagerly paid by, or pays into, the very same myth that feeds the highest tier transactions. The relationship between the profiting minority and the perpetually subsistent majority of cultural producers is therefore tightly knit, because value, on all levels of the art world, is dependent on various forms of extraction. Perhaps the best overview of this model can be found in Gregory Sholette's book *Dark Matter*, in which the shadow-work of artists working as museum guards or café workers, adjunct professors, blog writers, artist assistants, gallery staff, and unpaid interns at publications and institutions collectively create the *actual* value in the art world. Sholette conceives this community as the base of a pyramid with high value assets at the top. [1] Put simply, any market that is without this level of value-added involvement will lack the excess cultural production required to support a market concept such as "early blue chip" artists—an oxymoron of stupefying proportion.

Beyond labor, these artists in the shadows add essential meaning and context to the whole affair. As Sholette points out, artists make up the core audience when going to see exhibits and fairs, buying books, attending talks, and then processing and sharing their cultural—not monetary—investments widely. Further, this brings an air of hipness and intellectual relevance to contemporary art, which is ripe for extraction by all sorts of corporations, investors, and speculators. In short, the global art

world is now equivalent to a luxury lifestyle brand, attracting celebrities, politicians, and royalty.

Perversely, although most critical thinkers are likely skeptical of advertisements, understanding that a "corporation" is simply programming one to "consume" their product and associate one's own values with that of their branding, most participants in the art world blindly maintain brand loyalty to major museums and artists who help to form their image of artistic quality. What is it that allows individuals to be resistant to corporate branding, protecting the "self" from entanglement in "product," yet not to consider the authoritative process of value creation in the arts in relation to the extraction of value from themselves—either as student, art worker, gallery-goer, or teacher? The answer to this rests in the locations of the greatest authority: the museums.

Museum as Ratings Agency

Today, museums function like a governmental ratings agency in their relationship to the art market. Unlike art fairs and auctions and art schools, museums and related art institutions have a charge to exhibit art for the broadest public through collection, exhibition, and publication, and in doing so they perform the clerical function of interpreting meaning and ultimately forming a canon. Top museums therefore hold the symbolic power of appointing or "making" art's value. So, if we think of art as a currency—albeit a fiat currency—then the museums are essential at guaranteeing its credibility, much like a government might back the value of its currency. This process puts museum board members (many of whom are collectors themselves, and in some cases, board members of auction houses, representatives of corporate collections, or stakeholders in their own private museums) in positions of tremendous power to influence art value. This type of financial leverage runs parallel to the revolving door between the US government and Wall Street—the fulcrum on which America's economic disparity is tipping toward a new aristocracy. However, whereas White House/Wall Street unscrupulousness is nearly universally reviled, the financial misconduct within major museums has been widely overlooked.

Why, then, do art world citizens tend to look the other way from such corruption? One likely answer is that few to none feel they can afford to insult the deities of cultural capital within such an intensely networked sphere. Another answer is that the museum is so central to the definition of art that it cannot be wrong, any more than art as a whole could be wrong. But what if, instead of seeing the museum as "art," we viewed it as its "board," its "funders" or all of the executives behind the scenes who control its operations? Some of us love the museum, some of us hate the museum, and many of us

maintain a love-hate relationship to the museum—but few dare to question whether its transition into a luxury branding enterprise might actually be doing serious harm to the artist community which supports it.

Not since the Art Workers Coalition (1969–71), and only after the financial crash of 2008, has a substantial avalanche of voices emerged to overtly politicize the conflicts of interests woven into museums, their politics, and the people who control them. [2] However, unlike the effective and dramatic gestures of a then-insulated art world, the current financialization of museums is getting worse in the face of contest, not better. For example, with the Guggenheim expansion to Abu Dhabi, we are witnessing a transaction in which the museum has converted its prestige directly into liquid capital. If treating a museum like a Fendi store is not problem enough, then planning it to be built on the backs of indentured workers whose passports will be confiscated on their arrival [3] ought to be. Apparently when Guggenheim signed this contract, the thought that social responsibility might be a necessary dimension of their brand—whose real value has been built up by generations of artists and curators, writers, and, of course, audiences—did not cross their mind.

The issue of value extraction by museums can be parsed out by measuring actual rather than feigned sincerity to serve a wide public. Consider the recent sprouting of private museums built largely to take advantage of tax loopholes in which museum donations are fully tax deductible. Often these museums, with supposed missions to serve the public, sit on remote properties adjacent to their benefactors' estates. [4] This trend furthers a culture of institutional bad behavior, muddying the process by which cultural relevance can be transparently achieved, and creating a deeply cynical psychology in the artist as she or he tries to make their way in society. Within this dynamic, the individual artist risks being perceived as a paranoid defeatist if they challenge the system rather than surrendering to it—or worse, the artists perform a copycat corruption in their practice, a tactic seen and rewarded in leading figures of the financialized era.

Such circumstances present a classic Neoliberal dialectic that makes a further left resistance to leading institutions nearly impossible, as museums are deeply involved in politically progressive positioning. This is invoked through an exhibition's targeted programming, educational outreach, and liberal-minded sponsorships made to burnish the left credentials of the brand without interrupting free market funding relationships, which usually directly contradict the window dressing. This is not to discredit any of these efforts when they are for the good, but to remove a mirror that doubles those good deeds, exposing the diametrically opposed relation of the handout and the handcuff. As example, PS1 trumpets "Zero

Tolerance," a worldwide show on art-activism of recent years from China to Palestine, while conspicuously omitting the NYC artist-activists who have demonstrated against economic and racial inequality. Yet the riddle is revealed when it is understood that these banks, gentrification moguls, and Wall Street-billionaires-turned-mayors make up the museum's funders. [5] The result is that instead of presenting a tool to contemplate the political present situation, a guided tour through political Disneyland is offered. Or consider the double functioning of Kara Walker's Creative Time-commissioned sugar sphinx, a sculptural and conceptual masterpiece. It called on an unusually broad audience for site specific work to contemplate racial symbols on an undeniable scale, yet was also set up as a buffer against protest over the giant luxury condominiums soon to be erected on that exact site, bringing the developers, Two Trees— who also happen to be the funders of the work— greater security for their investment, which itself marks a final end to that neighborhood's association with bohemia.

The further one goes down this rabbit hole, the more figures emerge into view that seem to embody the entire process of extraction. For example, consider how a percentage of collectors and museum board members are major players in the real estate market. These figures enjoy asset value growth from Sholette's "dark matter": the young and indebted artists willing to get on the ground floor of pioneering ventures on one hand, while simultaneously creating the support system for the top of the market on the other. Facilitating a microcosm in which the artists they purchase are likely to employ studio assistants who were just evicted from the very properties in which they are stakeholders, thus allowing a far more philistine "luxury" consumer to enter and complete a multi-phased gentrification cycle that whitewashes any remnant of diversity, dissent, or digression from the region.

Debt as Crime

The most extractive and disempowering mechanism of all, and one that truly threatens to poison the roots of the artistic ecosystem, is debt, with student debt leading the charge. The cost of art schools, which unlike many universities depend almost wholly on tuition, is soaring and unmoored to any potential to pay it off. This kind of debt—the art kind—is among the worst to take on in relation to projected earnings; however, to well-buffered investors, it's a perfectly fine SLAB (Securities Lending and Borrowing) to be packaged and short-sold. [6] In a climate in which it is common for young artists to graduate with nearly $100,000 of debt for their BFA, followed by costs of an MFA upwards of $41,300–$108,900, entering the art world has become an existential, unpayable gamble with real-world effects immediately upon graduation, and in some cases before the student has earned a degree. [7]

Easy loan money has been sold as an American middle class privilege, opening the doors to higher education. But loans become debt and debt is years of working hours; debt is attention away from making artwork; debt is the loss of time, agency, and choice. In a speculative art world, debt's ultimate effect is to tie (as in bond) the artist directly into the market. The fact that artists need to take this burden on in order to make their entry into the official art world means that repayment by way of sales—think sellers of units not collectors that covet—becomes the necessary goal. [8] Those not chosen by the market to see a period of return on their investment, and those without families who can foot the loan bill, will start their careers in a mode of indenture. To add irony to this loss of agency, many of these artists have been educated on a diet of Marxism and anti-capitalist rhetoric, and are then set out to survive within in the very belly of the beast of capitalism they were taught to critique.

This puts said group squarely to work, adding value to individuals and institutions who are better placed to capitalize. Examples of those who profit from the cheap artist-workforce are the established artists who can easily get away with paying highly educated and skilled assistants minimum wage without benefits; art fairs who hire non-unionized labor to create temporary markets; institutions needing in-the-know labor for performances, activities, and other venues requiring part-time support; and galleries who frame their interns and gofers as the lucky few. Of course, this is a bleak summary of the labor landscape, and it does not reflect the circumstances of fairly paid or well-supported studio staff and institutional employees, but it is inarguable that the lesser paid and unpaid far outnumber the well compensated, mostly because the extractive culture allows such treatment, supports it, and helps it to proliferate through growth and expansion without planning for an infrastructure to support and fund it.

So before you sign that paper, consider all of these extractive dimensions of the art market as a whole, and take in the larger picture of its current culture and relation to class dynamics. Not only do impractical levels of debt make an autonomous art practice a perpetually unreachable aspiration, but it has the double effect of making art into such a bad deal that it repels entire classes, races, and cultural groups of people from the art world—a cycle that further homogenizes art's culture of money, class, and tokenism. To many who are less privileged and limited to viewing their prospects through a practical financial lens, such extractive mechanisms are quite obvious, sending up red flags from the get-go. However, these flags are rarely visible to those lured to dream by the vision—and pedagogical propaganda—of artistic stardom, cultural coolness, and, most ironically of all, individual freedom in the form of creative expression.

Epilogue

I have tried to describe how all sorts of art institutions and individuals are tied together into a process that subtracts value from some as a means of generating exponential value-multiplication for a very few. From museums, to real estate projects, to public art, to art schools, this machine is still ramping up. So what can be done? The first level is recognition; if we allow ourselves to see things clearly, we will see that they will likely get much worse before they get better. As example, student enrollment in higher education art programs continues to rise, while programs continue to proliferate in the form of specified MFAs, curatorial programs, programs in public arts, performance, and more, an increase in overall debt that can only escalate the conundrum described above. On the other end of the spectrum rests the booming museum luxury complex and its hyper-financialized global expansion. Diluting the power of the public sphere as they harvest common value and feed it into luxury assets, these museums are not the inclusive structures of the past, but exclusive enclaves of the ultra-wealthy.

Yet, we can say that although these educational and institutional exploits have been the dominant economic direction over the last few years, the Neoliberal myths that are essential to their continuation are no longer universally accepted. No longer are dissenters silent. The recent efforts of Occupy, 15M, Cassarole, Indignados and others have touched the arts deeply, exposing the parallels between the moral failure of the banks, and the cultural failure of institutions. As a result, multiple art-focused groups were spun out of these larger movements—Occupy Museums, Arts and Labor, Teatro Valle Occupato, StrikeDebt, Artleaks, Haben und Brauchen, Gulf Labor, Global Ultra Luxury Faction, and Liberate Tate, to name only a few. Each is a petri dish for developing tactics to challenge an extractive system; each is an incubator of the value of collectivity.

This value pushes back against the primacy of the individualistic picture of success: the non-allied artist-turned-brand whose only mission is to climb an extractive ladder toward branded museums, stepping on the bodies of “dark matter” to become one of those who can enjoy the fruits of speculation. This does not mean that solo practice is not a means to arrive at richly meaningful territory: it always will be. Therefore, a reformulation of artistic value is needed; one that takes every single person involved in the art world into account as visible partners in common value creation. This is a long-term project and art’s major challenge for the foreseeable future. Much better art will come out of it.

Notes:

1. *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* by Gregory Sholette, Pluto Press, 2011 ↩
2. In a now-famous case of conflict of interest, the New Museum's Skin Fruit, (2008) exhibited works from boardmember Dakis Jouannou's collection, curated by Jeff Koons who is also heavily collected by Jouannou. Many major board members have private museums while also heavily playing the market from Eli Broad, trustee at MoMA and MOCA and the Broad Museum to Robert S Taubman, member of Sotheby's board with the Taubman Museum of Art etc.
From a 2008 *ArtsJournal article*, here are some excerpts from "Museum Trusteeship" by Alan and Patricia Ullberg, published in 1981 by the American Association of Museums.
The trustee's own acquisitions must not compete with his museum's; he is obligated to put the collecting ambitions of his institution before his own. The collections management policy should itemize in detail the collecting interests of the museum so that trustees who collect are put on notice that certain activities related to their personal collecting must be circumscribed while they serve on the board….
The ethical standards that the board adopts for managing potential conflicts of interest for trustees are, in some museums, the same as those applied to the staff. The rules for staff with respect to collecting generally aim to prevent situations in which staff members compete with the museum or profit from their positions or official duties….
The trustee who collects could be liable to the museum for profits he makes as a provable consequence of actions taken by the museum if his participation was a major influence in the institution's decision to take those actions. Such a case might occur, for example, if he persuaded the museum to hold an exhibition of objects represented in his personal collection and then was able to sell those objects at a profit. Whether his objects were exhibited or not, there is a conflict of interest and potential liability to the museum in this situation. ↩
3. Some caveats are needed for this statement. First, I'm speaking only to arts in the United States, and do not mean to ignore the important work carried out by the many individual artists and groups working loosely under the institutional critique mode, from Hans Haacke in the 1960's (a member of AWC) to artists of the 80's and 90's such as Coco Fusco, Fred Wilson, Andrea Fraser, and many others. However, I am pointing out that these artists did not enjoy the support of large social movements in their critical examining of museums and also, it could be said that without a movement, the work functioned first as artworks and only secondly as political campaign, which is probably the reverse of AWC and OWS-related practices. ↩
4. The Kafala (Sponsorship) System is used in a number of Gulf states and required immigrant workers to have a sponsor while working, thus forfeiting a number of individual rights such as retaining their own passports, and relating to payments for their journey. During Gulf Labor's 2014 trip to Saadiyat island, members were able independently monitor the situation and found that no worker they interviewed was in possession of their passport and that workers carried heavy debts, although UAE development corporation said much the opposite. For more information, please see Gulf Labor's recent report ↩
5. "The Warhol Next Door" by Patricia Cohen NY Times Jan 10, 2015 ↩
6. Although the SLAB market has since cooled somewhat, as recently as 2013, the Wall Street Journal reported that "Student Loan Securities Stay Hot" March 3, 2013 by Ruth Simon, Rachel Louise Ensign and Al Yoon: "SLM Corp. the largest U.S. student lender, last week sold $1.1 billion of securities backed by private student loans. Demand for the riskiest bunch—those that will lose money first if the loans go bad—was 15 times greater than the supply, people familiar with the deal said." To learn more about these securities, I recommend reading *Creditocracy*

and the Case for Debt Refusal by Andrew Ross, Or Books, 2015. ↩
7. A 2013 Report in Education Sector called "In Debt and In the Dark: It's Time for Better Information on Student Loan Defaults" begins: Student college loan default rates have nearly doubled in recent years. The three-year default rate exceeds 13 percent nationally. Read report here. Additionally, in a recent study by Citizens Financial, 49% of students reported considering dropping out because of debt. "Debt Has Some College Students Thinking About Dropping Out." By Katie Lobosco, October 9, 2014, CNN Money. Here is the report ↩
8. See BFAMFAPhD's report on the economic reality of artists. ↩

Edit

On alliances – of the impossible, unlikely, circumstantial, conventional or emancipatory kind

Raluca Voinea

In his recent text *Greece: The Courage of Hopelessness* [1] , Slavoj Zizek suggests that the EU is pushing the Greek government into siding with extremists like Ukip and Le Pen, and conceding (literally) ground to Russia as to threaten the position of NATO in the region; these are the sort of questionable alliances which appear during war, when smaller or weaker combatants have to choose between equally bad but enemy gangs. As dying in isolation is no option, it seems one should anyway continue to play ruthlessly by the rules of the war game.

Photo: TASS / Barcroft Media

Pope Francis is quoted all around the globe every time he utters some progressive sentence. Liberation theology is supposed to bring the Church to the service of the poor. Orthodox priests in Romania opposed the mining exploitation from Rosia Montana, with an anti-corporation discourse, grafted onto their nationalist and xenophobic one (and during a break from building the biggest orthodox cathedral in Eastern Europe). The privileges of the Orthodox Church (i.e. its properties) are on the list of infamies Greece is supposed to correct to make the EU happy.

Pope Francis meets Dominican Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez, the father of liberation theology in November 2014.

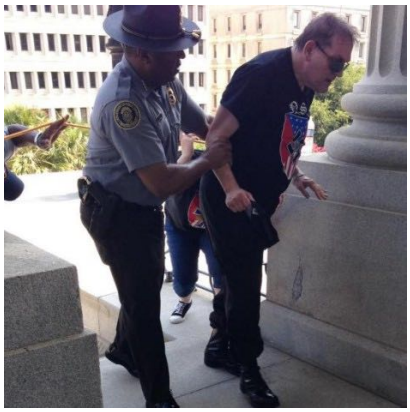


Photo via Rob Godfrey

On the 20th of July 2015, during a Ku Klux Klan rally in South Carolina, a black police officer was photographed helping a white supremacist to take shelter from the heat. During the protests in Tahrir Square in Egypt, Christians and Muslims were protecting each other during their prayers.

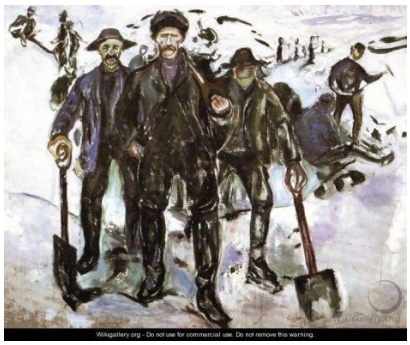
If racial and religious dissensions can apparently or symbolically be overcome, at least in moments of crisis, what about the economic ones?

El Greco: Stigmatisation of St. Francis, c. 1600. Cerralbo Collection, Madrid, Spain

There is a widely circulated comparison concerning the level of one's salary in post-socialist Romania, bringing to light the fact that cleaning women in private companies earn more than state employees with university degrees (where of course the state has become a bad employer and education useless). The implicit subtext usually accompanying this comparison is that this is not a fair society because inferior work is rewarded more than that considered 'praiseworthy' .
In the future, this kind of inferior work will be rendered archaic by machines, with engineers and managers filling the only meaningful positions in society (and gaining accordingly). Attaching different values to different types of work won't change that vonnegutian future, so we should better start by questioning the notion of value altogether.

When governments are – willingly or forced – into siding with the oligarchs, artists

should side with the poor. Not in content, not in aesthetics, but in political demands.

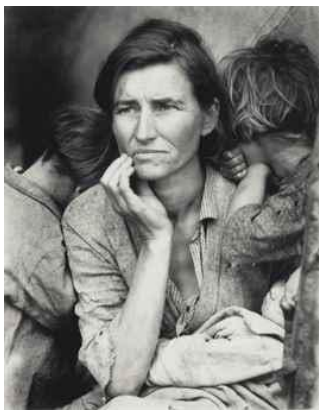


Edvard Munch: Workers in the Snow

The first political demand should be **economic equality**. Artists should not be paid less or more than the cleaners of the institutions with which they are working and the cleaners should not be paid less or more than the directors and architects of those institutions or than those who sit outside on a bench in front of the institution. No alliances are strong enough if they are not made from the same economic position. No hierarchies can be truly dismantled unless they cease being based on economic disparities. Equal payment for women and for men might not dissolve patriarchy but it can certainly weaken it (and give women the independence of choosing their own roles). Equal income for migrants (be they refugees or wanderers) and for natives may not be the only step towards the elimination of borders but it can bring them closer to obsolescence.

Iulia Toma: KKK, embroidery, 2015. Photo: Claudiu Cobilanschi

The poor no longer need someone else to speak on their behalf, they are tired of emphatic intellectuals preaching equity in comfortable universities (or in nice hotel conference rooms with constellation names); they don't need their portraits painted, when they hardly ever have the time or the means to visit a museum (in the fortunate case when the picture has ended up in a museum and not in a private collection); even less need they participatory projects in which they are expected to perform some kind of activity in exchange for the feeling they matter. The poor don't need their shelters and their outfits be imitated as artistic statements of kinship. They don't need to be represented or organized. They will represent and organize themselves as they please once they have the same economic situation as everyone else.



Dorothea Lange: Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California, 1936 Price Realized (Christie's): $35,000 Estimate: $10,000 – $15,000 Sale Information Sale 2543 —

Art events are increasingly opening up to all burning issues, to all disciplines and to all those who envisage ways to use this chaotic moment of crisis in order to effect some more important change. Besides artists, architects and poets, more and more scientists, politicians and economists are invited in artistic frames or institutions to deliver their version of doom or of salvation. The former mayor of Bogota, Antanas Mockus participated in the *Truth is Concrete* marathon in Graz, Austria. The former Tirana mayor and current prime-minister of Albania, Edi Rama delivered a presentation at *Creative*

Photographs 5 April 2012 New York, Rockefeller Plaza

Time Summit in Stockholm and the current president of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani had a conversation with his artist-daughter during *Creative Time Summit* in Venice. Yannis Varoufakis is invited to the next Moscow Biennale. Stars and leaders of every discipline, of every movement of dissent or reorganization, grass-roots or state-protected, long-lasting or short-lived, experimental or mainstream, resilient or just hype, performers or informers, they are all invested with aesthetic aura and brought into the spotlight of the great scene of art. Most often these events are for specialized, spoiled audiences who are fed with ever new theories, concepts, faces and image; inspired by so much knowledge, energy, exoticism and determination, but rarely converting this inspiration into more than small talk for the coffee or Prosecco break. Hardly ever however is anyone invited to such sublime gatherings from among those who clean the floors and the toilets, who arrange the electricity cables or turn on the air-conditioning, or even from the interns who print the programme and make the coffee. Their view on the world is not interesting, they probably don't know how to put together a powerpoint and include some jokes in-between the slides, they have generic names and probably hate those who keep them overtime with their 'one more question to address' or 'one more glass of wine to finish'. They can provide neither instruction nor entertainment, they cannot sell tickets from another position than at the counter, they don't know who the curator of the next big biennale is unless they park his car and generally they should stay content to be the statistics; the invisible many.

William Hogarth: The Servants of the Painter, oil painting, Tate Gallery London

Therefore, when imagining any sort of alliance, union, party or collective organization, artists and cultural workers (the many who are proud of this name, refusing to be decorators or consultants for the rich or entertainers for the privileged) should ask themselves who's reading their statements? Who's benefiting from their resolutions? Who's using the megaphone? Who's getting an administrative office? Who's representing and who is present? But also: who is washing the floor after their meetings? Who will use the organizational models they instate? Are they protecting more than just their profession's interests? And, not least, whom do they want as their allies?

Notes:

1. http://www.newstatesman.com/world-affairs/2015/07/slavoj-i-ek-greece-courage-hopelessness ↩

Edit

Notes on Artists, Workers and Cooperation in Norway

Sissel M Bergh

When working with art, you are not doing it for the money. But all people need to eat.

Most people would presume that if an artist is having a lot of solo shows with established institutions and is participating in group shows during the year, it would secure her or him an acceptable economical situation. But if you work for the common good, outside the market – it actually could put you in a disadvantaged situation.

What the art institutions expect from the exhibiting artists for the little pay they are willing to provide, is hideous. Sometimes it is expected that the artists put up the show themselves – often working for two weeks without payment. Regardless of how long the show will last, how big the space, or how many works are shown – the payment has not been regulated for more than 20 years: it does not provide the actual costs.

As an artist without a gallery representing you, it is exhausting and almost impossible to negotiate, because you have no

backup. Neither the regional nor the national artists' association can actually help you out of the situation as it is today. For many artists a solo-show without commercial potential could put you in debt and lead to an intolerable situation. Besides the inbuilt humiliation within such a system: Why does the exhibition guard, the cleaner, the director get paid by the public to facilitate the space for art exhibitions, while the actual producers are left in debt? How should the artist survive?

This is a widely recognized number-1-issue for artists' organisations at the moment: What could be done for the art practitioners to get paid for their ideas, working hours and the display of their art work? We have to change a system based on the idea that you don't need to pay the artist: Exposure is payment enough and will provide future gain.
Should we cooperate with the art institutions instead of "waging a war against them"? We are dependent upon each other, and they need to understand the absurd fact that the institutions get public funding, but do not pay the artists, who actually produce what they live off. The solidarity among artists is not strong, so a general strike is not a possibility. The art world is built on a strong hierarchical order, which makes artists compete against each other on a subtle level.

The Hierarchical Order

Another aspect is the public opinion. We must change the way art practitioners are regarded: to be an artist is a job! It is a job with a lot of work, without regulated working hours and no social security. This within a society were everyone else are secured as workers. Artistic work is part of the economic system, but needs to be understood on cultural and philosophical level as well. It is an ongoing task to make the public regard artistic work as important and a basis for democracy. Artists' voices – which are mirroring different life experiences and conditions – give different perspectives to the world and our lives, which makes art and culture deeply necessary.

In Norway, art has been seen as "high culture" for the establishment. Culture was created from Oslo. This has left the arts being seen as suspicious practice in popular believes. But this can be changed. If the funding is redistributed directly to the producers, the culture of the society the art practitioners operate in can become more open and innovative – creativity and art become a part of the society's identity. Even though art itself cannot be planned and structured by the state, the notion that funding independent and non-market art has a broader impact on society is crucial. We should not be afraid to speak about that.

The former Social Democratic government was pouring millions of Norwegian kroner into culture and arts, but mostly to build

infrastructure (billions of kroner went to regional “culture halls”) and pay the salaries for employees in the administration. The cultural politics is and has been very inefficient: It is based on a hierarchical order and finances hierarchy instead of processes, by financing institutions instead of art producers. The idea about culture in Norway is still retrospective, and does not see art as ongoing process, but rather as a commodity and national treasure. The state is funding the hierarchies that approve what is art.

The Regional Point of View

The cultural policy has always been centralised and most of the funds are still going to the capital of Oslo. Even though it is the most expensive place to work with art. The prices of studios and living costs are extremely high – not only in Oslo, but in all the bigger cities – and many artists are now moving out of the centres.Traditionally, if you work outside the capital, you are regarded within a hierarchical structure as less innovative, less important, less open: as provincial. We, who are working outside the traditional centres have to build our own network by not going through the traditional centres. This is the only way to “jump” over the hierarchy inherited from old cultural and economic structures.

The regional art associations are making an effort on the political level of the region to make the policymakers understand that “being provincial” could be the clue to development on many levels: The funding of independent ideas and art producers will benefit the identity of the non-centres. We can take a look at Iceland, which is a small province in Europe, but still regarded as a centre for innovative thinking.

Unfortunately art producers are not too much involved into decisionmaking: The region is hiring administrators from traditional centres like Oslo, Stockholm and Berlin at their art institutions – who regard the very place, ‘the region’, as unimportant and provincial in the negative meaning. These kind of leaders rather cooperate with Oslo and other bigger cities and show less interest in what is going on outside the traditional centres. Their ideal is to create just another institution which looks and behaves like any other globalised art institution. Years of post-colonial thinking, in the art world, have not yet transformed the approach towards a wider perspective.

Maybe we need people who have the off-centre experience, but still understand that we are all part of the wider world (of off-centres). This experience of being on the outside could be beneficial. It helps you think outside the dogma: What could art and artistic practice be, outside established art infrastructures? How can we make sure that funding goes out to the off-centres for new investigations and creations?

The Struggle with the New Government

The same autumn the new rightwing/liberal government came into power in 2013, it decided to cut 15 millions of artists' grants: This decision was part of a signal policy, based on the idea that cultural funding actually goes directly to the non market oriented art professionals and was promoting the prejudice that artists are freeloaders on the hardworking majority. The government was calling upon artists to become entrepreneurs: Artists must learn to organize themselves and market themselves to be able to earn money from their work within the market. They should not depend on the state.

Artists' protest, Oslo, November 19 2013, #KUNSTNERAKSJONEN

This led to a nationwide protest where artists covered public art works in black. All regional art associations participated.The artists' associations worked hard to make the government and politicians understand the structures and systems that surround the arts and the artist: Actually artists are already organized as small entrepreneurs, taxed as sole proprietorships and they generate work and jobs for others. They provide work almost for free to, and for the public. In less than one week after the protests, the government had to pull back the proposal!

Artists' Activism

The last time artists became activists on behalf of themselves at such a scale, was during the 1970s. The artists' organisations were fighting to establish a better deal for the artists. This resulted in the establishment of more working grants for artists by the state, and the state's guaranteed minimum income for established artists with a consistent and recognized body of work. Applications to the scheme were handled by a jury of peers, voted in every second year.

It made a huge difference in a country with almost no private funding of the arts. The level of the state's guaranteed minimum

income was not as high as the level of any other workers salary, but it provided for the basic needs. The minimum. If you were to earn money from selling your work for example, your salary would be cut for the same amount. With the result that you would most likely never earn more than the amount you received as guaranteed minimum salary for artists: You were guaranteed to remain poor.

The deal for a guaranteed minimum income for artists was renegotiated and replaced by a 10 years artist grant. It was this grant scheme which was stopped by the new government in autumn 2013. The new deal had been negotiated for a long time. It is a guaranteed “salary” for 10 years, with the possibility of being renewed for another 10 years. Every five years the artist will be appraised to see if (s)he is still working as an artist or if (s)he has been earning more than 6 times the basic level of the National Public Insurance during the last 4 years, (which equals 67.000 $.) If so, the salary from the state will no longer be provided. This is a much better situation than what was achieved in the 1970s, because it creates a better economic situation for more artists.

Other Historical Achievements

The Relief Fund for Visual Artists (BKH) was created by the Norwegian Parliament in connection with the law on art purchases in 1948. This law states that the buyer of art shall pay a fee of 5% in addition to the price, provided the price is higher than 2000 NOK. The art dealer shall collect the fee and send it to the BKH, which then returns the funds to the artists of Norway in the form of grants and scholarships for new production of art. Since its beginning, the fund has returned almost 300 million NOK to artists in Norway. In 2013, more than 22 million NOK was distributed in scholarships and grants. BKH is thus a major economic partner of the Norwegian art scene, and it makes an important contribution when it comes to ensuring diversity and further innovation in Norwegian art.

BKH provides grants to artists and surviving relatives of artists who have, or had, their main activities in Norway and contributes to other purposes in accordance with current arrangements. The grants from BKH are mainly given to individual artists, in the form of scholarships and grants by application. BKH also administers Høstutstillingsprisen (The Autumn Exhibition Award) and three other major art awards, regionally based grants administered by the Norwegian art centres, and a studio program called W 17 at Kunstnernes Hus (The Artists’ House).

The Compensation Fund for Visual Artists (Billedkunstnernes Vederlagsfond) is a distributional reserve built from

compensations paid collectively to Norwegian artists in the following areas: Compensation for the public use/copying of protected art works for educational purposes etc. The state, counties and municipalities are together with organisations and businesses paying through the organisation Kopinor. Tv stations are paying through Norwaco for the redistribution of art works. The state is also paying compensation for the viewing of artworks in public ownership. There will also be paid compensation replacement after illegal use of art works and other compensations for use. *The Compensation Fund for Visual Artists* is distributing stipends and grants, and means of production for new works by application. Both juries are constituted of and voted in by members of the artists' organisation.

Onwards

Last year a report from the Cultural Council was released. It showed that while the majority of the Norwegian population's general income has increased by 25 % in the last decade, the artists' income has decreased by 11 % within the same period. The report is a very useful tool for the artists' organisations, because politicians need numbers as a basis for policymaking.

This January the government, under the pressure from artists' organisations, started a test period were money for art institutions is earmarked to pay for production costs and working hours artists spent on works commissioned by institutions. We hope this will lead to lasting changes in the way institutions are run and how artists' work is regarded.

We need to believe that we can achieve changes together, by cooperating regionally, nationally and internationally – and by voicing the real situation of artists. How we work – what we do, what art does and the possibilities for how art disseminates in the wider society.

Image above: Protest action, Dale i Sunnfjord, November 19 2013, #kunstneraksjonen

Authors

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Danilo Prnjat is an artist based in Belgrade. He intervenes in the domain of political reality, explicating specific social problems by performing a vast variety of projects. This includes controversial, sometimes legally problematic actions, interventions and (media) manipulations, and social participatory projects. Danilo Prnjat finished the Academy of Fine Arts, University of Novi Sad, and interdisciplinary master studies in the subject of the Theory of Arts and Media, University of Arts in Belgrade, Serbia. Currently he is a fourth year student in doctoral studies at EGS (PhD in Communication) in Saas-Fee, Switzerland. He is one of the founders and editors of the contemporary art and art critic web portal "DeMaterialisation of Art". http://dematerijalizacijaumetnosti.com, http://daniloprnjat.com

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Ivor A Stodolsky is a curator, writer and theoretician based in Finland, Germany and France. In his engaged curatorial practice, he organises exhibitions, conferences and events relating art and politics internationally, and is also the editor of related publications and films. Recent projects include Pluriculturalism (Moderna Museet, Malmö), The Square (a newspaper), Back To Square 1 and To The Square 2 (Checkpoint Helsinki), the 4th Roma-Gypsy Pavilion (Cineromani Berlin), Re-Public (Urb Festival, Kiasma, Helsinki), Re-Aligned Art from Russia, Ukraine and Belarus (Tromsø Kunstforening), Re-Aligned/Media Impact (Moscow Biennale) as well as many other Perpetuum Mobile projects.
Ivor's curatorial practice is informed by his theoretical interests at the intersections of art, politics, history and philosophy. He holds a BA in Philosophy and Mathematics from Bristol University, an MRes from the London Consortium (Birkbeck, Tate, ICA, BFI and AA), and was a researcher at the Aleksanteri Institute, Helsinki University and in the field in St. Petersburg. http://PerpetualMobile.org

Jelena Vesić is an independent curator, lecturer, writer and editor. She is active in the field of publishing, research and exhibition practice that intertwines political theory and contemporary art. She is co-editor of Red Thread – Journal for social theory, contemporary art and activism and member of editorial board of Art Margins. She was co-editor of Prelom – Journal of Images and Politics 2001-2009 and co-founder of independent organization Prelom Kolektiv 2005-2010 (Belgrade). Vesić explores the relations between art and ideology in the field of geopolitical art history writing, focusing on experimental art and exhibition practices of the 1960s and 1970s in former Yugoslavia and Eastern Europe; She also writes on artistic labour and practices of self-organisation in the environment of cognitive capitalism. Her latest projects are based on experiments with the form of lecture-performance, immaterial quality of the exhibits and story telling: Oktobar XXX: Exposition – Symposium – Performance, On Undercurrents of Negotiating Artistic Jobs – Between Love and Money, Between Money and Love, Exhibition on Work and Laziness.

Jesper Alvær is a research Fellow at Oslo National Academy of the Arts, Academy of Fine Art, and currently working on an artistic research titled: Work, work: Staging dislocation in artistic and non artistic labour. He received his artistic training in Prague, New York, and Kitakyushu (Japan). His most recent exhibitions include Arbeidstid/Work Time (Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, 2013) as well as several exhibitions held in collaboration with Isabela Grosseova: Activum (Kunstnerforbundet, Oslo, 2013), Eventos Paralelos (Manifesta 8, Murcia, 2010/11), and an exhibition at Bunkier Sztuki Contemporary Art Gallery, Krakow, 2007.

Jochen Becker (Berlin/Stockholm) works as an author, lecturer and curator. He is a founding member of metroZones – Center for Urban Affairs. He has (co)edited several books, e.g. bignes? (2001) or Kabul/Teheran 1979ff (2006), and recently Urban Prayers (2011) as well as Faith his the Place (2012) and Global Prayers (2014). He (co)curated exhibitions such as the Urban Cultures of Global Prayers (2012/13, nGbK Berlin, Camera Austria, Graz) and Self Made Urbanism Rome (2013/14, nGbK Berlin, Maxxi Rome, Teatro Valle Occupato Rome). He is artistic director of the Global Prayers project at Haus der Kulturen der Welt (Berlin), where he curated Aernout Mik – Speaking in Tongues. Since 2014 he is director of the Art &

Architecture program at the Royal Institute of Art, Stockholm. He was a member of the Haben und Brauchen group that was formed in 2011 to demand an open cultural political dialogue about the situation and future of the production and presentation of contemporary art in Berlin. http://metrozones.info, http://habenundbrauchen.de

Kuba Szreder – graduate of sociology at Jagiellonian University (Krakow). He works as an 'independent' curator, his interdisciplinary projects combine artistic practices with critical examination of society. In 2009 he initiated Free / Slow University of Warsaw, together with Bęc Zmiana Foundation and other colleagues. In his theoretical research, he reflects upon the apparatuses of contemporary artistic production and their socio-economic context. In the Summer of 2015, he was awarded a practice-based PhD from Loughborough University School of the Arts. In his thesis he scrutinizes economic and governmental aspects of project-making and their impact on an 'independent' curatorial practice.

Lise Skou (born in Denmark, 1966), artist. In her practice Skou engages with post-capitalist politics and capitalist globalisation, working on the basis of theories by e.g. J.K. Gibson-Graham, who focuses on feminist critique of the political economy. Through a collective practice she sees to envision non-capitalist economies; to show a landscape of economic diversity – one that is not exclusively or predominantly capitalist – and to explore the challenges associated with alternative economic measures and interventions. Skou is a graduate from the Whitney Museum of American Art – Independent Study Program (2002-2003) and the Funen Art Academy (1998-2004). She also holds a BA (Art History) from Aarhus University.

Marina Vishmidt is a London-based writer, editor and critic occupied mainly with questions around art, labour and value. She is the author of "Speculation as a Mode of Production" (Brill, early 2016) and "A for Autonomy" (with Kerstin Stakemeier) (Textem, late 2014). She often works with artists and contributes to journals such as "Mute", "Afterall", "Texte zur Kunst", "Ephemera", "Kaleidoscope", "Parkett", and "OPEN!" She has authored chapters in "The Routledge Companion to Art and Politics ".
She teaches Theory at the Dutch Art Institute, and has lectured at the University of the Arts, Berlin, Central Saint Martins, Goldsmiths, and the Royal Academies in Copenhagen and Stockholm. Vishmidt also has a long-term involvement with artists' moving image in critical and exhibition contexts such as feminist film distributor "Cinenova" and the free cinema "Full Unemployment Cinema".

Marita Muukkonen is an internationally active curator based in Helsinki and Berlin, and a co-founding co-director of Perpetuum Mobile. She has been Chairperson of HIAP – The Helsinki International Artists-in-Residence Programme; Curator at HIAP; Curator at FRAME – The Finnish Fund for Art Exchange; Editor at FRAMEWORK – The Finnish Art Review (the international art magazine); and held key functions at NIFCA – The Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art over several years. Marita is currently co-curating the large-scale 5-year international thematic Re-Aligned Project. She is a contributor to art journals, catalogues and publications. Marita Muukkonen has curated exhibitions and projects internationally, including at museums such as in MoMA in New York, Moderna Museet in Sweden, Kiasma – Museum of Contemporary Art in Finland and galleries such as Momentum Gallery in Berlin, Bo Bjerggegaard Gallery in

Copenhagen. She has curates and co-ordinates exhibitions and events in biennial-contexts, including the Perpetual Pavilion (Venice 2009), The Finnish Pavilion in Venice (2009), The Nordic Pavilion (2009), The Arts Assembly (Manifesta 8, 2011), The Nordic Pavillion in the Dak'art Biennale (2012), and the School of Displaced Persons (Kiev Biennial, 2015). http://www.PerpetualMobile.org

Marius Lervåg Aasprong is a Ph.D-candidate in working-life studies at the department of Industrial Economics and Technology Management, NTNU. His focus is on the impact Multinational Corporations has on the development of working-life and industrial relations, especially concerning the Norwegian working-life model. His project is a part of Lean Operations, a research-project which aims to investigate how Lean can be successfully implemented in Norwegian organizations.
Marius has a Bachelor in social sciences, with majors in psychology and sociology and a Masters degree in Sociology. In his masters-degree he examined how the academic literature on Corporate Social Responsibility deals with issues of power. He is influenced by critical management studies, systems theory, meta-theory and postmodern organizational theory. He is interested in how organizations and leadership structure society, and in turn how society structures these phenomena. He is a member of the research-project Leadership for Transition (LiFT), which aims to promote more integrative and sustainable ways of living.

Minna Henriksson is an artist and art worker currently living in Helsinki. She is interested in exploring the capacities of art for critique and political influence. For her, art is interesting as a field where ideologies become detectable. Her artworks have been relating to topics such as nationalism, racism, economy, the politics of rewriting or erasing the histories of leftist struggles, and the power structures in the art world. http://minnahenriksson.com

Noah Fischer is a New York based artist and activist. He is a member of Occupy Museums and Gulf Labor. Following the financial crash, Fischer exited from the private art market, initiating an inquiry into mechanisms of inequality through performance in public space (Summer of Change, 2011). This practice collided with the Occupy Wall Street Movement where he performed in the park as a giant talking coin, and then became involved in direct action organizing, initiating Occupy Museums with a manifesto on October 19th, 2011. Fischer has played a central role in planning actions and experiments at MoMA, Frieze, Guggenheim, 7th Berlin Biennale, KM, and CCA Warsaw, uncovering a network of allies internationally. He is currently working on a platform concerned with debt in the arts along with artist Coco Fusco, and maintains a studio practice in Brooklyn.

Raluca Voinea (born in Romania in 1978) is art critic and curator, based in Bucharest. Since 2012 she is co-director of tranzit.ro Association and she runs the space of tranzit.ro in Bucharest. Here she is organizing a programme of exhibitions and discursive events focused on the relationships between contemporary art and political determinations, stimulating local production and debate, involving mostly a younger generation of artists, curators, writers, architects, etc. In 2013 she was the curator of the Romanian Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale with the project "An Immaterial Retrospective of the Venice Biennale" by artists Alexandra Pirici and Manuel Pelmuş, a project also produced by tranzit.ro/ Bucureşti. Since 2008 she is co-editor of IDEA arts + society magazine, published in Cluj. She is also one of the founders of the international platform ArtLeaks. http://ro.tranzit.org

Rena Rädle & Vladan Jeremić took care of the Trondheim Seminar. They are Belgrade-based artists whose artistic practice comprises working with drawing, text, video and photography. Since 2002 they develop a joint artistic practice, exploring the overlapping space between art and politics. In their artistic work they focus on social and economical conditions of reproduction, unveiling in a provoking way the contradictions of today's societies.

Sissel M Bergh is an artist based in Trondheim. Her recent work "Dalvedh - The Saami Connection" is dealing with silenced histories in Norway and Middle Scandinavia, and questions the methods and intentions of historiography. She has lived and worked in Lusaka (Zambia) for many years and is co-initator of the Munandi Art Studio. Currently she is leader of the visual artists' association of the Trøndelag region. http://sisselmbergh.net

Working Artists and the Greater Economy (W.A.G.E.) is a New York-based activist organization focused on establishing a sustainable labor relation between artists and the institutions that contract their labor. W.A.G.E. has advocated for the payment of artist fees by nonprofit institutions since its founding in 2008, evolving from an all-volunteer consciousness-raising group into an artist-run nonprofit organization that introduces and implements mechanisms for self-regulation within the contemporary art field. In 2014, W.A.G.E. launched a national certification program that publicly recognizes those art institutions demonstrating a history of, and commitment to, voluntarily paying artist fees. W.A.G.E. Certification is the only model of its kind—and the first in the U.S. to establish a sector-wide minimum standard for compensation, as well as a clear set of guidelines and standards for the conditions under which artistic labor is contracted. **Lise Soskolne** has been an organizer within W.A.G.E. since its inception and its core organizer since 2012. http://www.wageforwork.com

Further Reading | Transformative Art Production

Conclusions:

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Documentation:

Video documentation of the seminar: https://transformativeartproduction.net/documentation/

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Marina Vishmidt, *Anti-Work, Anti-Art: The Paradoxes of Radical Proximity*, http://www.openspace-zkp.org/2013/en/journal.php?j=4&t=25

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Gregory Sholette, Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture, Pluto Press, 2010
http://www.darkmatterarchives.net/
http://www.gregorysholette.com

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http://supercommunity.e-flux.com/texts/online-digital-artwork-and-the-status-of-the-based-in-artist/

Kuba Szreder, "How to Radicalize a Mouse? Notes on Radical Opportunism" in: *Mobile Autonomy. Organizing Ourselves As Artists Today* (ed. Pascal Gielen) Amsterdam: Valiz 2015, szreder_notes_on_radical_opportunism.pdf

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The Art Factory (ed. by Michał Kozłowski, Jan Sowa, Kuba Szreder), An excerpt from a report by the Free/Slow University of Warsaw, 2014
The_Art_Factory_Report_by_FSUW.pdf
http://issuu.com/beczmiana/docs/the_art_factory

Nottingham Contemporary: To celebrate May Day, groups share their campaigns for better working conditions in the arts, in the UK and the US. With Precarious Workers Brigade, W.A.G.E and Intern Labour Rights.
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Corina L. Apostol, David Riff, Dmitry Vilensky, Vlad Morariu, Vladan Jeremic (Eds.), *ArtLeaks Gazette No.1*, 2013
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http://art-leaks.org/bibliography/

Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle (Eds.), *Are You Working Too Much? Post-Fordism, Precarity, and the Labor of Art*, e-flux journal, 2011
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Websites and Platforms:

Gulf Labor Artist Coalition, Who's Building the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi?
A coalition of international artists working to ensure that migrant worker rights are protected during the construction of museums on Saadiyat Island in Abu Dhabi.
http://gulflabor.org/

Occupy Museums calls out economic and social injustice propagated by institutions of art and culture.
http://occupymuseums.org

What is a work of art in the age of $120,000 art degrees?
http://bfamfaphd.com/

ArtLeaks is a collective platform initiated by an international group of artists, curators, art historians and intellectuals in response to the abuse of their professional integrity and the open infraction of their labor rights. It's time to break the silence! http://art-leaks.org

The RE-ALIGNED Project looks into conditions, agencies and subjectivities provoking a new alignment of art, thought and politics in the 21st century. http://www.re-aligned.net

New York-based activist organization focused on regulating the payment of artist fees by nonprofit art institutions, and establishing a sustainable labor relation between artists and the institutions that subcontract their labor. http://wageforwork.com

The Artist as Debtor Conference, New York http://artanddebt.org

Recently formed advocacy groups that fosters research and discussions about the role of small-scale arts organizations in New York City, London and L.A. http://commonpracticeny.org http://www.commonpractice.org.uk http://commonpracticela.org

Chto Delat Journal, http://chtodelat.org

Documentation | Transformative Art Production

The Trondheim Seminar – Conclusions:

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The Trondheim Seminar – Video Documentation:

Plenary Session 1, 5 September 2015
Working group 1: Defining (artistic) work
Marina Vishmidt (presenter), Jesper Alvær, Noah Fischer, Marius Lervåg Aasprong, Danilo Prnjat, Rena Raedle, Gregory Sholette.
View video

Plenary Session 2, 5 September 2015
Working group 2: Situating precarity
Jelena Vesić (presenter), Jochen Becker, Vladan Jeremic, Marita Muukkonen, Jean-Baptiste Naudy, Kuba Szreder, Ivor Stodolsky
View video

Plenary Session 3 & discussion, 5 September 2015
Working group 3: Valuation of artistic work
Airi Triisberg (presenter), Corina L. Apostol, Sissel M Bergh, Mourad El Garouge, Minna L. Henriksson, Lise Skou, Lise Soskolne, Raluca Voinea
View video

Plenary Session 1, 6 September 2015
Working group 4: Possibilities and difficulties of coalition-building beyond local and international constraints
Ivor Stodolsky (presenter), Jochen Becker, Marita Muukkonen, Minna L. Henriksson, Sissel M Bergh, Vladan Jeremic

View video

Plenary Session 2, 6 September 2015

Working group 5: Transformative ways of art production

Raluca Voinea (presenter), Corina L. Apostol, Danilo Prnjat, Jean-Baptiste Naudy, Jelena Vesić, Jesper Alvær, Kuba Szreder, Lise Skou

View video

Plenary Session 3, 6 September 2015

Working group 6: Aligning with social movements

Gregory Sholette (presenter), Airi Triisberg, Lise Soskolne, Marina Vishmidt, Marius Lervåg Aasprong, Mourad El Garouge, Noah Fischer, Rena Raedle

View video

Seminar Program pdf

Impressions from the seminar:

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The Exhibition in the context of the Trondheim Seminar:

A Real Work of Art

2 Sep 2015 – 20 Sep 2015, RAM Galleri, Oslo
http://www.ramgalleri.no/eng/exhibitions/a-real-work-of-art

A Real Work of Art – art ,work, and solidarity structures.
The exhibition is initiated and organized by Rena Rädle & Vladan Jeremic, with contribution from Corina L. Apostol (ArtLeaks) Nikolay Oleynikov (Chto Delat?), Federico Geller, Iulia Toma, Fokus Grupa and others.

Although we live in a time of creative industries, which implies the emergence of a new proletariat of cultural workers, artistic work is not considered 'real' work. Artists and art critics alike nurture the utopian idea of artistic practice as a form of liberated, non-alienating work. Nevertheless, platforms like ArtLeaks and other initiatives publish 'Stories from the Production Line', to quote the famous title by the dramatist Heiner Müller. Working conditions in the global art system, the

corporatisation of art financing and precarious livelihoods of artists, unpaid labour, problematic sponsors – all these problems now plague the artworld.

A REAL WORK OF ART is less about the presentation of artworks and more about the organisation of art workers. The exhibition's 'raw material' consists of the experiences of artists who have tried to organise themselves into associations that promote improved working conditions for artists. Such initiatives are as old as the labour movement itself, and they can be said to form the backbone for today's positions and initiatives. The participating artists share important ideas about art and work, organisational structures and solidarity.

The aim of the exhibition is to generate a temporary 'hot spot' for these issues – one that can be useful for Norwegian artists and artist organisations who are grappling with cuts in public funding and other factors affecting the conditions for artists today.

exhibitionguide.pdf

Exhibition views "A Real Work of Art – art, work, and solidarity structures."
RAM Galleri, Oslo


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THE SILENCE


NAJVNA IGRA