

**Curation of Autonomy:
Participatory Art's Potential to Enunciate
Alternative Social Forms**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis provides a dialectical conception of relational aesthetics, the state of art given definition by Nicolas Bourriaud's text *Relational Aesthetics* (2002), by focusing on the 'value form of participation' and the ways in which this gets subsumed into capitalist circuits, to fit its purpose within 'culture'. One of the original contributions of this research project within the field of political art, or art that aims to be political, is its in-depth critique of relational art's political economy from the perspective of an engaged practice. The thesis also provides insights into the role of the curator as the interlocutor of this exchange. As part of this analysis I examine the changes in the formal character of this relation of domination, by analysing the ways in which the classic opposition between autonomous art and the culture industry has mutated today. The thesis supplements its Marxist analysis with Jacques Lacan's theories of discourse to examine the particularities of how art practices are subsumed into University discourse, and in order to further analyse how artists-students' struggle with subjection to the value form is determined by the capitalist economy. By combining the Marxist and Lacanian perspectives I conceptualise the artist-student as the subject or social embodiment of surplus value and surplus jouissance. My research interest is guided by my own position as a 'transversal' practitioner and by my desire to 'curate' a relative kind of autonomy that manages to de-link the symbolic from value and re-distribute the surplus of participation back to social movements and the communities that support them. The thesis thus is also informed by my commitment to organising educational and curatorial initiatives that imagine a dialogue between organising and art, as guided by practices of political or militant listening processes exemplified, for example, by the political aesthetic collaboration Ultra-Red, found in the fields of grassroots organising and specific forms of political education, as discussed by Paulo Freire. Hence another contribution to the field of social practice art is my concern as a researcher-practitioner to press current discourse on relational art further, from a critique of contradictory social processes to an embodying of critical agencies.

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INTRODUCTION

When considering the relationship between art and politics today, it is assumed that art holds the promise of teaching us how to perceive things in a different way, serving as a catalyst for political action or participation in alternative models of social exchange. One of the key theorists behind the 'art of social exchange' is Nicolas Bourriaud and his thesis on *Relational Aesthetics*, that places a particular emphasis on social relations over artistic production, where art is now called upon to contribute to the emergence of a 'relational society', the production of 'good subjects', in its goal of promoting constructive social change.¹ With this new characterisation and collectivisation of contemporary art practices however (including participatory, dialogic and socially engaging art), comes a new configuration of their political terms and conditions. While this *social turn* in art is justified by its desire to arrest capitalism's tendency for privatisation, at the same time any art that is recognised as such, must play along with its own integration into international circuits of capital; we arrive therefore at a paradox or contradiction. On the one hand art now needs to serve a purpose, via providing alternative 'models of democratic participation', for example, while at the same time it cannot do that unless it complies with art institution's own models of validation.

The criticism of *Relational Aesthetics* to date has certainly questioned its support for an intersubjective art of conviviality, challenging Bourriaud's homogenising conception of the social, with a more antagonistic conception of community. Claire Bishop (who coined the term *social turn*) argues for the irreducibility of the relational form to the question of ethics in participation, while Grant Kester in his *Conversation Pieces* attempts to provide a new critical framework for the art of dialogical encounters, with an emphasis on the historical and ideological context of community art

¹ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, France, Les Presses du Réel, 2002.

more generally.² However, what is absent as Stewart Martin points out in his *Critique of Relational Aesthetics*, is what in many ways is more fundamental, namely a critique of the political economy of ‘the art of social exchange’, by analysing the ways in which relational art forms actually relate to or oppose capitalist forms of exchange.³ Martin’s own attempt to draw attention to Bourriaud’s limitations here nevertheless, focuses more on the dialectical relation of commodification and art, that is how the relational form functions as an immanent critique of the commodity form, rather than providing models for rethinking relational form’s potentialities towards a radically emancipatory practice altogether. This also represents a failure in current discourse around ‘relationality’, to address the struggle to resist the value form in terms of the individual, i.e. the subject. It also, in turn, points to an urgent need to address the difference at stake when presenting appropriated aesthetic forms whose political content is supposed to enunciate both critical analysis and action, without considering the very possibilities for action in the first place.

Working transversally across cultural institutions, social movements and education, I have witnessed first hand how social processes of emancipation can be turned into their opposites, contributing to the subsumption of the ‘value form of participation’, to fit its purpose within ‘culture’. This research project, in fact, emerged out of my genuine frustration due to my inability to grasp a series of contradictions produced when working with museums and galleries on socially engaged projects, and my attempts to activate spaces for dialogue between art and activism. The relationship between autonomy and culture industry, the process of subsumption of art’s social value within established curatorial discourse, or the importance of remaining faithful to the constituencies one works are all questions that emerged at the the very beginning of my collaborative

² Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, London, Verso, 2012.

Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2004.

³ Stewart Martin, ‘Critique of Relational Aesthetics’, *Third Text*, Routledge, New York, London, vol. 21, issue 4, 2007, pp. 369-386.

'training' with sound artist and activist group Ultra-red, back in 2009, and continue to inform my research thinking and practice until today. The more I worked with community organisers, activists and independent self-organised groups on the one hand, and arts organisations, public institutions and sponsors on the other, the more I realised the relationship between autonomy and industry, self and other, producer and manager, word and action, is a lot more complex than I originally thought. I realised that many fellow practitioners were also deeply dissatisfied with the given discourse and philosophical writing in the field of social practice, looking for ways of addressing these questions in more depth, by attending to the gaps between theory and practice. My thesis is thus informed by my own practice, and a series of committed attempts to address my research questions in action, as collaborative open-ended co-investigations. One of the starting points for this research project then, and in view of current discourse's failure to address the 'relational' in political economic terms, but also due to my own journey through 'participation' and its discontents, was my determination to investigate relational art's potential to enunciate alternative social forms.

Is it still possible to curate a relatively autonomous participatory experience that manages to escape its own subsumption into culture industry? What kind of relations do we produce when we 'curate' the 'other' on behalf of the state? How does discourse relate to struggle? The art collective Ultra-red propose a political-aesthetic project that reverses usual relational models. They query:

If we understand organising as the formal practices that build relationships out of which people compose an analysis and strategic actions, how might art contribute to and challenge those very processes? How might those processes already constitute aesthetic forms?⁴

⁴ Ultra-red (2000), *Mission Statement*, as found at: <http://www.ultrared.org/mission.html>, (accessed 27.07.2016).

Chapter breakdown

In the first chapter of my thesis (Chapter 1: Relational as Form), I give a short introduction to Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* and contemporary curatorial and institutional enthusiasm for 'political' exhibitions, situating my research questions within a wider art historical context. I also provide a series of examples that hint towards certain failures within contemporary theorising around the politics of the relational, and as a way of emphasising why participation is still important as an emancipatory project. I then move on to an in-depth analysis in the form of a literature review of key theorists on the subject (including Nicolas Bourriaud and Claire Bishop), in order to further situate my thesis with respect to current discourse on relational art and the rhetoric around participation.

After having foregrounded my knowledge on the 'relational as form' and after having situated the relational within art historical discourse and practice, I then move on to an in depth analysis of the political economy of social exchange. Bourriaud's claims for an art of 'free' and 'open' exchange seems to rely heavily on his interpretation of the critique of political economy, as a metathesis of Marx's own description of commodity fetishism, from a relations between objects to a relations between people. Despite his presumably good intentions however it seems that Bourriaud fails to account for the contradiction internal to the commodity form itself, and Marx's own account of commodification.⁵ In my second chapter, (Chapter 2: The Political Economy of the Art of Social Exchange), I attend precisely to these gaps in Bourriaud's 'operative realism', by going back to Marx's own writings, and his analysis of the value form. Marx's dialectical materialist method was very useful here in my analysis of relations of production within the relational form, but also in order to re-introduce the structural non-relation which drives the relational exchange.

I then move onwards to an in-depth investigation of the ways in which the relational art work performs its integration into the culture industry, and the

⁵ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol.1, London, Penguin, 1867/1990.

character of this relation of domination, namely 'subsumption by capital', through a Marxist reading, analysing what exactly is being accumulated in this process of integration. In this way, I approach the contradictions from a more productive perspective perhaps, at the points of convergence between dominant and emergent forms. My contention here being, that any insistence on a strict stage-by-stage transitional understanding of the process of subsumption, does not necessarily apply for those non-immediate ways of domination and subordination, that on the one hand do *not* comply strictly to the capitalist command, but on the other, still contribute to the augmentation of surplus value.

My research pathway eventually starts to focus less on the social relations themselves (class interests of museums for example), than (given those interests), how it might be possible for relational projects to be realised without consensual management by way of curatorial 'order', while still occupying the structures inherited with an institution. This belies the classic opposition between autonomous art and culture industry, of course, as well as an analysis of the current state of institutional critique, which is the subject of my third chapter (Chapter 3: Curation of Autonomy). The character of this classic opposition today, as I analyse both theoretically but also with a presentation of particular examples, has mutated even further, where the compositional unity and thus the individuality of the art work's relational form (its 'law of movement' and thus its law of form) is no longer in contradiction to the logics of administration and capitalist production, but is informed and shaped by it. Through a close reading of Theodor Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, and in conjunction with my previous findings concerning Marx's concept of 'subsumption' of culture to the production of value, I discovered that for Adorno, autonomous art involves only its 'formal subsumption', that is the subsumption at the level of exchange.⁶ This helped me explain further the peculiarity of the relational work of art that in certain respects, resists its own commodity status, albeit via its absolutisation of one aspect of the commodity form: its character as fetish (which is essential to its illusion of autonomous meaning-

⁶ Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, London, Continuum, 1970/ 1997.

production). One systemic function the curator is inescapably a part of – as the journeyman that brings art and culture in relation – is the management of the ‘social bond’. One of my research interests, and in view of my own role as a curator of participatory and relational exchanges, thus here is formulated around the particular role of the curator within this new need for the museum to *curate* relational art’s *autonomy*, in order to propagate its social character as fetish.⁷

It is important to acknowledge here perhaps the personal style of my writing at certain points of my thesis, especially when reflecting on curatorial practice, and in view of situating myself as an actor in the midst of this contemporary scene. This is also reflected in the experimental approach of my thesis’ design, with the main body of text transversed by a series of performative ‘interludes’ in the otherwise linear theoretical narrative. This is perhaps due to my need to reflect on my role as a researcher, artist, educator and curator that is transversed and directly affected by various institutions and sites, public and private, commercial, or collective, that are often informed by conflicting roles, assumptions and

⁷ The concept of ‘curated autonomy’ comes from Peter Osborne’s article on the resignation of curator Chris Gilbert, which I read early on in my research, and has guided most of my theoretical analysis ever since.

Peter Osborne, ‘Living with Contradictions: The Resignation of Chris Gilbert’, *Afterall*, vol. 10, Autumn/Winter 2007, as found at: <http://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.16/living.contradictions.resignation.chris.gilbert.an>, (accessed 13.10.2012).

discourses.⁸ In this same chapter then, I firstly account for the often bizarre and ahistorical variations of ‘participatory’ or ‘socially engaged’ productions and their effects, by analysing ‘relationality’ in terms of cultural urban ‘regeneration’ schemes and neoliberal cultural policies, within the creative industries context. But then, I also examine the effects of this ‘democratisation of culture’ discourse on the individual level here, as I look at artists’ and curators’ role as cultural entrepreneurs, flexible knowledgeable-labourers always available to skill and un-skill themselves according to the dictates of the ever expanding ‘knowledge market’.

This last point in turn led me to question the role of education (Chapter 4: Subsumption of Art into University Discourse) within this new struggle for subjection to the value form, by focusing my attention on the educational value of art and the limitations of current *educational* and *curatorial* shifts.

⁸ These interludes serve as a way into the ‘unknown knowns’ of my research, disrupting the linear rhythm of the writing and offering the reader a ‘pause’, like a ‘cesura of allowing’ a flux of new ideas inside. Inhabiting that state of mind between reflection and actions, where dissonant elements come to disrupt the otherwise resonant thinking. These interludes thus serve more as a way of attending to the ‘gaps’ or other layers of my own but also the reader’s analytic reading. Where the reader inhabits in the ‘here and now’ of each reading, the context of the questions that arise from the main body of text – a durational activity between thought and non-thought. This in turn reflects my conceptualising of a political aesthetic project that allows for a coming together of participants within an intensified moment of listening that reveals differences between things that were already there, but one couldn’t see or better hear before. As Catherine Clément eloquently puts it, when she describes *syncope*, and the philosophy of rupture: ‘This sweet feeling of temporary interruption suspends the subject’s consciousness by contradicting time’s natural progress. Physical time never stops of course [...] but [syncope] seems to accomplish its miraculous suspension’.

Catherine Clément, *Syncope: The Philosophy of Rupture*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1994, p. 5.

At times these interludes simply serve as a kind of performative ‘testing action’, offering a practical example where issues that had so far only been addressed theoretically, can now be given more substance through the presentation of an artistic practice for instance. At other times, they attend to my own inability to make connections between my so far established ‘knowledge’ and curatorial ‘thinking’, by ‘intruding’ with another element in the argument, connecting the flow from one chapter to the next, by interrupting its linear rhythm. They thus form a crucial part of the overall thesis development as they introduce a performative element to the practice of writing and reading that attempts to disrupt the dynamics of accumulation, moving towards a sharing of ‘impossible studies’ instead.

For more on this see my analysis of Ultra’ed’s collective listening exercises as a model for such a political aesthetic project (Chapter 5, p.).

Paulo Freire informs a lot of my writing here around the academicising of the arts and the instrumentalising of research, but also my own attitude as a researcher-practitioner, reflected in my attempts to experiment with 'participation action research' methodologies of my own.⁹ My research question eventually develops around the production of discourse and its role as a legitimising power of the social processes of constructions of truths, how these are maintained and what power relations they carry with them. Can we develop a discursive analytic process without slipping into a set of conditions that lead to the subsumption of its surplus by a master's order? How can this un-subsumable part be redirected towards the commons?

Jacques Lacan's seminar on *The Reverse Side of Psychoanalysis* provided illuminating insights on my analysis of the status of the artist-student as the subject of social embodiment of surplus value and surplus jouissance, as well as my analysis on the role the curator plays in the circular extraction of surplus value (and surplus jouissance) out of participation. Lacan's discourses (the Master's discourse, the Hysteric's discourse, the University discourse and the Analytic discourse), in fact allowed me to further develop my self-reflexive analysis of the role of the curator as a neoliberal product in the history of art but also of my own desire to eventually develop a thesis for an emancipated practice.

My research from this point onwards purposefully attempts to venture out of this maze of contradictions, and continue with an analysis driven by a passing kind of curiosity itself. After all, for Lacan, the knowledge that defines the subject is the knowledge that is born by the non-sense of the letter: an agency that directs the subject without it knowing. A fundamental tenet of psychoanalysis is that desire is at the core of analysis and interpretation. Desire is necessary to give an analysis or interpretation an orientation, structure and even truth, since truth is conveyed in the 'half-saying' that desire conceals of its lack. As Lacan says, 'the only sense is the sense of desire [...] the only truth is the truth of what the said desire for

⁹ Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, London, Continuum, 1974/ 2008.

its lack hides, so as to make light of what he does find'.¹⁰ Or as elsewhere, 'Desire is its own interpretation'.¹¹ If the split subject cannot position itself within different terrains, unable to make its own connections between academic knowledge, research, and participation in life and society, but is instead 'master of transference' of its own unknown known of surplus, then the subject never has any control of its own agency in the first place.

Combining the Marxist and psychoanalytic perspective, I decided to move my research orientation towards a performative kind of critique of my own inability to imagine alternative realities or even understand the internal inconsistencies of my own models of practice, as a necessary step for me to move away from desire as hidden truth of agency, to desire as agent. After all, if the organisation of a participatory investigation has any effect, beyond mere subsumption of its symbolic value, it would be to contribute to this transition from hysteria to analysis. How does one delink the symbolic from value in practice however, without falling prey to the master's desire to know, subject, and colonise?

The practice of organised listening and the political aesthetic project of sound artist activist collective Ultra-red served well here as a performative paradigm that exemplifies this pursuit for a fragile but dynamic exchange between art and political organising, managing to reverse relational models of exchange (Chapter 5: Ultra-red: Reversing the Relational Model). One of the key theoretical points in my analysis of Ultra-red is Paulo Freire's insistence on inter-subjective modes of encounters (or, in

¹⁰ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII: Psychoanalysis upside down/The Reverse Side of Psychoanalysis*, 1969-70 in Gallagher Cormac (ed), unedited from French manuscripts-unofficial non-published version intended for the reading group at St Vincent's University Hospital, Dublin, 2001, p.61

¹¹ The title of Lacan's *Seminar VI: Le désir et son interprétation* (1958) correctly translates as 'Desire and its interpretation', but if pronounced in French this could also sound like 'Desire is its own interpretation' (*Le désir est son interprétation*). This mistranslation is purposefully done here in order to allude to Lacan's own call for analysts to mine or 'extract' the double working of signifiers, in order to attend to those insistent, meaningless, stray elements of *lalangue*, desire echoed in poetic non-meanings. For more on 'mining' instead of reading Lacan's seminars see:

Peter Buse, 'On the diagonal : Jacques Lacan's reading lists', *Parallax*, 2016, vol. 22(4), pp. 481-499.

Freire's term, dialogic): where those who make meaning and act accordingly do so as *incomplete entities*, not entirely known to themselves nor to each other. Thus, the symbolic accounting for conscious and unconscious registers of experience and the meaning made of that experience. Pierre Schaeffer's theorising of sound as a dynamic exchange between abstract and concrete, subjective and objective realities, as well as theories of the auditory subject became very useful here in my analysis of acoustic space as enunciative of social relations. In this chapter therefore, I also consider organised listening's potentials as an emancipated practice of critical reflection, analysis *and* action.

In my last chapter (Chapter 6: Towards a Radical Curatorial Practice), and with Ultra-red's practice as a guiding principle, I attempt to theorise more generally on a radical curatorial practice of knowledge production that can stimulate exchange between organising and art, activate alternative social relations, and contribute to the transition from symbolic participation, to a public 'collectivisation' of agency. My contention is that if the radical curation of participation has any effect beyond mere value, it can contribute precisely to this transition. Moving beyond that which one already knows they know and into a collective unconscious of desires. A practice that allows for these to come into dialogue, listen to ourselves listening, and collectively analyse our fears and limitations. This last chapter then attempts to present ten preliminary theses towards a conceptualisation of such an emancipated practice, on the way to get there. Unlike any claims to wisdom thus (master's knowledge), I attempt to listen to my own frustrations in a way, attending to the surplus of knowledge and insights I have accumulated from research and experience, but also to the limitations and inconsistencies between the two. In the end, perhaps one may discover that the interruptions to the flow of my narrative here are perhaps more important than the narrative itself, and the interest of this chapter does not lie on the level of narrative (even though it does tell a story), but more on the level of diegesis, or the succession of arguments and their problematic relations to my discipline's reality.

It is my programmatic intention thus here, to not present these theses as reached conclusions, but more as a kind of ‘accessing’, a ‘caesura of allowing’ what was so far imperceptible, perhaps.¹² This ‘accessing’ even though doomed to be contaminated by my addressing towards an object of study, and thus inevitably allowing for reason to contaminate what follows as ‘conclusion’, will hopefully still manage to allow the surplus to live on, allowing other planes of reality in, even as fleeting opportunities. This chapter thus, is a kind of tribute to the gaps between my thoughts and practice, a kind of hanging in the abyss of not knowing, as a way out of didacticism and back to rupture, and nervousness.

My first thesis argues for a need to move away from the aestheticising of politics towards a conceptualisation of ‘organising as *a priori* aesthetic’ (Thesis 1: Why call it art?). As boundaries and definitions of art practice dissolve, expand and mutate, we should also aim to attend to the *permissions* these changes allow for instead. Are these *permissions* immanent to the field of study they belong, for example, or do they get authorised by the urgent issues of the day?¹³ The curator’s role becomes very important here as the manager of ‘relational’ models, social exchanges, and the aesthetics of dialogue, where organising meets art; dialogue as reflection, analysis *and* action (Thesis 2: Dialogue). This in turn brings me to the question of accountability and the need for curators and artists alike to be accountable towards the constituencies they aim to represent (Thesis 3: Accountability).

Towards the end of his thesis on *Relational Aesthetics*, Bourriaud hints towards some possible expansions of his analysis of the relational as an

¹² Andrew Benjamin coined this term during a discussion on the ancient Greek concept of ‘stasis’, London Graduate School, Kingston University, Autumn 2013. For more on this see ‘PRACTICE’, where I present how his ideas in turn informed my exhibition on democracy, ‘Stasis’ in Athens, Greece, February 2013.

¹³ *Permissions* is a series of lectures hosted by Goldsmiths University of London public programme (2016) attempting to address issues around current methods of research, study and practice and the way these are connected with the urgent issues of today. For more on this see: <http://www.gold.ac.uk/calendar/?id=9452>, last accessed 15.06.2016.

aesthetic paradigm, for ‘the future of art, as an instrument of emancipation, and as a political tool aimed at the liberation of forms of subjectivity’.¹⁴ He refers to Felix Guattari’s work on the ‘production of subjectivity’ and the ways in which Guattari’s thinking links up with ‘the productive machinery with which present-day art is riddled’.¹⁵ How useful is the ‘production of subjectivity’ discourse for the development of a dialectical curatorial practice? Guattari’s theorising of subjectivity as an ensemble of multiple exchanges helps come closer to a conceptualisation of an emancipatory analytic practice that moves away from representation and towards the direction of co-management (Thesis 4: Subjectivity).

This, of course, involves a repositioning of ourselves within the Real, a kind of giving up or abandoning of authorial curatorial or artistic positions, and a simultaneous dissolution of this residue, back to the community. This state of ‘being without’ or ‘giving something off’ resonates here with Jean-Luc Nancy’s argument for a community of lack or absence, which is thereby defined as being engaged in an always unfinished working through of its own identity.¹⁶ Taking into account how the concept of community is nowadays profoundly abused in social practice discourse and community development projects, how do we move towards a re-definition of community, whose foundation is laid within the self and whose force pours continually out? (Thesis 5: Community). In a way it is almost as if what limits the community, also provides the key to its liberation. Jacques Rancière’s ideas on identification and subjectivisation inform this part of my thesis on dissensus, as an intentional move away from consensual collaborations and organising of pseudo-participations towards actual relations based on heterology and collective ‘relationality’, simultaneously (Thesis 6: Dissensus). I then move on to engage with Felix

¹⁴ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*: 79-104.

¹⁵ Ibid: 87.

¹⁶ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, Minneapolis, Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 1991.

Guattari's work on psychoanalysis and 'transversality'.¹⁷ The ways in which Guattari engages with the question of the institution, and his insistence on a necessary balance to be found between structuralist discoveries (and the quest for hidden truths) and their pragmatic management, feeds into my own insistence on working transversally across cultural institutions, social movements and artistic/ curatorial strategies (Thesis 7: Transversality).

In view of my desire for an emancipated practice and following Guattari's own life and work as a philosopher-psychoanalyst and political activist, I found it more useful to pay closer attention to Guattari's practice and his contributions to the field of group therapy, here, rather than his immanent and materialist conceptions of philosophy. Guattari's work with the La Borde clinic, and the importance of the institution and its possibilities ('Institutional Analysis'), guides my own analysis of militant research methodologies and their potential contributions towards the collectivising of curatorial analysis and action methodologies more generally (Thesis 8: Militant Research). After all, readings of Guattari's work which do not engage with his analysis of the institution or which consider Guattari's early writings only from the telos of his much publicised collaboration with Deleuze, might fail to consider new and fruitful ways in which Guattari's work might help us solve the urgent problems of linking theory and practice.

Instead of analysing from a distance then, I argue for a curatorial model that moves beyond representation, permitting one to enter a state of awareness of the self. By attending to dissonance and by foregrounding the 'other' against the background of the self, political listening could perhaps drive this dialectical exchange between self and the world, towards a knowledge praxis that is not made of answers but breaks in the 'knowings'. In my preliminary theses towards an organisation of a collective investigation thus, I also examine the possibility for curators to

¹⁷ Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, Bloomington, Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1995.

act as facilitators for the subject's own transition from hysteria to analysis in their own terms (Thesis 9: Curator Analyst).

This brings me to my last thesis on 'embodying criticality', which also serves as a kind of introduction to my curatorial/ educational initiatives, and my own embodiment of contradictory relationships as an academic researcher and social practitioner (Thesis 10: Embodied). Here I address the need for radical curatorial practices to have a direct alliance or direct connection with social movements and struggles that they aim to represent. Just after my conclusion, there is also a presentation of a series of performative critiques of my own practice, pressing further towards the conceptualisation of an emancipated practice, from a pronouncing of contradictory social processes to an embodying of critical agencies.¹⁸ My experimental practice aims to attend to the impossibility of perceiving the 'untested feasibility' which lies beyond the limit-situations of my writing.¹⁹ A kind of 'living things out' or 'testing action' which reveals its hitherto unperceived viability.

¹⁸ Irit Rogoff, 'From Criticism to Critique to Criticality', *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies: Transversal Texts*, 2015, as found at: <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0806/rogoff1/en>, (accessed 19.07.2016).

¹⁹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, London, Continuum, 1968/ 2005.

1. RELATIONAL AS FORM

Introducing the Art of Social Exchange

Over the past thirty years, a profusion of art practices has emerged out of the aesthetics of social relations, namely *Relational Aesthetics*. Relational art, as defined by Nicolas Bourriaud in his book *Relational Aesthetics*, is:

a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space.¹

It is an artistic form that is not about aesthetic objects, the mimetic representation of objects or our relations to objects, nor about 'any style, theme or iconography', but about the relations and behaviours between viewers and the world. An art that focused on what happens between people, their conversations, their discussions, their relations. Relational art's subject thus is the dynamic social environment itself with the artist 'curating' a series of relational dimensions and social experiences to be performed or brought to life by the participation of members of the public.

Relational Aesthetics was originally written as an analysis of the often process-based, open-ended and non-medium specific art of the 1990s. Initially published in 1998, the book arose from Bourriaud's curatorial engagement with a generation of artists of that period, such as Félix González-Torres, Philippe Parreno, Pierre Huyghe, Maurizio Cattelan and Rirkrit Tiravanija. Bourriaud's description of what distinguishes this kind of art reads as follows:

¹ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, France, Les Presses du Réel, 2002. p. 43
Originally published in French by same publisher in 1998 as *Ésthetique Relationnelle*.

The term 'relational' was originally coined by Bourriaud in a catalogue for *Traffic*, a group exhibition of contemporary art that took place at CAPC Musée D'art Contemporain de Bordeaux, France, February and March, 1996.

Rirkrit Tiravanija organises a dinner in a collector's home, and leaves him all the ingredients required to make a Thai soup. Philippe Parreno invites a few people to pursue their favourite hobbies on May Day, on a factory assembly line. Vanessa Beecroft dresses some twenty women in the same way, complete with a red wig, and the visitor merely gets a glimpse of them through the doorway. Maurizio Cattelan feeds rats on 'Bel Paese' cheese and sells them as multiples, or exhibits recently robbed safes. In a Copenhagen square, Jes Brinch and Henrik Plenge Jacobson install an upturned bus that causes a rival riot in the city. Christine Hill works as a check-out assistant in a supermarket, and organises a weekly gym workshop in a gallery. Carsten Höller re-creates the chemical formula of molecules secreted by the human brain when in love, builds an inflatable yacht, and breeds chaffinches with the aim of teaching them a new song. Noritoshi Hirakawa puts a small ad in a newspaper to find a girl to take part in his show. Pierre Huyghe summons people to a casting session, makes a TV transmitter available to the public, and puts a photograph of labourers at work on view just a few yards from the building site. One could add many other names and works to such a list. Anyhow, the liveliest factor that is played out on the chessboard of art has to do with interactive, user-friendly and relational concepts.²

Bourriaud introduces here a shift of interest from style or aesthetic trope of nineties art to 'relational concepts' and the extent to which this art has become, more immediately and above else a matter of its 'social constitution'.³ By considering relational practices in terms of their social form and how they in turn effect our social relations, Bourriaud in fact insists on art's specific sociability being the principal 'object' or 'work' of contemporary art, as all art's 'objects' are now subordinate to art's social or

² Bourriaud, *ibid*: 8.

³ Stewart Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', *Third Text*, Routledge, New York, London, vol. 21, issue 4, 2007, p. 370.

relational dimension: 'what the artist produces first and foremost is relations between people and the world, by way of aesthetics objects'.⁴

What is more important here perhaps, is the political and critical claims that Bourriaud makes for this new conception of contemporary art, which is now 'developing as a political project when it endeavours to move into the relational realm by turning it into an issue'.⁵ Bourriaud elaborates on this, for instance, when he analyses the relational artwork as *social interstice*, which 'fits more or less harmoniously and openly into the overall system, but suggests other trading possibilities than those in effect within this system'.⁶ Or elsewhere when he argues for Gabriel Orozco's photographs of Brazilian markets, 'operating at the hub of "social infra-thinness" [...] [as] a documentary record of tiny revolutions in the common urban and semi-urban life (a sleeping bag on the grass, an empty shoebox, etc.)'.⁷ This claim for relational art's disengagement from the everyday rhythm of capitalist exchange, and its offering of potentially different zones of engagement, is perhaps the reason why his analysis has attracted so much attention by a new generation of artists seeking to conceive of a new relation between art and radical politics. This resonates also with the more general emergence of sporadic anti-capitalist movements around the world, since the 1990s.⁸ Ranging from theatre and activism to urban

⁴ Bourriaud, *ibid*: 42.

⁵ Bourriaud, *ibid*: 16-7.

⁶ *ibid*.

⁷ *ibid*: 17

For more on Bourriaud's claim for relational art's resistant political character see my more in depth analysis in Chapter 2: 'The Political Economy of the Art of Social Exchange'.

⁸ A characteristic example of this recent attempt by exhibitions and biennials to address political questions was when Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art invited the Occupy movement to camp outside its most visible site, or when DOCUMENTA curator Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev welcomed Occupy activists interventions, including them hanging a sign in one of the showrooms reading: 'This is not our museum, this is your action space'. Maja and Reuben Fowkes, 'The Occupy Effect on Contemporary Art', *Art Monthly*, vol. 359, September 2012, as found at: <http://www.translocal.org/writings/occupy%20effect.html>, (accessed 17/11/2012).

Irmgard Emmelhainz, 'Art and the Cultural Turn: Farewell to Committed, Autonomous Art?', *e-flux*, no. 42, 2013, as found at: <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/art-and-the-cultural-turn-farewell-to-committed-autonomous-art/>, (accessed 25.02.2016).

planning, care work and models of 'living' and 'organising' as aesthetic forms of their own right, many contemporary artists of the last twenty years, have attempted to expand Bourriaud's 'models of sociability' outside the gallery's self referential context and towards an investigation of the very foundations of these social experiences themselves (with an emphasis on social engagement, participation, dialogue and action, in direct alliance with contemporary social struggles).⁹ Bourriaud's discussion of relational practices unfortunately focuses solely on works that already form an integral part of art world establishment, favouring artist-celebrities whose role as 'curators of experience' serves institutional spectacle. He does not attend to the internal contradictions of these relational social forms, or the potency of engaged avant-garde relational practices transversing the boundaries of status quo 'contemporaneity'. Nevertheless, it was perhaps due to Bourriaud's claims for this 'relationality' where his theory was most influential, offering an altogether new framework for the political terms and conditions of relational art practices around the world.¹⁰

⁹ Nato Thompson, *Living as Form*, Creative Time Books, New York, The MIT Press, 2012.

¹⁰ As Stewart Martin points out in his critique of relational art however, the widespread interest generated by *Relational Aesthetics* over the years has also been encouraged by Bourriaud's professional status, at the time, as a curator of the prestigious Palais de Tokyo (until 2006), and his role within the art world's contemporary turn to the 'curatorial'. As Martin explains, in fact, there has been considerable criticism about whether Bourriaud's political claims for relational art serve only as a form of strategic professionalism, attracting controversy around this new conception of art's relation to politics.

Martin, *ibid*: 370.

Mick Wilson argues further for the whole system of contemporary art nowadays construed as a system of reputational economies, organised and controlled through reputations. Specific instances in the history of art seen as 'moves in a game of reputational stakes'. He then moves on to analyse the role of curatorships in brokering 'reputational transfer' in the calculation of 'reputational capital', which on the one hand can have a positive effect on otherwise marginalised local and community based art practices while on the other it is 'still the dominant ones that territorialise the field, by providing the provisional discursive framework through which the various participants can share thoughts, insights, observations, reactions and so on'.

Mick Wilson, 'Curatorial Moments and Discursive Turns' in Paul O'Neill (ed.), *Curating Subjects*, Amsterdam, Open Editions/ de Appel, 2007, p. 215.

Situating the Relational within Art History.

If truth be told, radical artists have always experimented with alternative social forms and the avant-garde's role has always been to shock us out of our 'perceptual complacency', allowing for one to see the world in a different way.¹¹ Even though the heritage of the historic avant-garde is hardly central to Bourriaud's radicalism here –with Bourriaud in fact arguing for a 'rupture' with the modern in view of the 'truly' contemporary– it certainly underpins the foundations for it.¹² For Bourriaud, relational artworks can potentially overcome the avant-garde's utopianism, by not simply 'abandoning' it, but instead 'realising' it through alternative ways of living:

the role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever the scale chosen by the artist.¹³

Despite Bourriaud's insistence on distancing this new art of the 1990s as a truly 'interactive', 'performative', 'processual', 'user-friendly' and 'live' art of relational encounters however, a history of 20th century art could easily be sketched as the timely embrace of the relational fundamental. This historical legacy can be plotted as early as 1913, with Marcel Duchamp's readymades, for instance, and the latter's emphasis on artistic context over content – Duchamp proposed that it is the viewer who makes the pictures – or later on within the reactionary, politicised and socially

¹¹ Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2004. pp. 10-11

¹² Eric Alliez argues that Bourriaud's order of discourse fails to recognise its symptomatic nature as an effect of its claimed 'rupture' with the 'revolutionism' of the critical art of the sixties, for instance, explaining how in this way relational aesthetics have discharged the 'force of the most innovative theoretical and artistic practices of the sixties and seventies into modest forms, in the "most connections" of a *micro politics of intersubjectivity*'.

Eric Alliez, 'Capitalism and Schizophrenia and Consensus: Of the Relational Aesthetic', *Z/ X: Journal of the Manukau School of Visual Arts*, vol. 3, 2007, p. 3

¹³ Bourriaud, *ibid*: 13

engaged movements of the 1960s, like Conceptual Art, and Fluxus.¹⁴ These movements also sought to disengage from processes of Modernism's commodification, and 'present the unrepresentable', with nihilistic irony and by shocking the viewer outside the familiar barriers of common language, existing modes of representation, and even their own sense of 'self'. The development of new technologies of communication at the time (post-production), combined with the break-down of medium-specific art forms, provided the possibility for these artists to seek out new ways of appropriating non-hierarchical social forms, informed by an affinity with a range of other disciplines such as feminism, postcolonial theory, psychoanalysis and critical theory, amongst others. The social, cultural and political upheavals of those times is also echoed in the activist legacy of the Situationists, who departed from the classical Marxist emphasis on the primacy of production, in order to corrupt the 'value' of the work and move into the interrogation of everyday life, and the myths of social freedoms – all merged into Guy Debord's *The Society of The Spectacle* (1967).¹⁵

In this increasing climate of cultural and political radicalism, many artists concerned themselves with information systems, organisational tactics and the language of mediation, as they turned towards conceptual strategies (informing in turn today's relational communication-based aesthetic compositions for instance). Joseph Kosuth, John Baldessari, Clido Meireles, John Latham, Richard Long and Art & Language, took art's 'anti-objective' tendency to the next level where art abandoned its materiality completely, and instead art became the concept or idea behind the work, setting the ground 'on which nearly all contemporary art exists'.¹⁶ Many of these artists however and in their attempt to bypass the art world by stressing thought processes and methods of production as the actual

¹⁴ Marcel Duchamp began to take utilitarian objects, like a Bottlerack (1914) or a Fountain (1917), and transplanting them from their normal everyday context into an altogether new and alien one: the context of art.

Paul Wood, *Conceptual Art*, London, Tate Publishing, 2002, p. 11.

¹⁵ David Hopkins, 'The Death of the Object: The Move to Conceptualism', *After Modern Art 1945-2000*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 161-97.

¹⁶ Paul Wood, *Conceptual Art*, London, Tate Publishing, 2002, p. 9.

value of their work, became self-reflexive, questioning the structures of the art world themselves, all bound with a wider dissatisfaction with society and government policies (see for example Joseph Beuys' social sculpture).¹⁷ Institutional critique practices of that era (Marcel Broodthaers, Jannis Kounellis and Hans Haacke etc), and artistic gestures to 'primordial returns' (Robert Smithson's and Arte Povera) would also bring up issues of authorship found in relational practices of today, raising questions on people's participation in the definition and production of art.¹⁸

At the same time curatorship emerged as a creative, individually authored mode of production, with a degree of relative autonomy, which structured the ways in which art works were communicated to audiences.¹⁹ Post-colonial and collaborative approaches to exhibition making were explored, which in turn had an effect on the ways the artistic canon was read. Many artists rejected traditional principles of craftsmanship, permanency of the object and the notion of the artist as 'author' or 'genius', while the relationship between the artwork and the audience also became the central axis for the emerging forms of art practice in the 1970s (Fluxus), leading the way to time-based participatory and performance-based art.

Happenings and live experiments were to develop a new composition between politics and art, where social activism was mirrored in street-based arts practices as a radical means to eliminate distinctions between

¹⁷ The first one to use the term 'institutional critique' in print was Andrea Fraser in her essay on Louise Lawler.

Andrea Fraser, 'In and Out of Place', *Art in America*, vol. 73, no. 6, June 1985, p. 124.

¹⁸ Hopkins, *ibid.*

¹⁹ Curator Pontus Hultén, founding director of *Moderna Museet*, Stockholm, in the 1950s, achieved notoriety, for example, with his 1968 exhibition 'She-A Cathedral'. This was a deliberately sensational show, enacted with artists Nike de Saint Phalle, Jean Tinguely, and Per Olof Ultvedt, which took place 'inside a 100-foot long sculpture of a supine woman, between whose legs the public was invited to enter. In her right breast there was a milk bar, in her left, a planetarium view of the Milky Way; also inside were an aquarium with goldfish and screenings of Greta Garbo films'. Another key example of this turn to curatorship is Szeeman's 'When Attitudes Become Form: Works, Concepts, Processes, Situations, Information' Kunsthalle Bern, 1969

Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture*, Cambridge, London, MIT Press, 2012, p. 14.

art and political praxis. Relational art and its emphasis on 'social exchange' echoes here perhaps the avant-garde's emphasis on the viewer's new authorial relationship with the world, as well as the overall tendency for art to confront the ritualistic economies of mainstream social forms. One of the central components of the avant-garde's innovations that still resonates with a lot of contemporary 'relational' artists in fact is this insistence on an active participation of the viewer or spectator in the making of the work, where an artwork no longer serves as a text to be read by the viewer, but as something to be performed. Alongside the erosion of categories of art, artists also took on writing and exhibition-organising, functions formally assigned exclusively to the art critic (or curator).²⁰

This fragmentation of authority might also explain relational art's close relationship to what has come to be known as 'participatory art' or the art of social engagement, which is completely different. Many forms of relational and participatory practices nowadays also foreground the role of collaboration, nurturing relationality, responsibility and acts of sharing. Important figures that have expanded post 1960s and 1970s happenings and performance-based actions (see Allan Kaprow in US), are now directed beyond the gallery's all-white walls, linking these new forms of

²⁰ Gallerist Siegelau writes: 'All the different art word categories were breaking down [...] In a certain way this was part of the 1960s political project. The 'information society' was up and running, and many of these different areas were very touch and go, people were moving between things and doing many different things'. Siegelau, as Paul O'Neill testifies, coined the term 'demystification' as a necessary process in revealing and evaluating the more hidden curatorial components of an exhibition, making evident that the actions of curators had an impact on which artworks were exhibited, and how they were produced, how they were mediated, and distributed. In Siegelau words, 'to understand what the curator does is to understand what you are looking at in an exhibition'.

Siegelau in an interview with O'Neill, Amsterdam, 27 July 2004 in O'Neill, *ibid*: 19

intersubjective experience with social or political activism (Artists Placement Group, Suzanne Lazy amongst others).²¹

The creative power of language and 'performative utterances' has also been part of experimental practice for years, of course, but the appeal of the term 'discourse' as a word 'to produce and perform power', indicative of the *discursive turn* (or as Mick Wilson says the Foucauldian moment) in art, could not be more relevant here, as it develops parallel with the *relational* and *curatorial turn*. Discursive events (like lectures, symposia, discussions, talks and workshops) that were previously regarded as supplements to the exhibition have now taken centre stage within the exhibition space and its display, as this is interpreted and curated accordingly.²² Many of the artists that have now taken up conversation as a subject and form of their artistic-curatorial practice, also ground their work on a 'shared horizon of social change'.²³ In this context, one also

²¹ Kester, *ibid*: 8

It is important to point out here that there has been some nominal obfuscation of participatory art, that demands its appreciation as a distinct form. This has occurred simultaneously with the development of relational art throughout the 1990s, as well as community based and socially engaged art practices. My historical approach to these practices purposefully follows the development of the term 'relational' by Bourriaud, in order to hint to the subtleties and distinctions between different genres, that are not always clearly understood, as they all involve participation, engagement and development of relationships. The important difference here is that participatory art and community art prioritise participants over the artist's authority. Community artists are concerned with their attitude towards a certain community, where the social process is more informant than the final outcome. The ideological issue of use value is crucial here, as well as the context of participatory/ relational formats, as art made within institutions, will always by default remain part of the art world. Participatory and socially engaging practices, community-based or dialogic art, are in a way less interested in a relational aesthetic than in the creative rewards of collaborative investigations. All these subtleties and differences however will be further analysed throughout the thesis, and will hopefully become clearer for the reader through an analysis of different practices throughout.

²² Mick Wilson, 'Curatorial Moments and Discursive Turns' in Paul O'Neill (ed.), *Curating Subjects*, Amsterdam, Open Editions/ de Appel, 2007, pp. 201-216.

One of the discursive turn's typical moments was perhaps when Ian Wilson presented his work 'A Discussion' as art of 2005's Frieze Art Fair, in London. Indicatively, Jane Austin's *How to Do Thing With Words* has become one of the key texts, in fine art, performance and critical studies curriculum of any prestigious art school of the last fifteen years.

Also see: Eszter Lázár, 'Discursivity', *Curatorial Dictionary*, 2016, as found at: <http://tranzit.org/curatorialdictionary/index.php/dictionary/discursivity/>, (accessed 13.07. 2016).

²³ Monika Szewczyk, 'Art of Conversation, Part II', *e-flux*, vol. 6, 2009, as found at <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/art-of-conversation-part-ii/>, (accessed 13.07.2016).

needs to take into account here the social inclusivity agenda realised through ‘dialogical practices’ of the eighties and nineties (Stephen Willats), as well as the correlation between this turn to the *discursive* and the explicit thematisation of the infrastructural processes and roles of the art world, all bound with a tendency to reposition the exhibition space as a research tool or collective investigatory process – a performative kind of ‘knowledge’ event (Tino Seghal’s recent occupation of Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall with *These Associations* (2012) for instance).²⁴

As Gregory Sholette points out, in his article ‘After OWS: Social Practice Art, Abstraction and the Limits of the Social’, contemplating on the growing allure of socially engaged art among young artists, as the pressure within art education to work inter-subjectively and collaboratively through ‘social and participatory formats, often in a public context outside the white cube’ increased, so did more and more artists start working with specific audiences proposing critical interventions for ‘positive social impact’.²⁵ All this happened however, as education in the humanities and the arts was now under an ever-increasing pressure to standardise its approaches (especially in Europe under the Bologna Process).²⁶ Paul O’Neill and Mick Wilson in their introduction to *Curating and the Educational Turn* in fact

²⁴ Stephen Willats, *Artwork as a Social Model: A Manual of Questions and Propositions*, London, RGAP, 2012.

Marie Laurberg, and Margriet Schavemaker, ‘Between the Discursive and the Immersive: Research in the 21st Century Art Museum’, *Stedelijk Studies*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 2015, as found at: <http://www.stedelijkstudies.com/journal/between-the-discursive-and-the-immersive-editorial/>, (accessed 13.07.2016).

²⁵ Gregory Sholette, ‘After OWS: social practice art, abstraction, and the limits of the social’, *e-flux*, April 25, 2013, as found at: <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/after-ows-social-practice-art-abstraction-and-the-limits-of-the-social/>, (accessed 13.07.2016).

²⁶ As Andrea Phillips explains in a footnote on ‘Educational Aesthetics’:

‘The Bologna Declaration is the main guiding document of the Bologna Process. It was adopted by the ministers of education of 29 European countries at their meeting in Bologna in 1999. It proposed a European Higher Education Area in which students and graduates could move freely between countries, using prior qualifications in one country as acceptable entry requirements for further study in another. The process has caused high profile arguments in political and academic communities’.

Andrea Phillips, ‘Educational Aesthetics’ in O’Neill, P. and Wilson, M. (eds.), *Curating and the Educational Turn*, London, Amsterdam, Open Editions/ de Appel, 2010, p. 92.

argue for a 'curatorialisation of education' whereby the educative process, both as format and as a theme, often becomes the object of curatorial and artistic production itself, 'art as educational praxis'.²⁷

This insistence on the role of art as tool to ameliorate the 'social bond' and the exhibition as a framework of enquiry for public education to be actualised, eventually reached the point where ideas previously considered to belong to social theory and sciences –like primacy of structure and agency – have nowadays found their way into arts education curricula. The term 'social practice' was actually used for the first time to describe artistic experimentation in 2005.²⁸ Exhibitions of 'social practice' often include participatory work and collaborations with the public, providing pathways for emancipatory change through the art of building social exchange: 'Living as Form' curated by Creative Time, New York (2012), 'Culture in Action' (1993), 'Shine a Light' at the Portland Art

²⁷ Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson, Mick, *Curating and the Educational Turn*, London, Amsterdam, Open Editions/ de Appel, 2010, p. 13.

²⁸ Sholette, who teaches in the United States, in fact argues that the tendency towards socially engaged art begins to look more like a full-blown pedagogical shift, where contemporary art theory and practice is marked by a turn to education. Social sciences and abstract political philosophical thinking (drawing from the discourse of political economy and critical theory) thus become very relevant here in the task of 'repairing the social bond' (Sholette, *ibid*). As Mick Wilson points out in 'Curatorial Moments and Discursive Turns' however, there is a rehearsal here of 'a longstanding Enlightenment value-frame of the public sphere as the very condition of possibility of communicative action'. A speaking together which is supposed to be free of the constraining action of market relations, enunciating alternative processes of subjectivisation altogether.

Mick Wilson, 'Curatorial Moments and Discursive Turns' in Paul O'Neill (ed.), *Curating Subjects*, Amsterdam, Open Editions/ de Appel, 2007, pp. 201-216.

This sense of realised micro utopian communes of the 'here and now', prevails in most of the discourse around relational art or art as direct form of reified communities, the art of the 'multitude'. Which can of course also be read as a naive 'harmonistic conception' (Stewart Martin) of the social that does not consider the political economy and the antagonistic relations within the community. Not to mention the difficult case presented here when we consider art's definition historically as the discourse of incomprehensibility which is by nature unclarifiable in the first place, or in the words of Paul Valery, of course: 'A work of art, if it does not leave us mute, is of little value'. Considerations that will follow in my Marxist analysis of Bourriaud's claims and my attempts to emphasise the relationship of participatory forms in relation to value form, and the ways in which art gets subsumed into university discourse.

Paul Valery as quoted in Fiduccia, Joanna (2010), 'Report: Bullshit! Calling Out Contemporary Art' in *Map*, vol. 22 as found at <http://mapmagazine.co.uk/8981/report-bullshit-calling-out/>, (accessed 13.07.2016).

Museum in Portland Oregon (2009-2013), 'Condensation of the Social', New York (2010), or 'Truth is Concrete', Graz, Austria (2009-2013) are prime examples.

Socially-engaged art, as well as community art, also belong to this field of the art of 'social bond', of course, where art is used as a tool to enunciate interaction or dialogue with a specific community. The difference from relational or social practices being here perhaps that community art is 'art for social change' in a local context, often involving a grass roots approach to bringing people together in order to codevelop participation and change.²⁹ Grant Kester, when mapping out the history of dialogic practices of today, warns us that this is not a movement but more of an inclination that has developed over the past thirty years:

A series of provocative assumptions about the relationship between art and the broader social and political world and about the kinds of knowledge that aesthetic experience is capable of producing.³⁰

In this context it is crucial to emphasise the dramatic expansion of the market for contemporary art over the past ten to fifteen years, accompanied by the proliferation of an ostensibly cosmopolitan art world of international art fairs and biennales constrained by the more or less homogenous network of international collectors, curators, critics, and

²⁹ The production of discourse, written or spoken, is in fact key to understanding today's methodology of art production, since this is the institutional field in which it is endorsed and disseminated, where the discursive leads to the proliferation of the short text and statement as a site of production alone. Artists, curators, educators and even administrators nowadays need to be able to speak or write authentically about the 'relationality' of their practice, situating themselves within a particular field of the debate. It is almost impossible to conceive of an artist working with interactive media for example who has not yet engaged in some form of conversation positioning his or her work within the 'participation' debate, or a performance artist who cannot spend an hour discoursing about the importance of liveness vis a vis traditional history writing methodologies, in short the way we 'do' history. Community-based artists, –as the experts of 'engagement'– will also find themselves talking a lot about 'empowerment', 'dialogue' and 'representation'.

³⁰ Kester, *ibid*: 9.

dealers.³¹ Indicatively in 2002 auction sales for contemporary art in the United States reached a record high of more than five billion dollars.³² One of the most evident transformations within the art world over the last 25 years, in fact is its increasing operation at an international and transnational level under the guise of Biennales.³³

‘The era of the curator has begun’ wrote New York Times art critic Michael Brenson in 1998 when the number of independent curators jumped to a new level of visibility, with artistic production eventually becoming very theoretical, perhaps even managerial, and at times the art work itself resembling curatorial work.³⁴ The dramatic interest in collaborative, dialogic and socially engaging art increased here perhaps as a response

31 Marius Babias, ‘Subject Production and Political Art Practice’, *Afterall*, no.9, Spring/Summer 2004, as found at: <http://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.9/subject.production.and.political.art.practice>, (accessed 13.02.2016).

32 Kester, *ibid.*

The art world’s symbiosis with the profit-driven market is exemplified by the fact that artworks nowadays have by now become assets for financial investors who want to diversify their investment portfolios and even trade these by hedge funds. So that the art system now runs ‘on the basis of speculation and self-promotion’.

Sotirios Bahtsetzis, ‘Eikonomia: Notes on Economy and the Labor of Art’, *e-flux*, no. 35, as found at: <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/eikonomia-notes-on-economy-and-the-labor-of-art/>, (accessed 27.07.2016).

³³ In *Contemporary’s* special issue on curatorship Isabel Stevens provides a substantive list of eighty official such exhibitions to have been held around the globe between 2005 and 2006 alone. Artists and curators now exemplify the kind of ‘global tourists’ or ‘jet-set flaneurs’, as Paul O’Neill puts it, ridiculed with exhibitions like ‘Blown Away: Sixth International Caribbean Biennial’ (1999), where a selection of artists was invited and an international project was advertised, marketed, and mediated through standard art and media channels, but on arrival at St Kits in the West Indies, the artists and curators enjoyed a holiday together with no exhibition actually taking place. Afterword they produced a glossy, full-colour catalog with holiday snaps, texts, and statements representing the experience. Thus, as O’Neill argues, the ‘Caribbean Biennial’ could also be seen as a self-reflexive critique of the nomadic curator, increasingly responsible for seeking the new in far-off places’, hinting towards the cultural worker’s responsibility in supporting a vision of globalism and contemporaneity that does not necessarily apply to non-Western cultures, times and places.

Isabel Stevens, ‘Its So Two Years Ago’, *Contemporary* 21, no 7, 2005, pp. 22-32.

Paul O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture*, Cambridge, London, MIT Press, 2012, p. 74.

³⁴ Gregory Sholette and Oliver Ressler, *It’s The Political Economy, Stupid: The Global Financial Crisis in Art and Theory*, London, Pluto Press, 2013, p. 12.

by many artists that view the monetisation and curation of contemporary art as symptomatic of increasing global divisions of class, wealth and privilege, and thus seek to develop alternative models of distribution and production of their work, less dependent on the legitimising infrastructure of this exclusive world of the 'contemporary'.

Along these lines, the interest in the situational ability of collaborative processes to generate new insight and new forms of knowledge, along with a commitment to duration rather than issues of perception and aesthetic representation has also come to inform this new generation of avant-garde artists seeking to re-articulate aesthetic autonomy. Some of the artists working with relational models of participation have developed their practice around the creative facilitation of dialogue among diverse communities. Concerned with provoking social exchanges not amongst aesthetic objects and their viewers or among viewers themselves, but instead relational artists use dialogue as a generative process that can help one speak beyond the limits of fixed identities, official discourse and the perceived inevitability of party politics. Testing and expanding models of communication, beyond the gallery walls, linking intersubjective experiences of relational models with social or political activism, as the specific identity of art is challenged and transformed in contact with other adjacent cultural practices. As we have moved from institutional critique, to curated autonomies and orchestrations of 'dialogic encounters', so is relational, participatory and socially engaging art now called upon to contribute and challenge the formal practices that build the relational 'social bond', moving from representations and appropriations of social relations towards an aesthetics of organising, or as sound artist activist collective Ultra-red puts it, towards a conceptualisation of 'organising as a *priori* aesthetic'.³⁵

³⁵ Ultra-red, *Mission Statement*, 2000, as found at: <http://www.ultrared.org/mission.html>, (accessed 27.07.2016).

Situating the Relational within Contemporary Praxis.

Before I draw my own critique of Bourriaud's manifesto for relational art that is supposed to confront capitalist economies by building new 'social interstices' however, it might be helpful here to first present some contemporary examples of artistic practices that attempt to address such critical issues emerging from the praxis of relational exchanges, in action. This list of artistic examples serves here more as a provocation towards the more in depth analysis of Bourriaud's thesis that follows, hinting towards a number of specific features that might further expose the limits of the relational form, and where I will be considering in practice how this form relates to or opposes the value form, the form of social relations it produces and the forms of capitalist exchange it resists. I present thus here some of today's socially engaged projects that move beyond the -isms of a movement and instead attempt to investigate the kind of relations produced within this discourse, the significance in naming such practices according to their specificities and last but not least practices that question whether we want art to be the place of social change in the first place.

These contemporary practices raise questions that have a broader cultural and political resonance, for example: In the struggle over representational power, how do we form collective or communal identities without victimising or 'speaking on behalf of' those who are excluded from them? Is it possible to create a cross-cultural community without sacrificing the unique identities of individual persons? What does it mean for the artist to give up on his own unique way of self-expression for the facilitation of inter-subjective engagement? What does it mean to take the claim that such facilitations are works of art seriously?

Example 1: The question of Community.

For over two years, in Belfast, Northern Ireland (2000-2002), a team of photographers, film makers and artists worked with a group of bus workers to develop together the ROUTES project: an oral history, audio arts project-archive, a photographic exhibition, educational resource, performance, videos and film installation, as well as a travelling exhibition based on the bus workers' 'contribution to the cause of peace and community in Northern Ireland'.³⁶ At the centre of the project was an extended process of *listening* and documenting, in which the drivers were encouraged to recount their experiences over the past thirty years, specifically in relationship to 'sectarianism and intimidation in the workplace'.³⁷

The bus workers possessed a unique perspective in the city's 'sectarian divide', as the Transport and General Workers Union had decided in 1970 that all drivers would drive all routes in the city regardless of their religious or political affiliation. Public transportation was thus one of the few areas of social life in Belfast in which Protestants and Catholics continued to work together on a daily basis. This decision was made all the more courageous by the fact that drivers operate at key interconnecting areas of the city's neighbourhoods. As a result, the buses were frequent targets of hijacking, stoning, and bombing (thirteen drivers have been killed and 1,400 buses destroyed since the early 1970s).³⁸ 'I'm not a Catholic, I'm not a Protestant. I'm a bus driver' is how one worker described it.³⁹

Through the facilitation of these arts organisations and their unions, the drivers created a provisional community, outside the restrictions of their particular religious identity, and in order to re-direct their accumulated

³⁶ For more on this see: http://www.littoral.org.uk/project_routes.htm, (accessed 25.05.2015).

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Kester, *ibid*: 7.

³⁹ Ibid.

knowledge and experience towards present day's struggles. Grant Kester sums it up:

When sectarian differences did arise, the drivers and shop stewards developed their own internal mediation techniques to resolve them. These techniques represent a valuable, but unrecognised, *cultural practice* oriented toward the negotiation of a difference.⁴⁰

Unlike 'site-specific', this new 'community-specific' art thus positions 'relationality' within the context of real everyday struggle. It invokes a very diverse community, that moves beyond the sharing of an assumed common identity and moves closer to the production of a social exchange of difference. The significance of community here belies the difference between the aesthetics of organising around urgent social issues, and the representation of these relations as contemplative models of relational exchanges. Instead of providing models of imaginary community relations thus this project attempted to attend to the splitting of the assumed unifying 'social bond', moving closer to the participants' lives, the urgent issues of the day, and the cultural practices of the community's organising instead.⁴¹

Example 2: The question of Accountability.

After a residency invitation from the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London in autumn 2010, the Carrot Workers (CW) collective decided to put out an open call for other individuals and collectives to join them in their artistic residency, working together to investigate the many facets of 'precarity'. 'Precarity' refers here to the insecurity, vulnerability, and instability of labour conditions affecting an individual's life. Using forum

⁴⁰ Kester describes this as 'new genre public art', distinguishing it from public art of the past, which consists mainly of sculptures and installations in public spaces.

Kester, *ibid*: 8 [my emphasis].

⁴¹ For a more detailed analysis of a practice that attends to the assumed unifying 'social bond' and the way this can become part of cultural practice, see my chapter on sound artist activist collective, as well as my ten theses in the last chapter.

theatre exercises and co-counselling techniques, but also through film and video materials they researched for months the issues at hand. As their final exhibition they decided to host a *People's Tribunal* as a public space where voices of the implicated could be witnessed, by listening to the stories, sounds and images of the precarious themselves. Their thematic investigations centred around topics like: the underpaid and unpaid, institutionalised 'precarity', immigration and affect. The Precarious Workers Brigade (PWP) was born out of this first residency, in order to continue their analysis of the effect of research funding cuts, privatisation of culture, arts and higher education sectors in the UK, and with the purpose of developing tactics, strategies, formats, practices and knowledges for putting an end to 'precarity'.⁴² The Carrot Workers practice exemplifies here perhaps a critique of 'relational autonomy', by not only investigating the precarious nature of relational models of exchange, but also by activating those same spaces, as spaces for dialogue between organising and art, where the organisers remain accountable to the constituencies they work with instead of their institutional representations.

Example 3: The question of Transversality.

The *New World Academy* was founded by Dutch visual artist and writer Jonas Staal and BAK (Base for Contemporary Art, Utrecht) in 2013, with an open invitation to stateless political organisations to share with artists and students their views on the role of art and culture in political struggles.⁴³ Together, they 'develop collaborative projects that question and challenge the various frameworks of justice and existing models of representation'.⁴⁴ According to their manifesto in fact *New World Academy* 'proposes new critical alliances between art and progressive politics as a way to confront the democratic deficit in our current politics, economy, and

⁴² <http://dismagazine.com/discussion/21416/tools-for-collective-action-precarity-the-peoples-tribunal/>, (accessed 13.03.2014).

⁴³ For more on this see official website: <http://newworldsummit.eu/about/>, (accessed 13.03.2014).

⁴⁴ Ibid.

culture'.⁴⁵ The academy is part of Staal's larger long-term project called *The New World Summit* (2012-today), an artistic and political organisation dedicated to provide an 'alternative parliament' to organisations that currently find themselves excluded from democracy.⁴⁶



New World Summit (Jonas Staal, 2014, Brussels).

For last year's *New World Academy #5: Stateless Democracy (2015)*, the Kurdish Women's Movement itineraries were examined by poets, journalists, artists, anthropologists, sociologists, filmmakers and writers together with representatives and spokespeople of the movement itself, as well as the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) leader and founder. Together with a diverse group of students from art and philosophy courses, as well as theorists, writers and human rights activists, they discussed the meaning of statelessness, the possible alternatives to the state, turning to question the patriarchal and capitalist nature of the very concept of the nation-state itself.⁴⁷ In collaboration with the National Democratic Movement of the Philippines participants studied concepts like 'people's culture' with the use of emancipatory drama techniques used in mass protests and mock-trials of the Filipino State.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ <http://newworldsummit.eu/locations/rojava/>, (accessed 13.03.2014).

⁴⁸ Ibid.

The International Pirate Parties also discussed with participants the changing notions of culture and politics in the age of the internet. The internet is pivotal in the discourse of *Relational Aesthetics*, as the emergence of new communication and information technologies has come to 'shape and effect our social relations'.⁴⁹ Even though Bourriaud sees technology as a novel emancipatory social form however, Jonas Staal's use of the latter seems to move beyond conviviality and towards a critique of the ideological framework that supports the 'value form of participation' in these technologically facilitated relational networks, in the first place. Staal organises transversal dialogues between different constituencies who connect institutional representatives with members of grass roots social movements, and in a way offers his sophisticated information and communicative tools for the benefit of the communities behind those movements.

Example 4: The question of Institutional Critique.

With his *Ideological Guide to the Venice Biennale* (2013), an app you can download on your smartphone that makes available information on the political, economical and ideological framework of all the national pavilions of the Biennale, Jonas Staal managed to reveal the history of transnational alliances by which states promote political, economic and military interests, reminiscent of former colonial empires.⁵⁰ Like a virtual tour of the 'geopolitical chessboard that goes well beyond art', the ninety national exhibitions are still modelled after the world fair of 1895, with The United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Spain holding the key positions in the 'Giardini' while Iraq, Mexico, Macedonia occupy the peripheral and more obscure parts of Venice. Staal also provided answers around the way the organisation of the pavilions has been decided upon, i.e. the reasons why

⁴⁹ See in particular Bourriaud's subsequent book Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction: Culture as Screen Play: How Art Programmes the World*, New York, Lukas & Sternberg, 2002.

⁵⁰ <http://venicebiennale2013.ideologicalguide.com>, (accessed 13.03.2014).

a particular artist is chosen to represent this country this year, or even why a particular curator has been appointed. How and with what kind of money has each exhibition been funded on a national level, as well as how the latter relates to the current social and economic state of that country. In his deliberate effort to problematise artistic and creative agency, Staal emphasises the political economy of the relations behind many of the relational artworks exhibited at the Biennale, their assumed 'open' and 'relational' qualities, as well as the way they *inhabit* their value form. Last but not least, through this work, Staal also raises questions about the curator's responsibility in the art world of 'social exchange'.

Example 5: The question of Subjectivity.

Tania Bruguera's *Immigrant Movement International (2010-5)*, presented by *Creative Time* and the Queens Museum of Art, is a 'long term artist initiated socio-political movement'.⁵¹ Bruguera, a Cuban installation and performance artist spent a year (2014-5) operating a community space in the neighbourhood of Queens, engaging both local and international communities around the questions of migration. Collaborating with social services, migration organisations and their elected officials, as well as artists and researchers focused on migration, *Immigrant Movement International* explored 'who is defined as an immigrant and the values they share, focusing on the larger question of what it means to be a citizen of the world'.⁵² Bruguera exemplifies here perhaps, the artist's role as a co-researcher, embodying criticality by working in parallel with the 'other' in order to go beyond models of sociability and inter-subjective relationality, and towards a re-invention of subjectivity, working in a dialectical relation with the individuals and groups concerned.

⁵¹ For more on this see artist's official website, as found at <http://www.taniabruquera.com/cms/486-0-Immigrant+Movement+International.htm>, (accessed 13.07.2016).

⁵² Ibid.



'La Escuelita de Pensamiento Comunitario Tránsito Amaguaña', *Immigrant Movement International*, Courtesy of the Queens Museum.

Example 6: The question of 'militant research'.

The Silent University is 'an autonomous knowledge exchange platform run by refugees, asylum seekers and migrants'.⁵³ Led by a group of lecturers, consultants and research fellows, and initiated by Turkish artist Ahmet Ogut, the *Silent University* aims to address and reactivate the knowledge of the participants and make the exchange process mutually beneficial by inventing alternative currencies, in place of money or free voluntary service.⁵⁴ Instead of producing an exhibition, or a performance, this artist decided to use his skills and knowledge for the activation of pedagogic spaces that imagine alternative modes of knowledge production. Ogut re-directs art's educational value back to the community, bringing the movement and the education work in tandem, so that the relational surplus knowledge gets redistributed back to those who produced it.

Example 7: The question of 'dialogue'.

Back in 1993, Suzanne Lacy, a pioneer of socially engaging art, curated an ambitious project called *The Roof is on Fire*, consisting of a series of dialogues, collective investigations, analyses and actions on the problems

⁵³ <http://thesilentuniversity.org>, (accessed 13.03.2014).

⁵⁴ For more on this see artist's official website, as found at <http://thesilentuniversity.org>, (accessed 13.07.2016).

faced by young people of colour in Oakland, California. By bringing together students, community activists as well as the police, the project attempted to tackle questions that the students raised around their education, sexuality, family, drugs and culture more generally. The final presentation of the project involved 220 public high school students participating in unedited and unscripted conversations on: racial profiling, media stereotypes, underfunded public schools, as well as their future, as they sat in 100 cars parked on a rooftop garage, with over 100 residents of Oakland listening in.⁵⁵

After this first encounter, and over the course of two years, Lacy and her collaborators worked weekly with teachers and students to create a program of media literacy, as well as to develop a curriculum on 'teen identity and politics'. As Grant Kester explains, in *Conversation Pieces*, prior to this event, the image of young people of Oakland had been dominated by news coverage of a riot featuring a teenager kicking in a plate glass window.⁵⁶ As many of the youths involved in the project identified conflicts with the police as a major concern of their everyday lives, Lacy and her collaborators then created a series of six weekly dialogues between young people and police officers, laying the ground for a similar performance at the same parking garage for the police and youths of colour to discuss their respective assumptions and tensions that surround their everyday typical interactions.

Even though this project never really solved the problem of racial profiling, race-related acts of violence, and police brutality in the States, as recent extrajudicial killings of black people by police, and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement testify, nevertheless it still addressed the need for

⁵⁵ For more on this see artist's official website as found at: <http://www.suzannelacy.com/the-oakland-projects/>, (accessed 25.05.2015).

There is also a video documentation that was aired as a one-hour documentary by the local NBC, local news and national CNN, as found at: <https://vimeo.com/39865636>, (accessed 13.07.2016).

⁵⁶ Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2004, pp. 1-16.

the development of a critical consciousness, for members of the community to engage in an intersubjective transversal dialogue that allows a new set of conversations to happen. The project investigated the assumptions that persist beneath the American dream of 'equal opportunities' in a brutally unequal society, and acted upon the frames and determinations of our individual interactions and experiences as citizens. Recognitions that can break the momentum that laws don't seem to be able to alter. Taking abstract relations of social exchange (like those found in institutions, i.e. the classroom or the museum) into a concrete co-investigation of those relations, in order to explore with the constituents if there is a shared stake in this dialogic exchange in the first place.



The Roof is On Fire, Suzanne Lacy, 1994



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Relational as form

If, as Serge Danay writes, “all form is a face looking at us” what does a form become when it is plunged into the dimension of dialogue? What is a form that is essentially relational? ⁵⁷

When dealing with the art that privileges social relations over objects Bourriaud argues for a theory of a relational form, where:

Unlike an object that is closed in on itself by the intervention of a style and a signature, present-day art, shows that form only exists in the encounter and in the dynamic relationship enjoyed by an artistic proposition with other forms, artistic or otherwise.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Serge Denay in Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, France, Les Presses du Réel, 2002, p. 21.

⁵⁸ Bourriaud, Nicolas (2002), *Relational Aesthetics*, Les Presses du Réel, France, p. 21

Art is thus no longer about objects but about relations. Importantly these relations consist of 'social relations'. The art work no longer acts as an end in itself but instead materialises relations to the world. The art exhibition, according to Bourriaud, is thus seen as a 'state of encounter' that facilitates intimacy and proximity, allowing for something other than a purely aesthetic experience. This encounter is meant to transcend the demand that the viewer thinks about the 'art' and instead encourages dialogues with potential alternative worlds, or possible inter-human relations of the future. As Bourriaud explains:

[These installations] negotiate open relationships with the viewer, which are not resolved beforehand. This latter thus wavers between the status of passive consumer and the status of witness, associate, customer, guest, co-producer, and protagonist [...] we know that attitudes become forms, and we should now realise that forms prompt *models of sociability*.⁵⁹

So that the artwork is no longer about the compositional unity or perhaps the syntax of its elementary parts, but instead it is about the work's ability to enunciate dialogic and participatory encounters with the viewer. This 'rendez-vous' as Bourriaud characteristically puts it, is therefore about 'forms' or mostly about 'formations' that include 'actions', for 'dialogues' and 'encounters'. A space where artists and curators organise a set up of collaborative exchanges and participatory 'contracts', to be performed or re-enacted by the participants. Bourriaud thus proposes as artworks not the objects, but the very models of these very particular 'inter-subjective proximities' orchestrated by artists and curators alike.⁶⁰ These 'contracts' of new art and new models of sociability are in fact offered to the viewer as 'transitive', 'dynamic' and 'flexible'. Culture producers function here as creators and explorers of participatory 'relational' schemes, whose projects eventually form several different relational 'microterritories' in the depth of

⁵⁹ Ibid, [my emphasis].

⁶⁰ Ibid.

the contemporary 'socius'.⁶¹ Unlike an object of modernist aesthetics referring to a specific style or formal content, 'relational' art, on the contrary, only exists in the formal 'model of sociability', or an object produced out of this sociability.⁶²

'Form only assumes its texture (and only acquires real existence) when it introduces human interactions'.⁶³ The artist invents a relational dialogue between consciousnesses, as in an intersubjective 'field' formed by the audience, within the particular conditions of each encounter. Isn't this the predicament for most contemporary art today? Where all meaning comes down to different kinds of reception by the audience: performative interaction of a context slowly taking over critical interpretative tools? The work's qualities serving perhaps for a better social setting for the reception of the art, as the potential 'participant' performs the work's (predetermined) context anew in the here and now of each encounter? Bourriaud in fact argues for a 'relationist' theory of art where 'inter-subjectivity does not only represent the social setting for the reception of art, which is its 'environment' (its 'field'), but paradoxically also becomes the quintessence of artistic practice'.⁶⁴

Where an artwork no longer needs to embody conviction in its form, but instead enunciate all kinds of different interests from different beholders, which by extension of course opens up new niche areas of interests for the ways art is perceived. Art's *value* now resides not in the workings of the art itself, but more in the way it enunciates perceptions, i.e., the way it is perceived, and thus the way it is valued. For participatory art that assumes political effects, thus, the 'value form of participation' now takes on another meaning altogether, where the aesthetics of participation have gone from

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid: 22.

mode of addressing an audience to another ‘representation of experience’ and eventually to representation as experience’.⁶⁵

If we take into account how this current emphasis on relational processes over production, or perhaps more accurately, as Claire Bishop puts it in *Artificial Hells*, ‘on social process as product’ (hence the claim of a ‘*social turn*’), is justified ‘as oppositional to capitalism’s predilection for the contrary’, then we inevitably arrive at a paradox.⁶⁶ Where on the one hand, for many artists and theorists, autonomous art ‘proper’ is out of fashion, because art should no longer be about the subjective self-expressions of an individual artist, but art is now supposed to serve a purpose, and do something to change the world, via providing models of democratic participation, via ‘relational aesthetics’ for example. And on the other, where by doing that, art serves the institution’s need for social validation, eventually appropriating a practice of political engagement in accordance with the institutions’ pre-established understanding of democratic equalities ‘of aesthetic taste’ [and beyond], in the first place.⁶⁷

Relational art embodies these contradictions in its very own form. Contradictions introduced when dominant value systems, like those of the museum, subordinate the emergent. Artistic labour and the value of taking part, are determined here as a particular instance of abstracted [economic] relations itself. In a time where art’s role has shifted to a more embedded context in society, whilst still maintaining the premise as a space for

⁶⁵ Tim Griffin speaking as a response to ‘Why call it art? The Aesthetics of Participation: Pablo Helguera’, found at: <http://www.queensmuseum.org/blog/?p=4427> , (accessed 24/05/2013).

⁶⁶ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, London, Verso, 2012, pp. 11-40.

⁶⁷ Participatory art’s embodiment of this paradox becomes even more obvious when looking at contemporary art’s insistence on pluralism, and this ‘surplus of possible images’ as Boris Groys puts it, that contemporary art tends to refer to, that does not correspond or even have a specific appeal to any specific individual, high or marginal taste, or even the taste of the masses, but instead somehow addresses a surplus of unwanted images.

Boris Groys, *Art Power*, Massachusetts, London, MIT Press, 2008, p. 2.

independent reflexion, where does this leave valuation, and what means do we have for determining what we mean by 'value', and of course, last but not least, 'who' is this value for?⁶⁸

One key text here is Claire Bishop's seminal essay 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents' published in *Artforum* in 2006.⁶⁹ Bishop's in-depth theoretical investigation of the origins and historical development of social practices over the years, challenges such practices' ambitions in the political, by scrutinising their methodologies, but also their emancipatory potential. One of her key arguments is that any kind of perceptual re-education lead by an artist, organiser or curator that aims to activate and expand the subject's perception always already involves a kind of 'banal and earnest didacticism', that keeps the ongoing paradox of participation alive.⁷⁰ Where the viewer must 'complete' the work 'correctly' in order for participation to have any power as an activation device.

Like organising a participation in something where it is possible to participate, without a choice not to participate; our participation always already organised for us-like an organised passivity/ activity, that replicates capitalist structures –a highly 'ideologised' convention of a naive 'pseudo-

⁶⁸ Hence the contemporary tendency by artists to provoke traditional understanding of 'good value', 'value added', or 'surplus value', by using a framework that suggests a certain direction and pay-off, and then by intersecting that practice's discourse with that of another (at times even another discipline altogether). Artists nowadays seek to deny value, by achieving failure, in an attempt not to match pre-conceived 'relational' expectations.

⁶⁹ Claire Bishop, 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents', *Artforum*, February, 2006, pp. 88-9

⁷⁰ The very idea of 'making' someone participate undermines the subject's own capacities in the first place, as if the audience needs to complete the artist's work appropriately by fulfilling the artist's set of required actions. Claire Bishop mentions GRAV's Labyrinth (1963), for example, a series of twenty environmental experiences that was designed to trigger 'nine different categories of spectatorship', including 'perception as it is today', 'contemplation', 'visual activation', 'active involuntary participation', 'voluntary participation' and 'active spectatorship'. Like most participatory art in the 1960s, as Bishop argues, this project was conceived in 'universalist terms, as a classless (male) subject capable of returning to perception with an "innocent eye"'. Despite its phenomenal openness however, the project still involved a range of 'prescribed responses' that go hand in hand with an insistence on 'perceptual reeducation'.

Ibid.

participation'.⁷¹ Where 'consensual collaboration' is valued more than artistic merit, mastery, and individualism, most often regardless of what the artist's intentions were, what the project originally set out to do, or most importantly what it actually achieved. This reduced autonomy of the artist in the field of participatory practices often results in further problematising of the autonomy of art in general. In this model for social exchange the curator acts as the legislator of a certain set of illusory options that replicate the systematised 'information control' exercised over us on a daily basis.⁷²

Claire Bishop's historical overview of such 'social practices' enunciative potential, from Futurists and Dada to the Situationists, Happenings and the Artists Placement Group (APG) to more recent works like those of Tania Bruguera, Thomas Hirschhorn and Paul Chan, in fact reveals the insufficiencies involved here, especially when such works are judged by ethical criteria. Bishop explains:

Instead of turning to appropriately social practices as points of comparison, the tendency is always to compare artists' projects with other artists on the basis of ethical one-upmanship— the degree to which artists supply a good or bad model of collaboration— and to criticise them for any hint of potential

⁷¹ Bishop, *ibid.*

⁷² This system of 'information control' is of particular concern to us today, as according to Deleuze, we are now entering a society, that can be called 'a society of control', a term put forth by William S Burroughs. A new type of society that is very different from Foucault's disciplinary societies and their accumulation of structures of confinement, like prisons, schools, hospitals, and in our case museums. These structures, according to Deleuze, are no longer necessary, as they are already sites of permanent discussion. Thus the 'curing' treatment is spread out outside the museum, to the streets, to the home. Where people can take part infinitely and 'freely' without being at all confined yet while still being perfectly controlled. Deleuze writes: 'No counter-information ever disturbed Hitler. Except in one case. What was that case? And here lies the importance. The only response would be that counter-information only effectively becomes useful when it is—and it is this by nature—or when it becomes an act of resistance. And the act of resistance is neither information nor counter-information. Counter-information is effective only when it becomes an act of resistance'.

Gilles Deleuze, 'Having an Idea in Cinema: On the Cinema of Straub and Huilliet' in Kayfman, E. and Jon Heller, K. (eds.), *Deleuze & Guattari: New Mappings in Politics, Philosophy and Culture*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1998, p. 18.

exploitation that fails to 'fully' represent their subjects' (as if such a thing were possible).⁷³

If one were to follow Bishop's argument on practices of 'pseudo-participation', one could argue by extension that partaking in the 'relational' usually stems out of a feeling of 'social obligation', i.e. the drive here being that of guilt rather than genuine curiosity.⁷⁴ Hence we arrive at the famous *ethical turn* in contemporary thought, where participatory practices today are increasingly submitted to moral judgement bearing on the validity of their principles and the effects of their practices.

Bourriaud's argument in relation to the ethics of the relational form refers poignantly to Emmanuel Levinas' formula, for whom the face represents the sign of ethical taboo.⁷⁵ The face argues Levinas is that which 'orders me to serve the other', 'what forbids me to kill'.⁷⁶ So that, any inter-subjective relation proceeds by way of the face, which in turn symbolises the responsibility we have towards others. 'The bond with others is only made as responsibility', writes Levinas, hinting again to Bishop's argument on 'social obligation', and the question of guilt. The problem being here whether the image that Daney argues for when he writes '*all form is a face looking at us*', is always as loaded with ethical responsibility, or whether we can imagine a dialogue that escapes this sense of a burden, consensus, social obligation, guilt and 'sympathy', and is driven instead by the impossible: the genuine desire and curiosity towards that which limits the self, in the first place. Bourriaud argues:

⁷³ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, *ibid*: 80-93.

⁷⁴ See for instance Bishop's analysis of Argentinian art of the 1960s, under the influence of Oscar Masotta, and the western interest in this.

ibid: 105-28.

⁷⁵ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, *ibid*: 22.

⁷⁶ Emmanuel Levinas in Bourriaud, *ibid*: 22.

For Daney the image is not “immoral” when it puts us “in the place where we were not, when it ‘takes the place of another’”. [...] He maintains that *form is nothing other than the representation of desire*. Producing a form is to invent possible encounters, receiving a form is to create the conditions for an exchange, the way you return a service in a game of tennis. If we nudge Daney’s reasoning a bit further, form is the representative of desire in the image. It is the horizon based on which the image may have a meaning, by pointing to a desired world, which the beholder thus becomes capable of discussing, and based on which his own desire can rebound.⁷⁷

This ‘face to face’ encounter that Levinas describes as the ethics of intersubjective experience, derives here not from some transcendental subjectivity but from a given participatory or as Grant Kester – the

⁷⁷ Bourriaud, *ibid*: 22.

I can’t help but think of my first ever exhibition, here, curated by David Burrows, together with a group of fellow graduates from Goldsmiths University of London (2009). Our intention was to work as a group, investigating notions of ‘inter-subjectivity’, ‘taking-part by doing nothing’, ‘temporary autonomous zones’, and ‘pirate utopias’, all anchored with our common obsession with bees, beehives and swarming. Our relational welcoming ‘free’ space’ however was soon occupied by a group of participants who had a completely different understanding of the ‘ethics of the relational’, ‘tolerance’ and ‘democratic participation’. ‘Our bundle of relations with the world, giving rise to other relations’ which did not necessarily fit our ‘pirate’ sense of a-signifying machines. Eventually bringing our ‘experiment in alternative models of participation’ to a total crisis that the curator now had to manage and resolve by ‘administering the crisis’; eventually putting an end to our individual-collective experiment altogether. The exhibition ended up being more of an orchestrated presentation of individual works followed by a publication that showcased a kind of proof for our ‘pool of signifiers’ as a map of our ‘archipelago of thoughts’. This exemplifies in turn the problems created for the curator as well (as the manager of the relational), when the aesthetics of social practices and the organising structures behind them, focus on the kinds of participation they suggest, and the ethics of facilitating such participations. My argument here is that processes of organising, as in the relations of people coming together, and as these connections slip and slide, are *a priori* aesthetic. A more detailed analysis of this argument follows in the chapter 5.

advocate of dialogical aesthetics – eloquently puts it from a ‘dialogical situation in all its concrete historicity and individuality’.⁷⁸ Levinas explains:

But in knowledge there also appears the notion of an intellectual activity or of a reasoning will—a way of doing something which consists precisely of thinking through knowing, of seizing something and making it one’s own, of reducing presence and representing the difference of being, an activity which appropriates and grasps the otherness of the known. ⁷⁹

Our desire to interact (in an ethical manner) not as an abstract sense of duty but due to our direct positioning in the ‘here and now’ experience, the ‘lived’ time and place of our affective and meaningful relationship with concrete others.⁸⁰ Bourriaud’s ‘harmonistic conception’ of the social inevitably coming ‘face to face’ with the agonistic conceptions of political communities, who in this process of empathetic identification and critical analysis, insist on preserving that ‘irreducible element in human contact’ that resists co-optation by more general or abstract conceptual powers. To put it simply, empathetic identification is a necessary component of dialogical practices, of course, but empathy can also slide into sympathy, as is very often used to deny the real social differences and antagonisms

⁷⁸ Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2004, p. 118.

To put it in Lacanian terms, the relational form not only represents our desire to know, as the desire of the Other, but becomes the very substance of this relationship, providing the habitat (time/space) for such a dialogue to take place in the first place. Form coming about from a meeting between the imaginary and the symbolic.

⁷⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Ethics as First Philosophy’ in Hand, S. (ed.), *The Levinas Reader*, Oxford, England, Blackwell, 1989, p. 76.

⁸⁰ Kester, *ibid*: 118-9.

The broader philosophical implications of this approach are discussed further by Jeffrey Nealon in *Alterity Politics: Ethics and Performative Subjectivity* (1998) where Nealon examines the constitution of subjectivity in terms of communicative interactions, focusing on Mikhail Bakhtin’s model of ‘dialogical experience’ and Emmanuel Levinas’s concept of ‘responsibility’.

Jeffrey Nealon, *Alterity Politics: Ethics and Performative Subjectivity*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1998.

that exist between artists and their collaborators or the artist naively (or arrogantly) adapting a position of authority to speak on behalf of a disenfranchised other.⁸¹ The social relations supposed here by Bourriaud and the momentary freedom from capitalist exchange they may offer, manage to create contradictions that draw attention to the social constitution of capitalist exchange itself. Bourriaud's claim for an art that confronts service economies of informational capitalism and his manifesto for a radicalisation of social exchange against fetishism in fact often produces the very error that Karl Marx called 'fetishism' in the first place, in this case more specifically 'the fetishism of the social'. Marx writes:

... to find an analogy [to the fetishism of commodities] we must take flight into the misty realm of religion. There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands.⁸²

Yet, it is nonetheless due to Bourriaud's claims for the enunciative potentials of the 'art of social exchange', that his theory has attracted so much attention as a new conception of art's relation to radical and emancipatory politics. For all the reasoned reservations about the 'naive' and 'dogmatic' political moralism of current 'curatorial solidarity' practices however, their intentions and effects on art activists are nonetheless palpable. Many of today's artists and curators want to engage with a wider general audience and feel the need to respond to urgent social issues. They feel the need to comment and criticise, through provocation, through the modification of the conditions of environment, by visual aggression, by a direct appeal to active participation, by playing a game, or by creating an unexpected encounter.

⁸¹ Kester, *ibid*: 150

⁸² Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol.1, London, Penguin, 1867/1990, pp.171-2.

If the whole point of contemporary art today being 'relational' or 'socially engaging' is to exert a direct influence on the participant's behaviour and in a way perhaps to replace the work of art or performance with a situation that facilitates the spectator's 'taking part', and meeting with the other, then of course the question of ethical and moral standards of participation is useful. The problem for me however, is that there is no good conscience to be had in art institutions altogether, as art institutions are always already part of the capitalist machine of information production, distribution and circulation. Conscience or ethics, might not exactly be the issue here. It is also not an issue of emphasis on conviviality rather than antagonism. As Stewart Martin argues, commenting on the most prominent critics' approach to their analysis of *Relational Aesthetics*, like Claire Bishop, Liam Gallic and Grant Kester:

'By proposing antagonism as simply an alternative form of freedom or democracy only reproduces the problem. In any case, the issue is not just the internal social relations of art, but how it relates to capitalist exchange as, supposedly, something outside it'.⁸³

The criticism of Bourriaud's manifesto to date has questioned the assumed critical value of its 'open' and 'relational' qualities, as well as 'the irreducibility of judgements of form to ethics' in relational art.⁸⁴ However what is absent is 'criticism of [...] a critique of the political economy of social exchange that is implicitly proposed by *Relational Aesthetics*'.⁸⁵

⁸³ Martin, *ibid*: 378.

⁸⁴ Stewart Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', *Third Text*, Routledge, New York, London, vol. 21, issue 4, 2007, p. 370.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*.

2. THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE ART OF SOCIAL EXCHANGE.

If *Relational Aesthetics* is pre-eminently a theory of art as a form of social exchange, then the crucial question that must follow in order to consider its relation (as resistance) to commodification is: how does relational art's form of social exchange relate to the form of capitalist exchange? and by extension, how does relational art's form resist the value form?¹ Bourriaud certainly acknowledges these questions, by recognising the affinity of the 'social exchange' in art with the 'exchange-value' of commerce, but insists that these forms of exchange are essentially distinct. His ambition, of course, is for art to have a critical relation to capitalist culture, defined by its resistance to commerce and 'exchange-value', and by implication, its 'struggle with subjection to the value form', as Stewart Martin puts it in his critique of *Relational Aesthetics*.² However, the exact character of this 'struggle to subjection to the value form' is never really determined here. Bourriaud describes art's resistance to, or departure from, capitalist exchange forms as achieved simply by virtue of a general 'antipathy' of its 'own economy' from the 'general economy'.³ The relational artwork, according to Bourriaud offers an alternative to our mass mediated world of commodified relationships, 'alternatives for living' in a transition between what is 'outside of capitalism' and our otherwise commodified existence.⁴ At one point, Bourriaud suggests that what is at stake in art's social exchange is 'an exchange whose form is defined by that of the object itself, before being so defined by definitions foreign to it'.⁵ Bourriaud writes:

¹ Stewart Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', *Third Text*, Routledge, New York, London, vol. 21, issue 4, 2007, p. 376.

² Ibid.

³ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, France, Les Presses du Réel, 2002, p. 42.

⁴ Bourriaud's understanding of 'social relations' is partly informed by Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1967) where the spectacle is not only the collection of images but in fact the very relation amongst people, as this is mediated by the images. Debord's claims of a social conditioning and alienation of the self into a commodity form resonating with contemporary struggles for subjection, where people's desires are being commodified and sold back to them as packaged goods.

Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, New York, Zone Books, 1967/2006, p. 12.

⁵ Bourriaud, *ibid.*

[The work of art] is devoted [...] right away, to the world of exchange and communication, the world of “commerce”, in both meanings of the term. What all goods have in common is the fact that they have a value, that is, a common substance that permits their exchange. This substance, according to Marx, is the “amount of abstract labour” used to produce this item. It is represented by a sum of money, which is the “abstract general equivalent” of all goods between them. It has been said of art, and Marx was the first, that it represents the “absolute merchandise”, because it is the actual image of [...] value. But what exactly are we talking about? About the art object, not about artistic practice, about the work as it is assumed by the general economy, and not its own economy. Art represents a barter activity that cannot be regulated by any currency, or any “common substance”. It is the division of meaning in the wild state – an exchange whose form is defined by that of the object itself, before being so defined by definitions foreign to it. The artist’s practice, and his behaviour as producer, determines the relationship that will be struck up with his work. *In other words, what he produces, first and foremost, is relations between people and the world, by way of aesthetic objects.*⁶

However, as Stewart Martin rightly points out this seems to merely inflect the general argument that ‘the distinction of the social exchange of *art* from the social exchange of *value* is the dissolution, or at least subordination, of relations to objects to “relations between people”’.⁷ This makes good sense if we think of it as a metathesis of Marx’s own description of commodity fetishism, which is presumably Bourriaud’s

⁶ Bourriaud, *ibid*: 42 [my emphasis].

⁷ Martin, *ibid*: 376.

intention.⁸ In Marx's account of commodification, we have an inversion of the dialectic between subject and object (persons and things), where:

the social relations between their [the producers'] private labourers appear as what they are, i.e. they do not appear as direct social relations between persons in their work, but rather as material relations between persons, and social relations between things.⁹

So, in Marxian terms, and in accordance with Stewart Martin's analysis, we can understand *Relational Aesthetics* as arguing that relational artworks involve a refusal of commodity fetishism: a reassertion of social relations between 'persons' against social relations between commodities. Which is, of course, the purpose of most avant-garde, anti-objective, and 'anti-art' art in a way. How are we to understand this refusal of commodity fetishism however, without a recognition of the contradiction internal to the commodity form? Without a recognition of relational art's double nature, with its autonomy conceived as a fetish, in Marx's sense, as this in turn obscures or refuses to be 'sympathetic', as Bourriaud says, with its own social determination?

The issue here is whether Bourriaud's theory of relational aesthetics has any antidote to the compensatory function of art within capitalist culture, namely, the extent to which art is allowed to be an exception within capitalist exchange in order to provide models of de-alienating 'relationality'. Art's function becomes ideological here precisely by presenting itself as an autonomous space of conviviality that is 'free' from capitalist exchange. Bourriaud's refusal to be self-reflexive, does little to address this.

⁸ Martin explains how Marx opposed the social relations of commodities that are fetishised to the social relations of their producers that are obscured by this fetishism. Martin, *ibid*: 376.

⁹ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol.1, London, Penguin, 1867/1990, p. 166.

In this sense, Bourriaud's explanations poetically drift towards a banal fetishisation of the social, aestheticising the very forms the relational wants to resist:

The space where their works are displayed is altogether the space of interaction, the space of openness that ushers in all dialogues (Georges Bataille would have written: 'rift (déchirure)'). What they produce are relational space-time elements, inter-human experiences trying to rid themselves of the straightjacket of the ideology of mass communications, in a way, of the places where alternative forms of sociability, critical models and moments of conviviality are worked out.¹⁰

This exemption from economic relations of corruption, according to Bourriaud is in fact due to the very nature of the relational art work itself, an art that is based on social relations that go beyond commodities and objects. A kind of '*operative realism*', that allows for a wavering between contemplation and use.¹¹ In this relational space artists enable:

'an arena of representational context that creates free areas, and time spans whose rhythm contrasts with those structuring everyday life, and it encourages an inter-human commerce that differs from the "communication zones" imposed upon us'.¹²

'*Operative realism*' thus describes artists who move beyond this transitive interstice model and deploy 'mimicry' as a subversive strategy to refuse the fetishism of commodities (fetishism of the social). Bourriaud then makes the ambitious claim that 'make-believe' is a successful tactic because, by its very powers of imitation, it exposes the actual condition of today's reality. By using this '*operative realism*' strategy, and as a

¹⁰ Bourriaud, *ibid*: 44.

¹¹ *Ibid*.

¹² *Ibid*.

consequence of this very opening up of a dynamic space for ‘free dialogue’, however, one could plausibly argue for the dissolution of autonomous workmanship altogether, since ideas like artist’s intentions, the purpose or meaning of an artwork as such, or to put it simply what the artwork says or does, no longer apply. Or even as Stewart Martin argues, this ‘*operative realism*’ can also serve as a ‘naive mimesis or aestheticisation of novel forms of capitalist exploitation’.¹³

Nicolas Bourriaud’s argument for relational forms establishing a dialogical space between desire and meaning – that is founded on a network of inter-subjective relationships – is also based on his conception of a new kind of ‘*social interstice*’ that can create alternative social relations that escape the signification by the institution and turn the relational realm itself into an issue. To put it simply, although all artists live within the capitalist system of exchange, for Bourriaud they are still able to provide non-commodified models of exchange because they operate in a transitional ‘*interstice*’ that can actually elude the economic context of capitalism. He writes:

This *interstice* term was used by Karl Marx to describe trading communities that elude the capitalist economic context by being removed from the law of profit: barter, merchandising, autarkic types of production, etc. The *interstice* is a space in human relations which fits more or less harmoniously and openly into the overall system, but suggests other trading possibilities than those in effect within this system.¹⁴

And with regards to the role of curatorial practices within this system Bourriaud explains:

¹³ Martin, *ibid*: 371.

¹⁴ Bourriaud, *ibid*: 16.

This is the precise nature of contemporary art exhibition in the arena of representational commerce: it creates free areas and time/spans whose rhythm contrasts with those structuring everyday life, and it encourages an inter-human commerce that differs from the 'communication zones' that are imposed on us.¹⁵

According to Bourriaud in fact, even though the art object is still being used in exhibitions, it is rather incidental than central to the 'art'. Towards the end in his notes Bourriaud writes:

So the exhibition does not deny the social relationships in effect, but it does distort them and project them into a space-time frame encoded by the art system and by the artist him/herself.¹⁶

When one endeavours in such ambitious claims however, one should be very suspicious of current enthusiasm by museums and galleries to showcase such 'free' relational, curatorial exchanges. After all such enthusiasm is not guided by the institution's commitment to anti-capitalist politics or any sort of resistance strategy for a better society, to begin with. For neoliberal institutions (including museums and universities) on the contrary, and as Margaret Thatcher famously argued, there is no such thing as 'society'. There are only social relations founded on abstract freedom and equality, and supported by the right to private property and interest. On the contrary, a dialectical materialist method, as a theory of relations of production, reintroduces the rejected problematic of structural non-relation, which drives the capitalist mode of production, amounting to Marx's central hypothesis in *Capital*: there is no such thing as social relation, i.e. there is a society, albeit without an underlying social relation.¹⁷

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid: 82

¹⁷ Samo Tomšič, *The Capitalist Unconscious*, London, Verso, 2015, pp. 4-10.

A close analysis of Marx's own writing, even with regards to the simplest forms of commodity exchange, could perhaps shed more light here. Karl Marx, begins *Capital* with an analysis of the idea of commodity production, in which a commodity is defined as a utility object that is external to us and produced for exchange on a market. Marx suggests that all commodities have both a 'use value' and 'exchange value', and insists that exchange value changes according to its time and place, necessitating further examination (as an equivalence within the market). Marx argues that changes in the exchange value of an object can be understood in terms of the socially necessary labour required to produce the commodity, that is labour exerted at the average level of intensity and productivity for that branch of activity within economy. Marx writes:

Let us now picture to ourselves, by way of change, a community of free individuals, carrying on their work with the means of production in common, in which the labour power of all the different individuals is consciously applied as the combined labour power of the community. [...] The total product of our community is a social product. One portion serves as fresh means of production and remains social. But another portion is consumed by the members as means of subsistence. A distribution of this portion amongst them is consequently necessary. The mode of this distribution will vary with the productive organisation of the community, and the degree of historical development attained by the producers. [...] The social relations of the individual producers, with regard both to their labour and to its products, are in this case perfectly simple and intelligible, and that with regard not only to production but also to distribution.¹⁸

Marx reflects here the autonomy of value operating in 'innocent' acts of exchange, while at the same time introduces the gap between use value and exchange value, that anticipates the historical transformation of labour and in fact determines the dual character of commodities today.

¹⁸ Marx, *ibid*: 171-2.

Unfortunately for us however, such 'innocent' trading relationships exist only in pre-capitalist societies of primitive accumulation.¹⁹ They can arise and exist only when the development of the productive power of labour has not risen beyond a low stage, and when, therefore, the social relations within the sphere of material life are correspondingly narrow. Bourriaud's claim that contemporary art helps model such a 'community of free individuals' could perhaps hold truth if it was projected for a community of individuals that functioned outside late capitalism, and the law of relative accumulation.²⁰ However, the truth of the matter is that the art world, as it operates today, is not exactly like a 'community of free individuals', and the work of an artist, no matter how relational and socially enunciative, unless it enters into the capitalist mode of circulation (production and distribution), has no chance of validating its social importance. If there is no exposure, there is no social validity, and thus any claim for free relational value is

¹⁹ Many artists and philosophers (post-1968) interpret this distinction between formal and real subsumption as the basis for historical periodising of capital relations. Some see it as an assertion of a total integration of the realms of culture, education and life itself under capital, while others as a way out of capital, a promise that art is supposed to fulfil with a people to come, sometime in a future utopia. Gilles Deleuze writes characteristically on the cinema of Straub-Huillet:

'What relationship is there between human struggle and a work of art? The closest and for me the most mysterious relationship of all. Exactly what Paul Klee meant when he said: "You know, the people are missing." The people are missing and at the same time, they are not missing. The people are missing means that the fundamental affinity between a work of art and a people that does not yet exist is not, will never be clear. There is no work of art that does not call on a people who does not yet exist'.

Gilles Deleuze, 'Having an Idea in Cinema: On the Cinema of Straub and Huillet' in Kayman, E. and Jon Heller, K. (eds), *Deleuze & Guattari: New Mappings in Politics, Philosophy and Culture*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1998, p. 19.

²⁰ Ibid.

More pointedly, in *Postproduction*, Bourriaud further elaborates on this concept of alternative or resistant social exchange that appeals to an altogether pre-capitalist notion of the 'market-form', in which human relations of exchange are not yet abstracted (as they are within capitalist markets).

Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction: Culture as Screen Play: How Art Programmes the World*, New York, Lukas & Sternberg, 2002, p. 23

automatically extinguished.²¹ In a way thus, what Bourriaud seems to ignore when he argues for an emancipatory potential inherent in the relational ‘social interstice’ practices is that both artist and curator need to offer their labour to the capitalist market, if they are to sustain their lives. The means of production for the artist are the means of his existence, the means of his subsistence. For the relational artist/curator who works with participation, it is an offering of her value producing labour in the domain of ‘culture’, i.e. the symbolic capital produced as soon as participation obtains its value form. As soon as the products of her labour enter this market, as commodity form (even as a petty commodity), she thus gives up on any sort of pre-capitalist exchange relation form, in order to live. Her labour now appears to have a life of its own, independent of the producer. Both artist and curator however, participate in capitalist models of sociability, implied by the autonomy of exchange of the value form, and by inevitably offering their labour to the market.²²

²¹ Boris Groys analyses this further and explains that art is generally regarded at its most ‘authentic’ and ‘genuinely successful’ when there is no need for any curating at all, when the artwork can stand on its own, enabling a direct confrontation with the viewer (‘nil-curating’ or ‘non-curating’). At the same time however, Groys quickly points out, ‘such contemplation cannot go ahead without the artwork’s being exhibited’. He writes:

‘A work of art can’t in fact present itself by virtue of its own definition and force the viewer into contemplation—artworks lack vitality, energy and health. They seem to be genuinely sick and helpless—a spectator has to be led to the artwork, as hospital workers might take a visitor to see a bedridden patient. It is no coincidence that the word “curator” is etymologically related to “cure”. Curating is curing. The process of curating cures the image’s powerlessness, its incapacity to present itself. The artwork needs external help, it needs an exhibition and a curator to become visible’.

Boris Groys, ‘The Curator as Iconoclast’ in *History and Theory, Bezalel II: New Approaches in Contemporary Curating*, issue 2, Spring 2006 as found at: http://bezalel.secured.co.il/zope/home/en/1143538156/1143802471_en, (accessed 27.07.2016).

²² Eric Alliez puts it eloquently here: ‘Is its truly schizophrenic when the relational aesthetic tries to credit its *surfing* on the new universes of communication with a function of alternative democratisation. Far from liberating the ‘inter-human exchange’ from its economic reification ‘in the cracks of existing social forms’ (as the relational aesthetic claims –but without ever losing sight of the trajectory from the gallery to the museum-laboratories of the new economy of art and the *accelerated return* by a succession of Biennales, Triennials, Manifestas...), it instead promotes new criteria of merchandisation and participatory management of life by means of these exhibition devices that showcase the intensive extension of the “culture of interactivity” (The relation here is actually *transaction*)’.

Eric Alliez, ‘Capitalism and Schizophrenia and Consensus: Of the Relational Aesthetic’, *Z/X: Journal of the Manukau School of Visual Arts*, vol. 3, 2007, p. 4

Besides, Marx was writing this in 1867, and even though he predicted a highly developed form of capitalism to come, his analysis on the relation between capital and labour did not account for the much more sophisticated relation of domination that obtains today. In fact if one wanted to investigate the ways in which the artwork performs its integration into the culture industry nowadays and the character of this relation of domination, namely 'subsumption by capital', through a Marxist reading, one would probably end up acknowledging the end of autonomous art as a whole. But the purpose of this research project is to imagine a different kind of framework altogether. If there is a pre-capitalist or non-capitalist margin that enables capitalism to flourish and revolutionise its production, and if we investigate in more depth what exactly is being accumulated in this process of integration in the first place, then perhaps we might be able to approach the paradox from a more productive perspective, at the points of convergence and intersections between dominant and emergent.

Subsumption: Formal and Real.

Co-operation remains the fundamental form of capitalist mode of production, although in its simple shape it continues to *appear* as one particular form alongside the more developed ones.²³

The key task here is to examine what exactly is subsumed in the first place, when we talk about co-operation and by extension about the 'relational formations of non-capitalist processes' like the ones suggested by Bourriauds's aesthetics. In his critique of political economy Marx describes subsumption as the relation of domination that exists between capital and labour, so that a particular labour can be said to be subsumed under the universalised process of capital, by way of managing the production process itself. In this way labour gets subsumed under capital and is thus determined as a particular instance of it.²⁴

In the beginning, the labourer freely offers his labour for capital to take under its control formally, by entering into a relationship with it, purely at the level of economic exchange. The worker voluntarily subjects her labour's use value to the supervision of a capitalist validating machine,

²³ Marx, *ibid*: 454.

²⁴ It is worth mentioning here perhaps that 'subsumption' more generally determines the process in which a general rule (or concept) is applied to a particular case or instance of the universal (objective experience), in the case of a possible condition (intuition). For Immanuel Kant, in fact, it is through the act of subsumption that an 'inferential judgement' can take place within the process of syllogistic cognition (pure reason), as this gets unified within conscious experiences.

Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, A330

Andrés Sáenz De Sicilia, elaborates further on the ways in which Kant's whole theory of rational cognition is modelled around this idea of the process of subsumption acting as 'the mediating condition' connecting particulars with the conceptual 'mark's or predicates of universals'. He then analyses the manner in which contemporary thought has inherited and further developed Kant's understanding of subsumption, identifying issues and solutions that emerge out of this analysis, from Kant, Hegel and Marx all the way to contemporary post-Marxists thinkers.

Andrés Sáenz de Sicilia, *The Problem of Subsumption in Kant, Hegel and Marx*, PhD Thesis, CRMEP, Kingston, 2016.

entering into a wage relation, and establishing the social command of capital. Co-operation, according to Marx, plays a very important role within the general foundation of the capitalist system, as it is 'the first change experienced by the actual labour process when subjected to capital'.²⁵ 'This starting point coincides with the birth of capital itself', through the establishment of wage relations between workers and capitalists.²⁶

At this stage however the mode of production remains still in the hands of the producer-artist. The artwork gains its absolute surplus value as the material expression of its formal subsumption, and so far in the process, the only way for the capitalist to extract surplus value from it, is by extending that part of the working day that performs surplus labour. A law that cannot directly apply to artist's labour as they never entered an immediate wage relation to begin with. To quote Marx himself:

If then, on the one hand, the capitalist mode of production appears to be the historically necessary condition for the transformation of the labour process into a social process, so, on the other hand, this social form of the labour process is a method employed by capital for the more profitable exploitation of labour, by increasing its productive power.²⁷

At its highest level of abstraction, this social form of co-operation ceases to lie outside capital and becomes embodied in the development of the production process itself. The capitalist employs highly sophisticated strategies of technically re-organising the labour so that the production process itself – in this case the artistic process – will eventually become driven by the imperative of creating surplus value. According to this, the entire *real* form of production is revolutionised, artistic labour itself not only directed towards the augmentation of value (by gaining recognition by an

²⁵ Marx: *ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*: 453.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

institution for example), but this goal eventually gets inscribed in its concrete structure, its relational actuality, determining its means, methods and development. At the level of *real* subsumption then, the entire production process gets determined by, as, and for the capitalist command. Marx explains:

At first, the subjection of labour to capital was only a formal result of the fact that the worker, instead of working for himself, works for, and subsequently under, the capitalist. Through the co-operation of numerous wage-labourers, the command of capital develops into a requirement for carrying on the labour process itself, into a real condition of production. That a capitalist should command in the field of production is now as indispensable as that a general should command on the field of battle.²⁸

In the case of participatory art, thus, it is *co-operation* itself in its pure form that appears to run parallel with capitalist relations, still at the level of formal exchange. The affect or effect of the artwork must thus be sufficiently in excess of what goes into it – in terms of the support for its creation. The interesting point here with relational art is that part of the means of its production process does *not* produce value, and thus only a part of its original value will be transformed into the means of production. Thus it holds the potential to not be *immediately* translated to a commodity, although it is a use value, as a social product. As Marx himself explains:

it [the formal subsumption of labour under capital], is the general form of every capitalist process of production; at the same time, however, it can be found as a particular form alongside the specifically capitalist mode of production in its developed form,

²⁸ Marx, *ibid*: 448.

because the latter entails the former, the converse does not necessarily obtain.²⁹

Marx implies here that when the specifically capitalist mode of production has not been fully developed then artistic labour holds the potential to retain its status as a commodity subsumed only within formal terms, and thus the relations of production possibly escaping definition as a particular instance in the development of capital as a whole.³⁰ As long as the commodification of artistic labour remains in the realm of formal subsumption, and given its petty commodity character thus, it can never get *really* totally subsumed. The circular nature of my argument at this point corresponds perhaps to the historical development of capital itself, and the not so useful attempts by some to pin down the problem within clearly defined moments of historical transitions from one form of subsumption to the next.³¹

It is important to clarify here perhaps that even though Marx clearly presents us with a transitional development of this process within the historical development of capital in general, this does not necessarily mean that this process has been historically completed in all different sectors of the labour process. Taking into account how the 'art world' is not one single unified market (but one of many distinct and greatly differentiated sectors), how different artistic production processes occupy

²⁹ Ibid: 1019.

³⁰ For Marx's own analysis of the distinction between formal and real subsumption, see the appendix in Karl Marx, 'Results of the Immediate Process of Production', *Capital*, vol. 1, London, Penguin, 1990, pp. 949-1060.

³¹ Rob Lucas, 'On the Uses and Abuses of Abstract Temporal Concepts for History', paper as presented in *The Theory and Politics of Subsumption: Workshop I*, Birkbeck, London, 2013.

See also:
Antonio Negri, 'The Constitutions of Time', *Time for Revolution*, Continuum, London, 2013.

Endnotes, 'The History of Subsumption', *Endnotes: Misery and the Value Form*, no. 2, 2010, as found at: <https://endnotes.org.uk/issues/2/en/endnotes-the-history-of-subsumption>, (accessed 17.03.2016).

different stages of development at the same time (painting, design, fashion) or last but not least, how subsumption in art is always mediated by the production process (its relational-social form never really getting directly – immediately – determined by capital, through wage relations and social command), then perhaps one needs to consider this particular mode of production in its own terms: outside the globalised perception of capital's development as a whole. Moving towards a dispersed kind of non-synchronised temporality, i.e. a temporality of the present, where relative autonomies function at the level of individual works.³²

Frederic Jameson and his pessimistic view on total subsumption comes to mind here; where nothing escapes capital, everything has been subsumed (subsumption of the social per se), and there is no longer any outside.³³ This approach however exemplifies the problems arising from a conception of the completion of real subsumption in an evolutionary stage by stage manner, as it is presented within a unified perception of a temporality of the present, promoted by Bourriaud's conception of the 'lived time' for instance, as a 'new artistic content' concerned with the immediacy and proximity of the unified 'now time'. The art world falsely perceived as a unified singularity, both in geographical and temporal terms whose expression is nothing but the 'contemporary' itself.³⁴ My contention

³² Andrés Sáenz de Sicilia argues that 'the global unity of social relations and practices be thought as a *disjunctive synthesis* of conflicting and contradictory temporalities, which are distributed unevenly, develop asynchronously and reciprocally affect one another'.

Andrés Sáenz de Sicilia, 'Time and Subsumption' (Conference paper) at the Society for European Philosophy / Forum for European Philosophy annual conference, Kingston University (UK), Sept 2013.

³³ Fredric Jameson, *Representing Capital: A Reading of Volume 1*, London, Verso, London, 2014, p. 71.

³⁴ Peter Osborne, 'Notes on the Contemporary', *Bloomberg New Contemporaries* exhibition catalogue, London, Bloomberg, 2011.

This 'unified time' above all hides the reality –as Jacques Rancière has put it very well– of 'its capacity to recode and to invert forms of thought and attitudes that in the past strived for radical artistic or political changes'.

Jacques Rancière, *Malaise dans l'esthétique*, Paris, Galilée, 2004 as cited in Eric Alliez, 'Capitalism and Schizophrenia and Consensus: Of the Relational Aesthetic', *Z/X: Journal of the Manukau School of Visual Arts*, vol. 3, 2007, p. 4.

here being that any insistence on a strict stage-by-stage transitional understanding of the process of subsumption, does not necessarily apply for those non-immediate ways of domination and subordination, that on the one hand do *not* comply strictly to the capitalist command, but on the other, still contribute to the augmentation of surplus value. Their production process remains still *relatively autonomous* and independent of the capitalist command (no wage labour), but whose use value inevitably goes back to capital – the market is still regulating the intensity and productivity of this expanded kind of formally subsumed labour – namely the form of *hybrid* subsumption.³⁵ As Marx himself explains:

it will be sufficient if we merely refer to certain hybrid forms, in which although surplus labour is not extorted by direct compulsion from the producer, the producer has not yet become formally subordinate to capital.³⁶

After all, relational art can never complete its commodity character in full, given its ‘petty commodity’ character, and given the individuality of artistic production, where division of labour and machinery play an insignificant part in the artistic production process per se. It is perhaps more plausible thus from now on, and for the purposes of this thesis, to think of art’s integration into the culture industry in terms of a change in the character of *formal* subsumption, rather than a transition from *formal* to *real*. Art’s relation to the struggle of subjection to commodification has historically revolved around the issue of whether art is a commodity, and as such enables humanity’s subjection to capital or whether art is not a commodity, and thereby resists this subjection.³⁷ But this debate between art and anti-art, as Adorno has shown us, involves the two faces of the same coin, as it is based on the internal contradiction of commodity form itself. My

³⁵ Massimiliano Tomba, ‘Hybrid Subsumption and Modern Forms of Slavery’ paper as presented in *The Theory and Politics of Subsumption: Workshop I*, Birbeck, London, 2013.

³⁶ Marx, *ibid*: 645.

³⁷ Martin, *ibid*: 373.

suggestion here is that we should try and interpret relational art's paradoxes also through the dialectic of commodification, if we are to reveal its radical dimensions.

INTERLUDE: Public Space is the Place.

Oda Projesi, in Turkish meaning ‘Room Project’, is an artist collective based in Istanbul between 1977 and 2005. The three women artists rented a flat in (at the time) not-yet-gentrified Galata, to function as a meeting place for their neighbours –mostly children and teenagers– while simultaneously providing a platform for their artistic projects, ‘inside and outside its walls’.¹ They built up strong relationships with their local environment over the years and organised a series of varied activities whose common denominator, as Maria Lind, a Swedish curator who visited them at the time puts it:

‘[is that] they are not about showing or exhibiting a work but about using art as a means of creating and recreating new relations between people through diverse investigation and shaping of both private and public space’.²

The social form of engagement they proposed was localised outside the institution, in the streets and with their neighbours. The collaborations they produced thus, somehow managed to remain within the co-ordinates of local geopolitical struggles. Their work contributes its use value to the universal ‘contemporary’ time of capital, whilst still retaining its particularities as a *relative* kind of *autonomous* organisation, outside immediate determination by capitalist means. Nevertheless, a few years later, the same curator that had previously praised the value of such forms of co-operation, re-contextualised the group’s ‘self-organised’ *formal* terms by inviting the group to exhibit their neighbourhood-specific project in Tensta Konsthall, Sweden (2004). Tensta is one of Stockholm’s more ‘diverse’ public spaces devoted to art: ‘an institution with a given place in the local community’ which at the same time aims to offer ‘a program of

¹ Maria Lind, ‘Actualisation of Space: The Case of Oda Projesi, 2004’, *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Politics*, 2004, as found at: <http://eipcp.net/transversal/1204/lind/en>, (accessed 21/01/2013).

² Ibid.

the highest international quality, [and] to be an ongoing and self-evident destination for people interested in art' –where Lind is the director.³

The suburb of Tensta more generally –where Tensta Konsthall is located– has a large concentration of immigrants, high rates of unemployed and people on social welfare. The unemployment rate is 43.5% (2009) and immigrants make up 66% of the population, while 95-100% of the children in local schools are of foreign origin.⁴ The Swedish government has decided to boost Sweden's suburbs grappling with social exclusion, with a cash injection, one of them being Tensta's art gallery. This subsidy –which is performance based– is awarded according to three criteria: how the areas deal with education, employment and social benefits.⁵ Lind's role, here, becomes even more important as a curator of culture and an interlocutor of this transition from an art collective that appears to own its terms and conditions of coming together, to a collective whose co-operation is now required to perform a particular role in the general socio-economic process, as this is determined by the state's (capitalist) mode of validation. The curator here administers thus a shift in the relational equation, where the 'relational' value performatively reveals the construction of the discourse that regulates public space and who has access to speak therein, from local to national context. The critical issue raised here, being less the one flagged by the social relations themselves (class interests of museums for example), than (given those interests), how it is possible for projects like Oda Projesi to be realised without consensual management by way of curatorial (and 'cultural') 'order', while still occupying the structures inherited with an institution, like Tensta. This belies the classic opposition between autonomous art and culture industry, as well as an analysis of the current state of institutional critique, of course.

³ From Tensta Konsthall's official website Program as found at:
<http://www.tenstakonsthall.se/english/#about>
Last accessed 21/01/2013

⁴ It is in fact one of the suburbs where recent riots in Stockholm took place (2015).

⁵ For more information on this see:
<http://www.thelocal.se/42976/20120903/#.UQe-6qVhpR4>, (accessed 28/01/2013).

3: CURATION OF AUTONOMY.

The Dialectic of Commodification: Autonomous Art and Culture Industry.

Theodor Adorno, in one of his letters to Walter Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence 1928-1940* (1936), when referring to the highest and lowest art forms, namely autonomous art and culture industry and the dialectical relationship between them, argued that both are ‘torn halves of an internal freedom, to which, however, they do not add up’.¹ The dialectic of the lowest and the dialectic of the highest art forms are no longer in opposition with each other, but instead feed into each other to such an extent that autonomy and commodity are no longer in an external relationship. Commodification, according to Adorno, thus, is in fact the condition of autonomy.² Art acquires its specificity by separating itself from its origins (what it developed from).³ In *Aesthetic Theory* (1970), Adorno writes:

¹ Theodor Adorno, letter to Benjamin, 18 March 1936, in Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1999, p. 130.

² Hence, whereas for Adorno it is the non-communicativeness and enigmatic character of art that makes it critical, for Bourriaud it is precisely its communicativeness and transparency that allows art to achieve an ‘anti-commodity’ autonomous status. Stewart Martin elaborates on this:

‘Adorno’s point is not that art is actually autonomous from its social constitution. Following Marx, he thinks this would be a fetishisation or illusion. But in generating the illusion of autonomy Adorno claims that art criticises the illusion – intensified within a universally commodified culture – that nothing is valuable independently of its exchange value [...] If art’s claim to autonomy is to be self-critical it must be achieved through mediation with an anti-artistic or heteronomous dimension’.

Martin then concludes:

‘Whereas Adorno discerns an ironic recuperation of the affinity of art to commodity fetishism, as an immanent critique of the commodity form, Bourriaud interprets the social or non-object- oriented character of relational artworks as the simple negation of social relations between things, and the affirmation of social relations between persons, thereby rejecting Adorno’s whole strategy. (Bourriaud pointedly opposes Adorno’s aesthetics at several points).

Stewart Martin, ‘Critique of Relational Aesthetics’, *Third Text*, Routledge, New York, London, vol. 21, issue 4, 2007, pp. 375-6.

³ Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, London, Continuum, 1970/ 1997, p. 21.

In the face of the abnormality into which reality is developing, art's inescapable affirmative essence has become insufferable. Art must turn against itself, in opposition to its own concept, and thus become uncertain of itself right into its innermost fibre. Yet art is not to be dismissed simply by its abstract negation. By attacking what seemed to be its foundation throughout the whole of its tradition, art had been qualitatively transformed; it itself becomes qualitatively other. It can do this because through the ages by means of its form, art has turned against the status quo and what merely exists just as much as it has come to its aid by giving form to its elements. Art can no more be reduced to the general formula of consolation than to its opposite.⁴

The character of this classic opposition today has mutated even further, where the compositional unity and thus the individuality of the art work's relational form (its 'law of movement' and thus its law of form) is no longer in contradiction to the logics of administration and capitalist production, but is informed and shaped by it. Nowadays cultural functions between highly differentiated market sectors like art, fashion, popular culture, advertising, design, tourism, are paradoxically so integrated to each others' development, that all seems to function as research for fellow branches of the culture industry. One systemic function the curator is inescapably a part of. In a nutshell, art and culture industry are an integrated cultural economic system, with the curator as the journeyman that brings them into relation. For participatory art, in particular, the artistic form itself, as in the aesthetics of intersubjectivity, comes out of existing social relations (artist/curator pairing for instance) while retaining its 'service' as an intrinsic part of the institutional functions.

It is crucial however to point out here that for Adorno (and Horkheimer) whereas the *Culture Industry* involved what Marx called the 'real subsumption' of culture into industry, autonomous art involved only its

⁴ Ibid: 27.

'formal subsumption', that is the subsumption at the level of exchange.

They write:

Only what has been industrialised, rigorously subsumed, is fully adequate to this concept of culture [as administration]. Only by subordinating all branches of intellectual production equally to the single purpose of imposing on the senses of the human beings, from the time they leave the factory in the evening to the time they clock on in the morning, the imprint of the work routine which they must sustain throughout the day, does this culture mockingly fulfil the notion of a unified culture which the philosophers of the individual personality held out against mass culture.⁵

This perhaps explains the resistant formal character of the relational work of art that in certain respects opposes (and thus potentially resists) its own commodity status, by absolutising its character as fetish. This fetish character, for Adorno, is an aspect of the commodity form itself, which is nevertheless essential for its illusion of autonomous meaning-production'. On art's resistant illusory-fetish character, Adorno writes:

[...][in the age of overproduction the commodity's use value has become questionable and yields to the secondary gratification of prestige, of being in step, and finally in the commodity character itself: a parody of aesthetic semblance. Nothing remains of the autonomy of art [...] other than the fetish character of the commodity, regression to the archaic fetishism in the origin of art [...].⁶

⁵ Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1944/2002, p.104.

It is only when wage relations and efficient control of labour time is imposed on cultural process can the capitalist control the value producing labour of cultural workers, transitioning from formal to real subsumption.

⁶ Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, London, Continuum, 1970/ 1997, p. 22.

More generally, and as Peter Osborne clarifies in a footnote of his text 'Living with Contradictions: The Resignation of Chris Gilbert' (2007), Adorno and Horkheimer use the concept of subsumption:

to read Marx through Kant, thereby reducing subsumption to the value form to an instance of the general logic of equivalence of an instrumental rationality that also – indeed primarily – characterises administration. Hence the running together of economic and political forces that characterises their concept of the “culture industry”.⁷

The curator is thus called upon to manage the artwork so that it will retain its illusory fetish character, and thus curate its illusory autonomy, so that it will be able to perform its distribution, by way of exhibitions, reproduction and general circulation, (and thus produce value for other parts of culture industry). In a way thus, any artistic participatory model that attempts to provide models of resistance and bring the institution into crisis – and in fact the very value of its free, open, inclusive, and 'democratic' participation – risks the danger of 'superintendence' by the curator's command. Adorno writes for instance:

The general designation “culture” already contains, virtually, the process of identifying, cataloging, and classifying which imports culture into the realm of administration.⁸

What is for sure is that Adorno's Culture Industry was much simpler than our contemporary splintering of art into infinite socio-aesthetico-cultural niches. As Irit Rogoff argued in a recent lecture 'On Being Serious in the Art World', in the last twenty years the art world has differentiated into different niche areas of interests:

⁷ Peter Osborne, 'Living with Contradictions: The Resignation of Chris Gilbert', *Afterall*, vol. 10, Autumn/Winter 2007, as found at: <http://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.16/living.contradictions.resignation.chris.gilbert.an>, (accessed 13.10.2012).

⁸ Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1944/2002, p.104

numerous terrains and practices (gigantic museums that operate as entertainment machines, international conglomerates of art galleries, small cornerstones that are trying to show new work or unrecognised artists, self-organised groups that see their practice as intervention, mimicking of institutional structures by ad-hoc gatherings dedicated to education or communal organisation or political intervention, from reading groups in basements to endless study days and think tanks devoted to the state of the arts in... or to the role of the museum in...).⁹

And this division of artistic labour is before we have taken into account the openings, fundraisers, private events, corporate parties, and auctions as well as educational events, workshops, reading groups and self-organised collectives.¹⁰ Peter Osborne sums it up:

What was previously largely an external relation of appropriation between distinct cultural spheres (art and culture industry) has increasingly become internalised to a more integrated cultural-economic system. The dominant not only appropriates the emergent, it facilitates its production as emergent, as the condition of its appropriation.¹¹

If we think of current fashionable theories that conceive the integration of art institutions into the culture industry in terms of a historical transition from formal to real subsumption, as explained previously, it is perhaps logical to proclaim the end of autonomous art altogether hence the term

⁹ Irit Rogoff, 'On Being Serious in The Art World', [online video], 2012, as found at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2KNmV4QsE>, (accessed 16/11/2012).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Osborne, *ibid.*

'post-autonomous art'.¹² However, given the enduring singularity of artistic production and in view of Adorno's contention that autonomous art involved only its formal subsumption by capital, that is at the level of exchange (absolute surplus value), let us assume for the purposes of this thesis, that the work of art holds the promise of resisting its commodity status via absolutising its character as fetish. In other words, that there is still a form of *impossible* participation in social practice whose value, in its formal shape, continues to appear as one particular form alongside the more developed (really commodified) ones. What would the use-value of such an impossible discourse be and how then does the institution manage to transform this into a fundamental form of the capitalist mode of production; where the institution tends to turn this participatory model on its head and organises the social form of production under its own command? ¹³

¹² Hence Michael Lingner's useful term 'post-autonomous' art.

Michael Lingner, 'Art as a System within Society', *Place- Position- Public*, Maastricht, Jan van Eyck Akademie, 1993.

For more on current theories on subsumption of the social, see for example Italian autonomist-Marxists like: Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge and London, Harvard University Press, 2000, pp. 254-59.

¹³ The 'use value of the impossible', is the title of an article by Dennis Hollier, on the history of *Documents*, which is one of the first ever publications to go beyond anthropology's and nomismatics' disciplines characteristic objects of study and allow itself to be contaminated by 'the irritating and the heteroclitic, if not the disturbing'. Describing 'Metaphor' Hollier writes: 'it is not yet the shadow of the bull's horn, but something bites into the very page that wanted to appropriate it, something that is not in its place, something heterogeneous. Like the fly on the lecturer's nose. Or like the ego in the metaphysical whole. The appearance of the ego, Bataille says, is utterly shocking'

Denis Hollier, 'The Use Value of the Impossible', *October*, Vol. 60, Spring 2012, MIT Press, p. 16.

Curator's Role

In a recent article published at *Red Hook Journal*, artist Natascha Sahr Haghigian writes:

'Dear Curator,

I've been meaning to write to you, but it's only now, since your invitation, that I've made the time to respond. That's actually funny, since I've long been trying to somehow break this pattern in our relationship'. [...] It's been a little confusing for me since we became friends. I started seeing you as a person. Well, that sounds silly, of course I knew you were a person, from the start—but I didn't allow that to enter into our relationship. When I found myself meeting you in my favourite neighbourhood cafes, or even inviting you for dinner, I noticed something was different. I actually started seeing you, even liking you. Not for your job, no, but as a person. [...] Why had I tried to avoid that before? Well, because I did not want to mingle in that way, and randomly expose things that I like, or that matter to me, to the gaze of someone whose job it is to constantly rate, pick, choose, make lists and redistribute. I still won't make those lists you asked for—lists of people I think you should meet —but honestly, I don't know what to protect from your gaze any longer'.¹⁴

I found this letter very telling with regards to the level of integration of autonomous art into culture industry today, due to its anecdotal take on the suggested dialectic between the artist and the curator, involving a kind of resistance from the artist to her commodified form, to the extent to which she has persistently tried to absolutise the most mystical aspect of it, her character as the curator's fetish! This exchange is consistent with the current indeterminacy of art and non-art or life on the one hand and on the other, the extension of subsumption of artistic labour by cultural capital seemingly running the danger of subsuming the artist's life itself. A 'one-to-

¹⁴ Natscha Sadr Haghigian, 'Dear Curator', *Red Hook Journal*, 2013, as found at: <http://www.bard.edu/ccs/redhook/dear-curator/>, (accessed 21/01/2013).

one' encounter between the two however, as the artist seems to suggest here, holds the potential of exposing the inherent contradictions between this paradoxical relationship, perhaps even hinting towards a gap between 'the curator's gaze' and the artist's supposed knowledge, where impossible desire (as agent) resides.

One of the examples Bourriaud uses here is the work of Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, who proposes as artworks the very forms of social relations between artist and gallery owner. The artist/curator pairing in fact for Bourriaud – which as he admits still remains an intrinsic part of the institution – serves as a literal aspect of such inter-human formations, likely to define current artistic production itself. Where the artist makes forms out of existing social relations she is already a part of, and thus opens up a space for reflection between the utilitarian and the aesthetic function of these relations altogether.

In this seemingly post-autonomous era of relational models of intersubjectivity, by implication, arises a new set of obligations and duties for the curator too, who is now called upon to manage the social and economic conditions that shape art's new ethical and social premise. The curator's role is no longer limited to designing the arrangement of the artist's work in space, but also orchestrating the particular kind of rhythm needed for the beholder to experience and perform its 'relational' meaning. The curator needs to assume some kind of control over the network of intersubjective relationships of the relational form itself, in order to set up a legible map of lurking signifiers for our working memory to navigate and identify with. Like a traffic policeman, the curator now needs to organise a composition of people in her 'value' manual, seeking new ways of communicating, interpreting and allowing access to information (knowledge and by extension value) hidden behind the work. The curator eventually completes the circle of exchange by translating the artwork or the participatory experience into a meaning-making assemblage, by presenting its 'presentedness' to the beholder, so that she can experience

its 'relationality', according to the curatorial/relational/dialogical/educational and ethical symbolic orders.¹⁵

The truth of the matter is that everywhere the booming art market—exploding post-1989— as a haven for newly accumulated capital across the world, has inscribed art institutions more and more deeply into the transnational circuits of capital. The curator's role nowadays includes not only to command the capitalist processes of augmentation of value, but also to secure the harmonious co-operation of the activities of individuals, in the name of the global unified 'art world'. The curator then becomes a kind of independent producer, who takes good care that the art work adheres to the normal standards of this seemingly unified 'contemporaneity', hopefully succeeding in extending the work's surplus life-time within the history of art.¹⁶ The curator ensures that the continuity of labour increases so far as there is a constant paymaster. The dealer of the contract where C-M-C haunts M-C-M, ensures that the production process is not only transformed along the way, but in fact ensures that the actual mode of his own labour appears to be revolutionised too. If seen like this, curating thus becomes a way of creative management of capitalism's own process. And the curation of meaning, no matter how 'relational' it is, still involves a production of a relative surplus value for an

¹⁵ In his seminal book *Inside the White Cube* (1986), Brian O'Doherty prophetically writes:

'It is inescapably modern that alienation may now be a necessary preface to experience...much of our experience can only be brought home through mediation...In most areas of exchange there is a busy traffic in proxies and surrogates...as with other mediated experience, 'feeling' is turned into a customer product'.

Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 1986, pp. 52-3.

¹⁶ Barbara and John Ehrenreich's definition of a 'professional managerial class' comes to mind here, as those salaried 'intellectual' labourers (immaterial labourers) who do not own the means of production and whose major role is the social division of labour, through a management of the reproduction of capitalist class relations, as this in turn hides behind the process of production itself. Ehrenreichs refer here to a 'professional managerial class' of administrators, managers and technical workers whose functions are determined by the need to preserve social exchanges in capitalist relations terms, while 'persisting on reassuring [...] that its class interests are identical to the interests of society at large'.

Barbara and John Ehrenreich, 'The Professional Managerial Class' in Pat Walker (ed.) *In Between Labour and Capital*, Boston, South End Press Political Controversies Series, no1, 1979, p. 21

appeal to a market niche. The curator upgrades the work in terms of societal relevance, charting a linear history for the institution to create the conditions for art to become transformed into a communicative tool, moving from the architecture of the exhibition space and the display mode of experiential formats to a raised status of organiser for democratic 'relational' offerings. Where qualitative understandings of artistic value are now equated with demand, through the *manager of relationality*, 'curator'.¹⁷

Some argue, in fact, that traditional interpretive tools no longer make sense in today's art world as not only content but form itself is determined by the market.¹⁸ Context, no matter how performative its 'here and nowness', is still subsumed by the anonymous flow of capital. Either formally, at the level of exchange, by way of curating its illusion of autonomous meaning production, or as its subsumption moves on from *formal* to the *real*, by way of informational/communicative capitalism. The distinction between an intention to curate an active arena of exchange linking the work of art or the artist and the spectator on the one hand, and a programmatic strategy of transforming the production, and controlling

¹⁷ In their account of the ontology of the middleman as a performative agent within the transformation of use value to exchange value, Soren Andreasen & Lars Bang Larsen argue that even though this 'third man, intermediary, agent or dealer' has:

'literally established a 'super-market' transforming both use value and exchange value into capital value [...] [this intermediary] is not always a capitalist agent. The traditional revolutionary subject becomes a middle-man in spite of herself by being an intermediary identified with a utopian view or a desire for a different socio-political order: not because of the real political hustle it takes to usher in utopia or social change, but simply because the intention of taking over the means of production in order to build a better future for the people in itself is an act of representation.'

Underlying this perhaps, is the subject's struggle to subjection against commodification, hinting towards Rancière's understanding of the relation of the self to an other, an agent that acquires subjectivity in and by the act of mediation, and the potential responsibilities of the curator to allow for such crossing of identifications to occur. For more on this see Chapter 6..

Soren Andreasen and Lars Bang Larsen, 'The Middleman: Beginning to Talk about Mediation' in Paul O'Neill (ed.), *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture*, Cambridge, London, MIT Press, 2012, p. 26.

¹⁸ Nicholas Brown, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Real Subsumption*, as found at: <http://nonsite.org/editorial/the-work-of-art-in-the-age-of-its-real-subsumption-under-capital> (accessed 17/11/2012).

through art's relational value within a 'target group' or 'general public' on the other, now feeding into each other, in an inter-dependent metabolic process. Eric Alliez has put it very well:

The art administrators are overjoyed because they gain at the best possible price the social function of "proximity" indicative of the postmodern democratisation of art breaking away from avant-gardism and "revolutionary" dangerousness in the transformation of forms into forces [...]. The critics (who are here the same) are overjoyed because they recover within intersubjectivity "a theory of form" for which "form is the representative of desire in the image" [...] projected quite consensually by these brokers of desire onto the performative origin of the processes of artistic constitution for which the ready made would then be the post-historic truth. The biggest hurdle: Judgement then becomes the glossary of a practice that can no longer distinguish between the use value of art and a personalised tourist circuit for the use of the tenants of culture.¹⁹

Within this terrain of integration of formally autonomous processes of creative production into culture industry's circulation, many entrepreneurial types will find their way into new categories of economic areas. While 'anyone who resists can find their way only by being incorporated'.²⁰ Adorno and Horkheimer warn us: 'Once registered as diverging from the culture industry, they [entrepreneurs-curators-artists] belong to it as the land reformer does to capitalism'.²¹

One crucial role the curator plays here is legitimation, of course. Legitimation is a systemic function of the institution most directly relevant to curatorial presentations of politics. The curator is the one that affirms

¹⁹ Eric Alliez, 'Capitalism and Schizophrenia and Consensus: Of the Relational Aesthetic', *Z/X: Journal of the Manukau School of Visual Arts*, vol. 3, 2007, p. 5

²⁰ Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1944/2002, p.104.

²¹ Ibid.

both the fetish as well as the socially relevant character of the work. This is where institutional critique becomes relevant.²² As the work loses its autonomy and as the integration becomes more sophisticated, so does the museum's need to *curate* the work's *autonomy* in order to validate its social status (despite the fact that this validation serves only an illusion) becomes pertinent.²³ The art industry in turn, incorporates the affirmation of autonomy via the curator's sophisticated ways of producing compatibility (most often via reflexivity) which in turn postpones the achievement of any radical autonomy indefinitely. In fact, one could argue that the commodification of art today in the absence of any concrete effective politics serves as the condition for its institutional representation.²⁴

The curator now becomes the protagonist in this network of co-operations between interrelated affirmative master signifiers of the institution: the pun-ultimate inter-disciplinary profession, that has emerged as a result of the more general phenomenon of art's professionalisation within the industry from late 1980s onwards. The escalation of contemporary art exhibitions at a global scale, with the emergence of Biennales and large-scale group exhibitions, opened up a new market for curators. This was accompanied by the emergence of the 'curatorial' as a new academic discipline that

²² A more explicit description of this feedback loop of legitimation is provided by Lisa Tickner's historical account of British Pop Art's contribution to mass culture and the 'export drive', where indicatively she quotes a board of trade officials and their evaluation of British trade-supported-cultural events at the time, as part of British Council's diplomacy strategies in order to promote exports: 'generally speaking, the local authorities and leaders of opinion will not allow us to 'take over' their city for sordid commercial purposes unless we provide such a [cultural] quid pro quo'. A B Savage to W Pearce, Overseas Trade Fairs Directorate of the Board of Trade, 22 April 1968, as quoted in:

Lisa Tickner, *British Art in the Cultural Field: 1939-69*, London, Wiley-Blackwell, Association of Art Historians, 2012, p. 204.

²³ Peter Osborne, 'Living with Contradictions: The Resignation of Chris Gilbert', *Afterall*, vol. 10, Autumn/Winter 2007, as found at: <http://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.16/living.contradictions.resignation.chris.gilbert.an>, (accessed 13.10.2012).

²⁴ It is important to point out here that the way curatorial presentations of social-political practices fit in this picture largely depends on the relationship of such practices to proper political projects outside the art world, i.e. the work of artists as activists outside the institution and their political functions per se. My contention being here that all this is predicated on the absence of an extra-artistic political force. True radicals of today do not situate themselves within the imaginary, but instead risk occupying the impossible coordinates of the Real itself. For more on this see chapter six.

systemically observes the present state of art's autonomy, in order to make connections with the past and thus present the work's historical 'presentness'.²⁵ The institution maps the integration of new signifying elements into the artistic process and 'reads' the conditions that these need to fulfil in order to affirm it as an altogether new more complex 'present' state.²⁶

The function of 'legitimation' in fact, has always been a structural feature of art history, as well as its allied fields, art criticism, aesthetic philosophy, art practice, connoisseurship, the art market, museology, tourism, commodity fashion systems, and the heritage industry. Donald Preziosi, in 'Art History: Making the Visible Legible' (1998), explains how even in the very beginnings of the 'history of art history', where artists and their patrons had a much more separated relationship, art history's role was to interpret its objects of study, as 'evidential in nature'.²⁷

²⁵ 1987 is the year that the arts centre *Le Magasin* in Grenoble France launched the first postgraduate curatorial training program, which is the same year the Art History/Museum Studies element of the Whitney Independent Study Program (ISP) was renamed *Curatorial and Critical Studies*. It is during this period, according to Paul O'Neill, when the figure of the curator moved from a behind the scenes caretaker and organiser of collections to an independent practitioner more centralised within the contemporary art world. O'Neill in fact connects the curator's new authorial status with his/her ability to 'enunciate discourse' as part of the curatorial practice, which in turn, according to O'Neill has fostered frameworks for interactions with other disciplines.

Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture*, Cambridge, London, MIT Press, 2012, p. 2.

²⁶ Carlos Besualdo referring to contemporary international art fairs like *Documenta* and the *Venice Biennale*, as the 'epiphenomena' of the avant-garde's subsumption by the culture industry writes:

'Pure and simple spectacles whose logic is nothing more than that of capitalism in its late stage, that is the progressive suppression of the multiple system of values and its translation into a universal equivalent, namely exchange value' [...] The duty of criticism had been that of inscribing production into a symbolic field in a way that simultaneously made it accessible to the effects of the mechanisms of production of exchange value; and the duty of art history was that of recovering the specific differential in the work that hinders its complete subordination to exchange value [...] Diplomacy, politics and commerce converge in a powerful movement whose purpose seems to be the appropriation and instrumentalisation of the symbolic value of art'.

Carlos Besualdo, 'The Unstable Institution' in Paul O'Neill (ed.), *Curating Subjects*, Amsterdam, Open Editions/ de Appel, 2007, pp. 42, 45.

²⁷ Donald Preziosi, *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 13-18.

Preziosi writes:

Art objects of all kinds came to have the status of historical documents in the dual sense that (I) each was presumed to provide significant, often unique and, on occasion, profoundly revealing evidence for the character of an age, nation, person or people; and that (II) their appearance was the resultant product of a historical milieu, however narrowly or broadly framed.²⁸

In short, the principal aim of all historical study throughout its history has been to make artworks more fully legible in and to the present. Nowadays taking that to a further legibility of the very 'presentedness' of their presentation via the curatorial (the display of the display), where the artist's skills and the curator's abilities to make connections feed into each other, all part of the same signifying machinery that appears to be historically driven by the dominant, yet at the same time is informed by a series of antagonistic economies that do not necessarily find their way into that history altogether.²⁹

The criteria for explanatory adequacy, and the purposes as to which any such understandings might be put in the present have varied over time, and in view of the more integrated state of commodification of the art object, the ways in which its interpretation is mediated, (its subsumption always already structurally performed via the curatorial 'language'), runs parallel with the current disagreement regarding the extent to which an art

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Already in 1989, Benjamin Buchloh had argued that there is an urgent need for the curator's function to be acknowledged as part of the institutional superstructure:

'The curator observes his or her operation within the institutional apparatus of art: most prominently the procedure of abstraction and centralisation that seems to be an inescapable consequence of the work's entry into the superstructure apparatus, its transformation from practice to discourse. That almost seems to have been the curator's primary role: to function as an agent who offers exposure and potential prominence—in exchange for obtaining a moment of actual practice that is about to be transformed into myth/superstructure'.

Benjamin Buchloh, 'Since Realism There Was...', *L'Exposition Imaginaire: The Art of Exhibiting in the Eighties*, The Hague, Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst, 1989, pp. 96-121.

object can be taken, legitimately, as indicative or symptomatic of its historical milieu. In our age, art historical interpretation of form, style, aesthetic school, etc are no longer relevant, and all explications approach adequacy only with the articulation of the work's 'objecthood'. Validating a work's relational value in the contemporary context thus, and making legible its connection to the larger historical interdisciplinary 'context' is the way of foregrounding the work's documentary or representational status and thus re-producing the very circumstances of its production and reception.³⁰

The regulatory standards for making legible, historicising, curating and contextualising this autonomy have become even more complicated, after the failure of the institutional critique movements like 'art for art's sake', followed by Duchamp's readymades and the historical model of collage and pastiche. Twentieth century avant-gardes, particularly those of the 1960s and 1970s sought to escape such judgements of representational status and the problem of mediation between artist and museum/institution altogether, by aiming for direct contact with the spectator. The Situationists, for example, completely dismissed the institution and took to the streets. And even though some argue that due to them being dogmatic against even their fellow Situationists –their events at times lost their democratic basis by becoming too 'exclusive'– still the authenticity of their intention to overcome the existing boundaries of art and escape the curatorial 'scanning of the wavelength' of the audience's responses cannot be disputed.³¹ They did not expect of the viewer to fulfil a pre-existing set of 'interactivity' options and did not leverage their social function for the

³⁰ In his critique of Minimalism, or 'Literalism' as he calls it, Michael Fried, in his seminal essay 'Art and Objecthood' claims that 'the experience of literalist art is of an object in a situation –one that, virtually by definition, includes the beholder...'. For Fried it is a symptom of decadence that literalist art theatricalises the relation between the object and the beholder, whereas the experience of authentic Modernist art should involve the suspension of both 'objecthood' and of the sense of duration.

Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1967.

³¹ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, London, Verso, 2012, pp. 80-93

sake of more exposure. Thus, for them art's autonomous character was crucial if they were to overthrow injustice and allow for a confrontation with the commodity state. The problem is that eventually, by overthrowing society's rules and placing an emphasis on individual choice, this ideology simultaneously underwrote the basic principles of market forces. Autonomy eventually changed from the never ending promise that autonomous art held out to its unwillingness or incapacity to fulfil that promise.

Guy Debord can help make this point clearer. In his *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, published 20 years after the *Society of The Spectacle*, Debord offers the notion of the 'integrated spectacle' as the highest stage of the spectacular society. Debord does not describe the integrated spectacle as a reflexive-intersubjective circuit, reflexivity however still remains its primary conceptual innovation. Debord writes:

For the final sense of the integrated spectacle is this –that it has integrated itself into reality to the same extent as it was describing it, and that it was reconstructing it as it was describing it. As a result, this reality no longer confronts the integrated spectacle as something alien.³²

Adorno, in turn, warns us:

Only by immersing its autonomy in society's imagerie can art surmount the heteronomous market. Art is modern art through mimesis of the hardened and alienated; only thereby, and not by the refusal of a mute reality, does art become eloquent; this is why art no longer tolerates the innocuous.³³

Contemporary art is no longer a separate domain, strategically distancing itself or purposefully connecting to this 'alienated and hardened reality', but

³² Guy Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, London, Verso, 1998, p. 9.

³³ Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, London, Continuum, 1970/ 1997, p. 21

instead *plays naive* to its own integration into international circuits of cultural capital, where art's formal imperatives are gradually taken over by mimesis.³⁴ High Art or master Art, after Adorno's argument above, expands its reach and its relevance by absorbing and re-presenting in its own domain that which was not previously deemed an instance of art.³⁵

The history of contemporary art is in many ways the history of an expansion of criteria for this integration, and by extension the expansion of different forms of subsumption, which in turns calls for the preservation of more complex *relative autonomies*. Art theorist, John Roberts confirms:

Art today is subsumed under general social technique as a condition of art's increasing absorption into these new cognitive relations of production. The result is that the inexorable conceptualisation of art since the 1960s has found a ready home within the new relations of production.³⁶

Finally reaching our day where the non-art elements of relational values and participatory politics have become a register of symbolic autonomy themselves. Within this new complex state of institutional critique, and

³⁴ Marina Vischmidt argues for this shift from modern to contemporary art, in an essay inspired by Adorno's quote, titled 'Mimesis of the Hardened and Alienated: Social Practice as Business Model' (2013), explaining how art now serves as 'a specialised niche within that reality—art that is contemporary with its time, a time which is strictly harnessed to the temporal rhythms of the market, or more broadly, to capital accumulation'.

Marina Vischmidt, 'Mimesis of the Hardened and Alienated: Social Practice as Business Model', *e-flux journal*, no. 43, 2013, as found at: [http://www.e-flux.com/journal/"mimesis-of-the-hardened-and-alienated"-social-practice-as-business-model/#_ftn1](http://www.e-flux.com/journal/), (accessed 06.06.2016).

³⁵ The art critic Ben Davis has asserted as much when he insists that:

'What appears at one juncture to be radically opposed to the values of art under capitalism often later appears to have represented a development intrinsic to its future development, for the simple reason that without changing the underlying fact of capitalism, you cannot prevent innovations in art from eventually being given a capitalist articulation'.

Ben Davis, 'A critique of social practice art: What does it mean to be a political artist?', *International Socialist Review*, no. 90, 2015, as found at: <http://isreview.org/issue/90/critique-social-practice-art>, (accessed 04.01.2016).

³⁶ John Roberts, 'The Political Economisation of Art' as cited in Gregory Sholette and Oliver Ressler, *It's The Political Economy, Stupid: The Global Financial Crisis in Art and Theory*, London, Pluto Press, 2013, pp. 66-7.

even if art aims to retain its autonomy from the economic regulation of its means of production, it still needs to somehow retain an external relationship to the institutionalised concept of art as a whole, including form and content.³⁷ Otherwise relational art and social practice may have the same predictable destiny as that of its previous attempts of institutional critique, re-legitimising the institutions they aim to criticise. A step that most artists and curators are not always willing to take, however, since such an attempt most often translates into an exclusion from the art world altogether (the art world owning the means of subsistence of the cultural worker).³⁸

³⁷ Despite an instinctive mistrust towards the middleman curator, and a historical tendency to get rid of the middle man (see for example Joseph Kosuth's insistence on eliminating the role of art critics), Gilles Deleuze on the contrary maintains that mediators are essential if we are to maintain the flow mobile, open and alive. He writes:

'Mediators are fundamental. Creation's all about mediators. Without them nothing happens. They can be people –for a philosopher artists or scientists, for a scientist philosophers or artists, but things too even plants or animals (...). Whether they are real or imaginary, animate or inanimate, you have to form your mediators. Its a series, If you're not in some series, even a completely imaginary one, you're lost. I need my mediators to express myself and they'd never express themselves without me: you're always working in a group, even when you seem to be on your own'.

Gilles Deleuze, 'Mediators', *Negotiations 1972-1990*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1990, p. 125.

³⁸ This also begs the question that Dave Beech and Mark Hutchinson raise in their text 'Inconsequential Bayonets' in their attempt to translate Zizek's notion of 'interpassivity', i.e. a way to change things that stops them really from changing, within the curatorial realm, where they ask:

'Is it possible to have philistine curators? Or, perhaps for the philistine within each curator to have expression in what the curator does, qua curator?'. They go on to argue that any curation that claims its independence must do so from a position which acknowledges its dependance: that it does not operate under condition of its own choosing'. [...] The curator of a diverse, troublesome and changing art, surely needs to begin from a position of doubt and uncertainty, or, indeed, from a position of listening'.

They hint here towards the role of the curator as psychoanalyst, that follows in my Lacanian analysis of curatorial discourse.

David Beech, and Marck Hutchinson, Mark, 'Inconsequential Bayonets' in Paul O'Neill (ed.), *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture*, Cambridge, London, MIT Press, 2012, p. 56.

How Art Plays Along: Cultural Regeneration

With our current obsession with interactivity and participation, art in turn is called upon to fulfil its promise immediately and to cease hiding behind its autonomy, as if artists' insistence on the latter somehow involves an incomprehensibility, egocentricity, and irrelevance. Art is now called upon to reveal its communicative pretensions, to be transparent and reveal the domain where it responds. Art must play along and at least appear to contribute to the emergence of a relational society as a whole: the production of 'good subjects'. This task becomes very difficult in today's constellation where there is a certain urge to 'false freedom' inherent to the very structures of the art system itself. The production and reception of the arts has nowadays been reshaped within a logic in which audience figures and marketing statistics become essential to secure public funding. The question of what art can do for society is one often used by cultural policy makers in order to justify public spending on the arts. To such an extent where creativity, research and the value of 'experimenting for experiment's sake' gain value only if they fulfil their role in the value-producing machinery of the system. It is important to point out here, that the way curatorial presentations of social-political practices fit in this picture largely depends on the relationship of such practices to proper political projects outside the art world, the activist work their members are involved with and the real life contributions to the emergence of a relational society.³⁹

The truth of the matter is that the urge among institutions of art to rush the process of 'rate, pick, choose, make lists and redistribute', laying down, validating and legitimising criteria to purportedly render intelligible the quality of art's social value, results in sometimes bizarre and ahistorical variations on the semantics of knowledge production. Especially in the last twenty years, and as art became more and more 'participatory' and 'socially engaging', the number of publicly funded galleries and artists organisations interested in 'relational aesthetics' has proliferated too. As did eventually the number of 'independent' curators specialising in social

³⁹ for more on this see my analysis on 'transversality' and 'accountability' in Chapter Six.

practices. Followed by the production of a sophisticated discourse around 'relationality' and the development of niche areas of interests. Since the 1990s, critics, educators and curators alike have adapted to the new 'relational' trend, guiding the participation, encouraging the 'taking part', all bound with a will to propagate the artist's re-modelling of social exchange. A kind of 'trafficking' of the public through the 'arenas of exchange', that sooner rather than later becomes a gentrification of the very subjects they aim to emancipate.

This paradoxical relationship between actual struggles and curatorial representations is epitomised by the way 'relational collaborations' are nowadays also used in the context of regeneration schemes, which are by now shaped by public art programmes focused on community development and consensus-building processes (and critique) within the context of large-scale urban regeneration initiatives. Artists are parachuted into sites in order to create works meant to engage with the surrounding landscape. Everywhere, the booming art market, has inscribed art institutions and its disembodied interlocutors to 'cure' art works so as to inevitably facilitate the utilisation of culture by the transnational circuits of capital. Strategies of regional developments and 'regeneration' via the curation of culture are used as a crucial global resource of international globalisation, fully integrated into global political strategies. One only need look at the 'Cultural Olympiad' of 2012 and that year's curatorial boom in socially-engaging – but at the same time gentrifying – exhibitions in the city of London. Which once again demonstrated how most attempts from governments to 'free' the creative potential of individuals and unleash their imagination, is not designed to foster social inclusion, alternative realities or authentic social relations, but instead to produce a future generation that will be 'good for business'.⁴⁰

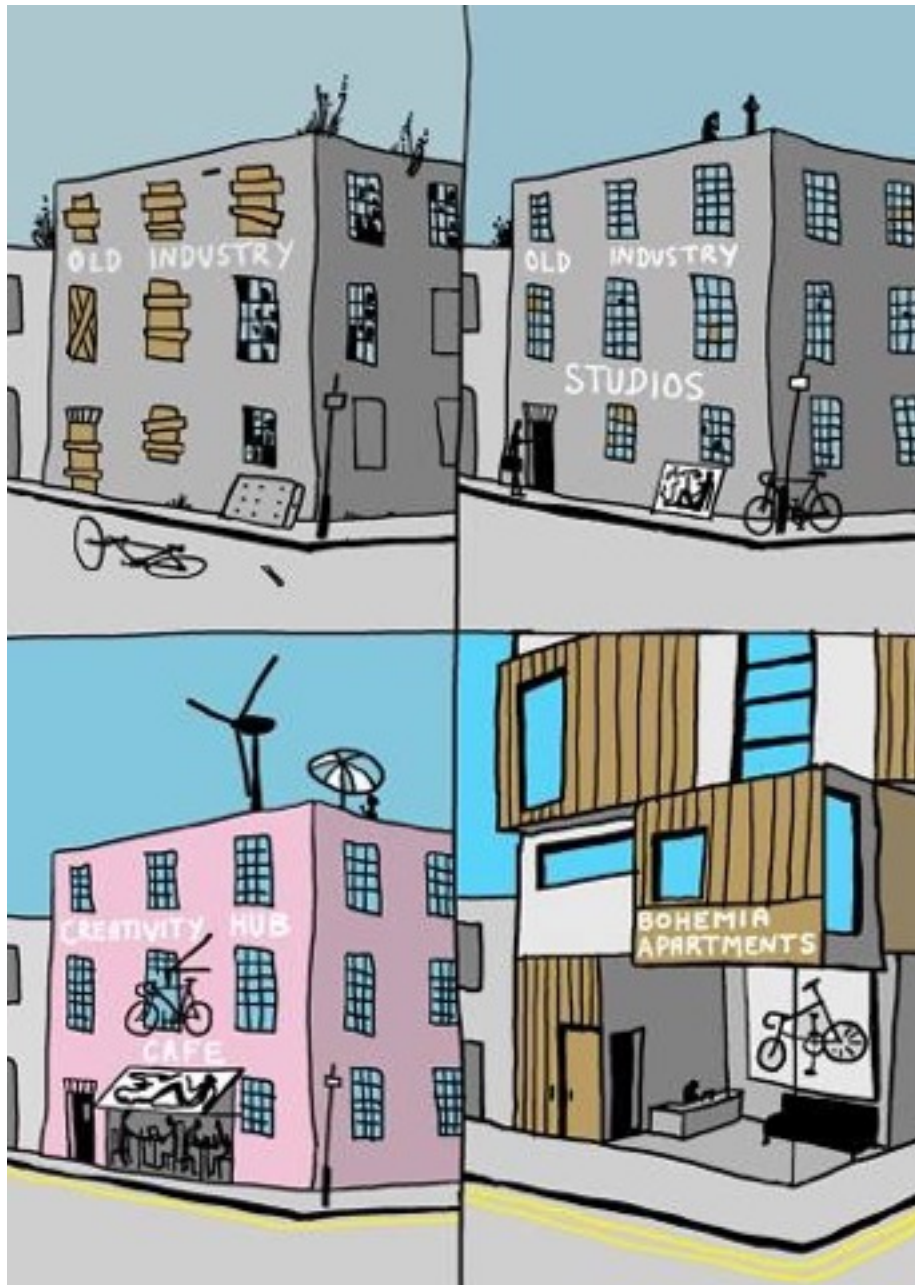
⁴⁰ The extent of this transformation in artistic production can be seen if one looks at the recent *DCMS Creative Industries: Mapping Documents*: where investment in the 'creative industries' has almost replaced that of traditional manufacturing. The creative industries, according to this document then, are those that 'have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property'; they include music, publishing, films, games, advertising, fashion, design, TV and radio, all of which are considered to have obvious commercial potential.

Culture is nowadays utilised as a political resource and the politics of curating contemporary art have by now become fully integrated into international political systems and strategies for regional development. 'Astro-turfing' – a term that derives from astroturf, the synthetic grass carpet that looks like natural grass – is only one example of such regional tactics of the new upcoming 'public relations' techniques used in politics and advertising, in which fake grass-roots activists, appear as experts of 'social practice', and are thus invited to take part in public opinion debates, which feed into policy-making strategies. False representation and pseudo-participation at the roots, where altering public viewpoints can create enough doubt to inhibit grass roots actions altogether. Culture is transformed as a source of regeneration, and the curator acts not only as the 'middleman' validator of 'relational' value, but also as a contributor to 'regenerational' capital. In this discourse, instead of turning to appropriately social practices, the tendency is to account instead the degree to which an artist provides a good model of participation, however mediated that may end up being.

In a debate that recently took place at TATE Modern's online community - space, curated by Susan Holtham, the discourse seemed to not only focus solely on the positive impact artists have on London's regeneration, however, but even more controversially as to how cities can develop ways to afford the artists. The understanding was that since artists are responsible for adding charm to forgotten neighbourhoods and attract an 'influx of hipster tourists', so do they also help indirectly in the 'increase of other rents around them' [...]. Citing from the online conversation indicatively:

Artists are considered triggers to many of these real estate valuations and people have to acknowledge this, so artists can still live in cities that themselves help to create.⁴¹

⁴¹ Vica Jung, 'What part do artists play in urban regeneration?', *Tate Debate*, 2013, as found at: <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/blogs/tate-debate-what-part-do-artists-play-urban-regeneration>, (accessed 14.07.2016).



source unknown, courtesy of Dont-Rhine, *Ultra-red*, 2015.

Even though I understand artists' struggle for affordable live-work spaces, I was admittedly struck with the kind of naive, utopian, at times even arrogant take on regeneration these young artists seemed to imagine, and their neglect of systemic perspectives, as a whole.

On the contrary, Dont Rhine, one of the founders of artist-activist collective Ultra-red, has been working in solidarity with the residents of Pico Alosa and their ongoing fight for housing justice in Boyle Heights District, alongside the LA river, for the last twenty years. Rhine has recently

publicly criticised the recuperation of cultural workers' identities to 'wash over' the reality of economic violence happening on the LA River by CurrentLA, one of the newest art programmes funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies. Bloomberg is a global Wall Street investment firm that is very clear about its goals: prepare the LA River basin for speculative development. As Rhine explains, the mayor, as well as the City's Council are also very clear about the goals of CurrentLA: prepare the LA River basin for speculative development. It seems thus, that only the artists are confused or deluded into thinking that this is about art or 'reflecting on water', etc. Meanwhile, what is 'washed away' are the working class communities of colour along the banks of the LA River who have the 'indecent' of occupying the 'waste land' desired for speculative development. Rhine explains:

Developers have learned that a key tool in the speculative real estate game is the use of arts initiatives to change the composition of historically working class and poor neighbourhoods. Art spaces move in, rents go up, tenants and local businesses are evicted, and capital washes away the barrio. This is what we are now seeing in Boyle Heights but can also identify in neighbourhoods across Los Angeles and beyond. Art-washing has become so prevalent that artists have to ask ourselves some extremely urgent questions: 1) What kind of art spaces are possible and what kind of art institutions do we need to not only refuse complicity but resist gentrification? 2) What kind of art practices can thrive and magically transform everyday life while refusing and resisting being a tool for growth by dispossession? And 3) what political movements can art contribute to that expose the lie of gentrification's inevitability? The fact that few existing arts organisations, art schools, publications, or funders give space for these questions already indicates their complicity in the neoliberal ravaging and class warfare that is speculative development. But I'm optimistic that the *Waters Are Rising*.⁴²

⁴² Interview with the author July 2016.

Neoliberal Cultural Policy

Whereas the need for change in terms of social justice and parity is essential, the methods and motivation of these cultural policies, particularly the roles assigned to art and culture within them, need to be examined further. From the mid-1980s onwards, we have witnessed an obvious effort from neoliberal governments to subdue arts education, and culture more generally, to the mechanisms of the free-market economy. Principles like competition and entrepreneurship, for example, previously belonging to the 'free' market world, have gradually been introduced to the sphere of education for artistic, cultural and intellectual production itself.

One only need to look at the United Nations Educational and Cultural Organisation's (Unesco) 'Road Map to Arts Education (2006)', a document that is used as a template and a set of overall guidelines to research on art education, set in place in order to meet the specific contexts of nations and societies around the world.⁴³ If we examine this policy's conflicted use of terms like 'cultural exchange' or 'creative economy' and 'creative workforce' as tokens for 'a good outcome', we begin to understand the paradox of this mutually informing and reciprocally conditioning relationship between culture and production, all bound up with the language of economic value terms. Market relations are not only brought into the sphere of artistic and cultural production as a general construct, but as established practices at the level of the subject (supposed to know) as well. Where ideas like 'free schools', 'self-organisation', 'radical' education and dialogical practices, traditionally belonging to emancipatory pedagogy projects of the left, are nowadays instrumentalised and

⁴³ For more on this see: Road Map for Arts Education: The World Conference on Arts Education: Building Creative Capacities for the 21st Century Lisbon, 6-9 March 2006, as found at http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/CLT/pdf/Arts_Edu_RoadMap_en.pdf, (accessed 12.04.2015).

Also see enclosed documentation of 'The State of Education' conference where we examined these terms in action through a series of Augusto Boal's exercises, together with the Radical Education Forum (RadEd).
<http://radicaleducationforum.tumblr.com>

appropriated for the sake of a self-directed subsumption of social exchange into neoliberal discourse.

The 'democratisation of culture' agenda, of course, claims that it seeks to promote and realise the vaunted values of equality, access, participation, and human rights for all. The UN World Commission on Culture and Development clearly states: '[The] core cultural right is that of each person to participate fully in cultural life'.⁴⁴ As, Prelom Kolektiv [Break collective] members Dušan Grija and Jelena Vesić, explain in an essay titled 'The Neoliberal Institution of Culture and the Critique of Culturalization' that accompanied the *Parallel Chronologies* (2013) exhibition at the New Museum, New York, however, it seems that the term 'democratisation of culture' has basically come to signify 'everyone's participation in activities previously reserved for the elites'.⁴⁵ Fluctuating according to the political preoccupation of their times, official approaches to the subsidised arts of the last ten-fifteen years, whether instrumental or egalitarian, have always remained pivotal to the formation of cultural policies.⁴⁶

From 1997 onwards, for instance, all galleries and museums in the UK were requested to account for the work they do in the area of 'social exclusion', monitored by a special 'Social Exclusion Unit' and the Department of Culture, which consciously developed policies that seemed to expand access and education work as a practice of cultural organisations. This is hardly a new area of practice for 'culture' of course,

⁴⁴ Our Creative Diversity: World Commission on Culture and Development, as found at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0010/001055/105586e.pdf> last accessed 10.06.2016, 12:55'

Also see:

Monica Gattinger, 'Democratization of Culture, Cultural Democracy and Governance', *Future Directions in Public Arts Funding: What Are The Shifts Required?*, Yokon, Canadian Public Arts Funders (CPAF), 2011.

⁴⁵ Dušan Grija and Jelena Vesić, 'The Neoliberal Institution of Culture and the Critique of Culturalization', *New Museum*, 2007, as found at: '<http://www.newmuseum.org/blog/view/the-neoliberal-institution-of-culture-and-the-critique-of-culturalization>', (accessed 12.04.2015).

⁴⁶ Pauline Hadaway, 'Soul-searching and Soul-selling: the New accountability in the Arts' in *Circa*, Vol 114, Winter 2005, pp. 55-9.

as artists have historically responded to issues that concern life and society as a whole for centuries, with a flourishing of community arts in particular especially during the 1970s and 1980s.⁴⁷ The difference being here perhaps, that museums and galleries now have to prove with *numerical and quantifiable data* the ways in which they diversify their audiences, their 'outreach programmes' success, now measured according to the number of sheer 'new audiences' attending. Taking into account how most 'social inclusion' projects with the arts, involve an arts organisation working in partnership with *care* (health, housing or education), but also how relative the idea of 'access' becomes in the first place, when one considers the intellectual, psychological and physical aspects of accessibility more generally, one can begin to understand the problematic basis of evaluating such projects solely on numbers.

In a conference titled 'Pieties or Policies?' organised by the *Institute of Ideas*, at Tate Modern (2001), and with the aim of examining ideas and values of government thinking around cultural policies, the conference posed four pertinent questions: 'How valid is the government's claim that we are all creative? How acceptable is the government's recruitment of museums, galleries and other cultural organisations as part of its strategy to combat social exclusion? Can cultural organisations develop 'joined up' policies with other agencies in society on social exclusion issues? What principles should guide future cultural policy?'⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Alison Cox and Jane Sillis, 'The Climate of Debate: A View from the Ground', *Engage*, issue 11, Winter 2001, as found at: http://engage.org/downloads/152E22D98_11.%20Climate%20of%20Debate.pdf, (accessed 20.04.2014).

⁴⁸ This debate has largely centred on two publications and related events. *Art for All? Their Policies and Our Culture*, Mark Wallinger and Mary Warnock (eds), was published by *Peer* and launched at a public debate at the RCA in London in November 2000. *Museums for 'the People'? Conversations In Print* was published by the *Institute of Ideas* in 2001, with a related conference 'Pieties or Policies? The language and assumptions of cultural policy' at Tate Modern, November 2001. These publications in turn are a response to government policy documents which place the arts, and particularly museums and galleries, at the centre of its policies to tackle social exclusion. Key documents include, 'Policy Action Team 10: A Report to the Social Exclusion Unit,' Arts and Sports, DCMS, (May 1999) and 'Centres for Social Change: Museums, Galleries and Archives for All,' DCMS (May 2000).

Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS), *Count Me In: The Dimensions of Social Exclusion through Culture*, Media & Sport, Leeds Metropolitan University, Leeds, 2002.

The majority of the speakers at the conference, including a panel from the world of culture, politics, academy and the *Institute of Ideas*, were very reluctant with the idea of defending access education programmes in the name of sponsorship, arguing instead for the museum's value as a place for 'understanding and enjoying collections and displays'.⁴⁹ Claire Fox from the *Institute of Ideas*, for example, explained how government policy advocating 'access to participation' had resulted in a gratuitous programme of practical arts projects where 'doing' literally means, 'applying paint or performing, whilst the art works themselves are largely ignored'.⁵⁰ One could go on and argue how Fox reflects here perhaps the ignorance of many critics and cultural managers on the history of gallery education, moving beyond notions of display. Or even refuses to acknowledge more generally, art's importance in expanding our ways of thinking about ideas and issues relevant to the world we inhabit. The point of interest here however, is that even though there is enough evidence to show how positive the experience of the arts can be, and regardless of whether most gallery education programmes might be misunderstood by cynical art critics, the issue still remains that art workers, no matter how socially engaging or relational they claim to be, they simply cannot replace social workers, carers, community organisers, or therapists. This begs the question of whether art's role is operatively transformational, to improve 'educational performance', increase 'employment rates', reduce levels of crime and standards of health, and produce positive social impacts, in the first place?

It is very hypocritical in fact when policy makers justify their insufficient welfare reforms with an increased interest to personal development and social cohesion achieved through the arts pathway, whilst overlooking the kind of responsibility due for real educational, and social reforms in the first place. Characteristically here, in a foreword to a 1999 report by Policy

⁴⁹ Ibid.

There is an archive version of the live webcast of the conference on the Tate website: <http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/programmes/webcasting/pieties.htm>.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Action Teams (one of several regulators set up by New Labour's government to ensure each department gave full attention to 'social inclusion' and 'neighbourhood renewal' agendas), Chris Smith, at the time Secretary of the State of Culture stated:

This report shows that art and sport can not only make a valuable contribution to delivering key outcomes of lower long-term unemployment, less crime, better health and better qualifications, but can also help to deliver the individual pride, community spirit and capacity for responsibility that enable communities to run regeneration programmes themselves.⁵¹

At the heart of this 'performance paradox', thus, as Eleonora Belfiore observes is whether these measures that are supposed to evaluate the socio-economic impact of the arts, including the imposition of targets, performance management, evidence-based policy-making etc, or, in her words, whether:

a whole range of measures introduced with the aim to improve *transparency* and *accountability* in the public sector – might have resulted, in reality [...] in opaque political messages amounting to little more than doublespeak.⁵²

Despite the mindlessness or complete lack of concern with the truth dominating the public domain perhaps, what is most interesting here is that behind the production of such 'hot air' lies a master's order that intentionally misleads its interlocutors (curators) so as to pursue the master's own interests and purposes.

⁵¹ Chris Smith, *Policy Action Team 10: Report to the Social Exclusion Unit - Arts and Sport*, London, Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), HMSO, 1999.

⁵² Eleonora Belfiore, 'On bullshit in cultural policy practice & research', *Variant*, Issue 37, Spring/Summer 2010, as found at: http://www.variant.org.uk/37_38texts/Variant37.html#L12, (accessed 11.06.2016).

In fact, what has really been happening, and as governmental funding to social services diminishes even more throughout the years, the private sector has also started capitalising on the surplus of participation. Where the private sector subsumes the 'third sector' (including self organised groups, grass roots and nonprofit organisations) and its (symbolic) values, in the distribution of shrunken welfare-state services.⁵³ As a result, this non profit sector of non governmental organisations and alternative associations (often with charitable status) instead has come to represent a prospective market for the so-called creators of culture. Where the third sector is now called upon to play the role of 'catalyst' for the process of replacing the retreating 'second sector' (the state) and fostering the growth of the still insufficiently developed 'first sector' (the market).⁵⁴ It is a process that has its own definite, economic, and therefore political logic, most prevalent in political ideologies like David Cameron's *Big Society* project for a creative Britain. In Cameron's official launch back in 2010 for instance, we read:

We want to give citizens, communities and local government the power and information they need to come together, solve the problems they face and build the Britain they want. [...] Only when people and communities are given more power and take more responsibility can we achieve fairness and opportunity for all.⁵⁵

Reading this one would assume that the UK government through its new cultural policies would aim to give communities more powers, encourage people to actively take part, 'transferring more power from central to local governments, supporting co-ops, mutuals, charities, and social enterprises'. When in reality, all recent UK governments (of the last fifteen

⁵³ Dušan Grlja and Jelena Vesić, 'The Neoliberal Institution of Culture and the Critique of Culturalization', *New Museum*, 2007, as found at: '<http://www.newmuseum.org/blog/view/the-neoliberal-institution-of-culture-and-the-critique-of-culturalization>', (accessed 12.04.2015).

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ For more on this see: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/78979/building-big-society_0.pdf last accessed 10/06/2016 14:52'

years at least), in fact, gradually withdrew funding from small scale organisations, encouraging a general marketisation of the arts more through private investment and entrepreneurialism instead. At the same time, and as a brainchild of New Labour (enthusiastically adopted by subsequent governments), the creative industries (including community arts, socially engaging practices, participatory and alternative education initiatives, have been defined by the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport, as:

those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of economic property.⁵⁶

This governmental need for '*proof of economic value for all forms of cultural output*', in the case of fine art, in fact, refers exclusively to the market and urges that 'attention should be paid to the range and availability of stock to ensure that buyers continue to be given choices'. To put it simply, artistic production now needs to not only show how it produces value, but also how it accommodates its needs.⁵⁷ Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt, one of the key figures behind Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)'s *Culture Value Project*, points out in her recent critique of Jeremy Corbyn's latest *Plan for The Arts*, in fact, for how many years UK's cultural policies have been formulated:

on the basis of market failure— the grudging acknowledgement that certain artistic endeavours are not supported by the market and must compete for ever-shrinking subsidies.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), *Creative Industries Economic Estimates*, 9 December 2010.

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⁵⁸ Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt, 'Jeremy Corby's Arts Plan', *Mute*, September 2015, as found at: <http://www.metamute.org/community/your-posts/jeremy-corbyn's-arts-plan>, (accessed 10.06.2016).

In the same article, Gordon-Nesbitt explains how publicly funded arts have become subordinate to the market through their evaluation according to the tenets of HM Treasury's Green Book, which insists on 'attributing monetary values to all impacted of any proposed policy, project, and programme'.⁵⁹ Which means that any cultural, artistic or community project must now be measured not according to its particular individual and social value, but instead according to its monetary economic value, competing in the market like any other commodity, without any distinction between the arts and other more commercial branches of creativity.⁶⁰ So on the one hand, and in order to secure public funding, the arts must now showcase what they can do for society, legitimising their function within *Relational Aesthetics* discourse, while at the same time, express their 'social value' in numerical and economic terms, in direct relevance with commerce and industry.

As culture industry doctrine expands its fetishisation of the social, subsuming the third sector's surplus in the value producing machinery, so does capital's command over production get less mediated, aiming to change the character of cultural production to conform with that of any other *really* subsumed work. The concrete aspects of this imposition, would eventually involve an imposed regulation of time, quality, form, pace etc. on cultural work where museums and cultural organisations become populated by administration and management, the 'immaterial' industrial machinery that enters the museum's infrastructure to free time for productive work. The cultural worker eventually also gets more upheld by a hierarchy of positions with a top-down structure of decisions; accommodating to this new 'effectively' managed, institutionalised, power-structured and socially sanctioned behaviour of conduct. This re-shaping of cultural work by capital would involve an everyday material practice whereby ideological constructs confront our field of operative functioning, eventually eliminating any kind of possibility for resistance, and instead implying coercion, boredom and misery (i.e. alienation).

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Museums and galleries of course continue to appear as sites of access, radicalism, multiculturalism, for a culture that is supposed to ensure tolerance and respect for the other, while the pressing problems of repression, precarity, poverty, racism and struggle, remain hidden behind the screens of their 'culturalised' forms. Similar rituals exist within the university, where a material reality of knowledge needs to be created and re-created by the rituals of conduct of the students and academics in their everyday practices. Some even argue that the very articulation of political struggles and social antagonisms have already moved from the "classical" domain of state apparatuses, such as political parties, the parliamentary system, and the procedures of law, to art spaces and their competing 'cultural options'; a further dispersing of political issues into cultural ones. Most importantly perhaps here, and as if the creative industries rhetoric had not damaged enough the way we produce and circulate our works in the arts, we also witnessed the withdrawal of government funding from small scale arts organisations that have historically been responsible for radical curatorial and educational initiatives, independent thinking groups and their supporting 'interpretive communities'.⁶¹

In a recent conference on 'Public Assets' (2015), organised by *Common Practice* and Andrea Phillips, at Goldsmiths University (London), Phillips pointed out precisely how the neoliberalisation of the cultural institution has brought about a series of contradictory relationships, between the front of an organisation (its exhibitions and public events) and the back

⁶¹ 'Interpretive communities' is a neologism quoted by Kodwo Eshun in *Public Assets Conference* (2015), Goldsmiths University of London, 2015, to include all those members of a possible community who 'gather around a concept', in order to build these concepts into subcultures. To quote Eshun himself:

'They bond through a certain theoretical consistency, through a struggle to develop a vocabulary, through a commitment to developing neologisms, to differentiate that project to metabolise it as an idea until it becomes lived as an attitude, shared by anybody who wants to commit to the project of building that attitude'.

Kodwo Eshun reminding us here perhaps the importance of such spaces, as spaces for dialogue, listening and exchange beyond value.

(how workers are paid for instance).⁶² Contradictions, as Phillips explained, that cultural workers need to now embody in their everyday, as they are left with little but no option but to carry this with their body, performing the domination of the ‘cultural industrial infrastructure’ on their work and pleasure.⁶³ In the same conference, speakers were then called upon to analyse artistic value beyond monetary and economic measurability, in defence of small-scale arts organisations, and against the ‘totalising effect of the cultural industrial machine’, as Phillips put it.⁶⁴ Calling for a more pragmatic and practical approach to the problem, by a coming together of art workers in order to get together and reclaim the language of autonomy and egalitarian aesthetic expression, i.e. ‘the language of creativity, culture, cultural wealth, public participation and engagement’ altogether.⁶⁵ All of these terms, Phillips explained, have been ‘repurposed by the capital that now surrounds the art industry’, arguing for a return of art’s language to its ‘social origin with inclusive work of small scale’.⁶⁶ Phillips then drew a comprehensive list of new issues that have now surfaced as a result of the withdrawal of public funding and the marketisation of previously funded industries more generally, shedding light on the particularities of this development within the context of arts relationship to discourse more generally, like:

⁶² ‘Common Practice’, London, founded in 2009, is an advocacy group working for the recognition and fostering of the small-scale contemporary visual arts sector in London.

‘The group aims to promote the value of the sector and its activities, act as a knowledge base and resource for members and affiliated organisations, and develop a dialogue with other visual art organisations on a local, national and international level. The group’s founding members are Afterall, Chisenhale Gallery, Electra, Gasworks, LUX, Matt’s Gallery, Mute Publishing, The Showroom, and Studio Voltaire – together representing a diverse range of activities including commissioning, production, publishing, research, exhibitions, residencies and artists’ studios’.

As found at: <http://www.commonpractice.org.uk/home/>, (accessed 10/06/2016).

⁶³ Andrea Phillips, ‘Introductory Welcome’, *Public Assets Conference*, Goldsmiths University of London, Goldsmiths, London, May 2015, as found at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xTe67R_60Qg, (accessed 05.06.2015).

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

the treatment of members of the public as un-informed statistical bodies [...], the encouragement of private enterprise and entrepreneurialism within the arts, as well as a shift in the job of the cultural worker from engagement with art and artists to entrepreneur and fundraiser.⁶⁷

This brings us to the most recent phenomenon of the artist as ‘cultural entrepreneur’, a ‘bio-political condition’, according to Phillips, which includes new working patterns of competitive structures (like inequality and exploitation) that we are called upon to incorporate into our bodies, living with the contradictions.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Within the conceptual framework of ‘biopolitics’ and ‘psychopathologies’ of desire, Franco Bifo Berardi takes this point further and argues that the progressive ‘mentalisation’ of creative processes has brought about an ‘enslavement of the soul’. He writes:

‘Putting the soul to work: this is the new alienation. Our desiring energy is trapped in the trick of self-enterprise, our libidinal investments are regulated according to economic rules, our attention is captured in the precariousness of virtual networks: every fragment of mental activity must be transformed into capital’.

Reflecting here perhaps the collapse of global economy and its effects on the ‘dark side’ of the soul, i.e. fear, anxiety, panic and depression surfacing after a looming decade of austerity and the final collapse of a system based on the neoliberal ideal of an ‘inherent balance’.

Franco Bifo Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*, Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2009, pp. 24, 207.

Artist as Cultural Entrepreneur

The principles of free market competitiveness and entrepreneurship have nowadays also been introduced to the once privileged sphere of artistic and intellectual production, which not only enter the sphere of culture as market relations commanding the social ones, but also on the individual level, i.e. at the level of the subject. One need only look at the sheer amount of freelance artists, designers, paired up with freelance curators-entrepreneurs, all part of small independent companies, collectives and 'free' working groups in the name of a new type of 'self' employed subject which no longer fits into previously typical patterns of full-time professions. In fact, the very idea of creating a freelance 'entrepreneurial cultural worker of yourself, that does not fit previous employability patterns of traditional full-time professions is nowadays hailed as a brilliant new way out of unemployment.⁶⁹

The cultural worker today has to be a creative entrepreneur, where on the one hand she 'creatively' — meaning profitably— uses the available cultural capital, while at the same time transforms this into more 'culture'. Or as Grlja & Vesić, find, the cultural worker is now supposed to be 'a "funky businessman" in contemporary "karaoke capitalism", transforming the raw material of "culture" into little more than temporary entertainment'.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Some knowledge workers and 'cognitariats' even see this precariousness as giving them new possibilities for alternative ways of socialisation and production, creating a new kind of 'common' (when (or if) it manages to escape the homogenisation and commodification of knowledge work to begin with). The idea is that differences between types of work that once were all important are erased, as all types of work become assimilated and subsumed for they all begin to incorporate cognitive work. As all these activities get increasingly subsumed under capitalist command, they all serve to the accumulation process, as society itself becomes an immense knowledge factory. Thus for some the distinction between productive and unproductive labour vanishes altogether. This theory is appealing for some new groups of activists who despite the difficulties resulting from precarious labour, see within it certain possibilities.

Selma James, 'Critique of Precarious Labour', *Variant*, issue 37, Spring/Summer 2010, as found at: http://www.variant.org.uk/37_38texts/Variant37.html#L9, (accessed 27.07.2016).

⁷⁰ Dušan Grlja and Jelena Vesić, 'The Neoliberal Institution of Culture and the Critique of Culturalization', *New Museum*, 2007, as found at: '<http://www.newmuseum.org/blog/view/the-neoliberal-institution-of-culture-and-the-critique-of-culturalization>', (accessed 12.04.2015).

The curator becomes the communication manager with specialist skills in the management of social relations and the structuring of 'fruitful' relational exchanges and diversifying cooperations, i.e. the manager of the production processes furthering and expanding profit.⁷¹

With an increased understanding of the curatorial as an independent discipline of its own, and as the spheres of independent and autonomous production feed more and more into the information machinery industry, so does the process of production of models of communication and sociability become part of the process of valorisation. If the value of the relational model manages to get immediately subsumed into the forms of curatorial organisation and management of curatorial practice, then we will have moved from a hybrid to a real form of subsumption. In this process of

⁷¹ Maurizio Lazzarato, in his account of new forms of organisation of work, and his understanding of 'immaterial labour' –which he defines as the labour that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity– refers to two different aspects of labour, within this value-producing process:

1. the 'informational content', i.e. the skills of direct labour involving computer control and communications
2. the 'cultural content', i.e. a series of activities that are not normally recognised as work, including the activities that define and fix cultural and artistic standards of value, fashions, tastes, styles and public opinion.

Activities that the curator, as intellectual manager of art's surplus, has been trained to strategically compose, manage and regulate, organising artistic production and by extension activating, managing and expanding productive cooperation. This practice requires the curator to be an 'active subject' in the coordination of the various functions of this 'interface', (including handling information, selecting, organising and decision-making), instead of passively following the capitalist command. In ways like this, and as Lazzarato argues, the new slogan for Western societies is that we should all 'become subjects' within 'participative management' processes that hold potential technology of power, a technology for 'creating and controlling the subjective processes'. Lazzarato writes:

'a polymorphous self-employed autonomous worker has emerged as the dominant form, a kind of 'intellectual worker' who is him or herself an entrepreneur, inserted within a market that is constantly shifting and within networks that are changeable in time and space'.

Lazzarato, of course, is not naive about the ways in which this information management is always already authoritatively codified, subordinated to the master's desire to know, and subsumed into the 'circulation of information'. He nevertheless believes that an analysis of immaterial labour can lead to defining a radical autonomy of the productive synergies of immaterial labour (that he considers as the work of this 'polymorphous self-employed autonomous worker').

Maurizio Lazzarato, 'Immaterial Labour' in Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (eds.), *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p. 140.

socialisation, and instead of a mediation, the curatorial practice could eventually by-pass mystification of the social process, and present it instead as value-producing creative labour in its own right (and as determined directly by the rules of equivalence). Directly appropriating the non-value producing labour of relational encounters as a commodity exchange proper. As a result both 'culture' and creative labour could be thought of as commodities proper. Indeed, both employers-curators and workers-artists already struggle to commodify labour. Curators use all their ingenuity, and that of their HR management minions, to quantify, measure and homogenise creative labour. Meanwhile, prospective employees-artists (or even students), in an anxious attempt to commodify their labour power, write and rewrite CVs, in order to portray themselves as purveyors of quantifiable labour units. And there's the problem. If workers and employers ever succeed in commodifying labour fully, capitalism will perish. Likewise, if curators and artists ever succeed in commodifying creativity fully, art will perish. It would be the end of a system capable of creating and distributing 'cultural' value. Hence we have capitalism's tendency to cyclically generate crisis, and the museum cyclically generating the new, reproducing this contradictory system ad infinitum. Andrea Phillips sums it up:

Meritocracy removes the contextual and historical basis of any individual or collective emergence. It produces a landscape of individuals whose randomised ascent is based on autonomy.⁷²

Another problem with this paradoxical 'free' entrepreneurial activity or dangerously 'self-organised road to commodification', as Stewart Martin explains in 'Pedagogy of Human Capital', is its effects beyond the laws of merely increasing profit and towards a more deeply entrenched ideological function of institutionalisation, where learning and education are used as a

⁷² Andrea Phillips, 'Remaking the Arts Centre', in Binna Choi, Maria Lind, Emily Pethick and Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez (eds.), *Cluster: Dialectionary*, Berlin, Sternberg Press, 2014, pp. 217–18, as cited in Carla Cruz, 'Practising Solidarity', *Common Practice*, 2016, as found at: http://www.commonpractice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/CommonPractice_PracticingSolidary.pdf, (accessed 31.05.2016).

fundamental way to manage class conflicts. Martin argues that education functions basically as the carrot, seducing us into the idea that we can all achieve middle class status, while the stick is the threat of deserved poverty of the individual or the whole nation (if they are not 'entrepreneurial' enough). He writes:

The idea that contemporary education is characterised by the move away from authoritarian forms of indoctrination and towards forms of self-directed or autonomous learning is perhaps the most powerful emancipatory ideology in this context' (where failure is nothing but educational failure).⁷³

He continues elsewhere:

"Life long learning" is exemplary. The phrase oscillates between the dream of fulfilling self-transformation beyond the privileges of youth, and the nightmare of indiscriminate de-skilling and re-skilling according to the dictates of a 'flexible' labour market. [...] "life long learning" extends "meritocracy" to the whole of your life. Qualification is a receding horizon; its promise of maturity takes the form of infantilisation.⁷⁴

This life-long learning carrot becomes more obvious, if we think about the increase in the total length of art studies and the number of postgraduate degrees and courses, or the mere rise in art student numbers and curatorial courses, all indicators of a general tendency for expansion of the realm of formal education in the arts and beyond (schools, colleges, universities), in order to subsume new sectors and new qualifications, as part of the realm of formal education. If we add internships, apprenticeships and vocational qualifications to that, or even distance learning, online learning, work based learning or home-based learning, we can definitely detect the current trend for an emphasis, on what Martin

⁷³ Stewart Martin, 'Pedagogy of Human Capital', *Mute*, vol. 2, no. 8, 2008, as found at: <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/pedagogy-human-capital>, (accessed 21.05.2014).

⁷⁴ Ibid.

refers to as 'life-long journey' of training and un-training, in order to continuously expand one's transferable skills, and become the ultimate flexible connoisseur –the manager-entrepreneur of relational exchanges.

A flexible labourer who has the skills to control, link, network, organise, retrieve, share, solve and track knowledge transformations, in order to encompass all different typologies of knowledge workers, as networks and flows. This new knowledge worker, i.e the artist/ curator and her ability to make connections, establish relationships, identify and understand trends, eventually produces new capabilities for herself, by creating and modifying strategies and models of relational sociability. This in turn brings valuable benefits to the institution, serving the expansion of the organisation's knowledge 'assets', eventually contributing to the overall surplus value of its cultural capital altogether (think of something like intellectual property here, only without a specific monetary value).

This idea of a pool of flexible 'knowledge labourers' available to skill and un-skill themselves, according to the dictates of the ever expanding market, brings to mind Marx's concept of the 'reserve army': a relatively redundant working population which is superfluous to capital's average requirements for its own valorisation, and is therefore a surplus population. According to Marx's understanding, the working population therefore produces both the accumulation of capital and the means by which it is itself made relatively superfluous; and it does this to an extent which is always increasing. In order for cognitive capitalism to continue its self-expansion then, it requires for its unrestricted activity an 'industrial reserve army' which is independent of any given natural limits. Marx writes:

the condemnation of one part of the working class to enforced idleness by the over-work of the other part, and vice versa, becomes a means of enriching the individual capitalists, and accelerates at the same time the production of the industrial reserve

army on a scale corresponding with the progress of social accumulation.⁷⁵

It is also perhaps interesting here to acknowledge that according to Marx, contemporary precarious ‘cognitariats’ are not therefore determined by the variations of the absolute numbers of the working population, but by the varying proportions in which the working class is divided into an active army and a reserve army, that is by the increase or diminution in the relative amount of the surplus population (by the extent to which it is alternately absorbed and set free).⁷⁶

Individuals that have been educated in the fields of art, design, media and cultural theory, in fact, have a certain degree of expertise, and by extension, a certain access to the artworks, images, concepts, representations, histories, and in short the symbolic agencies of what is nowadays encompassed by the term ‘culture’. This ‘savoir-faire’ of the artist is what grounds our basic assumption on the nature of art institutions and their function.⁷⁷ In a way then, this privileged access to the screening of culture’s signifying chains, is then supposed to allow for the entrepreneurial cultural worker to creatively (meaning profitably) use it as cultural capital – the truth at hand – in order to transform the raw material of ‘culture’ into surplus.

The problem here however, in this new ‘struggle for subjection to commodification’, does not lie with the individual artists/students/curators

⁷⁵ Marx, *ibid*: 782-90.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*.

⁷⁷ As artists and curators now share the continuum of presentational, processual and interphase skills, they also become more easily employable in cognitive, creative, and technical positions, on a freelance basis and in a variety of different kind of projects, rather than working as a wage labourer, like in older generations, through teaching, painting or decorating, explains John Roberts, concluding that ‘art is subsumed under general social technique as a condition of art’s increasing absorption into these new cognitive relations of production’.

John Roberts, ‘The Political Economisation of Art’ as cited in Gregory Sholette and Oliver Ressler, *It’s The Political Economy, Stupid: The Global Financial Crisis in Art and Theory*, London, Pluto Press, 2013, pp. 66-7.

and their by now client-like mentality, of course, as a consequence of the increase in tuitions fees, and the general tendency for privatisation and monetisation of arts education, for instance, but more with the character of its formal subsumption, i.e. the extent this capitalisation and economisation of culture, becomes integrated in the student's own condition for commodification.

As the term 'culture' has boundlessly extended over the past thirty years to encompass each and every symbolic activity of the precarious 'cognitariat', so has industry dispersed into those areas of society traditionally considered outside the economy of the market, turning education into a social process of production at its highest level of abstraction. A social form of co-operation which now ceases to lie outside capital and becomes embodied in the development of the accumulated knowledge production process itself. This revolutionises the entire realm of culture and education, as this goal gets inscribed into their concrete structures, determining production and distribution. The extension of this process of integration and expansion, via 'culturalisation of economy' or 'educationalisation of capital' has become formally integrated into its own commodification, now defining the very context of 'struggles of participation', democracy, autonomy and freedom. The more the margins between autonomy and industry, elitism and populism, official and marginal become blurred, the more our labours are commanded by capitalist processes. The demands for increased productivity, self-discipline, entrepreneurialism, and 'meritocratic ascendancy' become part of our social and natural life processes.

The real problem with this kind of subjectivisation, when arts education becomes an exclusively private concern, and in terms of its supposedly 'legitimate' social function, is that it loses its relevance to the tasks of its particular epoch. Instead, what we have is a series of repetitions and re-contextualised articulations of abstracted aspirations, concerns, concepts, values, and eventually 'tasks' as they are interpreted by an information manager (i.e the curator/educator/manager/programmer/entrepreneur),

presented in the form of recipes and prescriptions for the individual artist/student/curator to adopt. The latter gradually (at times even without realising the loss) relinquish their criticality and capacity for choice, eventually being expelled from decisions altogether. Students are instead carried along in the wake of change, being allowed to perform their own ways of activating the same set of generic mannerisms, in hope of themselves as subjects becoming 'transferable' as an 'aesthetic trope' (in the hands of a curator) for the latest 'contemporary' turn.⁷⁸ The primary goal here is the very demonstrability and ability to perform the 'self' as an adjusted self-educated, self-regulated individual, ready to become an object, and be an available self-organised 'transferable' identity in real time. The more 'transferable' and inter-disciplinary the learning, the more fluent the student, and thus the more valuable her skills. One need only look at social media's use in this context of self-professionalisation and self-education, where the artist/student is now called upon to perform his continuously available 'curated' self in the name of her continuous culturalisation.⁷⁹ As a consequence of this self-transferability, universities seem to have lost their monopoly over their traditional function as knowledge producers, for some even rendering their own existence

⁷⁸ This surge of entrepreneurial self-integration has resulted in the emergence of new terms of political struggle and dispute over capitalism and its limits. Italian autonomists, like Hardt and Negri for example believe that the precarisation of work and the appearance of immaterial labor fulfils the prediction Marx made in the *Grundrisse*, in a famous section on machines. In this section Marx states that with the development of capitalism, less and less capitalist production relies on living labour and more and more on the integration of science, knowledge and technology in the production process as the engines of accumulation. This is, of course, very important for the purposes of organisation of work and struggle. At the same time, I think it is important to keep in mind here that this tremendous leap in technology required by the computerisation of work, for example, or the integration of knowledge, and information control into the work process, has been paid at the cost of a tremendous increase of exploitation at the other end of the process. As Selma James argues the fundamental principle is that capitalist development is always at the same time a process of underdevelopment. Reminding us here the problems that arise form a conception of the completion of real subsumption in a stage-by-stage manner (and the assumption of a unified 'present' time and space), versus a more dispersed kind of disjunctive synthesis of the present temporality whose relative autonomies function on different levels, and inform each other).

Selma James, 'Critique of Precarious Labour', *Variant*, issue 37, Spring/Summer 2010, as found at: http://www.variant.org.uk/37_38texts/Variant37.html#L9, (accessed 27.07.2016).

⁷⁹ This process was based on the promise that 'self-organised access to knowledge, can be independent of any further mediation other than that of the medium itself'. See for example: Florian Schneider, 'Extended Footnotes on Education', *e-flux*, vol.13, issue 2, 2010, as found at: <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/extended-footnotes-on-education/>, (accessed 05.05.2015).

pointless, unless they are able to question their own functionality. This failure of public institutions (universities and museums alike) to resist their own demise by radically re-evaluating their own functionality eventually lays the groundwork for turning education into a business.

Janna Graham argues in 'Between a Pedagogical Turn and a Hard Place: Thinking with Conditions':

Paradoxically, these [curatorial and educational] shifts enable art education and research to continue in the form of courses, programmes and exhibitions that question the notion of artistic genius, the assumed authorial status of the artist and the colonial "imperialisms" of the corporation and the nation state. However, they at the same time require art practitioners to hatch new "geniuses", identify and produce more efficient "talent pathways" between creative education and the so called creative industries, consolidate institutional brands, demonstrate better time management (with less resources) and accelerate their output of "knowledge products" of various forms.⁸⁰

The effects of art's integration into culture industry as a mutually conditioning relationship, and the changes in the character of its formal subsumption thus become particularly pertinent within the field of arts education (i.e. research).

⁸⁰ Janna Graham, 'Between a Pedagogical Turn and a Hard Place: Thinking with Conditions' in O'Neill, P. and Wilson, M. (eds.), *Curating and the Educational Turn*, London/Amsterdam, Open Editions/ de Appel, 2010, p. 125.

Research.

An education which would lead men to take a new stance towards their problems – that of intimacy with those problems, one oriented toward research instead of repeating irrelevant principles. An education of “I wonder” instead of merely “I do”.⁸¹

Paulo Freire

In an open letter ‘To the Knowledge Producers’ (2008), a student from the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna has eloquently criticised the way the arts, and by implication the education and knowledge they produce are being ‘commodified, industrialised, economised and made subject to free trade’.⁸² The importance of artistic research and its contribution to knowledge is the key argument in this discourse, where artist’s ‘know-how’ is more and more replaced by a knowledge-based training provided by the university. The curator’s unique ways and styles of knowing and operating in this complex and sophisticated sphere of production and her abilities to communicate a more specialised and prestigious account for this relation, are very important here. The curator is always involved in this game of culture, as her job, to begin with, is to engage one in this system – to put one at the source of transference, as the supposed subject of knowledge. The recent phenomenon of practice-led PhDs, research-based practices, and ‘practice-as-research’ methodologies, together with the increasing number of art universities that aim to establish the new discipline of the ‘curatorial’ through interdisciplinary research-as-art programs, hint towards the manner in which art schools are nowadays slowly replaced as sites for research within the university system. (This research in turn used as a structure for the development of all these newly differentiated sectors of cultural functions, within the culture industry).

⁸¹ Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, London, Continuum, 1974/ 2008, p. 32

⁸² Tom Holert, ‘Art in the Knowledge Based Polis’, *e-flux*, no 3, February 2009, as found at: <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/art-in-the-knowledge-based-polis/>, (accessed 27.07.2016).

As Andrea Phillips emphasises in 'Educational Aesthetics', of course, there are two sides to this story where on the one hand the recognition of these kind of practice-based research projects by the European systems of funding allows for 'artworks to be understood on a greater and more profound level across various strata', opening up the terrain for 'people of different orientations to understand and be with each other'.⁸³ While on the other hand, as Phillips summarises, practice-based research projects also involve a 'certain scientification' of creative processes, faced with governmental demands to measure what artists do in terms of 'knowledge production and transfer', all bound with the effects of 'governmentalising and instrumentalising procedures'.⁸⁴ Phillips then asks: 'What happens when education is co-opted by the gallery system both formally and informally – what is delivered and what is rejected?'⁸⁵

Tom Holert's famous article 'Art in The Knowledge Based Polis' (2009) sheds more light on the history of this implementation of practice-led research in Art and Design in Great Britain, and the ways in which regulatory councils have established criteria for the legitimisation of art as research, affirming its new role as a knowledge-based practice.⁸⁶ As Holert points out, by 1996 the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) had reached a point where it defined research as:

original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding. It includes work of direct relevance *to the needs of*

⁸³ Phillips reminds us here how the work of artists-researchers within the format of practice-based research becomes invariably 'interesting, complex and highly evolved [...], often incorporating the production of useful and politically necessary discursive and communicable space for evolving publics'.

Andrea Phillips, 'Educational Aesthetics' in O'Neill, P. and Wilson, M. (eds.), *Curating and the Educational Turn*, London, Amsterdam, Open Editions/ de Appel, 2010, pp. 91-2.

⁸⁴ Phillips, *ibid.*

⁸⁵ Phillips, *ibid.*: 93

⁸⁶ Tom Holert, 'Art in the Knowledge Based Polis', *e-flux*, no 3, February 2009, as found at: <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/art-in-the-knowledge-based-polis/>, (accessed 27.07.2016).

commerce and industry, as well as to the public and voluntary sectors; scholarship; the invention and generation of ideas, images, performances and artefacts including design, where these lead to new or substantially improved insights; and the use of existing knowledge in experimental development to produce new or substantially improved materials, devices, *products* and processes, including design and construction.⁸⁷

According to another strategy paper published in 2008, 'artistic research' is now part of EU policy of the generation of 'New Knowledge' in a 'Creative Europe'.⁸⁸ Filling applications and project proposals, or even upgrading one's work in order to validate claims for 'genuine knowledge production'; establishing a limiting consensus for accountability, ticking the boxes for the parameters that legitimise new systems of knowledge while still operating at the heart of the system, through the university discourse, is now all part of the artistic/curatorial practice itself, as it gets more and more bound up with the structures of academic legitimacy.

The point I'm trying to make here, is that even though the professionalisation of arts education (and the emergence of new 'niche' disciplines that follow), helps (the university) continue the production of what appears as 'new knowledge', the power relations behind the way this knowledge is structured, and produced are nowadays directly or indirectly linked with the structure of the university itself (and its requirement to become a neoliberal institution). In a way it's like the artist's skills and 'know-how' are now geared towards the production of a new and highly intellectual pursuit that appears to go beyond art as we know it, moving towards a more interdisciplinary approach that is linked to a certain

⁸⁷ Ibid [my emphases].

⁸⁸ Ibid.

'dematerialised' production 'knowledge economy'.⁸⁹ The curator's 'know-how' then lies in the ability to appropriate and subject the artist's skill, refine it, abstract it and universalise it as *reason*, which in the name of *progress* needs to be placed back into the institutions, in order to cement the subordination, and secure it as knowledge.

One of the consequences of this process of 'academicisation' of the arts then, is that the artist/curator-researcher now needs to transform one's findings (performative, experiential or empirical) as a set of fixed, separable and demonstrable 'research outcomes', which in turn need to be abstracted via 'institutionalised speech acts' so they are eventually demonstrable as a piece of 'original' and 'useful' research work for the wider research community. The protocols and criteria for the valorisation of this process are not precisely fixed or pre-determined, of course, but need to undergo a constant re-establishing and institutionalising process, without necessarily re-evaluating the very criteria for institutionalisation to begin with. Where the academy itself needs to complete the consensual circle and establish the quality of art's 'new knowledge' contributions altogether, so that art can find its place within the discourse of [neoliberal] universities. As Tom Holert eloquently puts it, however:

When one speaks of knowledge with regards to art however, one needs to take into account how differentiated and nuanced an idea this is, than the usual accounts of this relation...any kind of 'measurability' [of art's surplus value], and shaping [and contextualising] in accordance with its anonymous and distributed intentions', reproduces the power relations and belief systems inherent in the system itself, namely neo-liberalism.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Dematerialisation was a term used by Lucy Lippard and John Chandler to ascribe certain values to ideas-based practice of the 1960s.

Lucy Leppard and John Chandler, 'The Dematerialization of Art', *Art International*, February 1968, vol. 12, issue 2, pp. 31-6.

⁹⁰ Holert, *ibid.*

As soon as one subjects sensation and perception to some sort of universal quantitative regime of accountability (supply and demand), by way of a utilitarian 'curatorial' language for example, one risks equating art for an academic, at times even scientific thought. This sort of transference of artistic knowledge to information by implication involves a formal change in the demands and expectations of the scientific community and institutional sponsorship vis a vis the research outcomes. This changes the character of the process of subsumption formally, so that the artist is finally required to translate their artistic practice proper into 'practice as research', all bound with the demands of scientific communities and institutional sponsorship.

4. SUBSUMPTION OF ART INTO UNIVERSITY DISCOURSE



Slogan 'Be realistic, ask for the impossible' (Soyez realistes, demandez l'impossible) in Paris, France, on May 3, 1968.

- *Who wants to know?*
- *I want to know.*
- *What do you want to know?*
- *I don't know!*¹

The political events of May '68 spurred a radical movement with resounding effects on France's cultural and social history for years to come.² The students brought the entire public services to a halt, with occupations of universities and factories, street violence and massive general strikes with slogans like '*Soyez réalistes, demandez l'impossible*' ('Be realistic, ask the impossible'). For Jacques Lacan however, the students protests of May '68 offered a clear example of the

¹ Irit Rogoff, 'FREE', *e-flux*, no. 14, March 2010, as found at <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/free/>, (accessed 10.06.2016).

² For more on this see 'The Beginning of an Era' in *Situationist International*, no. 12, September 1969, as found at <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/beginning.html>, (accessed 13.06.2016).

students entrapment in the discourse of the Master, a capitalist trap where the students' 'hysterical demands' merely ended up manifesting the transformation of capitalism into a 'market of knowledge'. Lacan's notoriously ambiguous response to the students revolts, of course, was seen by some as a reductive definition of revolution altogether.³ For Lacan however, May '68 was indeed an act that realised the structural contradictions determining the student's subjectification, demonstrating the link between politics, structure and the unconscious, in the streets.⁴

Immediately after May '68, Lacan pursued the theorisation of these structural imbalances and the dependancy of the subject on processes of 'discourse', in a materialist way, by producing his famous four discourses theory: the Master's discourse, the Hysteric's discourse, the University discourse and the Analytic discourse.⁵ In his seminars on *The Reverse Side of Psychoanalysis (1969/70)*, Lacan maintains the thesis that the discourse of the analyst is in fact the reverse, or 'the other side' of the master's discourse, attempting to re-position 'the Analyst in terms of a discourse that may contribute to the amelioration of the situation by

³ Lacan did not identify with the intellectual current of the time (Jean-Paul Sartre, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari) and the call for a communist revolution. For more on Lacan's relationship with this particular era of French history see:

Samo Tomšič, *The Capitalist Unconscious*, London, Verso, 2015.

⁴ Commenting after Michel Foucault's lecture 'What is an author?' (1969) Lacan wrote: '...for if the May events demonstrate anything, then [they demonstrate] precisely the descent of structures in the street. The fact that this was written at the very site where this descent took place, simply shows us something that is very often immanent to what we call the act, namely that it misrecognises itself',

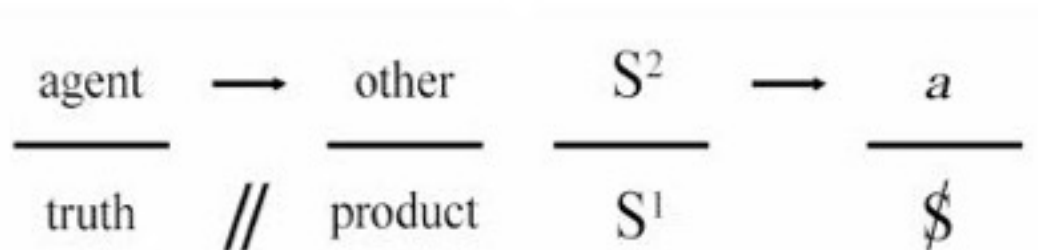
Jacques Lacan as quoted in Samo Tomšič, *The Capitalist Unconscious*, London, Verso, 2015, p. 20.

⁵ It is important to mention here that the term 'discourse' underwent significant development throughout Lacan's teaching: initially indicating speech and then moving on to interpret Marx's 'mode of production', in order to stress the inter-subjective nature of language and the fact that the speech act (of a speaking body) always already implies another subject that 'listens', an interlocutor. In his analysis in fact each term is sustained in its topological relation with the others, developing a psychoanalytic language with its own lexis and syntax.

Tomšič, *ibid*: 203.

tackling it from the reverse side'.⁶ Lacan's discourses actually become very useful here in analysing further the 'polymorphous perversion' of the cultural tendency to integrate and curate relational exchanges and the production of capitalist subjectivities more generally. Lacan's formula of the discourse of the university U in particular, provides illuminating insights on the status of the artist/student as a subject produced by a 'knowledge society', and the role the curator plays in the circular extraction of surplus value (and surplus jouissance) out of participation.⁷

In more detail then, Lacan represents the articulations of the symbolic network of his four discourses with four algebraic formulas structured according to the different positioning of agency in each case:



'The structure of the four discourses', *Source*: Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre XX, Encore*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, Paris, Seuil, 1975.

Lacan considers the master signifier to be designated S_1 , the 'battery of signifiers', i.e. the 'knowledge' that is always already there, to be designated by the sign S_2 and $\$$ as the split or barred subject, in this case

⁶ Gallagher Cormac, 'Introduction', *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII: Psychoanalysis upside down/The Reverse Side of Psychoanalysis*, 1969-70, unedited from French manuscripts-unofficial non-published version intended for the reading group at St Vincent's University Hospital, Dublin, 2001, p. 3.

Gallagher points out here how this was also a difficult time for Lacan personally as he had just been expelled from *École Normale Supérieure* and his peers had refused to accept his formulations on psychoanalysis.

⁷ Jacques Lacan in Cormac, *ibid*: 4.

the student-artist-protester, who wants to know but does not know what. Lacan further designates with *a* the objet petit *a*, which stands for the surplus enjoyment 'jouissance'.⁸ In these formulas (working from left to right) the top left position is the agent that dominates the relationship between the other symbols.

In Lacan's discourse of the university (U) then, the dominant position is occupied by the hegemony of knowledge (*savoir*) that disguises as the appearance of a 'neutrality', but is in fact hiding the domination of the master, in the position of 'truth' from whom this knowledge is imparted.⁹ Adapting this in the context of our so far analysis of the *relational* and *curatorial* turn in education, art nowadays occupies a paradoxical position between the signifying chain S2 (agent) and the master signifier S1 (truth), where the 'know-how' of the artist through the process of universalisation of knowledge becomes the agent for the production of the split subject $\$$ — which in this case is none other than the art student. When art schools are explicitly displaced by the university system as sites of research, it is almost as if academia captures art's 'new knowledge' within its already established university discourse. In this way, art's surplus *jouissance*, its surplus unknown-known part, is now part of the university's (master's) enjoyment. Through this process of universalisation, the artist's 'know-how' finally abandons any traditional sense of genius (that serves a particular patron), and occupies instead precisely the position of agent for the production of the neoliberal university discourse instead.

If we think of Jacques Lacan's formula of the social bond, and in particular the relationship between his discourse of the Master in relation to the curator's task today, it is almost as if the latter has become the personification of the ultimate neo-liberal product in the history of art. The master signifiers of the art historical-canonical training (which is now replaced by a whole new set of interdisciplinary master signifiers that

⁸ Ibid: 70.

relate art to all other kinds of disciplines, like the 'master signifier' philosophy or that of anthropology, sociology and science) takes the place of the agent, that drives the truth behind the split subject: the artist who wants to know. The artist's desire to know, as in his desire for the Other (disciplines) now controlled by this excess surplus object personified in the curator's fantasy trap. The formula of this paradoxical relationship serves us well here for a better understanding of the state of the subject that is supposed to know in relation to the 'unknown knowns'. What the art student doesn't know they know is what controls them, by way of the institutionalisation of art into knowledge, the surplus within knowledge (to be accumulated). In fact, as Lacan argues, it is not only that one cannot control this unknown-known, but that it actually controls you. In a nutshell, the master signifier has the power to produce the subject it controls.

Subjects soon lose their ability to choose and integrate themselves into their own context, and instead adapt their desires to the master's incessant demand, eventually turning themselves into an object. Adaptation here is perhaps most symptomatic of the subject's level of objectification and 'dehumanisation', to use Paulo Freire's term. If I lose my ability to desire and make choices, and I am subjected to the desires and choices of others, to the extent that my decisions are no longer my own, because they result from external prescriptions, then I am no longer integrated. Rather I have adapted. I have adjusted. As Paulo Freire puts it: 'Choice is illusory to the degree that it represents the expectations of others'.¹⁰

¹⁰ Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, London, Continuum, 1974/ 2008, p. 6.

On a similar vein, paulo Freire, when explaining the oppressed's conditioning by the myths of the old order writes: 'The oppressed at a certain moment of their existential experience adopt a model of 'adhesion' to the oppressor. They cannot consider 'him' sufficiently clearly to objectivise him, to discover him 'outside' themselves...they are submerged in the reality of oppression.

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, London, Continuum, 1968/ 2005, p. 46.

Within this terrain, the subject is unable to question her own position and the conditions that produce it, but is instead concerned with the 'transferability' of her knowledge, and her ability to adjust. Any sense of criticality here begins and ends with the way in which it entertains a relational exchange, a concept, context or a paradigm, as this is conditioned by a set of given limitations. In a way, it is almost as if from the outset the student/artist's quest needs to set its own limits of confinement, framing and by extension territorialising its field. Criticality's surplus 'unknown known' as an always already subsumed form of 'knowledge', where surplus jouissance is subsumed into (university) discourse. Free associations, dialogue, bi-lateral thinking, non-knowledge, experience, democratic participation, life and social mobilisations do not fit here. Instead we have a criticality that reproduces the same; because how can we claim for 'new territorialisations' when our territory is always already confined, always already part of capital as creative potential. When our surplus jouissance is always already subsumed as surplus value within the university discourse, hiding behind the master's desire to know, subject and capitalise?

Irit Rogoff, writes:

And it is the agency of subjectification and its contradictory multiplicity that is at the heart of a preoccupation with knowledge in education, giving its traction as it were, what Foucault called "the lived multiplicity of positionings".¹¹

Rogoff argues that this notion of criticality – that limits itself to the production of a surplus within knowledge– seems 'a very narrow one', as it fails to take on 'the problems of subjectification' to begin with.¹²

¹¹ Irit Rogoff, "Free" in e-flux, no 14, 2010, as found at <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/free/>, (accessed 10/06/2016)

¹² Ibid.

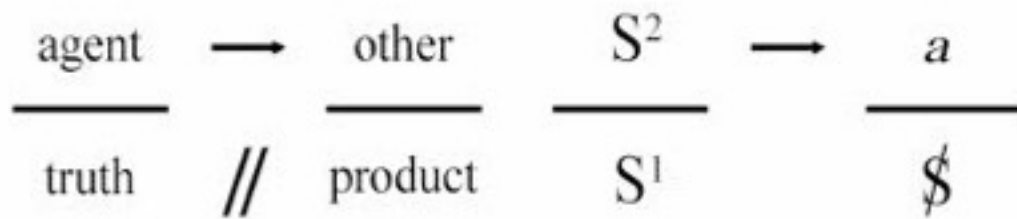
If the split subject cannot position itself within different terrains, i.e. is unable to make her own connections between academic knowledge, research, and participation in life and experience, but is instead master of transference of her own surplus jouissance as 'useful' 'social' 'value' producing subject, to fit the master (university)'s signifying chain, then the subject never has any control of her own agency in the first place. The subject in fact most of the times, is not even aware that such control even exists, as she is unable to free the creative potential of her unconscious desire and living labour. And it is exactly this unknown agency that manages to control her in the end, as she aims towards the unattainable fantasy of a subjectivity and society 'without negativity', without class struggle, of capital as life or as Samo Tomšič puts it, 'capital as a specific form of vitalism'.¹³

Samo Tomšič in *Capitalist Unconscious* (2015), argues further:

The dynamics and adaptability of capital – its capacity to mystify, distort and repress subjective and social antagonisms, assimilating symptomatic or subversive identities and so on – sufficiently indicates that capital should be understood as life without negativity, or more precisely, that the efficiency and the logic of capitalism is supported by a fantasy of such life, subjectivity and society. It is a vitalist fantasy, where Marx's critique of fetishism turns out to be more than a philosophical curiosity, since it targets precisely the hypothesis of the inherent creative potential of the three central capitalist abstractions: commodity, money and capital.¹⁴

¹³ Tomšič, *ibid*: 203.

¹⁴ *Ibid*.



'The structure of the four discourses', *Source*: Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre XX, Encore*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, Paris, Seuil, 1975.

If we re-examine Lacan's formula, in more detail, and in particular his positioning of *the partial object a*, i.e. the unknown known of surplus, as the 'other' within the social bond, we will begin to see more clearly perhaps how current problems of subjectification develop. We need to remember here however that, for Lacan, the unconscious discourse – where speech and language come from – does not belong to the subject's conscious control in the first place, as this constitutes the discourse of the Other.¹⁵ The big Other inscribed here is the symbolic order of universalising discourse, the discourse of knowledge and self-curatorial mastery. Moving away from Rogoff's reference to Foucault's 'lived multiplicity of positionings' perhaps, and towards a mediated relationship of the latter through the neoliberal university's formalising command over *jouissance*, organising the discourse of 'contemporaneity'.

¹⁵ According to Dylan Evans' Lacanian dictionary, the distinction between other and Other is fundamental to psychoanalysis. Dylan explains:

'[For Lacan], the little other is the other who is not really other, but a reflection and projection of the Ego. He [autre] is simultaneously the counterpart and the specular image. The little other is thus entirely inscribed in the Imaginary order'. The big Other on the contrary, designates radical alterity, an other-ness which transcends the illusory otherness of the imaginary because it cannot be assimilated through identification. Lacan equates this radical alterity with language and the law, and hence the big Other is inscribed in the order of the symbolic. Indeed, the big Other *is* the symbolic insofar as it is particularised for each subject. The Other is thus both another subject, in his radical alterity and unassimilable uniqueness, and also the symbolic order which mediates the relationship with that other subject'.

Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, London, Routledge, 1996, p. 135.

In this process, thus, the partial object *a* which drives the student/artist's desire to know beyond established 'knowledge', denotes the object which can never be attained, which as Lacan argues, is the cause of the desire rather than that towards which desire tends. This is why Lacan calls this the 'object cause' of desire, '*le petit objet a*', as the object which sets desire in motion, which is especially manifested with those partial objects which define our drives. Our drives, of course, do not seek to reach the object as a final destination, but circulate around it, so that the circle of desire-drive-desire continues accumulating new surplus, as the irreducible reserve of libido. The artist's surplus *jouissance* thus, namely the *petit a*, becomes both an object of intense anxiety, and the final reserve of potential-value producing regulation of desires.¹⁶

Within this constant exhortation to artists/students surplus, this new 'transferable' knowledge eventually needs to invent new and ever expanding outlets for itself, as it must also entertain the by-now prevalent belief that it should not only be obliged to seek out alternative sources of [knowledge] economies, but actually to produce them as well. The curator's managerial position becomes even more crucial here, where by producing the need for a particular type of knowledge, she is also setting up the means of its excavation or invention. This, therefore, becomes almost like a "need-based" culture of always already formally subsumed knowledges, that produces not only the support, but also the market through itself. 'Indeed, there's something eerily Marxist in this phenomenon, in that it mirrors Marx's prediction of capitalism's ability to create a surplus of capacity that can subsequently be freely shared without market forces' brutality', writes Cory Doctorow, when analysing the internally socialistic but externally capitalistic character of most of our institutions today, reflecting here perhaps the changes in the very

¹⁶ This becomes very important later on in my analysis of Ultra-red's practice as a practice that manages to turn relational models on their head by de-linking the symbolic from the value form of participation, when the participant must situate herself, just like an analyst as the semblance of *objet petit a*, the cause of the analysand's desire.

character of subsumption itself, and the ways in which this is internalised within the mechanisms of subject formation.¹⁷

Combining the Marxist and psychoanalytic perspective, we can conclude that the art student is both the social embodiment of surplus labour/value and surplus jouissance.¹⁸ The art students are obliged to engage in a formative process, to work on themselves in order to become the subject of value and enter the 'market of knowledge'. Lacan writes: The credit point, the little piece of paper that they want to issue you, is precisely this. It is the sign of what knowledge will progressively become in the market that one calls the University,' reflecting perhaps the extent to which the commodification of knowledge has reached today, where there is no visible outside, all part of the same enterprise.¹⁹

In today's integrated cultural-economic system of knowledge production, it seems that the master's own battle for control no longer lies in the desire to suppress any disruptions, but rather in the desire to know, subject and colonise, in her efforts to curate and regulate the formal character of the subsumption of our 'desires to know', so that their 'unknown known' surplus will work in tandem with accumulation economies, towards permanent self-valorisation.²⁰ The struggle then, is not so much to 'curate'

¹⁷ Cory Doctorow, 'Chris Anderson's Free adds much to The Long Tail, but falls short', *Guardian*, July 28, 2009, as found at: <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/blog/2009/jul/28/cory-doctorow-free-chris-anderson>, (27.07.2016).

For 19th century psychiatry, alienation was conceived as a mental illness, and a common term in France for the hysteric 'madman' is *aliéné*. The truth of the matter is that for Lacan the subject -student, artist- is fundamentally split, alienated from herself, and there is no escape from this division, no possibility of 'wholeness' or synthesis. Unlike Hegel and Marx, then, alienation for Lacan is an essential constitutive feature of the subject, and thus cannot be transcended.

Evans, *ibid*: 33.

¹⁸ Jacques Lacan in Tomšič, *ibid*: 213.

¹⁹ *Ibid*.

²⁰ The privatisation of universities has already amounted to the proliferation of student loans, eventually turning the learning process further into the reproduction of capitalism with the production of entire populations of indebted subjects, hysterically demanding: 'You Are Not a Loan' during the Occupy movements of New York Stock Exchange (2014).

often uncomfortable alienating contradictions and their implications, but in fact, to disrupt the conditions of this 'curating' to begin with or as Irit Rogoff puts it:

The task at hand is not one of liberation from confinement, but rather one of undoing the very possibilities of containment', stretching the terrain of knowledge beyond the border of what can be conceptualised in the first place.²¹

'Free' in relation to knowledge, she explains:

has its power less in its expansion than in an ultimately centripetal movement, less in a process of penetrating and colonising everywhere and everything in the relentless mode of capital, than in reaching unexpected entities and then drawing them back, mapping them onto the field of perception.²²

Similarly, Lacan accused major psychoanalytic schools of reducing the practice of psychoanalysis to the Imaginary order, which is nothing other than the field of images and imagination, i.e. the deception of the signifying terrain. Lacan proposed instead, the use of the Symbolic Order (the current domain of power, structure, hierarchy and so on) to dislodge the disabling (essentially delusional) fixation of our Imaginary field of perception, by mapping the imaginary onto language. 'The use of the Symbolic', he argued, 'is the only way for the analytic process to cross the plane of identification'.²³ By working on the gaps in the Symbolic order then, the analyst is able to produce (or 'cure') changes in the subjective position of the analysand, in this case the participating subject, as a 'cut in the Real', where the Real is 'the impossible', the object of anxiety par excellence; the un-subsumable useful but non-value producing surplus. These changes, according to Lacan, produce imaginary effects (because the Imaginary is structured by the Symbolic), whereby in the naming of

²¹ Rogoff: *ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Jaques Lacan as quoted in Evans, *ibid.*: 85.

desire the subject brings forth a new presence in the world.²⁴ The task at hand then, is to curate acts of transference where the participating subject recognises her un-subsumed desire (conscious articulations and unconscious registers) and by doing so, uncovers the hidden truth lurking behind her enjoyment, the master signifier (University/ Capital). The desire that hides behind the split subject as organised truth.²⁵ The truth of the structural imperative capital hiding behind every private interest.

Let us not forget however, for Lacan, this is possible only if desire is articulated in speech, i.e. in the presence of another subject, interlocutor: 'It is only once it is formulated, named in the presence of the other, that desire appears in the full sense of the term'.²⁶ 'For it is a funny business', as he says, 'between enjoyment and knowledge'.²⁷

Enjoyment (jouissance) finally enabling us to show the point of insertion of a systemic discourse. Enabling us to go outside what is authentically involved with knowledge, what is recognisable as knowledge.²⁸

This is a very interesting formulation with regards to the way discourse designates the social bond as founded in language, that involves not only

²⁴ Jacques Lacan, 'The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis: 1954-55', in Jacques-Allan Miller (ed), *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan, Book II*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991.

²⁵ In his *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan argues that desire is the root of all ethics. Analysis' only promise being the entrance into the I, where the analysand discovers in its absolute nakedness the truth of his desire.

Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII*, New York, London, Routledge, 2008.

²⁶ Jacques Lacan, 'The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book I', *Freud's Papers on Technique 1953-1954*, New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 1998, p. 3

²⁷ Ibid.

That is because the desire to know has no relationship to knowledge as such. What leads to real knowledge is the hysteric's discourse. A real master desires to know nothing at all. He just wants things to work. Think of the discourse of the capitalist here as the master, and Lacan's famous 'What you aspire to as revolutionaries is a master. You shall have one!', reacting to the Paris protests of 1968.

²⁸ Ibid.

the structure of social relations but also a certain kind of ‘formalisation’ of the mode of *jouissance* or satisfaction, that reflects the truth about the era that produced it. Lacan writes: ‘Any social link produces speech which is structured in a particular way and organises the subject at a certain historical moment’.²⁹ According to this then, the master signifier that structures the discourse of relational practices, is an essential part of the subject’s being.

The curator, of relational forms, like an analyst, provides ‘interpretations’ of what sustains the master’s discourse at the time, which in turn marks the subject’s being with a *metonymy*, in which the emergence of the subject exchanges with its disappearance, in the chain of differences. Just as a commodity appears to have a dual character of use (natural form) and exchange (value form), so does the subject appear to be internally doubled with an empirical and a discursive materiality. Samo Tomšič in *The Capitalist Unconscious*, explains this uncovering of the double character of the historical foundations of ontology further:

The lesson of the double character of commodity reaches beyond the framework of the capitalist problematic and echoes the ancient scandal of sophistry, whose rhetorical techniques demonstrated language is not merely a house of being [Heidegger], but a particular factory that produces within being more being. The shared discovery of Marx and Freud consists in the fact that this production also contains more than being, objects that are irreducible to the opposition of being and no-being, precisely surplus value and surplus *jouissance*.³⁰

Taking into account the role of the curator as interlocutor, and her power to legislate ‘new knowledge’ produced within the artistic realm, it is interesting to investigate how issues concerning the actual situations and meanings of art, relate to questions touching on the particular kind of discourse, and ‘knowledge’ that can be produced within the artistic realm, depending on

²⁹ Jacques Lacan quoted in Evans, *ibid*: 135.

³⁰ Tomšič, *ibid*: 201.

who grounds Lacan's formulas, throughout the history of art; whether it is the bourgeois master, the master as state, the global market, culture as national heritage, art as research etc. These are the curator's unique ways and styles of knowing and operating in this complex sphere of production and her abilities to communicate a more specialised and prestigious account for this relation.

The curator is always involved in this game of culture, as her job, to begin with, is to engage one in this system – to put one at the source of transference, as the supposed subject of knowledge. The *curator* thus could be imagined as the subject that is supposed to know, in the sense of the supposed knowledge, experience and expertise of the *analyst*. The difference however is that the analyst knows that the real knowledge lies only with the subject of the unconscious, the analysand or artist. This is dangerous territory regarding relational aesthetics's implications of the curator as co-producer, always already informed by a position of expertise, in a way that implicitly asserts the curator's position of authority. Of course, the analyst too, needs to assert her authorial position, as the subject of the (cultural or political) unconscious, that produces some kind of facilitation in the analytical journey. This 'facilitating' however does not involve the subsumption of the analysand's Real, but only a formal communication of it. After all, the purpose of analysis is not to 'bring into their own meaning' the expertise of the analyst's knowledge but to provide the conditions in which the patient must get rid of his or her illusion that there is a subject that is supposed to know in the first place.³¹ In this way, the patient abandons a model of compensatory guarantees, and instead is able to negotiate the negation of agency of her own subjectivity.³²

Mark Hutchinson elaborates on this comparison between analysts and curators further, by arguing how this analogy would not really be required if we were to return to a notion of the curatorial as the expert discipline of

³¹ David Beech and Mark Hutchinson, 'Inconsequential Bayonets' in Paul O'Neill (ed.), *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture*, Cambridge, London, MIT Press, 2012, p. 56.

³² *Ibid.*

‘display, reception and interpretation’. It is when curators take the role of a ‘master that is supposed to know’, however, and adapt to their institutional role, that they become ‘an additional slice of management only by concealing their dependence on the knowledge of others’, subsuming their surplus jouissance. Hutchinson goes on to argue:

The political task for curating, in overcoming the de-totalising split inherent within curation, is not to formulate some alternative, positive model of curation. On the contrary if the de-totalising split inherent in curation is the negation of certain experiences and so on (the negation of modes of being), then the uncovering of the concealments, refusals and denials hitherto present in curation is the negation of these negations.³³

David Beech in conversation with Hutchinson attempts to take this further:

Like anti-artists who resisted institutional tramlines of artistic and aesthetic practices, the anti-curator needs to resist the horizon of curation. It is to the outside, the other, the external and the alien that the curator needs to turn, and to turn into.³⁴

To put it simply, if the curator wants to occupy different structures, as a curator, and without abandoning her analytic role, the curator would need to transform her ‘being’ by ‘infecting’ herself with what is other to it. So, we refer ourselves to the limits, to an outside field as such, allowing for the emergence of knowledge as disruption, as counter-subjugation, and as a constant reminder of the hysterics’ demand: the riddle that is involved in the function of the surplus. In the end, this point of loss, through entropy, is the only point we have access to what is involved in jouissance, and how it gets introduced into the being of the subject.³⁵

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII: Psychoanalysis upside down/The Reverse Side of Psychoanalysis*, 1969-70 in Gallagher Cormac (ed), unedited from French manuscripts-unofficial non-published version intended for the reading group at St Vincent’s University Hospital, Dublin, 2001, p. 14.

In his recent lecture on *Contemporary Symptoms*, at Central St Martins, London (2016), Eric Laurent argued that any mythical imaginary community can become a real body event if the articulation of this plurality occurs through the experience of a 'shared jouissance'.³⁶ Thinking of jouissance within the realm of symbolism, artistic metaphor and imagery, grounds the unconscious in the Symbolic, and its signifying orders. At the same time, contemporary Lacanian psychoanalyst, Marie-Hélène Brousse has tried to re-position art within this circular relationship between analyst and master discourses, arguing that art can in fact provide insights precisely into how a master's discourse is organised in the particular eras that produce it, revealing to the split subject the relationship between their object of jouissance and knowledge (directly).³⁷ In reality, for Brousse, *art itself is a discourse*, not only revealing a truth about its entropy to 'contemporaneity' (historicist quality of art), but – most importantly perhaps for our analysis of relational art– it shows something about the autonomy of the signifier and the dominant relationship of jouissance as an organiser of the discourse of that historical moment (which is otherwise veiled, by the mediating function of the master signifier, and the knowledge related to the latter).³⁸ The difference between the discourse of the analyst and the discourse of art, according to Brousse then, is that art can directly point to the relationship of an object of jouissance and knowledge, instead of the analyst's usual direction of the object *a* to a divided subject (mediated relationship).³⁹

The problem with our contemporaneity however, as Brousse admits, is that we are now in an unconscious which is no longer organised by a 'shared jouissance', arguing that current discourse does not operate by a shared principle of universality, or metaphor, but instead operates on the level of

³⁶ Eric Laurent, *Contemporary Symptoms*, London Graduate School, Central St Martins, London, 2016, as found at: <http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2016/05/eric-laurent-contemporary-symptoms/>, (accessed 18.06.2016).

³⁷ Marie-Hélène Brousse, 'Art, Avant Garde and Psychoanalysis', *Lacanian Compass: Psychoanalytic Journal of Lacanian Orientation*, Volume 1, Issue 11, 2007, p. 7.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

the Real.⁴⁰ At times when students have ceased to identify with common slogans or mottos, calling for a reclining of commons without a clear direction, but with a certain commitment towards an occupation of an abstracted commonality, the task at hand then becomes: How can we reclaim an analysis of the unconscious in today's relational experiences?

Through an understanding of relevant discourse and our relationship to the structures that go beyond words (conscious and unconscious) we can perhaps begin to reverse the circular movement of meaning controlled by the abstract master signifier (capitalist, university etc), and attend to the hysteric's (students/artists) demands instead. Investigating collectively the role of discourse as a legitimising power and the social processes of constructions of truths; how they are maintained and what power relations they carry with them; the inexistence of social relations and the material consequences of these spectres.⁴¹ The question is how to develop a discursive analytic project without slipping into a set of conditions that lead to a subsumption of surplus by a master's order. It is the attempt to hold the collective on this edge, as a hybrid parallel to the mainstream, that facilitates its own impossible discursive context. If one acknowledges the fact that there is no pure outside from the standpoint of which judgement on contradictory social processes can be pronounced, one's only hope remains in the fleeting opportunities. My research, from this point onwards purposefully and perhaps even naively (but not so naively) attempts to venture out of this maze of contradictions, and continue with an analysis driven by a passing kind of curiosity itself. For if the fundamental strategy of ruling ideologies is to make themselves appear as natural, maybe a curation driven by asymmetry and nervousness can be its own form of critique.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Tomšič, *ibid*: 203.

INTERLUDE: THE HYSTERIC'S DEMANDS

'The more your quest attaches itself to the side of truth, the more you uphold the power of the impossibles, which are those that I respectively enumerated for you the last time – governing, educating, analysing [...]'.¹

It was towards the end of a recent lecture on 'Curating and the Event of Knowledge' at Goldsmiths, University of London (January, 2016), and after two eloquent presentations by Julia Morandeira and Doreen Mendee, two Goldsmiths alumni, on their work on alternative curatorial practices in Costa Rica and the West Bank respectively, when Professor and founder of the Visual Cultures Department there, Irit Rogoff, asked Morandeira whether she had 'given up on institutions altogether'? It was a rather provocative question of course, given that it came from the very founder of the Department of Visual Cultures of Goldsmiths herself, the representative of the institution's desire to know, the master of knowledge in person, who was the host of the event, in the first place. But also, a very pertinent one, considering both speakers' insistence on the need for 'curatorial knowledge' to be conceptualised as an expanded understanding of research that is *excluded* from universities, and actualises struggles themselves, 'as the conditions of production' instead'.²

¹ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII: Psychoanalysis upside down/The Reverse Side of Psychoanalysis*, 1969-70, in Cormac, G. (ed), unedited from French manuscripts-unofficial non-published version intended for the reading group at St Vincent's University Hospital, Dublin, 2001, p. 23.

² Doreen Mendee, 'Curating and The Event of Knowledge', Goldsmiths, University of London, 2016. This lecture formed part of 'Permissions: The Way We Work Now', a series of public lectures celebrating the 10 years since the foundation of the *Visual Cultures Department*, at Goldsmiths. I should also point out here perhaps how 'curatorial knowledge' is already an MPhil & PhD research program at Goldsmiths. The programme's website describes the relationship between research and knowledge accumulated from experience like this:

'The project of curatorial/knowledge is simultaneously a teaching program for post-graduate research and a mechanism for bringing together the experiences of working within art institutions and environments with modes of theoretical reflection and analysis being explored within the university. Both forums urgently require a complex mode of dialogue and exchange with one another, one in which experience and reflection can come together, *not as service industries but as interlocutors, disturbing and agitating the surfaces of each other's practice*' [my emphasis]. <http://www.gold.ac.uk/calendar/?id=9452>

The speakers' call to dissolve boundaries between teaching, researching, and 'articulating concerns', as well as the need to collectivise research, in order for *knowledge production to become a collective process*, echoing in my mind, Freire's understanding of education for critical consciousness. Freire argues for replacing the conventional 'banking' style of knowledge, in which the curator (educator) 'deposits' an expressive content into an 'object', to be interpreted (withdrawn) later by the viewer, with a process of dialogue and collaboration, where meaning is produced through a collective analysis and reflective action on the symbolic, delinking it from value in order to proceed towards an understanding of its inter-subjective '*relationality*'.

Doreen Mende's insistence on the importance of *failure* as a way to lose control of one's authorial status as a curator, and how this is perhaps the only way of 'holding it all together' as she said, characteristically arguing for a responsibility that means *not* to be responsible, also brought to mind my own struggles with control, and this idea of a curator's responsibility to fail (her master's desire to subject), all bound with an insistence on curating relative kinds of autonomous embodiments of criticality. The curator is now called upon to resist the sophisticated grammar of management and administrative control and instead allow for an emancipatory organising of hopes and fears. 'How do we work together?', 'Why preserve the idea of a museum?' and 'Let's take back our institutions' all very important tasks indeed, as both speakers proclaimed, arguing for a curating of resistance and struggle.

To go back to Rogoff's provocation then, and her question on whether or not Morandaira's exasperation with institutions had reached its limits, Morandaira's answer is rather contradictory and thus very indicative of the situation we find ourselves in: 'The solution is the creation of new and better institutions altogether', she argued, reflecting here a more general tendency by curators to resolve the 'hysteric's demands' by establishing a new apparatus by which these can be managed. Let us not forget here, how in Lacan's four discourses the master's discourse is the opposite of

the analyst's, and the hysteric's is the one that counteracts the university's. With her submission to an unavoidable new kind of institutionalisation, the curator reflects here perhaps a general symptom of the split subject's inability [including my own] to produce anything more than her own subsumption to the institution's desire to know, inevitably producing a knowledge that aligns the subject with the terms of the master.

Our own inability to imagine alternative realities or even understand the internal inconsistencies of our models of practice, more generally, obstructs us from transforming hysteria into analysis, as a necessary step for us to move from the desire as a hidden truth behind the agency of knowledge, to desire as agent. What kind of relations do we produce when we manage 'the other' on behalf of the institution? What kind of discursive frameworks are being produced in the University's lecture halls and how do they relate to the struggles resisting institutions – that these curators seem to show solidarity or even be a part of?

If autonomous art and the culture industry's external relation of appropriation has been internalised to the point where the master not only appropriates the hysteric, but in fact needs the hysteric as the condition of its own legitimation (in order to curate symbolic participation's autonomy), then perhaps there is no point in thinking in terms of such binary oppositions, in the first place. After all, if the organisation of a participatory investigation has any effect, beyond mere subsumption of its symbolic value, and identification with ideological state apparatuses, it is to contribute to this transition from hysteria to analysis.

It is at moments like these, as 'hysteric' researchers, that we need to refuse to be hypnotised by the authoritative master voices that appear to persist in the background of our subjectivisation, or better those moments when the master's voice stops speaking to one's self and begins to speak to someone else instead, when the subject begins to perceive this as a symbolic interaction, as if an inner awakening of the hysterics transfix that creates a distance. And it is exactly these moments of realisation, where

'*disturbing features*' and '*waste elements*' so far concealed by language, that a hermeneutics of attentive listening might reveal, and where a more radical mode of participating and by extension organising lies.³

Now imagine an analytic-pedagogic practice that produces an analysis of exactly this un-subsumed part: the '*disturbing features*' and '*waste elements*'. A practice that activates the space/time for this unknown known to be explored. A practice that allows one to pause the familiar passage of time, and the continuity of language as one thus far knows it. A practice that allows for one to inhabit a pause between the unfamiliar and familiar or better the *unfamiliar familiar*, and enter a space where individual '*desires to know*' meet the collective, as conscious articulations of needs and frustrations. But also, as unconscious articulations of a desire to listen. The desire to understand and make connections. Inhabiting the reminder (surplus) of desire itself.

And this brings us to the emancipatory effect of participation's analytic pedagogy process, where speaking beings meet their unconscious self-consciousness: the place where their own concept of the subject lives. The answer to '*the struggle of subjection to commodification*', as an effect of the fetishisation of the social and the lack of experiential political agency for leftist discourse and projects that are more than normally displaced from the public arenas to the ones curated by cultural exchangers. As one listens to the domain of assumed knowledge, and one gets to '*analyse*' the regimes, formulae and laws that structure this domain, consciously and unconsciously, and within the individual-meets-the-collective habitat, one starts making sense of the background noise inside his head, bringing to the fore the distinction between those desires that are an effect of speech, and those that are '*real*'. As Lacan says, the knowledge that defines the subject is the knowledge that is born by the non-sense of the letter: an agency that directs the subject, without it knowing. A subject of knowledge that does not know that it knows. Truth that you experience, beyond

³ Gemma Corrodi-Fiumara, *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening*, London, Routledge, 1990, p. 38.

words. Isn't that what art is all about anyway? Moving towards an understanding of art (or the desire for art) as a kind of symptom addressed to the artist-student-subject in the place of the 'other', seeking to produce another signifier (a different S1, that moves beyond that of the master signifier University, Capitalist, etc), in order to construct a different function for art: the aesthetics of emancipatory dialogical interactions.

5. ULTRA-RED, REVERSING THE RELATIONAL MODEL.

Activist art has come to signify a particular emphasis on appropriated aesthetic forms whose political content does the work of both cultural analysis and cultural action. The art collaboration Ultra-red propose instead a political-aesthetic project that reverses this model. They write:

If we understand organising as the formal practices that build relationships out of which people compose an analysis and strategic actions, how might art contribute to and challenge those very processes? How might those processes already constitute aesthetic forms? ¹

Founded in 1994 by two AIDS activists, Dont Rhine and Robert Sember, the artist-activist collective Ultra-red conduct acoustic mapping of contested spaces, 'pursuing a fragile but dynamic exchange between art and political organising'.² Ultra-red has expanded over the years to include artists, researchers and organisers from different social movements around the world, including the struggles of migration, anti-racism, participatory community development, and the politics of HIV/AIDS.³ Collectively, the group have produced radio broadcasts, performances, recordings, installations, texts and public space actions (ps/o).

Exploring acoustic space as enunciative of social relations, Ultra-red take up the acoustic mapping of contested spaces and histories utilising sound-

¹ Ultra-red, *Mission Statement*, 2000, as found at: <http://www.ultrared.org/mission.html>, (accessed 27.07.2016).

² Ibid.

³ Ultra-red's ten associates in North America and Europe work within a variety of ambiances conducting Militant Sound Investigations of the spaces of needle exchange (Soundtrax, 1992 - 1996), public sex ('Second Nature', 1995 - 1998), public housing ('Structural Adjustments', 1997 - 2003), resistance to global capital ('Value System', 1998 - 2003), labour ('Social Factory', 1997 - 2002), education (School of Echoes, 2001 - Present), anti-racism and migration struggles ('Surveying The Future', 2001 - Present), and HIV/AIDS ('SILENTLISTEN', 2005 - Present). The group also runs the fair-use online record label, 'Public Record'.

Ibid.

based research (that they call 'Militant Sound Investigations'), that directly engage the organising and analyses of political struggles. By delinking the symbolic from value, Ultra-red propose instead an understanding of the 'Symbolic' as 'an inter-subjective web of signifiers by which subjects make meaning and act in the world'. The key term here is inter-subjective (or, in Paulo Freire's term, dialogic): where those who make meaning and act accordingly do so as *incomplete entities*, not entirely known to themselves nor to each other. Thus, the symbolic accounting for conscious and unconscious registers of experience and the meaning made of that experience.



Ultra-red, "What did you hear?" (2011) (Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery. | Photograph by Patrick Hebert, courtesy Ultra-red).

Introduction: What did you hear?

It was dusk. Do you remember? It was dusk and the evening wind pulled at our banners. Our demand: What did you hear? For two hours the amplified speeches of movement leaders, representatives and those supposed to know better than we, echoed through the towers downtown. When they gave the signal, five thousand moved through the avenues, our scripted utterances adhering to earlier statements. Our destination was another amplification system and another program of speeches. In an analysis of the echoes that we occupied, what did you hear? ⁴

Back in 2008 Ultra-red were invited to Goldsmiths College, University of London, to give a talk on silence. What they asked the students instead was to read Paulo Freire's 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' and his text on dialogue, where Freire argues that 'silence is the condition for listening'. Ultra-red members Dont Rhine and Janna Graham, then asked the students (including myself at the time), to split into smaller groups, with each member of the group having five-minutes to lead the group anywhere in the college that was 'safe and publicly accessible'. When we re-grouped Ultra-red asked us: '*What did you hear?*'

Based on our observations from the sound walk, and with Freire's methodology in mind, we were then asked to collectively define silence. What is the method? We engaged in a very heated debate in the process of synthesising our definitions, all bound with an insistence on either confirming or contradicting Freire's methodology and his particular understanding of *critical reflection already constituting an action*. Retrospectively thinking about it, it was like we were probing, analysing and 'rewriting Cage's 4'33"' in order to question whether everyday life was as 'excellent' as Cage knew it'.⁵ Refocusing the silence on the intensities

⁴ Ultra-red, *Five Protocols for Organised Listening*, no. 2, Berlin, Koenig Books, 2014, p. 6.

⁵ Robert Sember (founding member of Ultra-red) in interview with Mark Fisher, 'We come from your future', *WIRE*, issue 295, September 2008, pp. 28- 33.

of 'social and cultural structures that precede and lend to the moment of listening'.⁶ Since, after all, the starting point was silently questioning while together embodying the investigation: what is 'safe and publicly accessible' in the first place?

For the year that followed (and due to a feeling of frustration I had at the time, for me wanting to be more engaged politically but not knowing how), I decided to look outside Goldsmiths college and reply to Ultra-red's open call for their first residency in London, where we formed the 'School of Echoes' (2009). We worked for months hosted by the newly opened *Raven Row Gallery* at the time, and we performed a series of protocols, based on collective listening sessions, analyses and strategic actions, collectively investigating different thematics, like: 'What is the sound of the conflict you cannot hear?' or 'What is the sound of regeneration?' Another long term 'Militant Sound Investigation' project was an ambitious collaboration on the thematic: 'What is the sound of radical education today?', a six month residency that led to a two day performance at the ICA, London, in response to ICA's 'Calling Out of Context' (2011) series, focusing on the legacy of Cornelius Cardew today-and in particular his 'Scratch Orchestra'.⁷ During these projects and together with a group of artists, activists, community organisers, educators, composers and movement leaders, we performed silence, visited contested spaces, listened together and asked each other what we heard. We used real-time sound processing, field recordings, amplified sound walks and electronic music compositions to construct a space in which to discuss. We considered how composed sound organises our everyday listening, and by listening to each other's listening processes, we deepened our

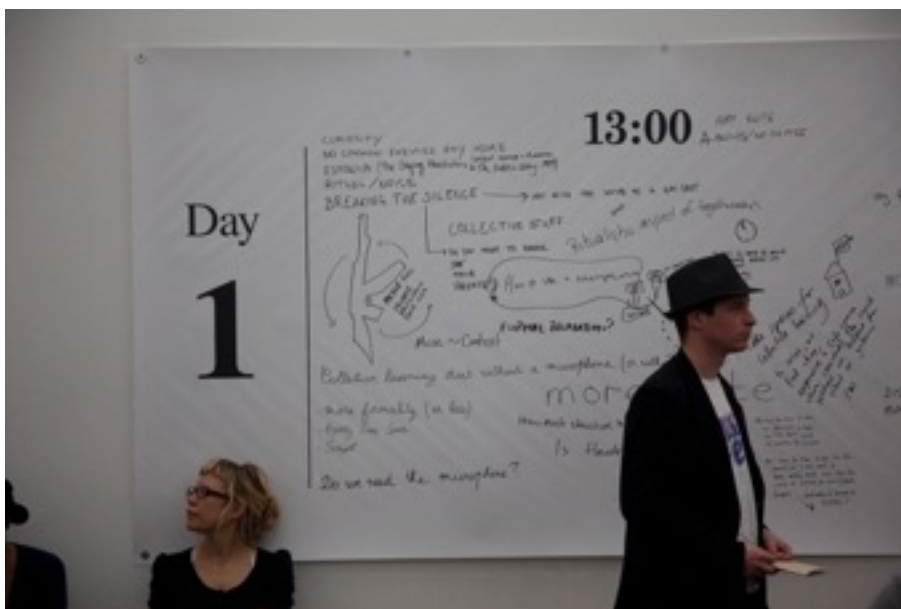
⁶ Brandon LaBelle, *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art*, London, Continuum, 2006, p. 51.

⁷ Please see enclosed or follow link here <https://archive.org/details/InvestigationThreetake116bit>. This is one the first sound objects me and another three collaborators composed, as we went off to create our own smaller sub-group within the bigger group, calling ourselves 'Investigation Three'. The scope was to continue our sound-led research on regeneration in the areas of Elephant and Castle, Southall and Broadway Market, London, over the course of two years, and with public presentations at the *Elephant Rooms*, *Departure Gallery* and *Five Years Gallery* accordingly (London, 2009).

understanding of how the conditions, procedures and arrangements in which we listen, advance the processes of reflection, analysis and ultimately action.



'What is the Sound of Radical Education?', *Ultra-red, School of Echoes*, ICA, 2009.



'What is the Sound of Radical Education?', *Ultra-red, School of Echoes*, ICA, 2009.

In all 'Militant Sound Investigations', and immediately after playing a sound object, the facilitator would ask: '*What did you hear?*' so that one by one individual participants speak out their responses or simply write their responses down on a piece of paper, later hung on the walls to form what will eventually become the 'score'. This process of listening and asking '*What did you hear?*' is repeated several times, where the question eventually becomes the primary protocol that choreographs the enquiry.⁸ This question '*What did you hear?*' not used as a formula, but more as 'a persistent reminder of the important dialogue that needs to be maintained between open attentiveness and intentional commitment'.⁹ Without that dialectic, as we know, listening procedures can fall into rigid formalism or aesthetic experience for its own sake.

The difference from formalism or aesthetic experience here being perhaps that within this listening practice, and by repeatedly asking the simplest question '*What did you hear?*', we didn't only consider, but in fact actualised the acoustic space as inherently social. By taking up acoustic meaning of various sites and the history that comes with them, and utilising our sound based investigation around London's sites of struggle in the 'here and now' of every collective listening, we eventually managed to challenge the usual understanding of the relationship between cultural analysis and action, at times even coming close to constituting an aesthetics.

The term 'Militant Sound Investigations' (MSI) in fact, comes from Ultra-red's own mission statement and their insistence on using sound not as an object of contemplation but more as 'a tool to enunciate social relations' as

⁸ The sound sources were never exactly a 'given' and thus the listening involved a deliberate suspending in a condition of the listening subject. Most of the times, the co-investigators-researchers would begin their analysis with 'acousmatics', a term first used by Pierre Schaeffer and later by Michel Chion, in reference to the use of off-screen sound in film, in an attempt to designate the sounds we hear when we don't know the original source..

Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2004.

⁹ Ultra-red, *ibid.*

they put it, arguing that *organising is a priori aesthetic*, i.e. it already constitutes an aesthetic form.¹⁰ That is: the organising of people, the way they come together and the way these connections slip and slide, these are *a priori* aesthetic forms for Ultra-red. Nicolas Bourriaud would call these ‘relational forms’ perhaps, the difference being however, as the case may be, that these relations are not institutionally curated (complete relational entities) but self-organised and incomplete.

Colectivo Situaciones (Argentina)’s analysis of militant research in fact hints towards some interesting points with regards to the origins of the term militant research and its relationship to research practices more generally:

‘Militant research works neither from its own set of knowledges about the world nor from how things ought to be. On the contrary, the only condition for researcher-militants is a difficult one: to remain faithful to their “not knowing”. As a silent language that allows the circulation of jokes, rituals, and knowledges that form the codes of *resistance*, this counteroffensive works in multiple ways and confronts not only visible enemies, but also those activists and intellectuals that intend to encapsulate the social practices of counter power in pre-established schemes. Therefore, the researcher-militant is distinct from both the academic researcher and political militant, not to mention the NGO (non-governmental organisations) humanitarian, the alternative activist, or the simply well intentioned person’.¹¹

Having myself initiated and organised numerous participatory projects for many years since then, both within the context of established cultural institutions (ICA, BNC, TATE), but having also insisted on maintaining a

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Colectivo Situaciones, ‘On the Researcher-Militant’, *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies: Transversal Texts* September, 2003, as found at: <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0406/colectivosituaciones/en>, (accessed 20.11. 2014).

practice outside institutions, collaborating with grass roots and community organisers (like the radical education community of London, *RadEd*, the English Collective of Prostitutes, *ECP*, and *Human Libraries* amongst others), I have witnessed first hand how social practices of ‘counter-power’ can naively turn into their opposites, with symbolic participation basically signifying the co-optation of base communities’ participation, extracted as value to fit its purpose within ‘culture’. In the discourse of socially engaging practice, and community development in fact, as I have tried to show, symbolic participation basically signifies the alignment of the participating subject with the terms of master discourses, producing a series of identifications with the master’s desire to know, to subject and colonise. My argument here however is that, if one manages to delink the symbolic from value, one could perhaps understand the symbolic instead to be an inter-subjective web of signifiers by which subjects make meaning and act in the world.

Protocols for Organised Listening

If we look at Ultra-Red’s practice of organised listening in more depth, we can perhaps begin to understand better how this de-linking of the symbolic from the ‘value form of participation’ occurs within the particular circumstances of organised listening sessions. The starting point is that every sound exists in *space* and *time*. And since space and time are the building blocks of human activity and struggle, sound is a venue where perception meets action. It is where the body politic encounters the material. Ultra-red are guided in their investigation by practices of political listening found in the fields of self-organising and specific forms of political education. Theories of sound, perception, aesthetics, listening and politics also inform their work. The two key theorists, that allow us to understand the emancipatory and educational value of their analytic practice further is French sound Theorist Pierre Schaeffer, and Brazilian pioneer of emancipatory education Paolo Freire.

Pierre Schaeffer was a sound theorist, composer, and inventor who rejected the binaristic separation between listening (active reception) and hearing (passive reception).¹²

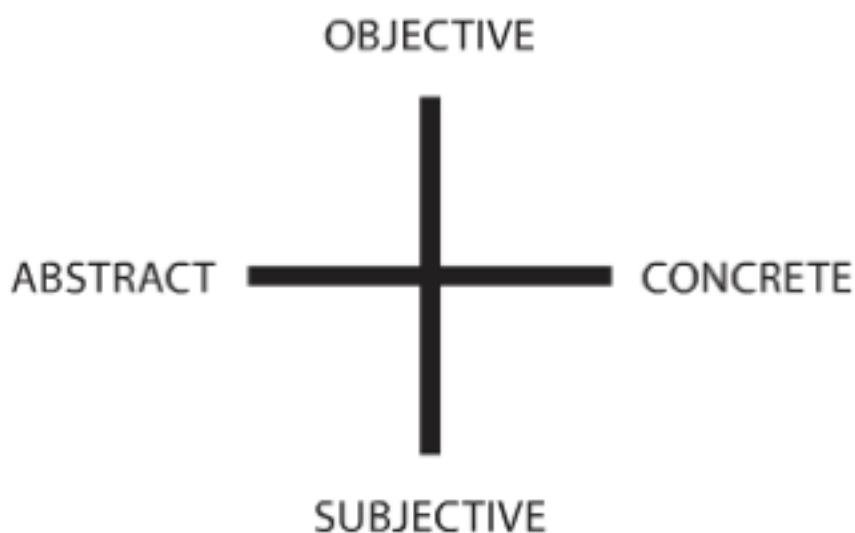


Figure 1: Ultra-red's Adaptation of Pierre Schaeffer's theory of organised sounds, (courtesy of Ultra-red).

Inspired by phenomenology, Schaeffer theorised a more dynamic exchange within the field of sound organised along two continuums: concrete and abstract, and subjective and objective (see above), proposing accordingly four constitutive and interacting practices.

¹² Pierre Schaeffer (1910-1995) coined the term *musique concrète* in 1948 first to describe a genre of music based on pre-recorded sounds. Later the term designated a research approach that prioritised *listening* in the concrete over composing in the abstract. The four practices of listening schematised by Ultra-reds' modifications on Schaeffer's theory, centre around the abstract modes. For Schaeffer, abstract listening served music as end in itself.

Pierre Schaeffer, *À la Recherche d'une Musique Concrète*, France, Éditions du Seuil, 1952.

A more detailed introduction to Schaeffer's ideas is given by Michel Chion in: Michel Chion, *Guide to Sound Objects*, 2009, as found at https://monoskop.org/images/0/01/Chion_Michel_Guide_To_Sound_Objects_Pierre_Schaeffer_and_Musical_Research.pdf, (accessed 27.07.2016).

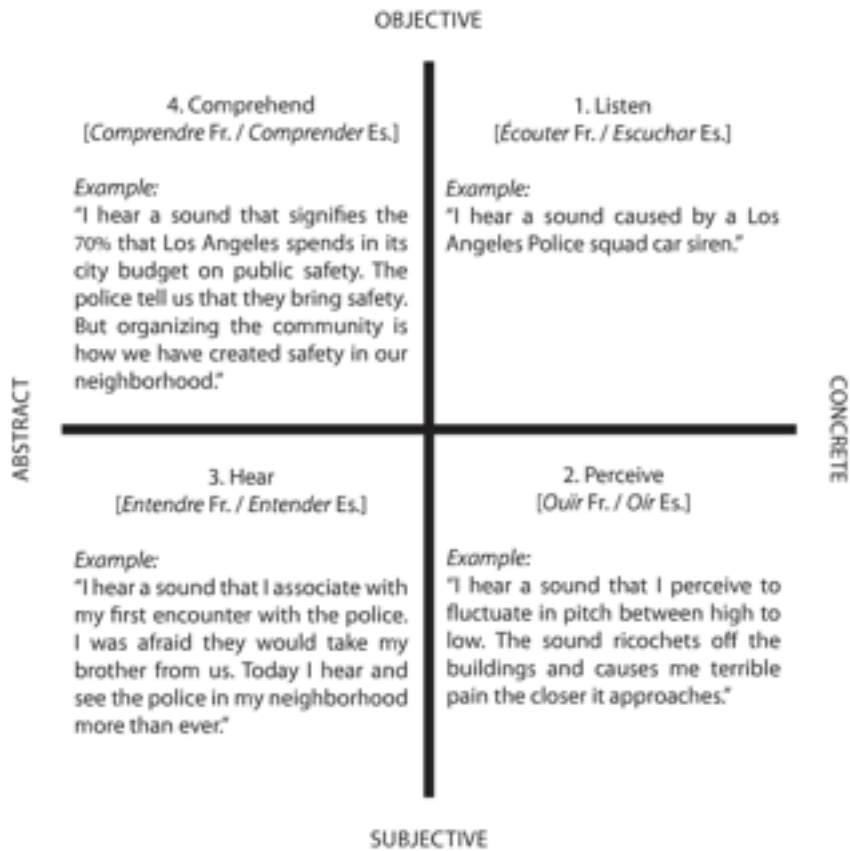


Figure 2: Diagram One (Courtesy of Ultra-red).

In diagram one we see Ultra-red's adaptation and expansion of Schaeffer's program for experimental music, to a more open and dynamic exchange, as this would take place in *real* time, when participants answer the questions: '*What did you hear?*'

Ultra-red explain:

1. 'Listening identifies sounds by the real-world events that cause them.
2. Perceiving reduces sound to its sonorous qualities as we bodily experience them, such as tone, colour, pitch, volume, and the spatial placement of sound'.¹³

¹³ Ultra-red, *Practice Sessions Workbook*, no. 9, Berlin, Koenig Books, 2014, p. 25, 27.

From concrete to abstract, Ultra-red then open these dynamics further to incorporate an analysis of everyday life (beyond pure acousmatics and acoustic ecology).

3. 'Hearing focuses on subjective associations such as memories a sound triggers.
4. And, comprehending occurs when the group critically analyse sound *in relation to social meanings*', they write.¹⁴



Figure 3: Diagram Two (Courtesy of Ultra-red).

And it is with regards to this latter point of 'comprehending social meanings', where the second reference point in this practice of 'organised listing' becomes relevant, i.e. Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), and his insistence on people's 'education for critical consciousness'

¹⁴ Ibid, [my emphasis].

starting from an analysis of lived experience itself, rooting the sounds in time, context, and action and by extension place, history and experience. So that, by coming together in a group, and as the participants discuss their experiences, they externalise their own 'thematics', thereby making explicit to themselves and the group their 'real consciousness' of the world. As they decode, abstract and recount these experiences, the co-investigators begin to see how they themselves acted while actually experiencing the situation they are now collectively analysing, and thus reach a '*perception of their previous perception*' as Freire puts it. Ultimately discovering in their background awareness the dialectic relations between the two dimensions of reality, the abstract and the concrete, the subjective and the objective.

This process thus, does not only serve as a catharsis for participants to open in 'the truth of the affective' but also insinuates the possibility for the listener- participant that she could well be a member of this high rational order, the order of the Other, so to speak, capable of making sense of the world in their own terms, as if for the first time. Taking over the language of the Other. Eventually gravitating toward the area of the 'unheard of' or the so far unthinkable, where what limits the self, also provides the key to its liberation – what Freire calls the 'untested feasibility' of a 'limit situation'.¹⁵ In this process of reflecting on the dynamic exchanges between subjective and objective, concrete and abstract, participants begin to analyse their stories in order to understand the world as socially produced and, therefore, changeable. The dialectical relation between subjective and objective eventually reminding us that by critically analysing and acting upon the objective world we also transform our own subjectivity. According to Freire in fact subjectivity and objectivity are in constant dialectical relationship. 'To deny the importance of subjectivity in the process of transforming the world and history is naive and simplistic. It is to admit the impossible: a world without people' he writes, emphasising the need to

¹⁵ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, London, Continuum, 1968/ 2005, p. 50.

move away from these kind of dichotomies.¹⁶ Like an imaginary dialogue between the 'self' and the other, affect and reason, symbolic and real; a kind of analysis of what was so far but also so near and so dear. Kodwo Eshun describes this process of inhabiting *acousmatics* best by saying:

Listening to oneself listening. Listening to emotions, and frictions of emotions. And then one has to decide what those frictions of emotions are. What is the tension they are generating, the rub between them. And then one has to name them-naming the parameters of emotions because you want to get the modulations of emotion. Listening to the act of your own listening, but also how this bounces back from the other, most of the times that's what it is all about.¹⁷

So that in this process, one attends to dissonance but also starts foregrounding the other against the background of one's self. Like a practice that evokes your fear of noise as your chain of signifiers, and

¹⁶ Freire, *ibid*: 50.

Similarly Marx writes:

'The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men that change circumstances and that the educator himself needs educating.' What Marx criticises here is not subjectivity, but subjectivism and psychologism. To achieve a transformation of reality thus the oppressed must confront reality critically, simultaneously objectifying and acting upon that reality.

Karl Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach', *Marx & Engels Selected Works, Vol. One*, Moscow, London, Progress, Zodiac, 2002, p. 28.

¹⁷ Kodwo Eshun, *Interview for Mediatec*, [online video], 1999, as found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RivGWj1LoQ>, (accessed 27/02/2015).

ways of making connections is now threatened from the outside. ¹⁸These other 'jouissances' then come back to transform your unconscious desires, moving from the auditory to the existential. This is the moment in fact, as Lacan teaches us, when the signifiers become 'real'; and by extension 'resistant' to the master's desires. As Scott Wilson argues, in *Stop Making Sense: Music From the Perspective of the Real*:

Lalangue is not Symbolic but Real. Real, because it is made of ones [signifiers] outside the chain and thus outside meaning (the signifier becomes real when it is outside the chain), and of ones that are enigmatically fused with jouissance.¹⁹

¹⁸ Steven Connor in 'The Modern Auditory' explains how Didier Anzieu has suggested that there is an auditory equivalent to Lacan's mirror stage: a sonorous envelope or bath of sounds, especially those of the mother's voice, that surrounds the infant, soothing, supporting and stabilising it. This imaginary envelope gives the child a unity from the outside; it can be seen, therefore, as a 'sound mirror or [...] an audiophonic skin'. Anzieu's analysis has been carried further by Edith Lecourt who, in turn, argues that this audiophonic skin protects the child from the otherwise diffusive and disintegrating conditions of sound itself. These conditions, Lecourt defines as the absence of boundaries in space: 'Sound reaches us from everywhere, it surrounds us, goes through us' and in time: 'there is no respite for sonorous perception, which is active day and night and only stops with death or total deafness, as well as its disturbing lack of concreteness. Sound can never be grasped; only its sonorous source can be identified'. All these conditions are summed up, says Lecourt, in sound's quality of 'omnipresent simultaneity'. Despite differences of emphasis, these psychoanalytic works, argues Connor, concur on the question of the defining contrast between threatening and disorganised noise, which is perhaps to be identified with the condition of sound itself, organised sound, or music. It is suggested in fact that it is in the passage from one to the other that the self is formed, in a process in which power and pleasure are intricately interwoven.

Steven Connor, 'The Modern Auditory I' in Porter, R. (ed), *Rewriting the Self: Histories From the Renaissance to the Present*, London, Routledge, 1996, pp. 203-223.

Felix Guattari takes this further when he describes the 'omnipresent simultaneity' of his experiencing of a 'pregnant moment' on a Sao Paolo bridge, corresponding to a re-enactment of the 'emergent self, with its moving feeling of initial discovery of the world, and moreover, with a topical re-organisation of the other modalities of the self'

Felix Guattari, 'Space and Corporeity', *Columbia Documents of Architecture*, vol. 2, 1993, p. 142.

¹⁹ Lalangue refers both to language, i.e. the pool of signifiers always already there before we utter speech and 'lallation' from the latin *lallare* that means none other than singing 'la la la'. Wilson refers here to Colette Soler's argument that later in his career Lacan revised his understanding of the unconscious as language, to a notion of the 'real unconscious'—that is an effect of lalangue.

Scott Wilson, *Stop Making Sense: Music From the Perspective of the Real*, London, Karnac Books, 2015, p. 22.

The structure of the unconscious assumed here, however, is not one that is structured as language, but one that is informed by those desires where speech is absent or misperceived. Wilson explains:

This means that while the unconscious is an effect of a system of differences, those differential elements do not have to be words. Moreover, their resonances can be all the more affective (and effective in the unconscious) through their repetition—the repetition of an initial dissonance.²⁰

Ultra-red as a performative paradigm thus, are not so much about finding correspondences but rather about recognising and mapping the ruptures and movements that are created by them. Here, the act of listening is not just the event, but is also the effect of the work in the material, discursive and affective domains. Instead of analysing from a distance then, the architecture that Ultra-red insist on is an ‘embodied criticality’ that breaks with one’s familiar ways of accumulating knowledge and instead permits oneself to enter another state of awareness; one that is not made of answers, but of breaks in the ‘knowings’.²¹ The problem, of course, is how to recognise these transformations, let alone mapping their effects. Sometimes these moments seem so inchoate or premature, their impact taking time to show itself. Other times the ‘I’ is too much in the process, thus one finds it impossible to assess just what is being done to it.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ The term ‘embodied criticality’ was first coined by Irit Rogoff in her text on ‘Smuggling’.

Iris Rogoff, ‘Smuggling: An Embodied Criticality’, *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies: Transversal Texts*, 2003, as found at: <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0806/rogoff1/en>, (accessed 19.07.2016).



Listening session set up for 'The Edgware Road Project', London, 2012 (Ultra-red, Raven Row Gallery, courtesy of Ultra-red).

*We were meeting people
on their own terms, not ours [...]
Before we ever got around to saying
what we had to say, we listened.
And in the process we
built up both their trust in us
and their confidence in themselves'*

John Lewis ²²

²² John Lewis, 'Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement' (1998), as quoted in Ultra-red, *Practice Sessions Workbook*, no. 9, Berlin, Koenig Books, 2014, p. 29.

As the interrogation develops collectively, the 'findings' are symmetrically balanced out by a study of the listening itself. It is towards the subject then, that the question turns around: 'What am I listening?' 'What exactly am I hearing?' and also, 'What do the rest of the people think of my listening?' 'Am I listening to information in the air or am I listening to a reflection of my emotions?' 'Is this my subconscious language reaction to stimuli?' In the sense that the subjects eventually start describing not only the external references of the sound they observed, but also the perception itself.

In an attempt to locate the intensity of these emotions, where they are coming from and how and why they rub against each other like this, the listening usually becomes more of a process of collective hermeneutics. This process of decoding what is obscure, blurred or so far muted, in order to make available to consciousness the undesirable of meaning, what is experienced, postulated and institutionalised as hidden, is never complete, of course. In fact, it is a very vulnerable one, that is never fully materialised, always developing, always transforming according to the context and its transitions, facilitating the ongoing discovery of the way the parts of the disjointed whole interact with each other.²³

Eventually by repeatedly returning to the question '*What did you hear?*', one becomes aware of the variations and contradictions in one's own listening. The most interesting moments during these Militant Sound Investigation and other collective co-investigations – as guided by Ultra-red's practice – are those awkward moments of silence, where people feel ready to admit a sense of failure. As if what one is studying runs the risk of being reduced to the changing impressions of each listener/co-investigator, making real communication *impossible*. But yet again, failure

²³ Let us not forget here how social relations and relational exchanges are not conceptualised here as a unified temporality of the present 'contemporaneity', but instead as a 'disjunctive synthesis' of conflicting and contradictory temporalities, that are 'distributed unevenly, develop asynchronously and reciprocally affect one another'.

Andrés Sáenz de Sicilia, 'Time and Subsumption' (Conference paper) at the Society for European Philosophy / Forum for European Philosophy annual conference, Kingston University (UK), Sept 2013.

is not the issue here. Failure in fact, is part of the group's evolving process as a group, practising out a habitat, where every individual should not be afraid to give up understanding herself, from one moment to the next. The question then becomes how to rediscover (and recode), through confronting subjectivities, something several listenings might agree on. Ultra-red's practice introduces therefore, a constantly changing kind of acousmatic intelligence, as in an inevitable revision, based on that listening's peculiarities, of our conceptions of how we listened and what mattered to us as a whole. This kind of practice exemplifies a suspension of familiar time as we know it, allowing access to a habitat that is as open as we are willing to imagine. Reminding us that what we do matters. And that's where the radical potential lies of course. By illuminating the responsibilities we must insist on and on the choices we must make in order to deal with our personal reality first, and only thereafter universalising it. By publicising the personal themes that emerge from listening –like anxiety, frustration, contradiction, alienation, fear, love, trust– contemporary struggles (like the right to sexual, class and racial freedom and individuality) are revealed from a new light. In psychoanalytic terms perhaps, the attention of the subject is here somehow suspended by an employment of fragmentation and the different positioning of spatiotemporal thresholds (via sound). The subject is now, as if for the first time, responsible for making and unmaking sense of the world around her. In the end, it is through estrangement, as Mark Fisher puts it, that Ultra-red's sounds manage to attain 'truth or political efficacy'.²⁴

The relation between one's thought processes and felt experience becomes unstable, exposed and in turn open to re-evaluation. By extension, time, space and the body, together with the issues at hand, and the way the subject identifies its own subjectivity within their context, are revealed as concepts constructed by culture and as such open to revision too. Through this practice then, one manages to temporarily break the chain of signifiers, the relationship between them and the system that

²⁴ Mark Fisher, 'We come from your future', *WIRE*, issue 295, September 2008, pp. 28-33.

connects them, all through the co-investigation and analysis of the perceiving subject's jouissance. In a way, excessive audibility now turns into a new kind of inaudibility, where what one element is, is what it is not. And it is precisely inside these blurred boundaries, where the 'unthought known' resides, initiating a kind of passage or journeying towards another kind of encounter, beyond art, situated both in the past of memory, and its re-enactment in the here and now. In this journey, what holds all the poles together, so they are no longer opposites but mates, is that habitat of *trust* that shelters them. A habitat that is not made of walls and rules, but people's mode of self-organisation. Where time and space become socialised, and thus become 'alive'.

Taking into account how today's multitude of technological multiplications penetrate our mundane life, and how the world's spaces seem to have collapsed into a series of accelerated images, where time and space's 'architecture' becomes one of enclosure, at times even conveying a sense of imprisonment (and alienation), this practice of socialised time and space becomes a force of resistance to the hegemony of vision. A practice that allows for a re-wiring of the self within its environmental system, an inhabitation, an investigation and a collective re-evaluation of this always already existing sense of cleavage between self and 'other', subject and object, in order to reclaim the connections and disconnections between abstract and real life arrangements.²⁵ A composition, where one can speak of 'music' as analogous to the organisation of the collective, and the individual's positioning within it. After all, as Jacques Attali argued in his last chapter on composition in 'Noise: A Critique of Political Economy':

'unless one tries to reclaim communication, that is, to tie other people into the meaning one is creating, one will be unable to create one's own relation with the world, and this one will be condemned to silence.'²⁶

²⁵ Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, West Sussex, Jon Wiley & Sons, 2005, pp. 6-71.

²⁶ Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1985, p. 134.

Auditory Subject

In order to hear the architecture of the prison system, I had to listen to the places where prisons rose with the stroke of a pen, where racism was manufactured and fostered for private gain, and where one person's gain in the abstract world of finance meant that the state would have more prison beds to fill. To record the prison system, in other words, I only had to walk down my own street, with the tapes rolling.²⁷

The auditory self that Ultra-red propose is one organised around openness, responsiveness and acknowledgement of the world around us, rather than an alienation from it. Discovering oneself in the midst of a collective body, as one takes part in it, rather than taking aim at it. It is important here perhaps to emphasise the difference between visual and auditory subjectification processes, where instead of 'an eye that focuses, pin-points, abstracts, locating each object in physical space against a background; the ear, favours sounds from any direction'.²⁸ Ultra-red's sound object itself is an enveloping sphere without fixed boundaries, a dynamic field that is always in flux, creating its own dimensions moment by moment, as people attend to its different arrangements. The subject's inherent being, always already within the midst of the (sound) world, attends to a (sound) object that is always already *relational*.

As Brandon LaBelle writes in *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art*, in fact, sound in general, is intrinsically and undeniably relational, as it: 'leaves a body and enters others; it binds and unhinges, harmonises and traumatises; it sends the body moving, the mind dreaming, the air oscillating'.²⁹ Sound's ability to emanate, propagate, vibrate, but also

²⁷ Trevor Paglen, 'Recording Carceral Landscapes' in *Leonardo Music Journal*, Dec. 2006, Vol 16, 2006, pp. 56-7.

²⁸ Paul Rodaway, 'Auditory Geographies', *Sensuous Geographies: Body, Sense and Place*, London, Routledge, 1994, p. 114.

²⁹ Brandon LaBelle, *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art*, London, Continuum, 2006, p. xi.

communicate and agitate is thus crucial here, if we are to understand sound's enunciative potential; sound as a tool to enunciate alternative social relations. Sound's 'relational' potential becomes even more important, within this attempt to re-position subjectivity in terms of its 'embodied-ness' (phenomenology), if one takes into account sound's non-discriminative nature. As Don Ihde has famously put it:

We cannot listen away, as we can look away', as 'we have no ear lids and, if we did, they could not function as eyelids do, because of the diffuse nature of sound, which radiates and permeates rather than travelling in straight lines.³⁰

For Ultra-red, sound is always already there. It is never a private affair but instead is always already a public event. Sound moves from a source and immediately arrives at multiple destinations. It is boundless on the one hand and site-specific on the other. The body occupies this time/space either in the foreground or background, on stage or off. As the sound travels it performs the material characteristics of this time/space but also the whole environment in which it is generated, including people's bodies

³¹ This renders the listening into an amalgam of spatial attributes, 'perception of previous perceptions', personal history, memory and last but not least cultural values (and social behaviours that influence and are in turn influenced by others). Sounds are thus always somehow beyond

³⁰ Don Ihde in Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 219.

³¹ Lars Bang Larsen explains Ultra-red's listening's capacity for empathy further, by analysing sound's elasticity, which he takes to indicate the refinement of hearing and the way it is receptive to the slightest of impressions. Larsen refers to Johann Gottfried Herder (Kalligone, 1800) and his idea that through their sound, succession and rhythm, tones are but vibrations of our sensations. This bodily vibration calls the voice of all moving bodies forth, from within themselves, 'announcing loudly' as he claims, or 'softly proclaiming' the excited state of their powers to other harmonic beings. Through the ear's receptivity and the hearing's inert empathetic ability then, this bodily 'nervousness' and reverberation becomes a primary truth that can be felt-embodied- and in turn evoked.

Lars Bang Larsen, 'Elasticity: On Nervousness and Vibration', text from the exhibition guide *Ultra-red, Raven Row Gallery*, 2009, as found at: <http://www.ravenrow.org/texts/15>, (accessed 27.07.2016).

themselves, round the room, and inside the heads of others. To listen thus here, becomes to hear in more than one head.

In addition, Ultra-red's sound-marks are not completely random. They usually refer to on-going site-specific struggle, the particular community's history, people's long term mobilising around social injustice, shared in the soundscape of a particular social group, no matter how diverse. They are relatively unique sounds or specific to 'a community in transition', and thus they possess qualities which make them special or noticed by people that attend to the community in question. The definition of community and the contested sounds themselves are never predetermined or fixed, neither are they prescribed by previous narrative schemes. Instead, the thematic investigation in question always begins by this nervous moment of transformation of sounds into syntax: *'What did you hear?'* This reflective analysis of the phenomenological impact of sound on bodies of the collective audio unconscious, ends outside oneself, in the social body, which in turn feeds back into one.

Participants often tend to identify with others in a variety of ways, such as their class, their national identity, their gender, their generation etc, making desperate attempts to position themselves within a given time/space, as if they want to anchor their thoughts in the clichés of the past. As the dialogical analysis continues however, the recalling of the past gets invested with new meaning every time anew, re-activating memories and history in the context of the collective's 'here and now'. As if memories, experiences and histories are no longer to be found in a fixed database where one can simply return to, retrospectively, but instead practising out a kind of inhabiting of the very nervousness and elasticity that comes with hearing empathetically, re-investing the 'self' with the collective 'meaning'.

By implication, if Ultra-red's practice implies reflexivity, insofar as its resonance returns from the outside, then it is 'a reflexivity without a self'.³² For as Mladen Dolar explains better in *The Voice and Nothing More*, it is not the same subject that lends his or her memory to a message and gets the sound bounced back, but rather, 'the subject is what emerges in this loop, the result of this course'.³³ I am thinking here of Dolar's understanding of the voice as a resonance that lives in the void of the Other, coming back to us from the Other, as a pure alterity of what is said. Dolar writes:

Whatever one says is immediately countered by its alterity, by the voice resounding in the resonance of the void of the other, which comes back to the subject as the answer the moment one spoke.³⁴

He reminds us thus that it is the nature of the voice, and sound in general to be transitive, both in the literal sense that is, sound is always in transit from me to the one that hears it (interlocutor), and in the more strictly linguistic sense, that it has an object or a target.

What Ultra-red's practice eventually teaches us then, is that to produce and receive sound is not only a matter of *talking or listening*, but in fact, it is to be *involved in connections*. These connections are what make privacy

³² *Implicated Theatre* is a group that has formed out of the Serpentine Gallery's acclaimed education programme, and after years of artists and curators working with members of hotel workers unions, domestic workers and youth groups around the neighbourhood of Edgware Road, London. For their *Radio Ballad* performed at the Serpentine's Pavillion (Summer 2016) their manifesto wrote:

'The role of the Voice is a central theme of our work. Voice exists in an in-between space; neither located purely in the body, the social or the political. It is constantly in motion, resonating through, from and past us. What happens when we try to take ownership of our own Voices? Where are we when we are in silence? What does it mean to 'speak out'? As the logic of capital increasingly governs our lives, how can we imagine and create a space which challenges the profit-driven motives of the neo-liberal discourses we inhabit and perpetuate? We are implicated, and so are you'.

(*Implicated Theatre*, 'Radio Ballad', Serpentine Galleries, London, 2011/2016).

³³ Mladen Dolar, 'Freud's Voices', *A Voice and Nothing More*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2006, p. 160.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

intensely public and public experience distinctly personal, closing the gap between self and other, us and them.³⁵ It is at moments like these when we reach individual or collective crises and realise that one's knowledge and one's experience don't necessarily complement each other. Unlike 'wisdom' (master's knowledge), listening becomes instead a state of profound frustration, in which the knowledge and insights we have amassed from research and experience, seem to do very little to alleviate the state we find ourselves in now.

The point, of course, is not to reach some form of resolution, but rather a state that allows for a transition from hysteria to collective analysis. Moving beyond that which one already knows they know, and into the collective (audio) unconscious of desires. A practice that allows for these desires to come into dialogue, listen to ourselves listening, and collectively analyse our fears and limitations. A state of heightened awareness, where our frustrations start resonating with the group's in their own terms, and as we analyse them together we gain access to critical consciousness, eventually reaching the point of action, i.e. embodying criticality. This state of heightened awareness, or committed attentiveness if you like, involves the activation of a special phenomenology of time, however. Where a gap is opened in the continuity of the familiar cycles of thought.³⁶ And it is from the practice of collectively performing this gap between what you hear ('*What did you hear?*') and what you understand (analysis), that action (performative utterance) emerges.

³⁵ The distinction between 'us and them' here refers to the question of the 'general public' and whether one identifies with it or not. A question that informed most of Ultra-red's practice, in the context of different social struggles and their resonances with the 'general public', and also with my own understanding of social practice, and in particular my investigation of this binary in the project titled *Honk! If Your Body's Not Yours* (see Practice enclosed)

³⁶ This gap, for Theodor Adorno in fact is a prerequisite for pure thought to occur. It happens rarely when you least expect it, but at the same time it seems like you have always already been preparing for it. In order to attain this pure awareness of the moment in fact for Adorno, one needs to remain faithful to the suspension of the brain's function between action and reaction. Instead of habitual perception thus, Ultra-red's practice allows for one to hear only that which one really desires. Listening as if for the first time.

Theodor Adorno, 'Gaps', *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, Verso, New York, London, 2005, p. 80.

As Catherine Clément eloquently puts it, when she describes *syncope*, and the philosophy of rupture:

This sweet feeling of temporary interruption suspends the subject's consciousness by contradicting time's natural progress. Physical time never stops of course [...] but [syncope] seems to accomplish its miraculous suspension.³⁷

This 'liveness' in turn allows for participants to come together within an intensified moment that reveals differences between things that were already there, but we couldn't see, or better 'hear'. Letting go of any conscious awareness of 'belonging' and instead sliding into the collective's liminal state, where time as we know it is now in our hands. This ability to position oneself in this transitory phase between reason and intuition, immediacy and mediacy, self and non-self, (la and la), allows for time itself to try and find itself a possibility within the listening. The listening process itself becomes a process of negotiating of the relational. No longer witness or interpreter, the self is now energised towards its own subjectivity, by the unknown known that resides inside it, and is now bounced back by the non-self as self; opening the gates to a self that is always already inside the 'Other'. This is hearing's empathetic quality at its best. Griselda Pollock describes this best when she uses the metaphor of a relationship. She writes:

The magic of the work resides in its ability to keep us out while drawing us in. It is much like the frightening thrill of being in a relationship: the quest for total security and intimacy is always countered and subverted by the impossibility of entering a stranger totally. The mystery is what attracts, yet it is clearly what repels and

³⁷ Catherine Clément, *Syncope: The Philosophy of Rupture*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1994, p. 5.

keeps us fearful but wanting more. [...] What is most hauntingly suggested is what is missing.³⁸

In Ultra-red's practice, ecstasy is the consciousness that is never yours, but which you have in and through the community that avoids closure, always in transition. In the process of dialogue, by discovering 'generative themes', an awareness of one's knowing and un-knowings is stimulated. Always in the process of losing control of yourself, being outside yourself and inside the many possibilities of negotiation with the 'other'. As Lars Bang Larsson explains in his text on Ultra-red's simultaneous '*nervousness and elasticity*' :

On one side there is all the symptoms of a vulnerable subjectivity (desire, skepticism, capricious idiosyncrasy), and on the other side there is a stoicism opening up towards the other and in which a non-hierarchical universality can exist. This is the gap between being involved and uninvolved in the events that unfold around you, the process by which your identity drifts in and out of definition.³⁹

By listening to the way we confer meanings together, and by using sound as a medium of reflection, Ultra-red provide a space for 'the public' to interrogate and explore for themselves through the nervousness of their performing body, the cultural dynamics of their elasticity, as they unfold in the duration of listening. Staging an interactive enquiry into what we think as near and dear. Keeping in mind how nowadays the idea that there is a political dimension to all aesthetic practices has become a wearisome commonplace of curator-speak, with the excuse that art is already inherently political, Ultra-red's proposal becomes key : organised listening as a politically serious act, composing as self-organising. By keeping knowledge embedded in the living world of humans, and by situating

³⁸ Griselda Pollock, 'Old Bones and Cocktail Dresses: Louise Bourgeois and the Question of Age', *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1991, p. 62.

³⁹ Lars Bang Larsson, 'Elasticity: On Nervousness and Vibration', text from the exhibition guide *Ultra-red, Raven Row Gallery*, 2009, as found at: <http://www.ravenrow.org/texts/15>, (accessed 27.07.2016).

knowledge within struggle, Ultra-red give license to an uncanny utopia whose foundation is laid within the self and whose force pours continually out. The more connections slip and slide between objects, the faster our independent thought and imagination will take flight. For Ultra-red, it is not the pure autonomous faculty of audition itself, but the very principle of '*relationality*' that defines the acoustic space and its ability to enhance and re-invent the experience of our every-day frustrations. The utopian element in their practice then, is not like a master plan that analytically organises the social change of the future, but one that describes a determined attitude from people's actions in concrete situations of the present.

By insisting on sound, and by extension direct perception, beyond representation, as found within the location of the Real, every time we open our ears as if for the first time, Ultra-red thus signal the liberation of the self. By extension, such a practice can help put forth the body as a site of struggle for understanding our place in the world, and thus to recognise the potential of sound as a perceptual means for enunciating a new political subjectivity altogether. From this position, the subject's body can resist the codes of habituation, and sound its own desires, its own resistance. The starting point is always a frustration, or a feeling of disconnection. But then it is about how we organise our life and practice, moving beyond rituals of pseudo-participation, curatorial strategies and mastery of discourse towards an actual organising.

Taking into account the logocentric culture we live, where talking does not involve listening but instead consists of repeating thesis and antitheses, a kind of repeating of the same, learning to listen could thus hold future potential as a method of research and collective organising, where practitioners move away from academic self-referential knowledge and towards the processual messiness of sticking together.

6. TOWARDS A RADICAL CURATORIAL PRACTICE

On May 2015, some twenty artists and academics from Global Ultra Luxury Faction aka G.U.L.F infiltrated the lobby of Guggenheim Museum New York in order to perform their museum intervention involving a parachute banner and flyers. The group later posted an online dispatch tactically accepting their status as artists and cultural workers:

‘We see our proximity to the system as an opportunity to strike it with precision, recognising that the stakes far exceed the discourses and institutions of art as we know them’.¹

In the face of recent claims for a ‘turn’ to relational forms of pedagogy in artistic practice and curating, and after having foregrounded the ways in which such a turn is constituted and situated in relation to policies and practices of neoliberalism, as well as the kind of effects this has in the ways we produce and distribute art, it is also important to attend to the hysteric’s desire to be ‘a critical agent’ in the arts. A desire to produce honest accounts and effective interventions into the conditions which shape us as curators, students, artists and activists vis a vis relations of power, identity and desire.² Guided by Ultra-red’s political aesthetic project, but also by my own curatorial collaborative-research initiatives, I attempt to theorise here more generally, on a radical curatorial practice that can activate pedagogic spaces for alternative modes of knowledge production, imagining a dialogical practice where organising meets art.

My intention is to present ten preliminary theses here as ‘generative themes’ of the present, towards a conceptualisation of such an

¹ G.U.L.F quoted in Gregory Sholette, ‘Merciless Aesthetic: Activist art as the Return of Institutional Critique. A Response to Boris Groys’, *Field: A Journal of Socially-Engaged Art Criticism*, issue 4, 2014, as found at: <http://field-journal.com/issue-4/merciless-aesthetic-activist-art-as-the-return-of-institutional-critique-a-response-to-boris-groys>, (last accessed 10.10.2015).

² Janna Graham, ‘Between a Pedagogical Turn and a Hard Place: Thinking with Conditions’ in O’Neill, P. and Wilson, M. (eds.), *Curating and the Educational Turn*, London/Amsterdam, Open Editions/ de Appel, 2010, p. 130.

emancipated practice, not just at the intellectual level, but at the level of action.³ Unlike any claims to wisdom thus (master's knowledge), I attempt to listen to my own frustrations in a way, attending to the surplus of knowledge and insights I have accumulated from research and experience, but also to the limitations and inconsistencies between the two. It is important to acknowledge from the very beginning here thus, that these 'theses' are not presented as comprehensive conclusions, or as an accomplished manifesto-like manual for curatorial practices of the future, but more as a kind of 'accessing' those gaps in my own thinking, between theory and practice. My purpose is to attend to the most compelling issues and questions related to the cluster of concepts and modes of thinking around the 'art of relational exchange', in light of the contemporary opportunities and challenges of public arts funding more generally. In view of this, and before embarking on such a committed listening to the gaps in my own 'knowings' around participation, it is important to bear in mind here also what Ultra-red member, and radical educator, curator and activist Janna Graham reminded me during a conversation on the un-subsumable part of participation:

The ultimate participation that isn't value form, is the participation that challenges capitalism so fundamentally that capitalism ceases to exist. So, I suppose that is the ultimate autonomy: the dismantling of a capitalist framework. But on the road to that, I think there are other ways in which you do resist subsumption. I think when something reaches goals that are not capitalist goals. I think there is something resistant about that...⁴

³ Paulo Freire refers to the concept of 'generative themes' as a kind of 'thought-language' with which participants refer to reality. The concept of the 'generative theme' is neither an arbitrary invention nor a working hypothesis to be proved here. In fact for Freire, one needs to verify a theme's objective reality and truth first (in and amongst others) before understanding it in its plurality, its significance, and its compositional and historical transformations.

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, London, Continuum, 1968/ 2005.

⁴ Interview with author, 22.07.2016, see appendix, *Sound Object: Ultra-red interview*.

If workers and employers ever succeed in commodifying labour fully, capitalism will perish. Likewise, if curators and artists ever succeed in commodifying creativity fully, art will perish. It would be the end of a system capable of creating and distributing 'cultural' value. Capitalism's tendency to generate crisis, and the museum's tendency to cyclically generate the new, can only be grasped thus, if one exposes this as a contradictory system in itself, which of course still remains one of the starting points of engagement with the urgent issues of the day.

This approach however, and for those of us who do not consider ourselves as radical theorists, but are mostly interested in developing engaged practices, may seem somehow pessimistic, as it is based on the assumption that radical anti-capitalist politics remain squarely defeated. Instead of promoting a radical agenda, the purpose of which would be to replace the existing system with a different one, this approach seems to simply respond to what is considered the status quo. This chapter thus, also serves as a kind of welcoming of the crisis of autonomy as an opportunity to develop ways in which we can maintain a radical position within the existing one, on the way to get there.

THESIS 1: Why call it art?

Before we begin working with participatory art's enunciative potentials, we should perhaps ask ourselves why there is a need to frame such practices as 'art' in the first place. When the very nature of these projects calls into question the role of institutional mediators, then why bother to self-discipline, re-producing the same discourse we want to resist? Besides, as many community organisers and activists sceptical of artistic intentions argue, why would one want to explain this work to an art historical and critical establishment that has so often treated it with indifference, if not contempt? After all art has a very specific public, an art public which is

predominantly interested in issues that concern art, and not necessarily concerned with an actual organising around struggles.⁵

Chris Jones, a member of Ultra-red and the long-standing community social centre and archive '56a Infoshop' in London's Elephant and Castle area, who has worked for many years outside institutions fighting 'cultural regeneration', confesses his discomfort in having to work with museums, and the compromises this involves, both with regards to the work produced, but also with regards to issues around his own struggles with subjection to the value form.⁶ Taking into account how nowadays art spaces are taking over self-organised community spaces or how grass roots activists now need to enter museums and gallery spaces for their voices to be heard, in the first place (curation of autonomy), the issue of 'art status' becomes very pertinent in practice. Nestor García Canclini in his analysis of art practice's expansion into sectors of urban development, design and tourism, argues that art is now 'even being asked to take the place once filled by politics by providing collective spaces to deal with intercultural relations'.⁷

⁵ I wish to clarify here that my critique of contemporary art's potential for political efficacy focuses solely on the fields of art that claim to be political in the first place, i.e. dialogical, relational, socially engaging, participatory etc. By no means do I intend to criticise all art for its political inefficacy, but only art that *claims* to be political here.

⁶ Interview with author, 22.07.2016, see appendix, *Sound Object: Ultra-red interview*.

In a recent conference on socially engaging arts and institutional 'activisms' (Creative Time 2011), Ultra-red chose to substitute a formal presentation of their work with an open dialogue with the audience, asking instead members of the auditorium: *Why do you do what you do?* Personal motivations and ulterior motives came face to face here with the reality of social practice and its existing frameworks. A more realistic question to ask would be perhaps here: *How much are you willing to sacrifice?* For Dror Feiler, an Israeli-Swede pro-Palestinian artist, activist and musician, it all narrows down to this question of self-sacrifice. As for him, and many other artists activists I have encountered throughout this research, it is not a matter of institutional critique and the possibilities therein, but more to do with the actual life sacrifices one is willing to make for the purposes of a particular struggle.

Dror Feiler interview with author, *Stockholm Modernat Museet*, Stockholm, Sweden, 2014.

⁷ García Canclini, Nestor, *Art beyond itself: Anthropology for a Society without a Story Line*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2015, p. xi.

At first instance, the question of whether art is the place for social change may seem as rather disingenuous since many of us are willing to invoke the art status of our work for obvious funding purposes, of course. 'Curatorial solidarity' projects often position themselves in complex and rather precarious labour situations in terms of funding and structural support, repeatedly compromising the effects of the work, due partly to these dependencies.⁸ What is at stake here of course, as previously analysed, is the difference between artistic and political autonomy, and the ways in which art spaces can become spaces in which to resist the subject's instrumentalisation, in the first place.⁹ The deeper implication of the question however, with regards to this dialogue between organising and art, is whether there is anything else (apart from funding) to be gained in defining this work in terms of art, in the first place.

When art critics come face to face with social practices, they often apply a scholarly, formalist-based methodology that cannot appreciate, or even recognise, the sharing of non-subsumable surplus jouissances involved in these kind of inter-subjective exchanges. As a result, most of these dialogic works are criticised for being non-pleasurable or are attacked for their lesser quality of aesthetics. The audience gains no sensory pleasure or stimulation or fails to find the work aesthetically engaging, and thus the project is dismissed as 'failed art'. In some cases questioning the status of the work *as art* in the first place.¹⁰

⁸ See for instance my recounting of my experience in curating the 'Democracy and Community' workshops for the TATE galleries and the difficult decisions I had to make in view of TATE's sponsorship by British Petroleum (BP Art Exchange) (see appendix: practice).

⁹ For more on this see Chapter 2: Curation of Autonomy, and my in depth analysis of autonomy versus heteronomy.

¹⁰ Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2004, pp.10-11

This debate is exemplified by Claire Bishop's text 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents', *Artforum*, February 2006, pp. 179-185 and Grant Kester's response to it in the same issue, Grant Kester, 'Response to Claire Bishop's paper on Relational Aesthetics', *Circa*, no. 114, Winter 2005, pp. 37-39.

In other cases, theorists consider this work as practically and theoretically indistinguishable from social or political activism, where the transformative power of discourse is reduced to action without reflection. 'Action for action's sake negating the true praxis, and making dialogue impossible'.¹¹ Other more 'socially engaged' critics are willing to accept the work's identity as art but limit their critical engagement to a straightforward calculation of its political efficacy. For example, does the work fail to achieve its stated intention? Is it complicit with some broader, possibly antithetical, political or cultural agenda? How accessible or democratic was its proposed model of participation in the first place?

Within this discussion around the activation of dialogues between politics and art of course, however, it is important to consider that despite such categorisations, the varied political art experiments of our times are not all equivalent. Nicolas Bourriaud, for example, references Rikrit Tiravanijah's performance, *Untitled (Free)* 2006 – in which the artist served pad-thai curry from an ad hoc kitchen in an art gallery – as an ephemeral relational micro-utopia that resists capitalism. Bourriaud's model for 'relationality' disseminates much less 'disconcerting situations' (to use Claire Bishop's term here) from the ones orchestrated by Jonas Staal, for instance, and his *New World Academy*, as a move away from conviviality and towards a critique of the ideological frameworks that support relational production in the first place.¹² Liberate Tate's activist performance *Gift* (2012), where a wind turbine blade was submitted to the Tate as a 'gift to the nation', in questioning Tate's sponsorship by British Petroleum (BP), is much less 'dialogical' compared to Tania Bruguera's *Immigrant Movement International* (2010-5) and her insistence on organising long term transversal dialogues between social movements and institutional constituents.¹³ Ultra-red in turn, propose a move away from activist art that assumes appropriated aesthetic forms (dialogic, participatory, socially

¹¹ Freire, *ibid*: 88.

¹² For more on this see Chapter 1: Relational as Form: Situating the Relational in Praxis.

¹³ *Ibid*.

engaging, activism etc.) and instead insist on an analysis of organising as *a priori* aesthetic. Instead of political content doing the work of both cultural analysis and cultural action thus, they argue for a ‘political aesthetic’ project that reverses this model; where the ‘formal practices that build relationships out of which people compose an analysis and strategic actions [...] already constitute aesthetic forms’.¹⁴

Depending on the criteria by which they are assessed, different political art initiatives, seem to offer different forms of horizontal encounters between different subjectivities, while others may seek to delimit such inter-subjective exchanges promoting the transference of a message from one to another instead – as opposed to the creation of dialogue. As boundaries and definitions of art practice dissolve, expand and mutate, however, we should also aim to attend to the *permissions* these changes allow for instead. Are these *permissions* ‘immanent to the field of study they belong, for example, or do they get authorised by the urgent issues of the day?’¹⁵ What is the point of taking the claim that these *are* works of art seriously, if not to develop criteria for the further evaluation and expansion of our understanding of these works’ potential to enunciate alternative social forms? How do these works go beyond institutional prescriptions and their discursive schemes in the first place? And if by framing alternative ‘radical’ practices within art historical, relational and other aesthetic discourses we produce the very subjects of neoliberal production we are fighting against, then what does *dialogical aesthetics* have to offer to counteract such enclosed and alienated subjectivities production?¹⁶

¹⁴ Ultra-red, *Mission Statement*, 2000, as found at: <http://www.ultrared.org/mission.html>, (accessed 27.07.2016).

¹⁵ *Permissions: The Way We Work Now* is the title of a new series of public lectures at Goldsmiths, University of London, on the subject of curating and the event of knowledge.

¹⁶ Dialogical aesthetics is a term coined by Grant Kester in ‘Dialogical Aesthetics, A Critical Framework for Littoral Art’, *Variant*, issue 9, 2000, as found at: <http://www.variant.org.uk/9texts/KesterSupplement.html>, (accessed 12.01.2014).

INTERLUDE: WochenKlausur

‘Art lets us think in uncommon ways’.¹⁷

WochenKlausur

As announced on their official website, since 1993 and on invitation from different art institutions, the Austrian collective WochenKlausur ‘develops concrete proposals aimed at small, but nevertheless effective improvements to socio-political deficiencies’.¹⁸ With projects like, *Outdoor School Classes* (Sanabria, Estonia, 2012), *Women-led Workers’ Cooperative* (Glasgow, UK, 2013), *A Cinema for Immigrants* (Limerick, Ireland, 2006), *Voting Systems* (Stockholm, Sweden, 2002), *School Classroom Design* (Vienna, Austria, 1996) and *Employment of Former Drug Users* (Vienna, Austria, 2003), the collective seems to proceed even further and invariably translate these proposals into action, ‘where artistic creativity is no longer seen as a formal act, but as an intervention into society’, as they put it.¹⁹

In response to those who would argue that this is not art but social work or activism the group argues: ‘localised between social work and politics, between media work and management, interventions are nonetheless based on ideas from the discourse of art’.²⁰ So that the discourse of art itself, allows for a capacity to think critically and creatively across disciplinary boundaries. Grant Kester, writing in defence of such discursive practices, in fact, argues that the emphasis should be placed on the actual character of the discursive interaction, rather than the physical or formal integrity of a given project, or the artist’s experience in producing it. So that the primary objective of this work is not the creation of an art project or artefact as an exemplary representation, (although actual physical objects

¹⁷ WochenKlausur as quoted in Kester (2004), *ibid*: 101.

¹⁸ WochenKlausur’s official website, as found at: <http://www.wochenklausur.at/projwahl.php?lang=en>, (accessed 04.07.2016).

¹⁹ *Ibid*.

²⁰ *Ibid*.

do play a role in many of these projects), but more on the way people come together, the way people build new relations, organising themselves, as they take part in 'exemplary discursive interactions with specific, often non-art, constituencies'.²¹ It is important to clarify, that the discursive projects Kester refers to here, are all projects that usually take place outside institutions, working quietly with little or no recognition by curators and mainstream art critics, all bound with an insistence on creating new forms of collaborative knowledge and interaction outside the gallery or museum spaces or as WochenKlausur argue: 'outside the hierarchies we are pressed into when we are employed in an institution, a social organisation, or a political party'.²²

One of the projects that exemplifies this kind of practice is the *Shelter for Drug-Addicted Women*, a project that took place in Zurich, for 8 weeks during the winter of 1994, establishing a shelter for drug-addicted sex-workers who needed to get some rest during the day. In 1994 the group was invited by the Shedhalle gallery in Zurich to curate a project involving drug issues, so that they would exemplify the art institution's new philosophy, namely that 'art should no longer be encapsulated from political reality'.²³ At the time, election campaigns were underway in Switzerland, and as the group explains all the relief organisations assisting drug abusers were being attacked at the time by right-wing parties for 'being counterproductive to narcotics enforcement'.²⁴ The city's council reacted with a reduction of social services, particularly for women who use sex work in order to support their addictions. From my own experience working at Cross Roads Women's Centre volunteering as a researcher for English Collective of Prostitutes (ECP), here in London, but also from

²¹ Grant Kester, 'The Art of Listening (and of Being Heard): Jay Koh's Discursive Networks', *The Third Text*, issue 49, Summer 1999, as found at: <http://ifima.net/IFIMA/personal/Art%20of%20Listening.htm>, (accessed 27.07.2016).

²² *Intervention to Improve Conditions in Deportation Detention*, WochenKlausur official website, as found at: http://wochenklausur.to.or.at/projekte/06p_kurz_en.htm, (accessed 27.07.2016).

²³ As found at: <http://www.wochenklausur.at/projekt.php?lang=en&id=4>, (accessed 27.07.2016).

²⁴ Ibid.

other artist-activist experiences during projects in the streets of Athens (Greece), I have learnt how many of these women feel stigmatised by society, subjected to violent attacks and harassment by customers, dealers, and very often the police, unable to find somewhere to sleep during daytime and thus living the risky life of the streets. In fact for these women the most urgent struggle is their right to work together, protect each other and have a place they can return to sleep (when the homeless centres are closed during the day). So how does one facilitate this uncommon dialogue, involving the creative orchestration of collaborative encounters, out of which new relations can be built? Is this an issue that belongs to aesthetic discourse to begin with?



WochenKlausur, *Shelter for Drug-Addicted Women*, Lake Zurich, 2014.

WochenKlausur's 'curatorial' strategy was rather unusual, moving beyond the limits of institutional confines. On a warm spring day, a small pleasure boat sets off on a three hour cruise on Lake Zurich. Seated around a table in the main cabin were an unusual gathering of politicians, journalists, sex workers, and activists, prevention and addiction specialists, attorneys, editors of newspapers, as well as the police chief of the city of Zurich. Their task was simple: to have a conversation around the topic of homelessness of women drug addicts. Over the course of several weeks WochenKlausur organised dozens of these floating dialogues involving almost sixty key figures from Zurich's political, journalistic, and activist communities. Of course it was not easy to get all these VIPs on board, as they testify. So, as in many of their projects they decided to use a tricky

strategy: inviting the mayor for example and telling him that his colleague, the Socialist party secretary, would also be participating, but only if the mayor committed himself.²⁵ Flattered in this way the mayor agreed, and half an hour later the same result was achieved with the party secretary etc.

As WochenKlausur explain, many of the participants in these boat talks would normally have taken opposite sides in the highly charged debate over drug and prostitution, attacking and counteracting with statistics and moral incentive.²⁶ But in the ritualistic context of an art event, and with their statements insulated from direct media scrutiny, they were able to communicate outside the rhetorical demands of their official status. Even more remarkably they were able to reach a consensus supporting a modest but concrete solution to the problem: the creation of a suitable house for these women to find shelter. With the help of different sponsors, including the City's council and the Federal Health Department, the thirty-bed women's shelter was operated for six years (until the City of Zurich withdrew its funding in 2001).

WochenKlausur has been working in this consultive manner for nearly a decade, developing projects all around the world. For the artists the complex process of bringing the women's shelter into existence 'was itself a creative act, a 'concrete intervention' where artist materials are replaced by 'sociopolitical relationships'.²⁷ The interactions central to these projects require some kind of discursive framework through which various participants can share their thoughts, experiences, knowledge and reactions. Within the context of art however, it seems that the usual social and bureaucratic obstacles can be easily circumvented in order to shock us out of 'perceptual complacency', as Kester puts it, and mobilise people in key political, administrative or media positions to accomplish concrete

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ WochenKlausur in Kester (2004), *ibid*: 101.

outcomes.²⁸ For WochenKlausur an invitation from an established art institution in fact, 'provides the cultural capital and infrastructural framework necessary for a cumulative process of dialogical exchange to materialise. The exhibition space serving more as a studio from which the intervention is constructed'.²⁹

THESIS 2: DIALOGUE.

The curator's role, as the facilitator of this dialogical exchange between art and politics, aesthetics and organising, reflection and action becomes very pertinent here, especially as these dichotomies get propagated within popular 'democratisation of culture' policies and their focus on a kind of top-down, at times even paternalistic 'social action' apparatus. This basically involves the prioritising of the expansion of 'access' and 'inclusion' of the 'general public' to (mainly European) forms of high culture, as a kind of abstracted 'civilising' where the curator imagines the effect of the work on the consciousness of a hypothetical 'implicated' public.³⁰

Paulo Freire refers to this kind of 'civilising' as the 'banking' style of 'dialogue', a kind of disinterested or alienated engagement, where those who name the world, always remain separate from those who change it. In Freire's understanding of the 'banking style' of engagement, the teacher-student (curator-participant) relationship has a fundamentally narrative character, where the teacher is the narrating subject S and the students are the listening objects O. 'The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalised and predictable'.³¹ Or the teacher expands on a topic totally alien to the everyday experiences of the students. 'Words are emptied of their concreteness and become a hollow,

²⁸ Kester, *ibid*: 101

²⁹ WochenKlausur as quoted in Kester, *ibid*: 101.

³⁰ Francois Matarasso and Charles Landry, *Balancing Act: Twenty-One Strategic Dilemmas*, Belgium, Council of Europe, 1999.

³¹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, London, Continuum, 1968/ 2005, pp. 70-2.

alienated and alienating verbosity [...] The outstanding character of this narrative education is the sonority of words, not their transforming power', writes Freire explaining how instead of communicating, the teacher here 'issues communiqués and makes deposits which the student receives, files and stores as 'banking'.³² The students are thus turned into receptacle containers, to be filled by the teacher's surplus. Freire elaborates:

This is the "banking" concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. They do, it is true, have the opportunity to become collectors or cataloguers of the things they store. But in the last analysis, it is the people themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system.³³

For a 'banking' style curator then, to paraphrase Freire, the question of political content would simply concern the program about which she will discourse 'culture' or 'politics' to her 'subjects' (that want to know). Her specialist knowledge on dialogue and participation becomes like a gift from the sophisticated and emancipated to those whom the curator considers the subject of ignorance. Negating knowledge and participation as a process of inquiry. The curator justifies her existence as the subject of knowledge par excellence, turning dialogue into what Freire calls an 'alienating blah blah'.

For the 'dialogical' curator however, following Freire's concept of dialogue, the program content of educational-curatorial initiatives can be 'neither a gift or an imposition', but more of an organised, systematised and developed 're-presentation' to participants of the things about which *they*

³² Freire, Ibid.

³³ Freire, *ibid*: 72.

want to know more.³⁴ The first step thus towards an open-ended analytic process of dialogical engagement thus is for one to give up the ‘arrogance of projecting ignorance onto others’ and starting to listen to one’s own.³⁵

Freire asks:

How can I dialogue if I regard myself as a case apart from others?
How can I dialogue if I consider myself a member of the in-group of pure men, the owners of truth and knowledge, for whom all non-members are “these people” of “the great unwashed”? [...] How can I dialogue if I am afraid of being displaced, the mere possibility causing me torment and weakness?³⁶

The question of ‘cultural democracy’ versus ‘democratisation of culture’, or politicising aesthetics versus the aestheticising of politics, thus also ought to involve an altogether different understanding of what constitutes dialogue in the first place, i.e. a necessary re-positioning of the curator herself within this analysis, as the manager of relationships between analysis and action. Taking into account how the interests of the ‘oppressors’ nowadays lie more in ‘changing the consciousness of the oppressed, rather than the situation which oppresses them’, it is perhaps not so much about art versus activism, politics versus aesthetics, or actions versus words thus, but instead about an analysis of the constitutive elements of dialogical practices in the first place.³⁷

In view of this then, it is important to also acknowledge here that most of the contradictions of socially engaged practices in fact begin, when an ‘unauthentic dialogue’ occurs, one which is unable to transform reality by

³⁴ Freire, *ibid*: 87, 93.

³⁵ Freire becomes very specific here in his analysis of ‘authentic dialogue’ arguing for ‘humility’, ‘mutual trust’, ‘love’, ‘hope’ and ‘critical thinking’, as the guiding principles of the ‘true’ and thus transformative ‘word’.

ibid: 87-92.

³⁶ Freire, *ibid*: 90.

³⁷ *Ibid*: 74.

being deprived of its dimension of action.³⁸ Museums and art spaces host amazing dialogical encounters, with very interesting speakers, well-orchestrated panels and sophisticated models of participation for ‘difficult conversations to happen’. No matter how interesting, sophisticated or participatory these conversations are, however, they will always remain inconsequential, if the dialogic participation is based on a dichotomy between reflection and action.

THESIS 3: ACCOUNTABILITY.

Without a direct alliance or a direct connection with the communities whose struggles we are trying to ‘represent’, dialogical aesthetics remain a kind of closed hermeneutic analysis with nowhere for that learning to go. For how can we organise a dialogue, if we don’t organise a relationship between words and actions, performative utterances and change? The organisation of an emancipatory dialogical practice thus, also needs to include the setting up of an ‘authentic dialogue’, of transformative ‘true words’ that includes effective analysis *and* action, as informed by the implicated constituencies’ desires.

There is a difference of stakes here of course, between a curator that works for an institutional artistic/ curatorial initiative on social injustice for example, and the constituent members of a community that is directly affected and mobilises around that injustice in the first place. Nonetheless, the whole point is to acknowledge those differences, and build on a solidarity project that does not erase them, but grows from them. After all, even if we share the same struggles with the communities we work with, but still remain accountable to the art world, as managers of the surplus, then how can we even claim for an authentic dialogue in the first place?

The question of accountability, comes as a consequence and in direct connection to the problems that arise when artists and curators claim a ‘socially engaged’ status for their art, without considering its relationship to

³⁸ Ibid: 87.

social consequences. The question of curatorial solidarity however should perhaps extend from ourselves and our recognising and being accountable to the people we are in solidarity with. This, of course, involves a shared intention and commitment around the production of change. Which might not always be experienced in the same way between different constituencies of the art world and grass roots communities. The purpose of accountability to the constituencies we work with however, is not one based on a shared stakes necessarily, but also perhaps on a recognising of these differences in experiences, conditions *and* stakes. Being able to talk about those differences and making them really apparent is what makes us accountable to the constituencies of social movements we work with.

If the radical curation of participation has any effect beyond the mere co-optation of base communities' symbolic value thus, it is to contribute precisely to this transformation from an idle verbalism or as Freire says 'an alienated and alienating blah' to a 'true word' of reflection and action.³⁹ This accountability involves a long-term durational, open-ended process of dialogue between 'those who deny others the right to speak their 'word' and those whose right to speak has been denied them'.⁴⁰ Dialogue as an act of creation instead of dialogue as an act of domination. An organising of collective co-investigations of the relations between our intentions and their realisations, the means and their possibility, or what Duchamp calls 'the unexpressed but intended and the unintentionally expressed', which represents the extent to which the 'dialogic' curator has control over the surplus of knowledge that can be imparted, and that part of the surplus disseminated back to learning experience, life struggles and social change.⁴¹ In this sense the curator's accountability also includes a responsibility towards the obliteration of meaning and the consequences of removing the possibility for its relational elaboration (fixed curricula, pre-

³⁹ Ibid: 87.

⁴⁰ Ibid: 88.

⁴¹ Marcel Duchamp in Lebel, Robert (1959) *Marcel Duchamp*, Paragraphic Books, New York, p.77

established schemes and protocols). After all, to elaborate one's own curatorial meaning from within a 'banking' kind of relational process, produces nothing more than a series of closed gestures in which the fundamental condition for intersubjective encounters and dialogue are no longer fulfilled. Janna Graham testifies:

The "creative" person – if dissociated from their micro and macropolitical circumstances of production, in favour of an idealised, or aestheticistically separate, condition – is much less likely to acknowledge the conflicts of these circumstances, let alone mobilise to resist or struggle against the sites in which conflicts are experienced.⁴²

THESIS 4: SUBJECTIVITY

The co-production of critical knowledge generates rebellious bodies. Thinking about rebellious practices gives value and potency to those same practices. Collective thinking engenders common practice. Therefore, the process of knowledge production is inseparable from the process of subject production or subjectification and vice versa. It is of little worth to go around telling (commanding) people what they should think, how they should interpret their own lives and the world. One cannot be certain that this type of transmission of information from consciousness to consciousness might produce something, or liberate in any sense. That form of transmission is too superficial, and holds disdain for the potential of encounter between different singularities and the strength of thinking and enunciating in common.⁴³

⁴² Graham, *ibid*: 127.

⁴³ Marta Malo de Molina, 'Common Notions, Part 2: Institutional Analysis, Participatory Action Research, Militant Research', *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies: Transversal Texts*, 2004, as found at: <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0707/malo/en>, (accessed 18.07.2016, 14:43').

Towards the end of his thesis on *Relational Aesthetics*, Bourriaud hints towards some possible expansions of his analysis of the relational as an aesthetic paradigm, for ‘the future of art, as an instrument of emancipation, and as a political tool aimed at the liberation of forms of subjectivity’.⁴⁴ He refers to Felix Guattari’s work on the ‘production of subjectivity’ and the ways in which Guattari’s thinking links up with ‘the productive machinery with which present-day art is riddled’.⁴⁵ He quotes Guattari:

The important thing is to know whether a work makes effective contributions to a changing production of statement (production d’*énonciation*) and not to delimit the specific boundaries of this and that utterance.⁴⁶

Guattari was a student of Lacan but also very critical of psychoanalysis, a discipline that he saw as seeking to regulate desire into certain ready-made configurations, ‘crystallised into structural complexes’ polarised by a ‘symbolic hermeneutic, entered on childhood’.⁴⁷ Expanding on Lacan’s conception of subjectivity as de-centred and incomplete, and in particular on his notion of ‘partial object’, Guattari puts forward the following definition for producing a subjectivity:

The ensemble of conditions which render possible the emergence of individual and/or collective instances as self-referential existential

⁴⁴ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, France, Les Presses du Réel, 2002, p. 78.

⁴⁵ Ibid: 87.

⁴⁶ Felix Guattari quoted in Bourriaud, *ibid*: 127.

⁴⁷ For Guattari, and his ‘machine-like unconscious’:

‘[...] The individual is fragmented into multiple relationships with a changing environment (technological, biological, cultural, and so on) forming alliances and couplings, which are motored by the energy of a desire that refuses to be curtailed’.

Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, Bloomington, Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1995, p. 5.

Territories, adjacent, or in a delimiting relation, to an alterity that is itself subjective.⁴⁸

Most interestingly for relational discourse, for Guattari, subjectivity is seen not as a unified and completed autonomous entity but instead as the ensemble of multiple exchanges between ‘individuals-group-machines’ (beyond the binary opposition of individual subject and society). Bourriaud explains in fact, that in the Guattari order of things:

subjectivity as production plays the role of a fulcrum around which forms of knowledge and action can freely pitch in, and soar off in pursuit of the laws of the socius.⁴⁹

Like ‘a mobile constellation of modalities’ and ‘grafts of transference’, moving along ‘lines of flight’ that transverse the human and the nonhuman world, to use Guattari’s vibrant terminology, subjectivity is not a natural order thus, but instead an individuation still to be won.⁵⁰ As Simon O’Sullivan explains, subjectivity for Guattari, is therefore ‘collective and specifically *relational*’.⁵¹ And what is particularly pertinent about Guattari is his foregrounding of art (an ethico-aesthetic instance) in the process of subjectivisation:

According to Bakhtin, in this movement the ‘consumer’ in some way becomes co-creator; the aesthetic form only achieving this result

⁴⁸ Guattari, *ibid*: 9.

⁴⁹ Guattari in Bourriaud, *ibid*: 88.

Also see Grant Watson, ‘Response to Claire Bishop’, *October*, vol. 110, Fall 2004, pp. 51-79.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*.

⁵¹ Simon O’Sullivan, *On the Production of Subjectivity: Five Diagrams of the Finite-Infinite Relation*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p. 258 [my emphasis].

through the device of an isolating or separating function of such a kind that the expressive material becomes formally creative.⁵²

Subjectivity for Guattari is thus constructed, formulated and worked on as it gets deployed in production, theory and frameworks of the general economy and trade. We must thus learn to 'seize, enhance and reinvent' subjectivity, for otherwise we shall see it encapsulated into pre-established schemes, 'transformed into a rigid collective apparatus at the exclusive service of the powers to be'.⁵³ These ideas, as utopian and vague as they may seem at first, according to Guattari, have immediate political effects, namely the need for the production of a collective subjectivity that is not defined by capitalism, but instead moves towards a 'massive subjective revolution' in the direction of emancipation. Finally, to return to art, and Bourriaud's referencing of Guattari, art and the 'aesthetic paradigm' consist of 'a block of percept and affect' that offers a flexible agency capable of operating on several levels and on differing planes of knowledge. In short, Guattari writes, 'affect is not a question of representation and discursivity, but of existence'.⁵⁴ The best attitude to have then for Guattari is:

to envisage the work of cartography and psychological modelisation in a dialectical relation with the individuals and groups concerned and to move in the direction of co-management, in the production of a polyphonic and heterogeneous subjectivity altogether.⁵⁵

For Guattari artistic practice provides the terrain for the invention of such 'life possibilities', providing models for human existence. This 'scizoanalytic' world becomes particularly relevant, when we try to connect these ideas directly to contemporary discourse on art's emancipatory

⁵² Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, Bloomington, Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1995, p. 14.

⁵³ Guattari in Bourriaud, *ibid*: 89.

⁵⁴ Guattari, *ibid*.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*: 6, 11.

potential, and in particular the contradictory rather than liberatory possibilities of the artworks Bourriaud references (Philip Parreno's *Made on the 1st of May* (1995) a 'leisure activity assembly line', Rikrit Tiravanijah's *One Revolution Per Minute* (1996) or Maurizio Catalan's *Bel Pease* (1994) where the artist feeds rats on cheese), or to put it another way, when we try to understand these ideas in a constructive way in terms of positioning the role of art within the discourse of political subjectivity production.

Guattari argues for a necessary balance that needs to be found between 'structuralist discoveries (which are certainly considerable) [referring here to the quest for hidden truths behind master signifiers] and their pragmatic management, so as not to remotely founder in 'social post-modern abandonment'.⁵⁶ He then explains, how this balance only comes if social relations are investigated at their proper 'temperature', at the heat of inter-subjective relationality and not artificially 'cooled' in order to 'single out the structures' (like when we 'cure' the inter-subjective in order to attend to the dissonant resonances between different participants' responses or when we retrospectively reflect on a performative exercise of being singular-plural). For Guattari, in fact, the doing away of artificial social bonds that stick 'subjectivity' onto a subject as its natural attribute, and the mapping of the transformations of such re-singularisations and their effects is where the liberator possibilities lie. Instead of analysing from a distance then, this model moves beyond representation, permitting one to enter a state of awareness of the 'self'. A knowledge that is not made of answers but breaks in the 'knowings'.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Guattari as quoted in Bourriaud, *ibid*: 90.

⁵⁷ Simon O'Sullivan in his book *Art Encounters: Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation*, attempts to map out the affirmative and specifically materialist potential of such artistic encounters, analysing the work of artists that position their practice outside the gallery, and in order to attend to art's political and ethical potentiality.

Simon O'Sullivan, *Art Encounters: Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation*, Hampshire, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

In a world where power has been de-centred (postmodern world, late capitalist or *Empire*), and virtual centres of power exist everywhere, as O'Sullivan explains, the 'virtual [real] centres of power are our own subjectivities, and thus the battle ground against this power, is in some sense ourselves'.⁵⁸ O'Sullivan calls for active and creative involvement in different artistic strategies and practices that allow for the production of the self beyond the habitual, in order 'to treat our lives as works of art'.⁵⁹ Contemporary artistic practice is seen here as a rich field for social experimentation, for the study of relational activities and the production of models of democratic participation. A focus on subjectivity thus allows us to unpack abstract concepts such as structural contradictions and curatorial alignments, and focus instead on the nuanced ways in which these are performed. O'Sullivan describes this as a kind of training or creative pedagogy that involves the actualisation of different states and temporalities, with 'lines of flight' transversing different subjective states that effectively tear down the 'ontological curtain between self and other'.⁶⁰

In this manner, relational artworks's transient and ephemeral micro-utopias are able to enact temporary inter-subjective encounters holding a promise for one's own transformation with and among others. In this sense subjectivity becomes constituent of consciousness which not only defines what it is to be an individual but also shapes the subject's actions, as these participatory experiences have a direct impact as to how the individual perceives subjective reality, moving from the abstract to the concrete and back. Marlene Maeckelbergh, in fact, takes this further and argues for 'participatory decision making processes' potential to 'offer the

⁵⁸ Simon O'Sullivan, *Academy: The Production of Subjectivity*, 2006, as found at: <http://www.simonosullivan.net/art-writings/production-of-subjectivities.pdf>, (accessed 27.07.2016).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

beginnings of an emerging democratic alternative by placing diversity of people's subjectivities at the heart of decision making practices'.⁶¹

In short, Guattari's theorising of subjectivity as an 'ensemble of multiple exchanges' helps come closer to a conceptualisation of an emancipatory analytic practice that moves away from representation and towards the direction of co-management. If we want to understand where the future potential of this discursive model of relational praxis lies then we would need to start talking about the transversality or horizontality of the inter-subjective relations it produces, to begin with, and the ways in which these can get articulated within 'collective assemblages of enunciation'.

Nevertheless, and before we move on to further analyse such collective enunciations, we also need to bear in mind the emphasis that Bourriaud and other advocates of relational practices, micro-politics and production of subjectivity discourse place on the temporality of such micro-political utopias and the transient dimension of such momentary transformations. Bourriaud writes:

The age of the New Man, future oriented manifestos, and calls for a better world all ready to be walked into and lived in, is well and truly over. These days utopia is being lived on a subjective, everyday basis, in the real time of concrete and intentionally fragmentary experiments. The artwork is presented as a social interstice within which these experiments and these new "life possibilities" appear to be possible. It seems more pressing to invent possible relations with our neighbours in the present than to bet on happier tomorrows.⁶²

⁶¹ Marlene Maeckelbergh as quoted in Alex Flynn, 'Subjectivity and the Obliteration of Meaning: Contemporary Art, Activism, Social Movement Politics', *Micro-Utopias: anthropological perspectives on art, relationality, and creativity*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2016, as found at: <https://cadernosaa.revues.org/1035>, (accessed 10.06.2016).

⁶² Bourriaud, *ibid*: 45.

There are those who even argue that such temporary and transient constellations reflect the 'pragmatic' vector of the politics of our time, where a new kind of discourse is articulated with regards to the short-lived temporalities of social mobilisation movements such as Occupy, the Indignados, the anti-globalisation movement, the Zapatistas or Brasil's Landless Worker's movement (MST). Alex Flynn writes for instance:

The lack of conviction in *utopian* solutions that characterises relational aesthetics is mirrored in the politics that underpin the subjective turn in social movements more widely.⁶³

Flynn hints towards the lack of commitment perhaps from radical practitioners of our times to push this reclaiming of the 'means' of producing subjectivities towards more long-term and broader goals. In the end, and even though participatory practices may offer a framework for 'subjectivity to emerge as a key site of conflict and creativity', there is also a need to differentiate these kind of enclosed and short term subjectivity-making processes of conviviality, or 'subject-making' as an end in itself', from those long-term durational and committed processes of organising.⁶⁴ Pushing this ethico-aesthetic model's promises on diversity, horizontality and a 'flattening out of subjectivity' further from a transitive kind of ethic, to a committed and open-ended way of living one's life.

After all, it is the long term engagement processes, sustained social relationships and committed attitudes of challenging subject-making positions, institutional conditions, exploitation and alienation that enable participation and engagement in the first place. Chris Jones explains this in more practical terms perhaps: 'There is always the question of time... In LA [Ultra-red] are committed to years of going through all these painful

⁶³ Alex Flynn, 'Subjectivity and the Obliteration of Meaning: Contemporary Art, Activism, Social Movement Politics', *Micro-Utopias: anthropological perspectives on art, relationality, and creativity*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2016, as found at: <https://cadernosaa.revues.org/1035>, (accessed 10.06.2016).

⁶⁴ Ibid.

questions [...] If there is no time to maintain relationships, there will be no time to feed that learning into organising. There is no time to set that up'.⁶⁵ Engaged 'dialogic' curators thus should perhaps immerse themselves in processes of temporising the now, without fear of the risks involved. Critical thinking – in contrast to naive thinking– involves a perception of reality as process, as transformation through time. Freire writes again:

For the naive thinker, the important thing is accommodation to this normalised 'today'. For the critic, the important thing is the continuity of transformation of reality, on behalf of the continuing humanisation of men.⁶⁶

After all, having the benefit of an extended period of time means that a dialogue produces a commonwealth of ideas, intentions, listenings, records, and ideas. More importantly it produces the collective experiences that come from a shared history of working together through a long period of time. Which bring us to the question of community and the ways subjectivities come together to form this polymorphous ensemble of multiple exchanges.

THESIS 5: COMMUNITY

An analysis of the relations produced by socially engaged, community and emancipated practices must also involve the uneasy task of re-defining community itself. In the discourse of community-development and public art, there is a tendency to fetishise the authenticity of an artist's integral connection to a given community, considering it as either entirely positive or wholly negative.⁶⁷ Taking into account how the concept of community is nowadays profoundly abused in social practice discourse and community development projects, how do we move towards a re-definition of

⁶⁵ Chris Jones in interview with author, see appendix, *Sound Object: Ultra-red Interview*.

⁶⁶ Freire, *ibid*: 92.

⁶⁷ Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2004, pp. 129-30.

community, whose foundation is 'laid within the self and whose force pours continually out'?

Jean-Luc Nancy, in his influential essay 'The Inoperative Community' (1983), which builds on George Bataille, states that loss is fundamental of a community, which is thereby defined as being engaged in an always unfinished working through of its own identity.⁶⁸ This involves a kind of giving up or abandoning one's fixed identity or authorial (curatorial) position, a state of being without or giving something off. In this way, a community of lack or absence can be defined here, on the search for a place to keep the time/space of history alive, as imaginary and optimistic, as a way of leaving my individuality behind in order to *re-invent myself with and among others*. As Nancy writes, 'the individual is merely the residue of the experience of the dissolution of community'.⁶⁹ Community after all, is not really as grandiose as 'society', with its assumptions about nations, the idea of a people, or even a society of producers, but rather temporal, local, non-legal, dispersed and interested.⁷⁰ Nancy writes:

But these singular beings are themselves constituted by sharing, they are distributed and placed, or rather spaced, by the sharing that makes them others: other for one another, and other, infinitely other for the Subject of their fusion, which is engulfed in the sharing, in the ecstasy of the sharing: 'communicating' by not 'communing'. These 'places of communication' are no longer places of fusion, even though in them one passes from one to the other; they are defined and exposed by their dislocation. Thus, the communication of sharing would be this very dis-location.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, Minneapolis, Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 1991, p.15.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid: 159.

⁷¹ Ibid.

For Nancy conventional models of community are premised on the concept of centred, self-identical subjects coming into communion through the mutual recognition of a shared essence. In reality however, our identities are always in negotiation, always in the process of being formed and re-formed through encounters with others. The anxiety caused by this constant negotiation – this sense of dependence – triggers the aggressive closure of the fascist collective (what Nancy calls an ‘essentialist’ community).⁷² Most interestingly for Nancy, all participants of a community are not individuals but ‘singularities’, always already linked to others at a pre-discursive level, by virtue of an ‘ontological or original sociality’ that precedes our very identity as thinking beings. The concept of community thus for Nancy, cannot be established through communicative interactions, i.e. dialogical/ discursive practices, but instead through some aggressive derangement, an essential specular intersubjective experience (the phenomenological image of organised listening), that cannot be carried through shared labour or collaboration, (either verbal or physical), but instead through a kind of *syncope* or epiphany, where we get confronted with the image of the ‘other’, as our identity is suspended by this aggressive sensory derangement (drawing from Bataille’s work).⁷³

In relational practices however, such instantaneous epiphanic moments very rarely take place (without traumatic consequences). In the staging of an inter-subjective enquiry into what we think near and dear, and as we listen to our frustrations and limitations, we suspend the familiarity of time as we know it, not in order to experience some ecstasy of the pre-discursive level (as a pure formalist or aesthetic experience), but in order to interrogate in public the nervousness of our performing bodies. When Ultra-red use sound, for instance, they insist on sound’s use not as an object of contemplation but more as a tool to enunciate social relations, moving *from hysteria to analysis*, as they put it. Ecstasy here is the consciousness that is never singular, never belonging to the subject as such, always in the process of losing control of your so-far perceived ‘self’,

⁷² Ibid: 154.

⁷³ Ibid.

being outside yourself and inside the many possibilities of the 'other'. In this participatory collective investigations, the subjects explore the cultural dynamics of their elasticity as incomplete entities, opening up towards the 'other', in a ritualistic kind of process-based, open-ended and durational transformation of their split subjectivities. These transformations are never direct nor complete, but the process instead involves a kind of processual creativity analysis, accumulating all these partial transformations, always developing into a new collective alterity.

The epiphanic moment of Bataillian nature that Nancy refers to thus, is more of an uncanny utopia or process-based solidarity whose foundation is laid within the self and whose force pours continually out. The utopian element is not an 'aggressive sensory detachment' but more of a determined attitude of the subject to position themselves within the location of the Real. After all, even if this aggressive sensory derangement does happen (through the sound/ aesthetic/ phenomenological impact of an object), there is no way of analysing it or turning it into a collective process of analysis and action, unless we eventually transition from epiphany to the organising of connections. The *syncope* in a way is located between the phenomenological impact of sound, the listening process [where the individual-meets-the-collective] and back to the 'word', by listening and analysing the ways we confer meanings together, and the lack of our unknown knows that attracts our desire to know. Staging an inter-subjective analysis of what we think 'as near and dear', the nervousness and elasticity of our duration.

The invocation of the community-specific more generally thus, does not *necessarily* involve an assumed shared sense of common/ communal identity (based on ethnicity, gender, religious beliefs, class or political affiliation etc), but more 'the extent to which identity itself is constructed within a complex discursive field'.⁷⁴ Community not in the conventional, commonsensical understanding of people coming together through a

⁷⁴ Mary Ann Jacob as quoted in Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-specific art and locational identity*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press, 2002, p. 112.

sense of heritage, shared truths and knowledges, but a community whose foundation is laid within the ontological originality of self but whose force pours continually out. A community re-defining itself from a shared loss (and re-capturing) of its shared *jouissance*, through an inter-subjective analysis of the un-subsumable meaning that gets re-distributed back to it, connecting community back to its own 'un-knowings'.⁷⁵ Community not as the result of an existing 'original ontological sociality' necessarily, but instead as a 'living things out', through the activation of a dialogue between original (assumed) subjection and the analysis of the distribution of its inter-subjective '*jouissance*'. A call to a collective praxis in the 'here and now' of coming into being, analytically organising a collective subjectivity through polyphonic and 'chaosmic plunges into the materials of sensation'.⁷⁶ A collective subjectivity based on splicing and cuts, the segmenting and dismembering of 'the illusory units of psychic life'.

It is important to clarify here that in practice, one should not ignore the value of working with communities that have already identified their collective voice in social struggles and the lessons we can learn from people who have been practicing community organising and grass roots activism for years. The knowledge they bring with them of their local culture and politics, their empowering educational strategies, their inspiring dedication and passion, their articulated fears and desires, and their long term commitment and experience is the lifeblood of any movement. Any attempt for 'participatory', 'socially engaging', 'emancipatory', 'educational',

⁷⁵ Žižek referencing Hardt and Negri eloquently defines the commons as:

'the shared substance of our social being whose privatisation is a violent act that should be resisted with violent means, the commons of culture the immediately socialised forms of cognitive capital, primary language, our means of communication and education, but also the shared infrastructure of public transport, electricity, post etc; the commons of external nature threatened by pollution and exploitation, the commons of internal nature (biogenetic inheritance of humanity)'.

Slavoj Žižek, 'Two events mark the beginning and end of the first decade of the 21st century: the 9/11 attacks in 2001 and the financial meltdown in 2008' in Gregory Sholette and Oliver Ressler, *It's The Political Economy, Stupid: The Global Financial Crisis in Art and Theory*, London, Pluto Press, 2013, pp. 29-30.

⁷⁶ Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1995, p. 90.

or 'dialogical' practices that does not start from listening to the community's struggles is doomed to fail as a mere representation, based on an 'us and them' separation. This however involves a privileging of the definition of oneself through solidarity with others while at the same time recognising the contingent nature of this identification. In each case, community formation thus, is more accurately viewed as an ongoing process of developing the collective's own critical consciousness, for the cultivation of the coherent collective agency necessary to engage in collective actions in the first place (rather than a fixed identification).

So that, in this participatory process, always in progress, people do not essentialise some 'pure' identification with a particular characteristic or trait but instead develop their conscious diversity, processing their own meaning-making composition, as incomplete entities, not entirely known to themselves nor to each other. Participants analyse together the conscious but also their unconscious registers of their desires and needs. So, that the practice of producing collective subjectivities involves a dynamic exchange between the concrete and the abstract constitutive elements of reality, but also those mutations that happen between inter-subjective (or dialogic) encounters, where the subjective and objective ecology of everyday life comes to meet the existing contradictions of social relations. In this process, what limits the investigative community also provides the key to its liberation. As the group develops its own cultural analysis and action, so will it transform so far completed entities into mutually transforming subjectivities.

THESIS 6: DISSENSUS

‘The folly of our times is the wish to use consensus to cure the diseases of consensus’⁷⁷

Jacques Rancière

Claire Bishop’s analysis of the antagonisms inherent in relational practices and in particular her understanding of these antagonisms as essential for democratic participation can shed some more light here on our understanding of a radical practice that produces a polyphonic heterogeneous collective subjectivity. In her essay titled *Art of the Encounter: Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics*, Bishop refers in turn to the political philosophers Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe and their argument on a fully functioning democratic society, being one in which antagonisms have not fully disappeared, but instead one in which new political terrains are constantly being drawn and brought into the discursive framework. To put it simply, for them a democratic society is one in which relations of conflict are sustained, not erased. Bishop writes:

Without antagonism there is only the imposed consensus of authoritarian order – a total suppression of debate and discussion which is inimical to democracy.⁷⁸

Bishop then embarks on an analysis of Laclau and Mouffe’s understanding of antagonism as founded in a Lacanian theory of subjectivity, where the subject is not ‘self-transparent, rational and pure, but is irremediably de-

⁷⁷ Jacques Rancière, *On The Shore of Politics*, London, Verso, 2006, p. 106

⁷⁸ Claire Bishop, ‘Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics’, *October*, vol. 110, Fall 2004, p. 66.

centered and incomplete'.⁷⁹ Reminding us of our 'failed structural identity' which makes us 'dependent on identification in order to proceed'.⁸⁰ Subjectification, according to Lacan, is a process of identification after all, and that's exactly what makes us all necessarily incomplete entities, with a partial object *a* always as surplus. According to this understanding of subjectivity then, antagonism is what emerges from the split subject, the divided subject of incomplete entities. Instead of a micro utopian situation that produces a community whose members identify with each other, (because they have something in common, i.e. the art public), Bishop argues for work that produces unease and ambivalence, rather than belonging, sustaining a tension between viewers, participants and context (Guattari's individual-group-machines). She concludes that all art has the potential to destabilise and de-centre our thoughts from the predominant and pre-existing consensus.⁸¹ For Bishop:

This relational antagonism would be predicated not on social harmony, but on exposure of that which is repressed in contriving the semblance of this harmony, and thereby would provide a more concrete and polemical grounds for rethinking our relationship to the world and to each other.⁸²

Politics after all, as Jacques Rancière argues in *Politics, Identification, Subjectivisation*, is not 'an enactment of a principle, the self of a community'. Instead for Rancière the very concept of emancipation stems

⁷⁹ In *Hegemony and Social Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (1985), the political philosophers Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe argue that a fully functioning democratic society is not one in which antagonisms have disappeared, but one in which new political frontiers are constantly being drawn and brought into debate.

Erneston Laclau, and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Social Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, London, Verso, 1985.

⁸⁰ Bishop, *ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*: 35.

from a heterology of the self, i.e. 'the politics of the self as other'.⁸³ For in order to enact emancipation, one needs to verify 'the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being, and that is exactly what an injured community is seeking: the name of anyone'.⁸⁴ The place of emancipatory truth thus here, is not in some grand ideal, but is instead the very argumentative plot of subjectivisation itself, whose universality involves its discursive and practical enactment, collective investigation, analysis *and* action. Its not a demonstration of values specific to the group, as pure and essential for the group. Nor is it the moment of identification of the group, but more about together analysing and acting upon the assumptions, antagonisms, contradictions, gaps and unfamiliar familiarities within the on going process of our subjectivisation (both as social and critical agents). Rancière writes: 'It is the formation of a one that is not a self but is the relation of a self to an other'.⁸⁵ This network of collective subjectivities enacting politics as a 'crossing of identities of no name or group or class', for Rancière 'always involves an impossible identification, an identification that cannot be embodied by he or she who utters it'.⁸⁶ To quote Rancière again:

Policy is about "right" names, names that pin people down to their place and work. Politics is about "wrong" names—misnomers that articulate a gap and connect with a wrong.⁸⁷

And elsewhere:

The process of equality is a process of difference. But difference does not mean the assumption of a different identity or the plain confrontation of two identities. The place of the working out of

⁸³ Jacques Rancière, *Politics, Identification, Subjectivisation*, as cited in John Rajchman, *The Identity in Question*, London, Routledge, 1995, p. 65.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid: 66.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid: 67.

difference is not the 'self' or the culture of a group. It is the topos of an argument. And the place for such an argument is an interval. The place of a political subject is an interval or a gap: being together to the extent that we are in-between—between names, identities, cultures, and so on.⁸⁸

This is an uncomfortable position to inhabit of course, as described earlier, but it is this discomfort that gives way to the urgency of struggles and the shared sense of dissonance to begin with. If this gets translated to the language of policy, subsuming the partial 'object *a*' into discourse of interpretive meta-politics, then of course, the gap is closed, and politics are 'no more'. Rendering all differences as relations of subordination. If however there is no overarching common ground between conflicting utterances, but instead a genuine articulation of the way needs and desires 'slip and slide', then there is no way in subsuming them under a universal objectivity which would supposedly reveal its 'pure' and 'true' essence. We always need to examine and acknowledge the difference of stakes between those that are directly impacted and those whose solidarity emerges out of a hypothetical identification, an artificial community, or a community without struggle. In fact if there is anything true and pure about this transversal inter-relational network of collective subjectivity, is its anti-essentialist framework, in which the subject is constituted by the 'non-crystallised grafts of transference' between different subject identifications, in a non-fixed, open system of differences.

Against 'postmodernism's refusal to construct a 'we' of pure and true essence thus', and the problem of producing 'a series of equivalences' without ever establishing a common ground in short-termed social mobilisations, one could perhaps argue here for the establishing of an open-ended, process based, long term commonality that does not erase differences, an individual collectivism for 'a pluralist democracy', or as

⁸⁸ *ibid*: 68.

Chantal Mouffe proposes an ‘agonistic pluralism’, that recognises conflict and argument as the condition for democracy in the first place.⁸⁹

THESIS 7: TRANSVERSALITY

In view of my own desire for an emancipated practice and following Guattari’s own life and work as a philosopher-psychoanalyst and political activist, I found Guattari’s understanding of ‘transversality’ and his work with the La Borde clinic, very useful as a way of connecting theory and practice, intentions and their realisations. After many years of working within the field, and through a series of collaborations with grass roots and community organisers, educators and activists, sex workers and feminists, teenagers and black sisters, I am willingly risking to sound dogmatic here: for a practice to move beyond representations and into actual relations, it needs to work transversally across social movements, cultural institutions and pedagogic spaces. For the producers of micro utopian situations who seek to find resonances in the name of a belonging to a specific community or a future community to come, a comfortable togetherness can perhaps allow for such identifications. As I have tried to explain in different ways through this thesis however, these identifications get actualised through the mediation of a system of master discourses, re-enforcing a commitment to a predetermined belonging, without recognising their own accommodating of the neoliberal globalisation of a subject to be colonised. In addition, practices that do not consider the means and possibility of articulating one’s subjectivity in one’s own terms, and the ways this reflection and analysis always already constitutes an action, will simply produce what Freire calls an ‘alienating blah blah’.

Janna Graham in a recent conversation around the educational value of participation and the re-distribution of the un-subsumable part of participation across the different constituencies Ultra-red work with, argued

⁸⁹ Chantal Mouffe, ‘Democratic Politics and the Question of Identity’ in Jon Rajchman (ed), *The Identity in Question*, London, Routledge, 1995, pp. 33-47.

for a need to move away from artificial connections and abstract situations (hierarchical situation of a school classroom for instance) and towards a collective investigation of ‘what this shared stakes might be in’.⁹⁰ She explains:

If we produce a really closed hermeneutic community for consciousness raising or for becoming conscious, and if we have nowhere for that to go, I think that’s really problematic. [...] There’s a real danger of opening up a whole set of questions with nowhere for that to go. Furthering the alienation or producing reactionary positions.⁹¹

The task at hand thus is not only in organising a participatory process of learning and consciousness raising here –after all, there is always something to learn and become aware of even in an artificial community environment of a classroom, for instance– but also how we can feed that back into the constituencies we are in direct alliance with. In the desire to be a critical agent, one needs to acknowledge the inevitable crisis that necessarily emerges from occupying such ambiguous positions, as a split subject of agency. It is important to acknowledge here perhaps that throughout my thirteen year involvement in the radical education/ artistic community of London, most of the ‘radical’ projects I have been a part of and perhaps the vast majority of ‘visible’ contemporary socially engaging art practices around the world, have some kind of affiliation with a cultural institution, a private sponsor, a university or some kind of systemic economic power structure. And while I am happy to defend as genuinely radical the pursuit of a modest agenda for criticising a system that I am still a part of, I shall not pretend to be enthusiastic about it. On the other hand, it is almost impossible for some of us to even consider sustaining a life, if we were to abandon institutions completely. This however does not require

⁹⁰ Janna Graham in conversation with author, see appendix, *Sound Object: Ultra-red interview*.

⁹¹ Ibid.

one to identify with the institution's values, institutional brands and management protocols.

An analysis of the contradictions we embody within our 'contemporary' subjectivity, working against modes of standardisation, serialisation, repetitions of tasks, desires and roles inscribed by the institution, could perhaps push further towards a 'transversal' mode of curating whose accountability is directly towards the constituents of the community instead. Orchestrating moments of crisis, of simultaneous rupture and access that cannot be 'managed' by information control. Investigating collectively, without distinctions but instead as co-researchers, that part that remains outside economic relations of adding value. That part of knowledge that remains outside numerical evaluations and economic projections. Curating a dialogue between *participation, action and research* that investigates the fetish of the un-subsumable part of use value, and activates the lack of the 'unknown known', that needs to be shared within the relational form.

If Ultra-red's performative paradigm teaches us anything in this respect then, it is precisely how to move beyond such contradictory conjunctives of usual binary oppositions between autonomous art and 'culture' (or those that bring together art and politics), subject and object, 'researchers' and 'researched', and towards an organisation of a co-investigation, where educators, facilitators, curators and arts intellectuals, become co-researchers with (and as) 'hysterics'; abandoning their master's 'desire to know' and to move on to an 'embodied criticality' of the conditions of their own subject production. For those practitioners that are trying to create such habitats of embodied criticality whose relational content is in direct dialogue with social consequences, and who reject the elitist understanding of the curator or arts intellectual as an 'autonomous' cultural producer, the question then becomes how to connect struggles outside of institutions with the fields usually occupied by artists and curators. And by extension how can one avoid such practices' enclosure by the hierarchical value systems of the art gallery, institution and university. Another

important question is how can one move beyond the usual small interventions within well established circles of activists and social agents and into a hybrid population. Asking these questions will open up the discussion, far away from institutionally inscribed agencies, at times even bringing the critical agents into crisis with their institution, which for many cultural workers is a difficult question to overcome –taking into account that an existence which is exclusively outside of institutional life is impossible, hence an existence between submission and dependance becoming inevitable.

So, the question is also how can we can go beyond institutional inscribed agencies and find ways of moving away from the ‘critically impoverished trend to produce exhibitions, publications and conferences, steeped in the valorisation of individual authorship and celebrity’, and towards a commitment to struggles that help people [including ourselves] to actually move beyond production’.⁹² Utilising our role as educators, curators, artists and cultural producers to challenge those very processes that govern our subjectivities.

If we were to imagine social practice not as an arena of exchange for the accumulation of ‘culture’ but instead as a way out of this paradox as a whole, we would also need to develop a habitat for the ‘art world’ to meet with the social agents of change, eventually reclaiming the public spaces as spaces for dialogue, analysis *and* action and not as places of ‘culture’, as this is defined by institutional actors. Apart from ‘curatorial solidarity’ this also involves curatorial resilience, in order to find ways to move beyond the usual small scale interventions within well established circles and expand our practices into hybrid populations. As Janna Graham explains in ‘Thinking with Conditions’, many artists and curators have recently turned away from short-term, spectacular modes of presentation to longer term projects, experimenting with ‘impossible’ curatorial formulations of what a radical or participatory project of ‘militant research’ could be. Moving away from a position of authorship and towards a curating that

⁹² Graham, *ibid*: 139.

mobilises the sophisticated grammar of intelligent productions, participatory formats, and relational models of exchange towards a reflective analysis *and* action.⁹³ Graham, for instance has been guided by the idea of ‘possible study’, i.e. ‘the study that is not yet constituted and emerges through relations between artists and transversal constituents’, where social processes of identification and emancipatory education are situated ‘within the context of relations across the divisions of the creative class and its others, de-centring the artist researcher as the author and propellant’.⁹⁴

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

Janna Graham is an acclaimed engaged curator, educator, activist and artist, founding member of Ultra-red, but also founder of ‘The Centre for Possible Studies’, sponsored by Serpentine Gallery and growing out of the gallery’s long term work on Edgware Road. The idea of ‘possible study’ in fact has been explored by transversal group of artists, residents, shop owners, students and other workers in the neighbourhood of Edgware Road in London. A typical example of this kind of work is their project *Re: Assembly*, and in particular *The School and the Neighbourhood: A Subverted Curriculum*, a curriculum to be used by teachers and students to ‘bring their schools into conversation with their local area’, part of the centre’s *Studies on a Road*, series, based on knowledge produced during the Edgware Road Project at St Marylebone CE School. The project was a four-year residency that took place between 2009-2013, in which the art collective Ultra-red worked in the context of the school and the neighbourhood, involving teachers, administrators, students and local activists to address the question of what it means to be a pupil in the current policy-drive overdrive for vocation and career. They also worked through questions around migration, citizenship, and regeneration through curriculum based investigative processes of using sound and collective listening.

For more on Ultra-red’s ‘Re: Assembly’ see here:

<http://www.serpentinegalleries.org/exhibitions-events/ultra-reds-reassembly>

Last accessed 18.07.2016, 13:24”

Implicated Theatre is another long term collective project that has come out of the Centre for Possible Studies, instigated by artists from no.w.here and with the help of theatre director Francis Rifkin. These experimental theatre-based participatory workshops have been running since 2001, exploring the relationship between political speech and action, the self and the collective, voice and silence. ‘Forming close relationships with migrants’ rights groups and unions, Implicated Theatre creates theatrical interventions inspired by real-life struggle, and highlighting issues of social justice’.

For more on Implicate Theatre, and the Centre for Possible Studies, see here:

<https://centreforpossiblestudies.wordpress.com>

last accessed 18.07.2016, 13:24’

THESIS 8: MILITANT RESEARCH

It is in the precedence of resistances that grounds the figure of the “researcher-militant”, whose quest is to carry out theoretical and practical work oriented to co-produce the knowledges and modes of an alternative sociability, beginning with power (potencia) of those subaltern knowledges.⁹⁵

Colectivo Situaciones

Within this direction, curatorial research can be seen as the organising of relationships with ‘others’ in order to generate common thought-actions, that move beyond the small ‘us’ of established groups and towards a collective construction and dissemination of processes of mobilisation. Two movements that have emerged out of the traditions of militant research practices, and as a reaction to ‘Research and Development’ policies, can be very useful here in this move from curatorial authorship to a collectivising of research-actions, namely ‘Participatory Action Research’ (PAR) and the practice of ‘Institutional Analysis’. In keeping with *Colectivo Situaciones* call for research working ‘neither from its own set of knowledges about the world nor from how things ought to be’.⁹⁶

‘Participatory Action Research’, has come as a result of a confluence between critical schools of social research and Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968) in an attempt to bring research and social intervention in dialogue with local communities, their fears and desires, but also people’s know-hows and experience. It includes three equally important moments: ‘Participation’ in life and society, ‘Research’ that involves growth of knowledge and soundness in thinking, and ‘Action’, as in the engagement with experience and history. The truth that lies behind these

⁹⁵ Colectivo Situaciones, ‘On the Researcher-Militant’, *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies: Transversal Texts* September, 2003, as found at: <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0406/colectivosituaciones/en>, (accessed 20.11. 2014).

⁹⁶ Ibid.

knowledges is generated through the degree to which they are collectively produced, through intersubjective dialogical analysis of the 'unknown knowns', as participants move from concrete realities to the abstract elements of that reality, and back to the concrete. A key element in this inter-subjective research practice in fact is its rupture with traditional distinctions between student and teacher, researcher and researched, subject and object, where as Freire argues, the subject that comes from the outside of the community, as facilitator (or curator) is now considered a co-investigator, relating to his/her fellow co-researchers, with absolute transparency towards all the participants in the process, and without in any way determining the research outcome. Like an exercise of Freire's understanding of 'critical reflection always constituting an action', every 'object' and result of study (which normally involves knowledge that comes from the outside) is now transformed into social praxis that contributes to the collective transformation of a certain reality. A reality that is now incomplete and open to discussion. This process of situating the relational with the materialist and experiential components of a collective investigation (proceeding from the concrete to the abstract and back), eventually leads to a kind of transformative interpretation of reality altogether, where action, experience and practice become the primary results of the research experience itself.

'Institutional Analysis' is the second development in militant research practices that could also be useful in 'curatorial solidarity' efforts by curators to become 'transversal' critical agents of struggle. 'Institutional Analysis' came as a consequence of spaces that opened up by the crisis of institutional critique practices in the 1960s and as an attempt to overcome institutionalised pedagogy and psychotherapy. It constitutes instead an analysis of the institution's material basis, its history and that of its members, as well as its structural relationships and the expansion of these relationships with an 'associated sector'. The term was developed by Felix Guattari, around 1964, during a session of a study group that focused on institutional psychotherapy, and as a way to distance analysis from its increased specialisation, that gave exclusive responsibility to an

‘expert’ person or group.⁹⁷ Guattari suggested instead, a mode of research and pedagogy that he described as the organising of an ‘associative sector’, that is:

an association based neither in the state nor in private capital, nor in small collective practices, but in the combination of those committed to work transversally across social institutions, social movements and artistic strategies, against the forces attempting to link creativity to the production of alienated and exploited subjectivities, no matter where these were located.⁹⁸

One of the first acknowledgements in this process of analysis then, is the recognition of a ‘false neutrality’ of the psychoanalyst, or pedagogue (curator/artist) and the fact that any educational or analytic project implies an intervention. For Guattari:

Neutrality is a trap: one is always compromised. It is more important to be aware of this in order for our interventions to be the least alienating as possible. Instead of conducting a politics of subjection, identification, normalisation, social control, semiotic management of the people with whom we relate, it is possible to do the opposite. It is possible to choose a micro-politics that consists in pressuring, despite the fact that we’ve been conferred little strength, in favour of a process of de-alienation, a liberation of expression, using ‘exits’, or rather ‘lines of flight’, with regards to social stratifications’. Also, ‘In order to develop an authentic analysis [...] the main problem would not be interpretation, but intervention. ‘What can you do to change this?’⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Graham, *ibid*: 128.

⁹⁹ Jacky Beillerot, ‘Entrevista a Felix Guattari’ in Guattari, Felix *La Intervención institucional* [Institutional Intervention], 1981 as cited in Marta Malo de Molina, ‘Common Notions, Part 2: Institutional Analysis, Participatory Action Research, Militant Research’, *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies: Transversal Texts*, 2004, as found at: <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0707/malo/en>, (accessed 18.07.2016, 14:43’).

Even though sometimes Guattari's language may seem too abstract, nevertheless the work of this movement involved very concrete actions most vividly realised in the LaBorde Clinic where Guattari was based. Despite its origins in pedagogy and psychotherapy, 'Institutional Analysis' considered 'discovering' or analysing impossible encounters with the institution, as informed by confrontations and experiences of action in everyday life. Guattari managed to bring together psychiatry groups, teachers from the Freinet movement, students, architects, sociologists, service workers and administrators as well as local residents (a 'hybrid population ranging from the region's peasants to members of the Parisian cultural scene') in order to 'unblock false problems of identification', doing 'research on research', learning from their 're-arrangements' and the theoretical and practical tensions produced in their own forms of subject-making. Guattari also considered:

the fact that researchers cannot comprehend their object except under the condition that they themselves are organised, and that they question themselves about things that on the surface have nothing to do with their object of study.¹⁰⁰

Reminding us here how the university's demand for transferable skills and the curator's call for 'positive social impact' might be altogether redirected towards more critical outcomes, than those made by cultural policies, like 'social inclusion', 'cohesion' and 'community regeneration' and towards a collective refusal of established subjectivities. The question, is whether the curator-researcher is willing to take the role of 'militant' in the first place. English conceptual artist Liam Gillick in his text *Maybe it would be better if we worked in groups of three?*, seems rather optimistic. He writes:

Recently we have seen the rise of a new group of people who have studied art history but have resisted or found no place within the standard systems of curating. This new 'non-group' has yet not

¹⁰⁰ Ibid: 96.

been completely identified, ‘manipulated or instrumentalised by the dominant culture, yet. They appear to be deeply embedded within hierarchical academic structures, but also do not deal with the merging of voices that constitutes a symbiotic alliance between the discursive and the curatorial. They have studied art history but do not all want to be curators—or traditional critics, either.¹⁰¹

THESIS 9: CURATOR- ANALYST

In traditional curatorial thinking, there is a prevailing tendency to let ourselves be determined by a system of knowledge centred around language. ‘Saying without listening’, as a mechanism has multiplied and spread ‘to finally constitute itself as a generalised form of domination and control’.¹⁰² In spite of our having risen to sophisticated lives of cognitive awareness, we have little familiarity with what it means to listen. As Gemma Corrodi Fiumara argues however, in *The Other Side of language: A Philosophy of Listening*, and her critique of Western thought and its logocentric system of knowledge, ‘perhaps there is no justifiable reason why we should have to ‘keep repeating’ and could not decide, instead, to listen’.¹⁰³ Listening after all, has not acquired a remunerative surplus value in the dominant culture of relational exchange. But how are we to listen without translating, analysing our own interpreting? This would involve a gradual transformation of how we position ourselves within the ‘here and

¹⁰¹ Liam Gillick, ‘Maybe it would be better if we worked in groups of three? Part 1’, *e-flux*, vol. 2, 2009, as found at <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/maybe-it-would-be-better-if-we-worked-in-groups-of-three-part-1-of-2-the-discursive/>, (accessed 13.07.2016).

Similarly Gregory Sholette refers to the concept of ‘dark matter’ as in the dark energy of art and artists who wish to remain in the ‘shadows of the art world’, ‘invisible primarily to those who claim to the management and interpretation of culture -the critics, art collectors, dealers, museums, curators and arts administrators’. Just like ‘the astrophysical universe is dependent on its matter’ he writes, ‘so too is the art world dependent on its dark energy’.

Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture*, London, Pluto Press, 2013, p. 2.

¹⁰² Gemma Corrodi-Fiumara, *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening*, London, Routledge, 1990, p. 7.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

now', developing the habit of 'paying heed' to formally unheard of messages and voices, in order to allow the 'waste elements' or 'disturbing features' of symbolic processes inside. Shifting our attention from logical or moral visions of a situation and changing our understanding of the 'Real'.

The idea of inhabiting a problem instead of critically analysing it, without falling back to an opposition between abstract and concrete experiences, comes back to Lacan's understanding of the unconscious as the concretisation of linguistic autonomy; with the body as a site of discursive production that contains: the production of subjectivity and the production of jouissance.¹⁰⁴ In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan assists us in understanding the distinction we need to make between the knowledge produced by the curated rituals of participation and that knowledge produced in the organisation of a collective investigation through his distinction between symbolic versus imaginary forms of knowledge. Lacan argues that the Symbolic consists of the signifier (based on) difference, the discourse of the Other, internalised as the unconscious domain of culture. By working on the symbolic thus the curator as analyst is able to produce changes on the participants (and their own) inter-subjective position, eventually dislodging the disabling fixations of the Imaginary (because the Imaginary is structured by the Symbolic). 'The use of the Symbolic, is the only way for the analytic process to cross the plane of identification', writes Lacan.¹⁰⁵

The Real on the other hand, for Lacan, is 'the impossible' itself, as it is impossible to imagine, and thus impossible to integrate into the Symbolic. The Real is always in its place, the 'here and now' of coming into being. Unlike the symbolic which is a set of differentiated elements (signifiers),

¹⁰⁴ Samo Tomšič, *The Capitalist Unconscious*, London, Verso, 2015, p. 19.

This production gives the unconscious a structural causality, where language is given a material and effective existence: language has real consequences only as a disclosed system of negativities (signifiers as pure difference) concretised in speech through which these negativities are inscribed in the living body.

¹⁰⁵ Jacques Lacan in Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, London, Routledge, 1996, p. 85.

the Real in itself is undifferentiated, it bears no fissure. The Real in fact, according to Lacan, is what is outside language and that which resists symbolisation absolutely. And it is precisely this impossibility to attain the Real and its resistance to symbolisation that also lends it its traumatic quality. He writes: 'the essential object which is not an object any longer, but this something faced with which all words cease and all categories fail, the object of anxiety par excellence'.¹⁰⁶ The Real thus, is not the ordered reality we experience as subjects of ideology, but in fact the place where the social and cultural structures of representation and reproduction resist their full inscription into the master's terms. The truth that emerges in the Real thus, is clearly not the relational and adequate truth of cognition but the conflictual truth of social relations as experienced in the 'here and now' of coming into being, and therefore one could argue, a political truth.¹⁰⁷ To sum it up, it is all about how we position ourselves in the 'here and now' of this coming into being, inhabiting this structural Real with our political unconscious oriented towards the social symptom of a specific 'truth formation'.

For the Lacanian psychoanalyst what defines the analyst is not that she is the subject of knowledge but that she knows that the subject that is

¹⁰⁶ Jacques Lacan, 'The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis: 1954-55', in Jacques-Allan Miller (ed), *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan, Book II*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 164.

¹⁰⁷ In developing his thesis on ideology and its function, Slavoj Žižek in fact argues that this confusion is actually fundamental to consciousness itself, which is, according to Žižek, illustrated with the fact that although 'biological psychology' might one day be able to completely model a person's brain, there would still be something left over that could not be explained. For Žižek the Real names points within then fabric of hegemonic systems of representation in fact that resist their 'full inscription' into master's terms and thus hold the potential to 'generate sites of active political resistance'.

Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of ideology*, London, Verso, 1989.

Also see, Slavoj Žižek, 'Marx and Lacan: Surplus-Enjoyment, Surplus-Value, Surplus-Knowledge', *Toronto International Film Festival 2016*, Toronto, 2016, as found at: <http://mariborchan.si/text/articles/slavoj-zizek/marx-and-lacan-surplus-enjoyment-surplus-value-surplus-knowledge/>, (accessed 27.07.2016).

supposed to know doesn't know.¹⁰⁸ Instead of imparting with the analyst's knowledge thus the curator could be providing the conditions in which the hysteric (including herself) un-alienates herself from the order of the Other, capable of making sense of the world in her own terms, as if for the first time. This process does not only serve as a kind of catharsis thus, as the participants open up to the 'truth in the affective' but also insulates the possibility to attain what Freire calls the 'true word'. Besides ritualistic solicitations of the hopes and fears of 'target populations' constitute the sophisticated grammar that brings 'feeling' into compliance with the systems of administration and control, in the first place. A kind of curatorial 'banking' of the symbolic so that it can be managed on behalf of an ideological truth formation (hidden behind the chain of signifiers). Similarly within university discourse, art's symbolic value gets subsumed as knowledge that aligns the subject with the truth unsaid, 'the master signifier masquerading behind the agency of knowledge'.¹⁰⁹

The organiser of a collective investigation ('dialogic' curator) that does not seek to 'curate' the hysteric's demands, but works as the facilitator-analyst for the subject's own transition from hysteria to analysis in their own terms, uses this desire as agent. The split subject in turn interrogates any complete identifications and claims of significations (Am I who you say I am?), questioning and acting upon the master signifier. This collective investigating of meaning and action, where the subjects come together to analyse their meaning and act as incomplete entities, eventually produces an analysis of participating subject's conscious and unconscious needs, but also of that 'invisible remainder' namely the surplus of their desire' (that

¹⁰⁸ In their analysis of the curator as a potential 'subject that is supposed to know, and the artist as analysand, David Beech in response to Mark Hutchinson takes this further and argues: 'It is not a question of discovering what is already internal to the curator or of abandoning the curator altogether; it is a question of transforming the curator by infecting the curator with that which is other to the curator'.

David Beech and Mark Hutchinson, 'Inconsequential Bayonets' in Paul O'Neill (ed.), *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture*, Cambridge, London, MIT Press, 2012, p. 56.

¹⁰⁹ Ultra-red, '10 Preliminary Theses on Militant Sound Investigation', *Artists & Artists no 5*, New York, Printed Matter, 2008, p. 4.

guides participation in the first place). This intersubjective web of signifiers comes back to transform one's unconscious desires through a practice of collective analysis, reflection *and* action thus holding the potential for an emancipatory reorganising of hopes and fears, where signifiers become real and thus resistant to the master's desire. Tomšič sums it up eloquently:

Various forms of subjectivity can certainly be thought, but there is one form caused by the autonomy of the discursive relations. It is on this basis that the given order determines the thinking and action, and it is also here that the subject comes to think and act against the established regime.¹¹⁰

In this struggle to develop a new vocabulary, towards an analysis of our own interpreting, people tend to gather around a concept, in hope of building that concept into a subculture. Like a group therapy session where people bond through a certain analysis of an idea, curatorial researchers, artists and activists alike also bond through a certain

¹¹⁰ Tomšič, *ibid*: 21.

One of the functions of a relatively autonomous field after all is to account for what Pierre Bourdieu calls 'the space of possibilities'. In a given space of fixed position-takings, the dialogic curator needs to bring the 'curatorial' in dialogue with what is outside itself, realising that 'no cultural product exists by itself'. Besides, and as I hope to have so far demonstrated, it is actually impossible nowadays to assume the cultural order as a sort of autonomous, transcendent sphere capable of developing in accordance with its own laws, and outside capital. In his attempt to break with the naive vision of an individual creator (curator), Bourdieu explains:

'When we speak of a field of position-takings, we are insisting that, what can be constituted as a *system* for the sake of analysis is not the product of a coherence-seeking intention or an objective consensus (even if it presupposes unconscious agreement on common principles) but the product and prize of a permanent conflict; or, to put it another way, that the generative, unifying principle of this 'system' is the struggle, with all the contradictions it engenders (so that participation in the struggle –which may be indicated objectively by, for example, the attacks that are suffered– can be used as the criterion establishing that a work belongs to the field of position-takings and its author to the field of positions)'. Curation seen here as the result of the co-organised activities of a transversal cooperation between different constituents that takes into account the social conditions of the production of the very field of social agents (including museums, galleries, universities etc).

Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, Cambridge, Polity press, 1993. p. 34, 29- 28.

theoretical consistency, in the process of metabolising ideas and concepts as attitudes. Kodwo Eshun's calling for the development of such 'interpretive communities' comes to mind here, as a project of building that attitude 'through a culture of dissatisfaction, a yearning and a target'. He says:

Such a project tends to attract students who belong to but tend to be at odds with their subject. Who are in a struggle with the capacity of the discipline to discipline. [Such a project] appeals to graduates who are unable to reconcile themselves to their postgraduate existence. It appeals to freelancing individuals, autodidacts, disaffected people. [...] They are not floating. They are not polysemous, but they are not wholly fixed yet. They are open to interpretation. They operate by disagreements that open up a field of meanings barged over by people that affiliate themselves with them. They are not so much "terms" as they are "wars" of interpretation whose aim is to intervene in culture. They are new forms of cultural politics fashioned to articulate discontent and to ferment theories to live by. Theories that are inhabited. Theories that are embodied. Theories that are rigorous and delirious.¹¹¹

THESIS 10: EMBODIED

Karl Marx, argues:

Man must prove the truth, i.e. the reality and power, the this-sideness of his thinking in practice.... All social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mystics, find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this

¹¹¹ Kodwo Eshun in *Public Assets Conference* (2015), Goldsmiths University of London, 2015.

practice.... The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.¹¹²

Paulo Freire warns us:

It is not enough for people to come together in dialogue in order to gain knowledge of their social reality. They must act together upon their environment in order critically to reflect upon their reality and so transform it through further action and critical reflection' [...] To speak a true word is to transform the word.¹¹³

And Marta Malo Malino, in turn explains:

It is no longer that we have been interpreting the world for a long time and now is the time to change it, but rather that the very interpretation of the world is always linked to some kind of action or practice. The question will be then, what kind of action: one that conserves the *status quo* or produces a new reality.¹¹⁴

Inquiry and co-research. Collective analysis, self-valorisation, transversality. Micro-politics and the economy of desires. The militants of care. Action-research. The personal is political. All of these concept-tools

¹¹² Karl Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach', *Marx & Engels Selected Works, Vol. One*, Moscow, London, Progress, Zodiac, 2002, pp. 13-5.

¹¹³ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, London, Continuum, 1968/ 2005, p. 87.

¹¹⁴ As Malo de Molina explains Participation Action Research (PAR) emerged as a strong trend in the mid sixties, originally rooted in popular education and grass roots activism in Latin America. Upon its introduction to the global North however, during the eighties, PAR was soon co-opted by governments, as a formalised process of consensual making, and as a tool to make the so far 'silent majorities' speak in order to better govern them. Nevertheless it is certain, that many elements of PAR, as Malo de Molina identifies with current tendencies to re-articulate PAR today, still constitute a source of inspiration to make research a tool for transformation, especially when the participations of local communities are not 'by invitation by state institutions', but out of the 'irruption' of local communities.

Marta Malo de Molina, 'Common Notions, Part 2: Institutional Analysis, Participatory Action Research, Militant Research', *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies: Transversal Texts*, 2004, as found at: <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0707/malo/en>, (accessed 18.07.2016, 14:43').

have reappeared in the contemporary initiatives that are seeking to articulate research and action, theory and praxis. As Marta Malo de Molina, who has written extensively on the history of militant research methodologies notes, the current terrain into which such militant research concepts are utilised is ‘mobile, changing, dispersed and atomised’.¹¹⁵ The common element that connects such practices of ‘transversality’, co-research and analytic subjectivity production with old materialist anti-ideological ones is an insistence on starting from a concrete reality.

Instead of relying on established knowledge and discourse then – or as Freire would say from the ‘myths’ of the past – one needs to move from the concrete and abstract (and back) to transform the concrete. Working towards a collectivisation of research and knowledge, involves critical reflection and action methodologies that allow for a reconstructing and reorganising of experience. It involves the developing of a critical awareness of one’s social reality through reflection *and* action. It requires one to elaborate and interrogate reality, challenge emotional doubts, collectively analyse and act upon the symbolic, delinking it from value and proceeding towards a dissemination of its surplus back to the community that produced it. If there is no movement from explanation and into a processing of experiences on a deeper level, the learning will not have anywhere to act upon.

Analysing these concrete elements of reality, as well as intervening on them however also involves that ‘sensitive machine we know as the body, a surface where the inscription of a subjectivity, that lives and acts in a concrete social reality occurs’.¹¹⁶ Without the body, theory remains disembodied, speaking from a position of false neutrality, pretending to ‘speak from a neutral place of enunciation from where everything can be seen’.¹¹⁷ This process thus involves a sustaining of processes of dialogue and collaboration across different constituencies, for the uncovering or real

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

problems and actual needs. In this process, critical agents embody the action in themselves, reflecting the way they embody theory and participation in their own subjections. It is a question of accountability, and the embodying of such a positioning: with whom does the curator stand with for example? with the struggles of local communities, self-organised groups and the 'hysterics' demands? with women and with children? with workers? The co-researching of such critical knowledge and the development of such critical consciousness affects and modifies the bodies and subjectivities of those who have participated in such processes.

Irit Rogoff in her essay 'Smuggling' (2003) writes about a kind of 'embodied criticality' which while building on critique wants nevertheless to inhabit culture in relation other than one of critical analysis, other than one of illuminating flaws, locating elisions, allocating blames'.¹¹⁸ She writes:

'It seems to me that within the space of a relatively short period we have been able to move from criticism to critique to criticality - from finding fault, to examining the underlying assumptions that might allow something to appear as a convincing logic, to operating from an uncertain ground which while building on critique wants nevertheless to inhabit culture in a relation other than one of critical analysis; other than one of illuminating flaws, locating elisions, allocating blames'.¹¹⁹

As we have moved to engage increasingly with the performative nature of culture, with meaning that takes place as events unfold, Rogoff argues for a need to also move away from notions of immanent meanings that can be investigated, exposed and made obvious. While being able to exercise critical judgement is important, according to Rogoff, it does not actualise

¹¹⁸ Irit Rogoff, 'Smuggling: An Embodied Criticality', *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies: Transversal Texts*, 2003, as found at: <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0806/rogoff1/en>, (accessed 19.07.2016).

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

‘people’s inherent and often intuitive notions of how to produce criticality through inhabiting a problem rather than analysing it’.¹²⁰ And it is precisely this inhabiting of a problem, through an organising of a participation, co-investigation, and reflective analysis and action where the heterogeneous elements of knowledge come to be practised out. Rogoff explains:

‘The term ‘smuggling’ here extends far beyond a series of adventurous gambits. It reflects the search for a practice that goes beyond conjunctives such as those that bring together ‘art *and* politics’ or ‘theory *and* practice’ or ‘analysis *and* action’.¹²¹

In such a practice we aspire to experience the relations between the two as a form of embodiment which cannot be separated into their independent components. In the context of a question regarding what a practice of such organising might be, and in order to introduce questions and uncertainties in those places where there has so far been some theoretical consensus, avant-garde curators of today find themselves drifting away from material productions and towards a production of ‘possible studies’. As the former pragmatics of separate fields servicing each other have given way to a mutual conditioning of the conditions of production, artists and curators alike have also started recognising their own role within this mutation and the ways in which their acts perform such validating processes.¹²² Instead we see an eroding of the old boundaries between theory and practice, historicising and displaying, criticising and affirming and a call for alternative modes of knowledge production, as informed by grass roots and community organising strategies. Working transversally between their field of knowledge, social movements and activism. Practising out a public interrogation of the thoughts and knowledges in which we thought we were immersed and de-legitimising the very paradigms we thought we inhabited.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid [my emphasis].

¹²² This last thesis is inspired by Irit Rogoff’s text ‘From Criticism to Critique to Criticality’, *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies: Transversal Texts*, 2015, as found at: <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0806/rogoff1/en>, (accessed 19.07.2016).

In my own particular case this was a journey from the disciplines of art history and critical theory, via militant sound investigations and radical education pathways to the place of curatorial research and pedagogic activism. After many years of navigating the interstices between different theoretical paradigms, and in my attempt to expand my field's possibilities, I started collaborating with different 'militant researchers' concerned with the urgent issues of our times (regeneration, racism, austerity, AIDS activism, democracy, education), in an effort to attend to the gaps of my so far theoretical knowledge. I also started a series of curatorial initiatives that attempted the co-investigating of possible intersections between Participation Action Research (PAR) methodologies, organised listening and dialogical aesthetics. I explored the possibilities for participatory practices to enunciate alternative social forms, all bound with an attempt to eventually formulate my long-term project on 'curated autonomies'. In a self-reflective shift from the purely analytical to the performative function of participation thus, I eventually moved on to what Rogoff calls 'the uncertain ground of actual embeddedness', attending to meaning as it takes places in the present. I recognise the importance of theoretical knowledge and the need for critical analysis of the terms and conditions of my field, but also attend to the living out of the very conditions I have been trying to analyse and come to terms with.

This journey now spans almost thirteen years, including encounters with disciplines that move beyond my original field of study, like psychoanalysis, political economy and sociology, but also with dynamic members of different 'communities' and their allegiances (from artists and curators to educators, cultural agents, art therapists, and activists, including those from the Radical Education, LGBTQT and women's rights communities in London). In the beginning of this journey I felt lost between who I was, what I did and the world I inhabited in, most of all frustrated by the fact that I seemed to produce more contradictions than real effects. My claims for 'embodied criticality' not passing through my body, as my research did not feel situated, implicated, taking a side. As my

collaborations developed into long term and committed relationships however, and through an insistence on bringing theoretical research in dialogue with participation in life, academy and society, and through reflective collective actions, my engagement eventually seemed to move from a dynamics of accumulation towards the sharing of a hysteric's habitat for the study of the impossible.

As the work of an educator-researcher-curator-organiser, this thesis is not without contradiction, given that it represents an attempt to understand my chosen practice. Therefore, and even though I have attempted to maintain a certain degree of critical distance throughout this research process, my own position can never be value-free, due to its investment in the field of inquiry. At the same time, and as I hope to have thus far demonstrated, critical distance and abstraction seem to do very little to alleviate the contradiction of individual self-reflexivity. Practical experiences of embodying critical agencies, and resistances to the status quo, as well as collective analysis and situational interpretations of 'established knowledges', are how situationally relevant knowledges are produced, developing a transformative effect in action. This state of inhabiting the space between master narratives and emergent 'minority' ones, between knowing and unknowing, being empowered and confused is a state of 'profound frustration in which the knowledge and insights we have amassed do very little to alleviate the conditions we live through'.¹²³ For those who are embedded in those struggles for subjection however, there is no other choice.

Rogoff finally wonders what is the point of it all if one needs to embody this state of duality as a frustration without resolution, but then she concludes:

'Well, I would answer, the point of any form of critical, theoretical activity was never resolution but rather heightened awareness and the point of criticality is not to find an answer but rather to access a different mode of inhabitation. Philosophically we might say that it is a form of ontology that

¹²³ Ibid.

is being advocated, a 'living things out' which has a hugely transformative power as opposed to pronouncing on them. In the duration of this activity, in the actual inhabitation, a shift might occur that we generate through the modalities of that occupation rather than through a judgement upon it. That is what I am trying to intimate by 'embodied criticality'.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Ibid.

CONCLUSION

In the beginning of this research I tried to demonstrate how Nicolas Bourriaud's conclusions for relational art's enunciative dialogic potential, do not logically flow on from his assumptions on 'free' participation. Current discourse on relational practices does not take into account the contradictions internal to the 'art of social exchange' and the real life processes through which relational art forms can resist subjection to the value form. In fact and as I hope to have so far showcased any claims for an art of 'free relational exchange' that does not recognise that this exchange is based on a contradictory political economic system, and does not engage in the dialectic conception of 'relationality', eventually contributes towards the paradox of commodification, and the fetishisation of the social itself. In the discourse of socially engaging practice, and community development in fact, symbolic participation signifies the alignment of the participating subject with the terms of master discourses, producing a series of identifications with the master's desire to know, to subject and colonise, where the value form of participation is extracted as surplus value to fit its purpose within 'culture'. By rethinking relational models of exchange within a dialectical conception of art, and by recognising relational art's double character however, this debate can be transformed.

One of the things that can destabilise and genuinely challenge already established thinking in fact is the demonstration of the internal inconsistency of its own models. It was for this reason, that in the very beginning of this research, I chose to delve into contemporary relational theory's contradictions. When analysing subsumption in the art world, I had no alternative but to fall back on the Marxist dialectic tradition. Luckily enough, from my first steps of thinking as a researcher, to this very day, it occurred to me that Marx had made a discovery that must remain at the heart of any useful analysis of contemporary institutional critique. It was the discovery of another binary opposition deep within human labour. Between labour's two quite different natures: i) labour as a value-creating

activity that can never be quantified in advance (and is therefore impossible to commodify), and ii) labour as a quantity (numbers of hours worked, numbers of visitors on a webpage etc.) that is for sale and comes at a price. That is what distinguishes human labour from other productive inputs of the culture industry, for example, its twin, contradictory, nature.

One of the main conclusions from these first chapters of my analysis thus was that any insistence on a strict stage-by-stage transitional understanding of the process of subsumption does not necessarily apply for those non-immediate ways of subordination. Hence for relational art, it is important to situate these contradictions within the dialectic of commodification. Capitalism's tendency to generate crisis, and the museum's tendency to cyclically generate the new, can only be grasped, if one exposes this as a contradictory system in itself. One of the main tasks thus today, and if we want to reveal relational art's radical potentials, is this immanent critic of the political economy of contemporary art and an in depth analysis of its effects.

Taking into account how today autonomous art and the culture industry are two faces of the same currency, the curator's role as the journeyman that brings them into relation, becomes more important than ever. Curators are the managers of the relational within the value form of participation, and thus hold the potential to redistribute that surplus of knowledge and 'individual-meets-collective' *jouissance* back to the community that produced it. Curators hold a key role in organising participations that allow collective investigations of meaning and actions, and a move away from individual authorship and institutional demands and towards an organising 'in the name of the people'. Solidarity after all extends from yourself, your recognising and listening to the people you are in solidarity with. If Ultra-red's organised *listening* practice teaches us anything with this regard thus, is the need to attend to dissonance, by foregrounding the 'other' against the background of the self, enunciating a new political subjectivity

to come. Organised listening practices thus, constitute one of the first steps towards a knowledge praxis that is not made of answers but breaks in the 'knowings'. Curating re-conceptualised as the enunciating of a dialogical exchange between self and the world, theory and practice or as Freire argues, as a practice where reflective analysis always already constitutes an action.

'For the idealists of the dialectic, who are at the same time the realists of politics' however, 'true word' and action have a 'radical presentness in common', which is on the one hand distilled in history and experience while at the same time constitutes an 'actualisation of desire no longer relegated to a future liberation, but demanded here, immediately', in the current situation we live through our bodies.¹ On this note, and in view of the inevitability of contradictions involved within the alienating nature of Nicolas Bourriaud's relational interstices, it was worth going back to Irit Rogoff's point about 'embodied criticality' perhaps and her insistence on a move away from notions of immanent critiques and towards peoples' inherent and intuiting actualising of critical analysis through an inhabitation of a problem. As a result of this insistence on performative critique, I argued for transversal practices of curating that work in direct alliance or in direct connection with social movements and grass roots organising, with their accountability lying to those constituencies they work with, instead of the art world. Instead of analysing from a distance then, I argue for a curatorial model that moves beyond representation, permitting one to enter a state of critical consciousness of the self with and among others.

One of the most profound moments for me as a researcher, in fact, and perhaps with the most significance with regards to 'radical' curatorial research practices more generally, however, was an in depth understanding of what this embodiment actually means. Without a direct alliance or a direct connection to the constituency work, it is quite difficult

¹ Jean Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production*, St. Louis, Telos Press, 1975, pp. 164-5.

to redistribute the surplus of participation back to the social movements and communities of struggle, and thus one might end up producing a series of immanent critiques of banal contradictions instead. So, for me one of the most important conclusions of this research project, which is something I have not been able to explore fully in practice, and would be worth revisiting in order to further develop as framework perhaps, is the need to think of curatorial and educational processes in tandem with social movement processes. The fact still remains that contemporary representations of curatorial solidarity projects seem to do very little to resist the co-optation of the base communities' symbolic value. But maybe resistance is not the right word here to begin with. As Ultra-red member Michael Roberson insists: 'I don't do resistance. I do resilience'.²

If the fundamental strategy of ruling ideologies is to make themselves appear as natural, maybe a curation driven by resilient asymmetry can be its own form of critique. Lacan urges us: 'Now in fact, it should not be a matter of eliding the impossible, but of being its agent'.³

² Michael Roberson in interview with author 22.07.2016, see enclosed.

³ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII: Psychoanalysis upside down/The Reverse Side of Psychoanalysis*, 1969-70 in Gallagher Cormac (ed), unedited from French manuscripts-unofficial non-published version intended for the reading group at St Vincent's University Hospital, Dublin, 2001, p. 17.

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**Curation of Autonomy:
Participatory Art's Potential to Enunciate
Alternative Social Forms**

Practice

Anna Alkistis Kontopoulou

2016

Practice

As part of the ‘knowledges’ produced through my theoretical analysis and after having accepted this as the material focus of my research, I would also like to acknowledge the knowledge gained through my educational curatorial initiatives, as another layer of my research practice that hopes to press current discourse on participation further, from a pronouncing on contradictions to an embodying of critical agency. The process of incorporating the empirical knowledge gained through this research practice –that developed parallel with my writing– has been a challenging one, of course, especially when one takes into account the growing number of artistic practice-based research projects, compared to the rather limited amount of established ‘transversal’ frameworks in the field of ‘engaged curatorial practice’. Nevertheless, throughout this process, and as I hope to demonstrate below, I have attempted to open up the discussion around prominent issues that have surfaced out of my theoretical analysis, to a wider set of participants, working transversally across museums, small-scale arts organisations, ‘radical’ and self-organised communities, as well as spaces of pedagogy. This ‘testing action’ has allowed me to move from a management of relational exchanges towards the direction of a co-investigation. This ‘accessing’ has in turned allowed for other kind of ‘knowledges’ in, as a flux of new ideas that come to disrupt my linear thinking, discovering in practice how a dialogue between ‘word’ and experience can reveal other kind of insights about the conditions we live through. Sometimes these moments seem so dispersed and premature, their impact needing more time to show itself. Other times, the analysis becomes too personal, where the ‘I’ is too much in the process of ‘opening up to the affective’, making it impossible for me to assess inter-subjective encounters outside their proper ‘temperature’. The point here however, is not to offer some form of fixed framework, but rather to attend to different working models that attempt to move beyond that which one ‘already knows they know’ and into open ended processes of collectivising agency.

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Stasis

Curatorial Research, Audio-visual installation, Workshop, Publication.
February–April 2013
Create an Accident: Myth Phd (Play Hence Destroy).
taf: metamatic, Athens, Greece

Research

Neither anarchy nor tyranny shall the citizens defend and respect, if they follow my counsel; and they shall not cast out altogether from the city what is to be feared. For who among mortals that fears nothing is just? [...] If you keep this order, you will have a protective power against all other cities in history' [...] I hereby found this assembly as a parliamentary council, untouched by profit and always awake to protect the city.

Athena establishing the Areopagus in Aeschylus' 'Oresteia', *Eumenides* (696–99)¹

The term 'democracy' originates from the Greek 'demos' (people) and kratos (power), meaning 'rule of the people'. The term first appeared in ancient Greek political and philosophical thought in the city-state of Athens during classical antiquity (507–508 BC). The myth says that Lady Justice 'Dike' came down from the skies to install a new 'democratic' order that was to replace both the 'eye-for-an-eye' rule and the long history of people inheriting their position in society from their parents. This new ruling acknowledged that everyone was equal under the law, which was now for the first time voted by the people themselves. Athenian democracy took the form of a 'direct democracy' with a random selection of ordinary citizens filling the few existing government offices on rotation, and a legislative assembly (Areopagus) consisting of all Athenian citizens. Athenian citizenship however excluded women, slaves, foreigners, non-landowners and males under 20 years old.

Oresteia, is one of the few plays we have left from that first 'direct democracy' era, written by Aeschylus and originally performed in 458 BC to celebrate the newly emerging democratic order, when Athena established the Areopagus court. Aeschylus employed this dramatic moment of Areopagus's establishment as his instrument for disrupting the ancient chain of

¹ Aeschylus, 'Oresteia', *Eumenides*, Shapiro, Allan & Burian, Peter (trans), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 458 BC/2005 BC, paragraphs 696–99.

fateful justice (vengeance/anti-vengeance) in order to introduce to the audience the civic and legal courts run by men. In this way, and even though the great aristocratic families remained powers to be reckoned with, it was as if every citizen (member of his audience) was born anew into a new man-made order constituted and bounded by the concept of 'isonomia', i.e. equality of all citizens before the law, embodied in legal, as well as constitutional order.

This ancient Athenian conception of democracy gave every citizen a central role to direct and open participation in the discourse around *polis*, with the theatre now transformed as the locus of such debate. The Greek theatre's participatory and relational role, in fact, was reflected by everyone's participating in culture, whilst actively expanding the representation of minority voices within that participatory format as a whole. Despite the fact that the actors were all men, there was always a 'collective ensemble of enunciation' called 'chorus', a homogeneously masked group of performers who followed the main characters around and who with a collective voice, sang or spoke in unison the play's underlying contradictory truths (desire as a hidden truth of agency). Their role was to comment, provide insight, or even give voice to the commonsensical 'general public', but also – most interestingly – to speak of the things the main protagonists could not say (like fears, unconscious desires and prejudices), at times even acting upon the audience's desire to take part (introducing a transition from reflection to enactment). Imagine a haunting 'public opinion' following the individual performer on stage, speaking of 'common sense', or accepted stereotypes (usually around moral/ natural/ political orders), but who could also help change the course of the play, since sometimes the chorus provided the secret 'truths' revealed as a kind of background noise that helped or prevented the protagonist to see the drama through.

In *Eumenides*, the last play of the *Oresteia* trilogy, a large number of powerful, dynamic and dangerous women called Erinyes (Furies), the archaic goddesses of the underworld, are called upon to reopen the question of a woman's civic role and status, and by implication all those that are excluded from the newly established concept of 'isonomia', precisely at the moment of its intended resolution. Just before Athena establishes the new democratic order, the Erinyes (Furies) threaten to unleash their destructive forces in the city, arguing that if Athena allows for the citizens to take charge, there will be '*stasis*', meaning resurrection and conflict. That the citizen-jurors probably voted against Orestes (Athena breaks the tie in favour of the city), also suggests that perhaps the framework of the polis

itself is neither adequate, nor any too secure. At the end of the play, we are in fact left with an unsatisfying dilemma of having to choose between a consensus-based democracy, and a perpetual struggle of resistance of its 'others' (slaves, women, non-citizens), to the latter's normalising and homogenising effects.

Is it possible to imagine a democratic politics that balances this quest to fulfil democratic aspirations of 'isonomia' while at the same time attend to the hysteric's demands (Erinyes) that attempt to disturb and disrupt it? Can we avoid the self's enclosure within the institutions that secure such disciplinary systems that support the democratic order, in the name of 'progress'? What do we mean by progress anyway? Progress in the name of whom? Democracy, of course, represents our first and last hope to fulfil such 'democratic politics of resistance', as Christopher Rocco argues in his text *Democracy and Discipline in Aeschylus' Oresteia*, 'or else democracy is one more regulative ideal, a subtle strategy of disciplinary control'.² At the same time however, we cannot ignore the Erinyes's (Furies) determined-calling for 'stasis'. The myth says that before the establishment of democracy, the Erinyes (Furies) were chthonic deities, the goddesses of rage, vengeance, revenge and remorse, living as a family of aged spirits in the underworld, a sort of parasitical 'other'. After democracy was established however, they could finally get recognised as part of the official discourse; they were thus re-named 'Eumenides' (The Kindly Ones), legitimised within the new civic order by the invention of a new adobe right next to Athena/ Dike (Goddess of Justice).

The conclusion of the *Oresteia* certainly leaves no doubt that the new democratic institutions were more impartial, and inclusive, constituting an advance over the particularity of the household and clan rule of the past. But, as the persistent presence of the Erinyes (Furies), the conflict between natural and positive law, men and women, citizens and foreigners, and by extension, self and other/ Other, is larger than the polis itself. The founding of Areopagus (and by extension of democratic order) solves the problem of Orestes, momentarily, but not the unreflective retributive injustice that Erinyes (Furies) still represent. An institution after all, comes into being only if agreement to be subjected to its authority survives. The Erinyes (Furies) attend here thus to the dissonant and dissatisfied other within the self, whose surplus is always fleeting, always in transit.

2 Christopher Rocco, 'Democracy and Discipline in Aeschylus Oresteia', *Tragedy and Enlightenment*, Los Angeles, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1997.

Participation/Action

In response to an open call for an exhibition in Athens, Greece on the theme of ‘Destruction: Myth PhD [Play Hence Destroy]’ and an insistence from the curator’s side to work on the one hand ‘within the platform of a game [...] as a cultural simulation [that] reproduces the myths integrated in the social narratives’, and on the other working on a co-investigation of ‘the fundamental elements of a community’ and how they are socially constituted, I decided to focus on the myth of democracy, expanding on my research on Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* and the notion of ‘*stasis*’.³ What does democracy mean for contemporary Athenians today? How do they understand ‘*stasis*’? How can we re-activate the myths of the past in order to re-constitute a community of ‘destruction’? How do we play this game?

This was one of my first artistic/curatorial projects to coincide with what was, at the time, a freshly started academic research project, and as a first attempts for me to expand my so far theoretical analysis of participation. My exhibit consisted of a sound-based installation, a publication and a participatory workshop for contemporary Athenians ‘citizens’ to debate on the state of democracy today. The first room introduced Aeschylus’ tragic play: focusing on the moment when Eumenides pronounce ‘*stasis*’ (revolt) as an avoidable condition for conflicting forces to reach an equilibrium. The accompanying publication/ research folder provided more information on the concept of ‘*stasis*’ more generally, documenting the research process, including a lexicon, and correspondences with other theoreticians, as well as some visual/graphic representations of my thinking. The final room consisted of an empty classroom setting, with a makeshift blackboard for people to take notes, draw and interact as they engaged in the conversation during thematic workshops on the meaning of ‘*stasis*’ today.

3 For more on this see curator’s statement as found at: <https://createanaccident.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/thesis-statement.pdf>, (accessed 01/07/2016).

On A Side Note:

I think it is this last point on the meaning of ‘*stasis*’ today and the democratic basis of participation (or not), where one needs to consider the contribution Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* makes to today’s *possible* ‘participations’ in the politics of disturbance, more generally, a politics that (like the trilogy) sustains and celebrates democratic norms, even as it resists and otherwise disrupts resultant democratic normalisations.

I’m thinking here of American political theorist Jodi Dean, and her argument about the non-democratic basis of today’s ‘democratic’ models for participation, within the context of ‘information control’ within communicative capitalism (web stream, Facebook, Twitter, radio, print etc), in particular; and more precisely her analysis of Amy Goodman’s (‘Democracy Now!’) two-hour long interview with Julian Assange and Slavoj Žižek. In this conversation, Amy Goodman was claiming that in this ‘new age of information, [...] information is power’. It can ‘save lives’ and it is basically the knowledge necessary for action, as the missing link between acceptance and active work to change the world.⁴ To put it in Socratic terms, ‘to know the good is to do the good’. As Slavoj Žižek’s project shows us however, today’s communicative capitalism is unfortunately also characterised by a decline in symbolic efficiency, pointing to the failure of symbols and messages to produce expected responses altogether. It does not necessarily mean, for example, that mediated participation will translate into collective action for a more democratic society, to begin with, but rather, paradoxically, for the mediators to propagate the appearance of institutions as more ‘democratic’ altogether (which in turn propagates the illusion of a democracy, at times even a disbelief in it).

In a nutshell, what to Goodman are merely the necessary preconditions for radical ‘democratic will’ formation, are for Dean the prior effects of a power that produces the very subject it controls. Reminding me here of Lacan’s formula of the subject that is supposed to know: what the subject doesn’t know they know is what controls them. Claire Bishop questions the ‘democratic’ quality of the relationships produced within such ‘free’ and ‘open’ relational encounters, while Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in turn argue for a sustaining of conflicting relations, in order for democracy to

⁴ Amy Goodman in Jodi Dean, ‘Know it All: WikiLeaks, Democracy and the Information Age’, *Open: Transparency and Secrecy in the Age of Wikileaks*, no. 22, Rotterdam, SKOR: Foundation for Art and the Public Domain, 2010, pp. 46–56.

live one..⁵

The Wikipedia page on ‘democracy’ explains:

In virtually all democratic governments throughout ancient and modern history, democratic citizenship consisted of an elite class until full enfranchisement was won for all adult citizens in most modern democracies through the suffrage movements of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Wikipedia continues by presenting the ‘democratic index 2012’, formulated by the Economist Intelligence Unit, as a series of mappings of ‘full democracy’ indexes according to country and region. According to this, Athens, Greece is nowadays considered a ‘flawed democracy’.⁶

In the end I would like to quote Aristotle here:

But one factor of liberty is to govern and be governed in turn; for the popular principle of justice is to have equality according to number, not worth, ... And one is for a man to live as he likes; for they say that this is the function of liberty, inasmuch as to live not as one likes is the life of a man that is a slave.⁷

5 Erneston Laclau, and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Social Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, London, Verso, 1985, as cited in Bishop, *ibid*: 34.

6 As found at: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democracy>, last accessed: 27.07.2016, 11'15".

7 Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 6, Part II, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 350 BC/1957 AC, 1317b.



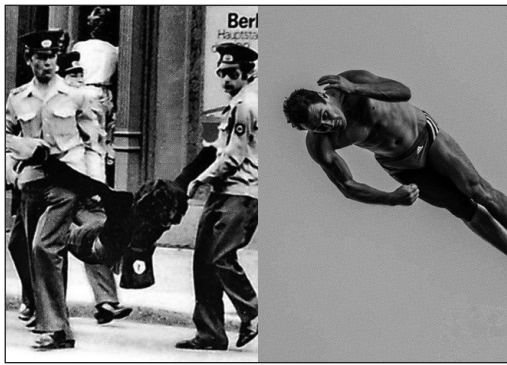
Stasis, Installation view, taf: metamatic, Athens, Greece, 2013



Stasis, Installation: introductory posters, taf: metamatic, Athens, Greece, 2013



Stasis, Installation: publication spread, taf: metamatic, Athens, Greece, 2013



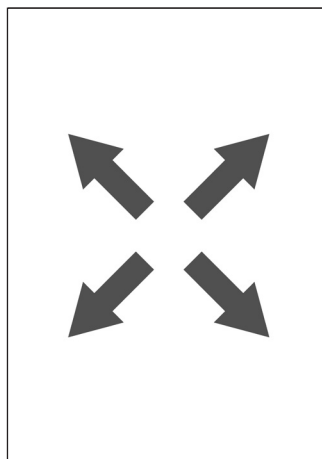
Stasis, Publication excerpts, taf: metamatic, Athens, Greece, 2013

STASIS

From Greek *στασις*, may refer to:

“A standing still”, a standing, from *histanai*, meaning to stand, related to latin *stare* = to stand. Motionless. ✓ A state of stability, in which all forces are equal and opposing, therefore they cancel out each other. A condition of conflicting forces in equilibrium. ✓ *Stasis (political history)*, as defined by Thucydides as a set of symptoms indicating an internal disturbance in both individual and states. A moment of resurrection. ✓ *Stasis (biology)*, a period of little or no evolutionary change in a species, in the punctuated equilibrium model of evolutionary biology. ✓ *Stasis (fiction)* implies, especially in science-fiction, an artificial pause that stops all physical and chemical processes, including those of life; they resume as if uninterrupted as soon as the stasis is ended. ✓ *Stasis (mythology)*, a state in which the normal flow of a body liquid stops, for example the flow of blood through vessels or of intestinal contents through the digestive tract. ✓ *Stasis (music)*, a technique or form used in minimalist music, and also any other style that may use slow musical development. ✓ *Stasis (historics)*, represents a “stand” or a “mode of proceeding” in a given argument. It consists of a four-part invention process which investigates facts (conjecture), definition, quality (right or wrong) and policy (plan of action) in a given argument.

Stasis, Publication excerpt, English, taf: metamatic, Athens, Greece, 2013



Stasis, Publication excerpt, taf: metamatic, Athens, Greece, 2013

ΣΤΑΣΙΣ

Stasis in Aeschylus' Oresteia:

- ✓ In Agamemnon stasis threatens the family.
- ✓ In Eumenides it threatens the whole state.
- ✓ The potential for social fragmentation in the system of justice which obtains in Oresteia. Erinyes (Eumenides) are a threat to order. There is inevitably a potential for social disintegration where loyalties are reduced to a minimum and where violent action is the only conceivable response to violence.
- ✓ It is this destructive force which the Erinyes threaten to let loose in Arcton (if Athena allows for the citizens to take charge of justice via civic, legal and constitutional order-democracy).
- ✓ Blood in the whole trilogy: bloodshed. Blood spilled on the ground, demands fresh blood. The poison which drips from Erinyes threatens the whole of society.
- ✓ The founding of Areopagos solves the problem of Orestis but not the unreflective retributive justice that Erinyes represent.
- ✓ An institution in real life comes into being only if agreement to be subjected to its authority survives. Universal value of the need for violence to be controlled.

Stasis, Publication excerpt, Greek, taf: metamatic, Athens, Greece, 2013

Dear Lena,

I have been thinking of this idea of a community that is determined by its pre-defined conditions for its own destruction. This idea for me has some kind of Orwellian connotation and so, after your valuable recommendation, I began by Virilio's 'Administration of Fear' and Hannah Arendt's 'terror is the realisation of the law of movement'.

I started thinking of this idea of terror as a destructive force, and this idea of undoing our link to fate altogether. What would happen after the destruction of this community you are describing and in order to attempt an understanding of the preconditions for the existence of the community to begin with, as you seem to suggest. We don't know what will happen with that release. But in my opinion fear or terror is definitely not what would release us from Fate. On the contrary it seems to be eudaimonia-happiness that can separate, release and liberate us. An opening that undoes the trope of Fate (present here as the predetermined structures, our historical conditioning, patriarchy etc), and creates an interruption. Maybe this destructive character thus involves a 'making room', or 'spacing' if you like, a space of allowing. Like a father occasions the moment for his bored child, to be allowed to play. A moment he occasions in which he/she can do exactly that. A moment which cannot be determined in advance.

This destructive character seen here not as a utopian form of escapism. (You know, how I have had enough of this easy way of political thinking—especially when it comes to art). So let us not an image. Because their future has no image. Its more of an interruption that is productive and by extension the suspension of a determining image.

Stasis, Publication excerpt: documentation of curatorial correspondences, taf: metamatic, Athens, Greece, 2013

Here comes my remembering Aeschylus' Oresteia III, namely the story of Eumenides and the Greeks understanding of the notion of Fate. For the Greeks it was justice done by gods acting immediately on to humans. In this myth turned into tragedy, Dike is hovering over the men, while they duel. Immediacy meaning here both: the 'in now time', but also as the 'non-mediated'. Athens in the final praxis of the play claims that in order for there to be justice, I will have to 'undo' myself as god—Dike—and let the men take their fate in their hands (so basically decide for themselves and not on some predetermined structure). The representatives (Eumenides) however, warn here beware! If you occasion the moment for them to do that (remember kids being allowed from father to play), then there will be 'stasis'. This stasis is for me what is so interesting in what you are suggesting by create an accident and in particular the Thesis project. Because with this 'stasis', the Greeks (and I am referring here to ancient Greeks of course), do not mean simply an interruption of the linear process of time, a pause that will allow the idea to come inside (See Minima Moralia, 'Space', or in a modern sensibility, that all thinking originates from an act of destruction (Hegel)—but for them it was closer to the meaning of conflict and war. Stasis as resistance. So when thinking of the democratic condition, its as if the notion of 'conflict' is always already there. The democratic basis is itself based on 'violence'. When one makes the decision to denounce the Gods (give up on justice by Gods and instead go for justice by democracy), then there is always already there a moment of destruction. By extension, to stage this there is an activity of destruction.

An intervention within time.

Now to go back to our contemporary context, and this concept of fate, I would say the recognition of the place of which one's being, or a whole community's project of departure, is perhaps to announce the idea of interruption, break from the idea of eternal return and waking up in a world of remnants. A messiness where everything is seemingly the same, but also everything seems to be different. When the child protests to say they are bored then, it is not perhaps out of his or her individual fault; being in the world, but maybe as an individual it is an aftereffect of a network of relations, a world that his/her father has created for them that is boring. A mood that organises him/her as individual in boredom.

If you do not want to stage an interruption of times without stasis-conflict - a potential French Revolution (blood spill) then, a Politics of Time (Peter Osborne) may be the only solution. To occasion the moment for an opening.

So in a way to even ask the question—as you do—is always already an opening. Be wary though, it might be considered naive to think that there is simply no Fate or the logic of pre-given, as simple as that.

Dear Anna,

Another notion that maybe would be interesting to introduce is that of guilt, as it appears in the text of Benjamin (and if I remember well Arendt has dealt with that as well). Guilt is closely connected to Fate and religion (and this could be a link to the way you deal with Oresteia within this context) while at the same time it is very much present in the way we perform as part of the community, both on a personal and collective level. I really like these thoughts on destruction and I believe there is also a



Members of the public working out themes from *Stasis*, taf: metamatic, Athens, Greece, 2013



Notes after participatory workshop: Self and Other, Oikos and Polis, Stasis, Installation view, taf: metamatic, Athens, Greece, 2013

Exercises on Democracy

Organising Thematic Co-Investigation
February-March 2013
Royal College of Art (London)
Sandberg Institute (Holland)

At the same time as I was researching the concept of ‘stasis’ for my exhibition in Greece, I was also invited to organise a collaborative investigation for a mixed group of students from Sandberg Institute (Holland) and RCA’s Visual Communication Programme (London), during Sandberg’s students visit to London, hosted by the RCA. The idea was that I would facilitate a participatory workshop that introduces ‘the basics of democracy’, with a hands-on, open-ended approach for students to ‘design the final outcomes’. At the time I was also reviewing contemporary relational models of democratic participation, the concept of pseudo-participation and consensual collaboration, while examining the democratic basis of participatory practices as a whole.

For the purposes of this one-day event, I decided to introduce Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* to the students as a paradigmatic play that exemplifies the relationship between democracy and theatre in ancient Greece. How has this relationship mutated today? Does contemporary life provide a similar context for democracy? What is the performative aspect of democracy in everyday life? Hoping to also work with participatory theatre techniques as a way of embodying the thematics of power.

The first part of the workshop included a kind of ‘storytelling’, where I introduced the myth of democracy and the story of Eumenides. I then asked participants: What did you hear? The students analysed the themes that surfaced out of the storytelling in their own terms. There was a rather short session where students were called upon to present the ‘word’ that represented their so-far co-investigation to the rest of us, followed by a longer session of ‘action’. Some students decided to focus on the role of women within the myth and in particular on interpreting the role of the chthonic deities of Erinyes, today. They were fascinated by the dramatic details of these characters, like how, according to the myth, these female deities were older than the gods, older than Zeus himself. How they didn’t have grey hair but instead serpents growing out of their hair. And how their skin colour was black. Or how they were said to be virgins living in the underworld, representing mother’s blood and family bonds, serving maternal rights even when these were ‘unfair’. I explained to them that the word ‘erinyes’ itself means anger and vengeance, always representing

the ‘blood of the mother’, so some students were really inspired by this particular character of Erinyes focusing on their role as inherited ‘enactors’ of a memory of ‘man’s obligation to the maternal’. They thus created an impromptu role-play performance focusing on their grandmothers’ heritage and their own interpretation of matriarchal relationships and how these have thus far affected their contemporary role as citizens. Their performance involved talking and eating together, while recounting memories of their lives.

Another group of students decided to focus on the concept of representation itself, staging a ‘mediated’ performance that reflected on contemporary media’s representation of electoral democratic candidates (with the help of technological tools like the camera, android phones, projectors etc). They referenced Noam Chomsky’s ‘propaganda model’ and his concept of ‘manufacturing consent’ referring to his homonymous book *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (1988). This group’s experimental installation focused more on the visual communication aspect of interactive design and the concept of partial identification (practicing out Guattari’s thinking around subjectivity as an ‘ensemble of multiple exchanges’ between individuals-group-machines).

The third group decided to focus on the role of master ‘Gods’, as they re-enacted Aeschylus’ play in the ‘now time of the future’. Their aesthetic combined elements of science fiction, fantasy and humour in order to critique and revise the Western-centred history of democracy. They used masks and other props to tell the story of a North Korean leader coming back from the future, running a multinational bagel chain. Their performance was multi-coloured and playful, focusing perhaps more on the satirical aspect of the chorus and the mythopoeitic potential of art.

In many ways, Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* helped us think through the contemporary tension between democracy and the discipline it potentially engenders, investigating the legacy of such ideas today while investing them with new mythopoeitic qualities altogether; looking at the different characters and their role within representation, and how perhaps the very requirements for such representations serve to exclude, silence or discipline those same differential ‘selves’ that democracy requires.

The overall outcome of these workshops was really interesting for the purposes of my research and with regards to my argument about the university discourse as well, as we ended up spending an extra two days together, outside university, debating about the need to experiment for experiment’s sake versus a validation of the knowledge produced during the

workshops, in this case materialised through a proposed publication. The institutions organising these ‘Exercises on Democracy’ were very keen on us publishing our results, especially taking into account how these were all graphic design students specialising in experimental approaches to visual communication. The students were adamant they did not want to foreclose their learning outcomes. The publication never materialised and instead we decided to arrange for a future meeting. The meeting was supposed to take place in a random time in the future, on a boat, in between national borders, where we would produced an ‘archipelago of thoughts’ as a map of our processual coming together.



Storytelling, *Exercises on Democracy*, RCA, London, 2013.



Exercises on Democracy, RCA, London, 2013.



Exercises on Democracy, RCA, London, 2013.



Exercises on Democracy, RCA, London, 2013.



Exercises on Democracy, RCA, London, 2013.



Exercises on Democracy, RCA, London, 2013.



Exercises on Democracy, RCA, London, 2013.

Honk! If Your Body's Not Yours

Curatorial research, Sound objects, Workshop
19 Jun 2013- 8 September, 2013.
Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London.

As a response to the ICA's exhibition *Keep Your Timber Limber (Works on Paper)* (2013), and in an attempt to open up the discussion around this exhibition's thematic approach, I curated *Honk! If Your Body's Not Yours!*, a sound-based research project that ran throughout the summer of 2013 and culminated in a public listening event (please see enclosed). The project was organised as part of the ICA's Student Forum and in collaboration with fellow curator Victor Wang.



Honk! If Your Body's Not Yours, Courtesy of Marlene McCarty

Research

The original idea behind *Honk! If Your Body's Not Yours*, was to offer an alternative reading to the main exhibition, and open up the debate around its curatorial/ thematic arrangements, like: 'the politics of gender and sexuality', 'feminist issues, war, censorship and race'. To quote Sarah McCrory, the curator of *Keep Your Timber Limber*, herself: 'stretching from fashion to erotica, the works can all be viewed as being in some way transgressive, employing traditional and commercial drawing techniques to challenge specific social, political or stylistic conventions'.⁸ But what are the underlying social and political 'conventions' that assume these stylistic forms here?

⁸ Sarah McCrory, *Keep Your Timber Limber (Works On Paper)*, Press release, ICA, London, 2013, as found at: <https://www.ica.org.uk/whats-on/keep-your-timber-limber-works-paper>, (accessed 27.07.2016).

What is the relationship between these graphic representations of the body and the politics they represent? What exactly are they trying to challenge? Is there any way we can explore these thematic and curatorial relationships further by attending to the gaps between them?

I started by looking in more depth, at the exhibiting artist's backgrounds, and my curiosity was immediately drawn to American artist Marlene McCarty and her particular relationship with the artist/activist collective Gran Fury.⁹ Due to my previous work with Ultra-red and their background in ACT UP (Aids Coalition to Unleash Power), I was already familiar with Gran Fury's legendary work: an activist/artist collective that came together in 1988 in New York, emerging as a sub-group of ACT UP's 'unofficial propaganda ministry and guerrilla graphic designers'.¹⁰ They organised as an autonomous collective within the bigger one, describing themselves as a 'band of individuals united in anger and dedicated to exploiting the power of art to end the AIDS crisis'.¹¹ I soon realised that McCarty was in fact a key member of the group, due to her graphic design skills, but also curiously due to her being one of the group's only female members.¹² McCarty's role was also very significant for Gran Fury's notorious contribution to the 1990 Venice Biennale, a.k.a. the 'Pope Piece'. The artwork caused big controversy at the time due to an incident involving the Vatican considering it blasphemous. When asked about their approach to their work, Gran Fury explained: 'We want the art world to recognise that collective direct action will bring an end to the AIDS crisis.'

9 They took the name Gran Fury as it was the specific Plymouth model used by the New York Police Department for unmarked police cars. The name was also meant to reference their anger about the AIDS pandemic.

John, Addario, 'AIDS, Art and Activism: Remembering Gran Fury', *Hyperallergic*, 2011, as found at: <http://hyperallergic.com/42085/aids-art-activism-gran-fury/> (accessed 27.07.2016)

10 Douglas Crimp in Peter Kalb (ed.), *Art Since 1980: Charting the Contemporary*, London, Laurence King Publishing, 2013, p. 112.

ACT UP was formed in March 1987, initially in New York, with the aim of bringing attention to the AIDS crisis and the federal government's ignorance towards the disease through direct political action. That same month, New Museum curator William Olander, himself a participant in ACT UP, invited members of the group to create an installation in the window of the New Museum's downtown location at 583 Broadway, resulting in the exhibition "Let the Record Show..." for which the SILENCE=DEATH sign was produced. Gran Fury formed as an affinity group within ACT UP to create this New Museum installation. The installation included a neon version of the SILENCE=DEATH Project's already existing symbol, SILENCE=DEATH. Underneath the pink triangle there were silhouettes of what Douglas Crimp refers to as "AIDS criminals" - people who were perpetuating silence surrounding, or misrepresenting AIDS.

Douglas Crimp, 'On the Museum Ruins' in Hall F. (ed), *The Anti-aesthetic, Essays on Postmodern Culture*, Seattle, Bay Press, 1993, pp. 43-57. For more on this see: <http://www.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/view/act-up-gran-fury>

11 Richard Meyer, *Outlaw Representation: Censorship & Homosexuality in Twentieth Century American Art*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 225-237.

12 The role of women within the movement, and the organised feminist strategies they brought with them, was particularly important here. Some arguing that these 'predominantly white middle class' women helped bring 'gay men of colour's' voices to the fore, especially at the time when AIDS was still invisible at those circles. While others arguing, on the contrary, that these women organisers brought with them a series of problematic assumptions and hierarchisations that were not particularly relevant to the movement's organic development at the time. For more on this see interviews of ACT UP members at ACT UP's Oral History project: <http://www.actuporalhistory.org/beta/interviews/index.html>, last accessed 20/04/2016.



Gran Fury, The Pope, Installation Poster, *The Pope Piece*, Venice Biennale 1990. Courtesy Marlene McCarty



Men Use Condoms Or Beat It, poster, 1988, part of the installation *The Pope Piece*, Venice Biennale, 1990. Courtesy Marlene McCarty

. . . Whenever we can, we steer the art world projects into public spaces so that we can address audiences other than museum-going audiences or the readership of art magazines'.¹³

As I researched further into the 'gaps' of this movement's history however, and upon an illuminating interview with Dont Rhine, a member of ACT UP, LA chapter, and founding member of Ultra-Red, it soon became apparent to me that Gran Fury's art world/ media strategies were not always endorsed by the bigger ACT UP movement. Rhine in fact pointed out how most historical accounts of ACT UP within the art world, nowadays, tend to focus on the art of ACT UP instead of AIDS cultural analysis itself.

¹³ An interview with artist Marlene McCarty commenting on this particular event, as found in ACT UP's Oral History project, can be found on *Honk! If Your Body's Not Yours!* playlist, entitled 'blasphemy at the Venice Biennale'. See here: <http://www.actupny.org/indexfolder/GranFury1.html>, (accessed 20.10.2015), see appendix, *Sound Object: Honk! If Your Body's Not Yours!*.

Rhine argues:

By and large, we rejected the notion of a “general public” as our audience. They were our enemy – complicit, morally failed, murderous, and compliant. If one or two people in ACT UP saw the art world as a means to address a “general public” then that should not be mistaken as a perspective common in the movement as a whole. For many of us, art has no general public. It has a specific public. It has an art public.¹⁴

Rhine echoed here, fellow artists and curators at the time, questioning the very ‘contemporaneity’ of my curatorial initiative: ‘Is there still an AIDS crisis today?’ they asked me. ‘And why does it concern you?’ By implication, I started asking myself, what does it mean to feel oneself part of a ‘general public’ to begin with. What does it mean to feel oneself outside the AIDS crisis, or the crisis of capitalism or even the climate crisis? By extension what does it mean to re-present such social movement histories if you don’t embody the struggles with your own body? And what does it mean to use the art world as a means to address such issues to a ‘general public’ to begin with? Who is this ‘general public’ anyway? It soon became apparent to me that because of the prominence of certain artists within ACT UP, many of its historical accounts by artists and curators alike, tend to focus on the art of AIDS cultural analysis. As Rhine explains however, and after an in-depth research into ACT UP’s Oral History project and a series of communications with other members, I realised that for those people who were actually in the movement, activist art and AIDS cultural analysis were never really a distinct or isolatable thing, but in fact an aestheticised and politicised mobilisation embedded within their larger embodied critical analysis, as this was carried through in people’s actual bodies. Rhine in fact takes this further and argues that ‘the art’ of ACT UP and Gran Fury was not the only site of aesthetic operations in the movement. Everything ACT UP did considered the issues of form, process, pleasure, and the politics of representation. He writes:

‘In the typical narrow perspective of the art world that can only see art in representations or in discourse that speaks of art by name, the fullness of ACT UP’s practices are lost on cultural producers and artists today. That loss, I would say, has political implications for how we conceptualise the AIDS crisis and our relationship to HIV and its politics.’¹⁵

14 Interview with author, August 2013.

15 Interview/email conversation between myself and Dont Rhine, founding member of Ultra-red and ACT UP, August 2013.

It is no different, I suppose, from those who are only interested in the art of feminism but remain totally disinterested in the life and death struggles around abortion and contraception access, and the real contradictions of class and gender oppression that permeate all of our politics.¹⁶ My research question eventually expanded to incorporate issues of commodification and the struggle to subjection to the value form. How does the AIDS crisis relate to larger issues around political economic relations, and what are the implications, if curatorial re-presentations of relational exchanges do not address such structural relations in the first place? The real contradictions however, as I was discovering in my research, are indeed found in the material conditions and a larger analysis of the structures that administer such crises. Rhine in fact takes this further and argues that as a result of the decision to look at the material conditions that connect the two crises (public health and poverty), a number of the ACT UP subcommittees in Philadelphia, New York, Los Angeles, and elsewhere made a very important practical/analytical shift towards the analysis of that relation, which actually helped them survive the collapse of the ACT UP movement after that period of extravagant publicising.¹⁷

Analysis

With these questions in mind, and due to the practical problem that I was not really allowed to use a physical space within the ICA's main galleries, I soon made a decision to occupy the 'imaginary'. I decided to work with sound once again, to invoke a symbolic register of such struggles' histories,

16 For the poor in the United States, especially for young gay men of colour, AIDS remains very much a public health crisis and a political crisis to this day. The AIDS crisis is still killing people. The mass incarceration of the poor and people of colour, mass poverty, homelessness, and criminalised status are all social determinants of the on-going AIDS pandemic. Meanwhile, the threats of austerity every year endanger life-saving programs that provide the pharmaceutical industry with subsidies so the poor can have access to treatment. But those subsidies are exactly that; a public contribution to private profits. Infection is big business. But again, if one has an HIV-exclusive perspective, none of what I'm describing constitutes an AIDS crisis. Except among people like ACT UP Philadelphia

This latter point in fact has really hit home. A recent study in Greece (2012) talks about 'HIV outbreak', overall there is a 1,450% rise on 2010's figures on cases in the city centre, and especially related to 'out-of-treatment populations', while in the last three years this gets concentrated and becoming 'established' in this population, reaching 20%. I am certainly not an expert on this, but I have read a few studies across sectors and the emergence of this outbreak not only coincides with the economic downturn that the country is being currently undergoing, but is actually due to budgetary cuts in the health system (especially the field of drug treatment and harm reduction, including stuff like carers, nurses, doctors and therapists who have not been paid for months)- the deteriorating of socio-economic environment of the Athens city centre (police being part of a kind of terrorizing-stabilising the government's agenda) - together with changes in injecting behaviours among IDUs. While needle and syringe programs remain in significantly low standards, again due to 'austerity' measures. For the first time ever there is a charge of 5 euros per hospital visit, while the government has implemented its new policy named 'operation skoupa' (=hoover), where illegal immigrants considered a risk to public health are detained indefinitely for 'compulsory health checks'-its basically a policy to clean up busy touristy streets from homeless, and those most obviously vulnerable, so that the streets will be 'good for business' again..

17 Several ACT UP chapters continue to provide services and advocacy to this day. Housing Works in New York and *Clean Needles Now*, the needle exchange in Los Angeles, are two such examples.

and in order to collectively compose ‘a protocol’ for collective analysis and reflective action that would trigger an accountability towards these struggles in the first place (and not the art world). This was also due to my insistence on expanding the practice of listening as a tool to enact potential solidarity and transversal dialogues. Sound would actually turn out to be a very useful tool in this project, as it allowed for a more experimental approach to the way we ‘do’ history altogether, performing and re-activating the past in the ‘here and now’ context of each listening.

Within a couple of weeks, I compiled a series of sound objects, editing archival sound material from the ACT UP Oral History Project, interviews, audio clips, as well as ‘composing’ my own sound pieces, with contributions from Marlene McCarty, Donna Haraway, Judith Butler, James Baldwin, as well as Gran Fury and ACT UP (see enclosed). The playlist also included compositions from my previous collaborations with contemporary sound artist/activist collective Ultra-red and their AIDS Uncanny Series, as well as a piece from the English Collective of Prostitutes (ECP), a sex workers collective based in London, that provides information, help and support to women and others who are concerned with sex workers’ human, civil, legal and economic rights.¹⁸

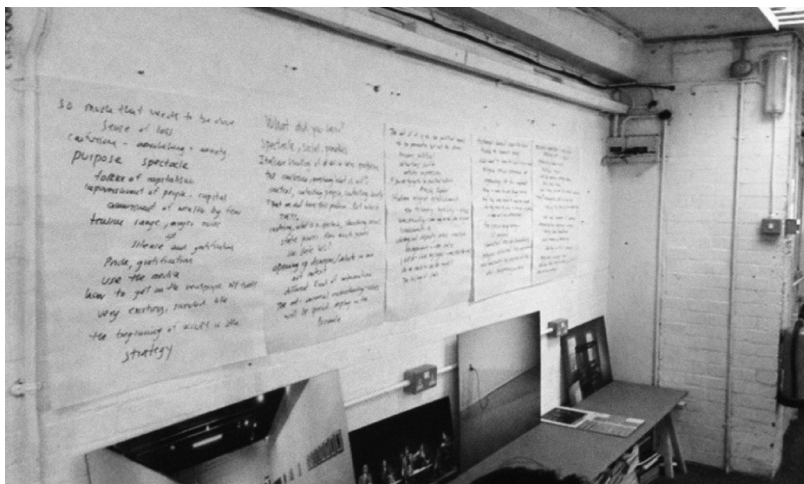
This playlist purposefully hinted towards issues that would not necessarily fit the art institutional discourse on AIDS cultural analysis, like issues of class, gender and race, and the relationship of these within the contemporary system of political economy. The aim was to look backwards at the legacy of these historical movements today in order to situate our investigation within a wider context, shifting attention from the particularities of each activist struggle as such, not in order to undermine them, but in order to attend to their differences or resonances. To re-orientate the debates around the body and its representation within a larger analysis of the political crisis that has its basis in the material and structural conditions of our society today—moving away from the virus itself and looking at the political conditions of the epidemic.

The audio-playlist was made available as a set of mp3 players and headphones to collect from the ICA box office as an alternative audio-guide to accompany the exhibition, but also as downloadable playlist on people’s smartphones.

18 Please listen here: <https://soundcloud.com/icalondon/sets/honk-if-your-body-s-not-yours/>, or see appendix, *Sound Object: Honk! If Your Body’s Not Yours!*.

Action

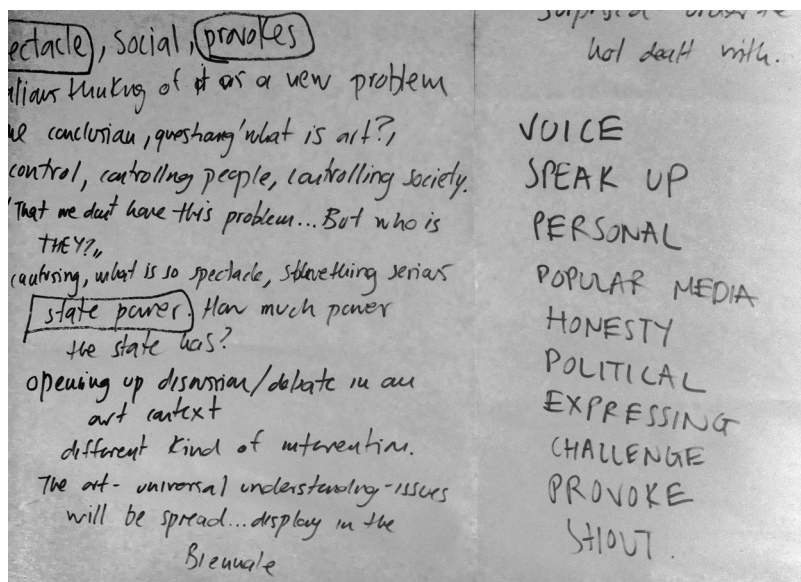
In an attempt to avoid the act of listening to the sound objects becoming some kind of rigid and isolated experience, and with the aim of moving towards a collective reflective analysis *with* a possibility of action, I organised a public event in the ICA studio, in order to further analyse these thematics in a public co-investigation. The event was basically a sound-based workshop that had different stages: a curated listening, a collective analysis and an intersubjective investigation of themes that came out of the listening, like the notion of ‘general public’ vs art public, the use of media within the context of art and activism, as well as issues of identification. Inspired by Ultra-red’s protocols for listening, the primary protocol that choreographed our inquiry was the question: ‘What did you hear?’



What did you hear? Taking notes during *Honk! If Your Body's Not Yours* workshop, ICA, London, 2013.

The outcomes of the investigation were then collectively analysed by a small but very diverse group of participants, who eventually managed to activate their own voice, inhabiting that space between voice and understanding, as they were involved themselves in the process of ‘making meaning’ as this bounced back by listening to the others. This process was repeated in a cyclical way around the group, a few times after each listening, so that people would eventually be given the chance to reflect upon their individual and collective thought processes and their relationship to the structures behind words and language.

Interestingly enough, the most fruitful moments for me, within this exercise were those awkward pauses in between voices, where the ‘self’ struggled to come to terms with things that remained in excess of meaning. Am I who you say I am? or Am I the product of somebody’s else’s desire for knowledge? Eventually, and after attending to the final sound piece –brought to us last minute, by a member of ECP collective –documenting one of their members’ material and structural conditions that have led to her protesting for her rights – people started talking about the: ‘personal’, ‘experience’, and ‘honesty’. Together with previous recorded utterings like ‘spectacle’, ‘use of media’, ‘voice’, ‘provoke’, ‘shout’, ‘challenge’, ‘state power’, in the end, we tried to analyse our listening and look at our affective pool of signifiers.



Notes from *Honk! If Your Body's Not Yours!* workshop, ICA, London, 2013.

Presented with this list of free associations, then, what could one make of our collective audio unconscious? Was there ever a sense of affinity within this group, or did we remain fragmented throughout? And most importantly, was the group's individual/ collective 'crisis' ever resolved or 'curatorially administered' by way of my own role as organiser of the knowledge/ 'information control'? Did people come out feeling happily frustrated-willing to interrogate all manners of imaginary identifications altogether? Or was there a sense of lack and alienated frustration instead? What is the point of such ephemeral exercises in the first place if we cannot accommodate for their sustained and open-ended form; if there is nowhere for this 'activation' to go?

In a way, and when looking back at this workshop, as an experiment of co-research methodologies, the workshop ended up becoming a collective investigation of the very terms of our temporary 'togetherness'. Participants seemed to eventually perform a transition from a doubtful presence ('what is this curator trying to do to us?) and forced participation—driven by social obligation or perhaps museum protocol (participants initially resisting to even talk)—to an active investigation—driven by empathetic curiosity (participants moving from the abstract to the concrete). Joining me in my attempt to break down the politics behind curatorial presentations of these political representations, and somehow reflecting/ acting out with me the contradictory affective registers we co-produced.

In ways like this, this workshop also served as the starting point for my quest to develop an alternative kind of practice that de-links 'value' from the symbolic part of participation, moving away from curatorial representations of the 'contemporary', and towards the co-production of knowledge of the symbolic itself. It was not consensus that brought this group together to begin with. The process of listening amongst strangers was not natural. It required some common literacy that we did not seem to have at the very early stages of our coming together. But since the listening put us into relation with one another and with the outside world, and after a few cyclical analytic sessions, it was the listening itself that constituted us as a group in the end.

This insistence however, came as a commitment from my side to accommodate for a more dialogic approach to reflection, not always allowing for individual participants to venture off into their own symbolic pool of signifiers, but instead facilitating for one's imaginary 'acoustic' gaze to linger in between intentional commitment and abstract thought, in the space

between conscious articulations of needs, but also unconscious registers of desire. *Honk!* as a pure sound, an empty signifier, that can nevertheless function as a call or ‘hailing’ sound that seeks to re-tie the stolen, commodified, alienated body back on to the subject.¹⁹

It is true perhaps that social practices’ potential to enunciate alternative social and political forms is limited when these relations are situated and form part of the art institutional discourse. Especially if they remain as such, and there is no sustained and committed relationship – social processes co-opted by the signification machinery. At the same time however, museums still function as repositories of historical collective memory and sites of systemic historical comparison for the production of ‘contemporary’ taste, including knowledge and fashions. If this still holds then, it is the museum, that should first and foremost be a place for collective analysis, moving from symbolic participation to collective co-investigation. Where we are not only reminded of the egalitarian projects and movements of the past in a nostalgic kind of way, but also where we can learn how to discuss and communicate the materiality or affective quality of contemporary problems as they emerge outside hierarchical value systems, by activating these spaces for debate and collective action.

At the end of the session, the group exchanged emails, and decided to meet again. Some of the participants decided to join me for a subsequent collective inquiry of some of the themes we identified from the listening, assisting me in the early stages of organising a radical education collective.²⁰



Honk! If Your Body's Not Yours! Flyer, ICA, 2014.

19 The detached body, or ‘bodily externality’ is a significant symptom in the clinic of ordinary psychosis (the ordinary state of the neoliberal subject) that is the effect of the gap produced by foreclosure. As Miller writes, ‘the inmost disturbance is a gap where the body is un-wedged, where the subject needs some tricks to re-appropriate his/her own body, where the subject is led to invent some artificial bond to re-appropriate his body, to tie his body to itself.’

Jacques-Allan Miller, ‘Ordinary Psychosis Revisited’, *Psychoanalytical Notebooks:19*, London, London Society of NLS, 2009, pp. 139–68.

20 see *New Terms: Radical Education workshops*.

Honk! If Your Body's Not Yours! is a series of audio playlists* that open up discussion around the main themes of the exhibition 'Keep Your Timber Limber' (Works on Paper), providing an alternative way of reading issues around the body and its representation. Attending to different perspectives that hint towards a set of relationships between economics, politics, race, gender, law, science, and the body.

Playlist:

- 1 **Marlene McCarty** (Gran Fury) (2004)
Blasphemy at the Venice Biennale
- 2 **Ultra-red** The Aids Uncanny series (2006)
An Archive of Feelings: 1987-92
- 3 **Peter Staley** (ACT UP) (2006)
Invading the New York Stock Exchange
- 4 **Judith Butler** (2011)
Your Behaviour Creates Your Gender
- 5 **Ultra-red** The Aids Uncanny series (2006)
4' 33", A Union of Feelings
- 6 **Ming Yuen S Ma** (ACT UP) (2003)
Challenging Power Relationships
- 7 **Ultra-red** The Minutes (2006)
Walter Phillips Gallery, Thursday 23 June 2005
- 8 **Robert Vasquez-Pachero** (Gran Fury) (2002)
Majority Action, 2002
- 9 **Ultra-red** Articles of Incorporation (2004)
Clean Needles Now, Cosmo and Selma, Hollywood
- 10 **Elias Guerrero** (ACT UP) (2004)
AIDS Remains a Political Struggle
- 11 **Prof Jacktone Ojwang Njoki Ndung'u, Dr Smokin Wanjala and Philip Tunoi of The Supreme Court of Kenya Advisory Opinion** (2012) Two-Thirds One-Third Gender Principle In The Constitution
- 12 **James Baldwin** Berkeley (2004)
On Marriage Equality and Love
- 13 **Donna Haraway** (2008)
When Species Meet: Inter-species Humanism
- 14 **Ultra-red** The AIDS Uncanny series (2006)
Andy Warhol Museum, Wednesday 30 November 2005

Initial results of *Honk! If Your Body's Not Yours!* will be further investigated in an open discussion on the relationship between art and activism today, on the **5th of September** (ICA Studio).
Project initiated by ICA Student Forum members:
Anna Kontopoulou and Victor Wang.

ICA

On A Side Note: Participation

On a personal level, one of the most important outcomes of this project was my continuous involvement with *English Collective of Prostitutes* (ECP) as a volunteer for their research and organised actions programmes. ECP happens to be based at *Crossroads Women's Centre* run by social activist and scholar Selma James. James and the *International Wages for Housework Campaign* have played a distinct role within feminist and emancipatory movements of the last four decades, contributing to the problematisation of work by highlighting women's 'unwaged' role in reproducing labour-power for capital, as according to them, this goes unrecognised in many historical analyses.²¹

Through *Honk! If Your Body's Not Yours*, I thus gained access to a very interesting place for research and political thought but also and most crucially familiarised myself with women's organising histories of the past and of today. A member of ECP who attended the *Honk!* workshops introduced me to Selma James in person, who in turn introduced me to the *International Wages for Houseworks Campaign* and later on Silvia Federici. Federici's writings (radical autonomist feminist tradition). Federici informed a lot of my thinking at the time around 'production of subjectivity' and ways of escaping the academic enclosure of knowledge.²² Collective reproduction around food, housing and care, the politics of care, militant love and the idea of a non homogenous community of 'not so like-minded people' founding a commons, in fact informs the basis of much contemporary curatorial research/ avant-garde practices of today. And there couldn't have been a better environment for me to learn all this in practice, but the community of women supporting ECP and *Crossroads Women Centre*.

Even though in practice I totally support *Wages for Housework*, and the claim for women's unpaid labour to be recognised, however, at the same time from a purely theoretical perspective, and in conjunction with my argument in the main-body of my thesis text, it is perhaps important to acknowledge here that at least theoretically, wage relationships do not

21 The text most relevant perhaps here is 'Marx and Feminism' (1983), which was delivered as a lecture during the centenary of Marx's death and is a clear engagement with sections from Capital mentioned in my main thesis argument on subsumption, highlighting Marx's own contribution to James's 'unwaged' women analysis. For more on this see:

Selma James, *Sex, Race, Class*, 2010, as found at: <https://caringlabor.files.wordpress.com/2010/11/james-sexraceclass-read.pdf>, (accessed 26.07.2016).

22 Silvia Federici, 'Feminism and the Politics of the Common in an Era of Primitive Accumulation', *The Commoner*, 2011, as found at: <http://www.commoner.org.uk/?p=113>, (accessed 12.01.2014).

save us from, but in fact establish the subjugation of our labour to capitalism.²³ The actual function of capital as such, in fact, as Marx tells us, is the production of surplus value; which is nothing but surplus labour, the appropriation of unpaid labour in the course of the actual process of production. This labour manifests or better objectifies itself as surplus value.²⁴ No Marxist would deny that housework and reproductive work are functional and necessary for the whole process of capital's self-valorisation. The Wages for Housework argument however is based on the claim that housework is a real expenditure of abstract labour time, and a real creator of value, and thus can be quantified and claimed for.

This goes back to my first steps of thinking as a researcher, and my discovery of Marx's understanding of two quite different natures within labour. Labour as a quantity (eg, numbers of hours worked) that is for sale and comes at a price. And labour as a value-creating activity that can never be quantified and is therefore impossible to commodify. That is what distinguishes human labour from other productive inputs of the culture industry, for example, its twin, contradictory, nature, and that's exactly the unsubsumable part that we want to retain in any attempt to organise a relative kind of autonomy altogether. Any coerced activity can be functional to the valorisation of capital of course, but this does not mean that it is abstract labour and produces value. In that case, any alienated, coerced and boundless work amounts to an expenditure of abstract labour and thus creates value for capital.

Besides, categorising work as productive and unproductive might in fact become a politically dangerous thing to do, as we don't really need every proletarian to be producing value for capital (through wages) and we don't want housework to assume the character of any other waged work, i.e. factory. Isn't that the very reason why we have coercion, boredom and misery in the first place (i.e. alienation)? The difference between theory and practice exemplified here in my struggle to alleviate the differences from the knowledge I had amassed from my reading of Marx

23 It is important to clarify here however that when capital first determines the labour process as its own, it does so by formally subsuming it, only at the level of the social form of the relationship that constitutes it. This is an abstracted economic relation where buyers and sellers freely (out of their own free will) exchange their commodities as part of the process of augmentation of value, i.e. of capital. Unlike primitive relations of direct domination (feudal systems) where surplus value was extracted through slavery and violence thus, the fundamental basis of capitalist production on the contrary is that buyers and sellers of labour power enter this game out of their own free will. In a way thus capital buys the right to exert its command over labour's activity in the labour process and formally subsume it under capital. This is established generally through the implementation of wage relations.

24 Federici (who bases her analysis on Leopoldina Fortunati) claims that the expropriated unpaid labour that capitalism's primitive accumulation relies on (in order to perpetuate itself), is in fact women's unpaid labour.

Federici, *ibid.*

with the experience of attending to the urgent issues of the day, by practically engaging with social mobilisation movements that go beyond such abstract contradictions and towards the concrete politics of care. The importance of understanding these contradictions and the history that supports class struggles, of course, is the first step towards resistance to the value form. Nevertheless for those affected by the struggle there is no other solution but to be practically engaged in resilience and care. After all, as Federici reminds us, the commoning of our material means of life is a powerful mechanism to create mutual bonds and collective interests that go beyond relations of abstract solidarity that are often practiced in radical movements.²⁵

25 Deborah Sielert, 'Commons that Care: Feminist Interventions in the Construction of the Commons', *(Un)usual Business Reader*, p. 4.

New Terms: Radical Education Workshops

Conceptualising, Organising, Facilitating Platform, Workshops, Blog, Public Events.
January 2014–November 2015
Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London

When I first joined the ICA's Student Forum I thought it would be a great opportunity for me to meet students from a variety of colleges around the UK, people from different education levels, in order to share our frustrations, expand our perspectives and engage actively in debates around 'student' issues. At the time, my academic research position brought me together with lots of philosophy students, which on the one hand expanded my theoretical perspectives, of course, but at the same time did not allow for discussions around experimentation, dialogue and empirical knowledge methodologies. I thus felt the need to reconnect with cultural workers and art practitioners again.

I soon realised however, that the Student Forum did not really accommodate for such discussions in the first place. The idea behind the ICA's Student Forum in fact, was for us students to engage with the institution's existing curatorial programme, in order to expand and promote it. Of course, this platform allowed for young artists and curators to experiment with their own approach, showing work in a prestigious space like the ICA, perhaps for the first time. But this was always made to fit the ICA's always already existing agenda. Not to mention how all of this was on voluntary basis, despite the long-term commitment and high-end final production of some of these initiatives. The responses were very open and experimental, with students provoking the very boundaries of what artistic and curatorial practices could be, but at the same time, it also felt as a rather limited individual self-promoting kind of process (what Mick Wilson refers to as 'reputational economies').²⁶ I was initially thus very skeptical as to the motivation behind students curatorial initiatives, but also the ways in which the ICA was subsuming the value of our participation and 'learning outcomes' into an altogether different kind of knowledge economy. Is there any way one could use this structure with an orientation towards change? I wondered.

26 Mick Wilson, 'Curatorial Moments and Discursive Turns' in Paul O'Neill (ed.), *Curating Subjects*, Amsterdam, Open Editions/ de Appel, 2007, p. 215.

New Terms: Radical Education Workshop no 1, January 2014

As a result of this introspection, I decided to address my skepticism to the group as a whole. At the time we were being briefed about the upcoming *New Contemporaries* exhibition, showcasing work of young fine arts graduates from all around the UK. Did other people feel there is a lack of space and time in our educational and institutional structures for us to get together and talk about what frustrates us? Do people even feel frustrated? What kind of issues are there in the first place in being a student today? Would this be a good time to initiate these discussions, taking into account the vast numbers of students that will be visiting these galleries' spaces in the next six months, but also the cuts in the arts more generally?

After this initial discussion, two more student forum members decided to join me in forming *New Terms*, a smaller group within the bigger student forum group that wanted to work collaboratively and engage with issues around education. The first thing we did, was to organise a participatory workshop-based public event addressing 'learning' and 'teaching' in the wider sense, whilst also acknowledging the specifics of arts pedagogy. This initial workshop's primary aim was to bring primary, secondary and higher educationalists together in dialogue with students and practitioners, as well as with guests from 'alternative' and 'radical' education collectives around London to discuss the urgent issues of the day. We were clear that although a firm conclusion was not necessarily to be arrived at, the ultimate aim at the time was to propose a new set of questions surrounding arts education in response to the ever-changing political and social climate. Participants had the opportunity to gather around questions of interest, meet each other and contribute to group discussions, which were recorded and shared at the end of the day. For an indication of the questions circulating, please see opposite page:

Workshop structure:

A / INTRODUCTION: Introducing themes and questions.

B / COLLECTIVE INVESTIGATION: Analysis of 'themes' of investigation by joining a group from the 3 below. People are free to move between groups, and will be provided with paper rolls and pens to make notes. (30 mins/45 mins) [Come back together as a group]

C / ANALYSIS / ACTION: What's next?

Thematic investigations:

GROUP 1

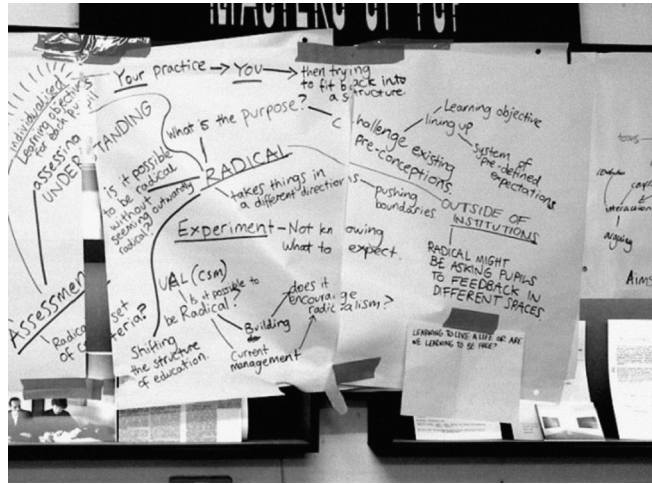
- What does it mean to put a monetary value on education?
- How has the increase in fees affected the arts?
- How has this affected...
 - Arts education (schools and universities, curriculum, structures that support it)
 - The production and display of "contemporary" art

GROUP 2

- What does it mean to experiment for experiment's sake?
- Is it possible to be radical within an institutional setting?
- How can one be 'radical' today?
- Is it possible to be conventional within a radical setting?
- Where does the 'radical' potential reside here?

GROUP 3

- What does it mean to work within a group?
- What experience do you have of working within a group?
- What experience do you have of working independently?
- What is the difference between learning from each other and learning from a teacher?
- What is the role of structure both inside and outside the institution?
- Do you need the structure or is it the motivation that holds a group together?



Notes from first *New Terms Workshop*, ICA, 2014.

The first group discussed the importance of accessibility to and independence of arts education in a climate of soaring higher education fees. The imposed monetisation of the value of arts education raising questions about the autonomy of artistic knowledge production and its mediation through the value form. Some student union representatives reported back from recent student occupations at UCL's Slade and Cooper Union NYC, illustrating the urgency to appeal rising higher education costs. There was a strong consensus that the precarious and entrepreneurial character of work most artists and curators are exposed to after graduation puts them at strong disadvantage compared to peers graduating from non-arts subjects, or even artists and curators of previous generations. The group concluded the discussion by raising concerns about the general lack of spaces for public debate on arts education, as well as demanding a more inclusive approach to higher education.



Notes from first *New Terms Workshop*, ICA, 2014.

The second group co-investigated the concept of experimenting for experiment's sake. Within this group the focus was on discussing whether it is at all possible to be 'radical' or 'experimental' within the profit-driven structures of neoliberal institutions. For this group the term 'radical' was not only found outside the 'status quo' but in fact described a process of pushing boundaries both inside and outside of institutions, by challenging existing pre-occupations and 'learning objectives' but also learning from members of established 'radical' communities themselves (united in action).



Notes from first *New Terms Workshop*, ICA, 2014.

The third group of investigators engaged in a heated conversation around the question of group work. Here the aim was to critically engage with the possibilities of collaborative practices as facilitators of creative knowledge exchanges. Based on the principle of participation, many argued that collaborative work opens up the discussion to voices not normally heard in institutions. While others argued that within higher education frameworks, top-down hierarchical management, administration control and assessment can become a problem in collecting knowledge, co-developing curricula and learning from each other. The group argued that existing criteria do not recognise the value of a free and open-ended creative process, as these all eventually focus on the final product. Collaborative practices however, if they are to result in alternative and 'authentic' knowledge need a lot more flexible and horizontal structures.

The organising of this first co-investigation event was very successful both with regards to numbers and enthusiasm, but also with regards to people's desire to commit to a long-term collaborative investigation. The original plan in fact was that at the end of the three smaller investigations, I would bring together these three groups, inviting everyone to analyse

with me our ‘findings’ as our notes were mounted on the walls, summing up the ‘learning process’ by finding resonances between the groups ‘key words’. The atmosphere in the room however was very intense and it was obvious to me as a facilitator that any such attempt would in fact ignore or even undermine the participants’ own desires to be critical agents. Instead of ‘facilitating’ a consensual kind of subsumption of their surplus thus, I decided to attend to the group’s frustrated call for a further meeting. We thus began to meet once a month for a year after that, utilising the gallery’s studio as a space for further debate and organising, but also most importantly perhaps, just simply as a space for us to meet, share our thoughts, roles, positions, tasks and desires.

Within the process of trying to define ourselves as a group, we tried to transverse the different paths of action (engagement with experience and history), research (soundness of thought and the growth of knowledge) and participation (life in society and democracy): by meeting other groups, collaborating with different collectives, attending public events together, sharing experiences, but also attempting to make a video (on the importance of skills-based learning), writing a manifesto, reading and sharing references, and researching case studies (like the legendary Hornsey College of Art’s sit-in (1969) and its resonances today).²⁷

As our discussions moved deeper into our understanding between knowledge production and knowledge economisation, we also started considering how artistic knowledge is made subject to free trade by ‘research’ branding. We discussed a lot about the phenomenon of practice-base PhDs and by implication started thinking critically about the increasing ‘subsumption’ of artistic knowledge as new and original information to be used by culture and creative industry. The role of the curator was not scrutinised enough perhaps here, as many of the *New Terms* members seemed to distance themselves from this particular function of cultural workers in the first place, preferring to focus on their role as artists or educators instead. For my own personal research journey however this was, of course, a great opportunity to test ideas out in a reflective manner, amongst my peers, within the very milieu of action. I was thus particularly pleased to hear other members of the *New Terms* platform, imagining a ‘reclaiming’ of the ICA as a space for public debate and action, some even calling for an occupation of the institution itself!

27 see ‘Hornsey Case Study’ that follows.

New Terms: Radical Education Workshops Final Event

After almost a year of working together as a group, we eventually decided to open out again to the wider 'education' community, by organising a one-day co-researching marathon, as a public event, hosted by the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), in November 2014. *New Terms* by then consisted of different people at different times, from students, artists, educators (primary, secondary, higher and alternative education), curators, art therapists, researchers, as well as people involved with direct action groups, community organising and activism. Through this bigger and more ambitious public event we hoped to further expand our relations and potential collaborations with those committed to working transversally across public institutions, social movements and artistic strategies. But also to allow for new curiosities to come in through members of the public who are not necessarily invested in education or the arts but still feel the need to voice their opinion. We thus invited several groups and individuals to take part with an open call. After a series of meetings, and with a very open attitude to all proposals that came through, we finally managed to collectively decide on the following programme (see next page).²⁸

28 Also see a blog I kept at the time documenting *New Terms: Radical Education Workshops*: <https://newterms.wordpress.com/page/5/>.

New Terms Radical Education

Workshops 29-11-2014

How do we organise? — Can a socially engaging art 'project' become a permanent organisation for social justice? — What is the matter of urgency for you? — How can we reform arts education so it can be autonomous from the current commercial higher education agenda? — How important are technical and aesthetic skills in arts education today? — Where/how can we create (metaphoric?) dinner tables which deploy the techniques of more radical forms of education, in order to enable more direct forms of democracy? — Are children without a family, and without a table, also without democracy? — Anything can be art. Do we define art by what it is not? Should we ask rather, When is Art? — How can we set up relational pedagogical praxis through dynamic, trans-discursive dialogue? — Is the activity we have been engaged in, in this interactive workshop art? If so, when? — Who or what else determines certain subjects in culture as important and why? — How does art education influence subjects and figures we perceive to be of cultural value? — How do these constructed values affect our positionings within race, gender and class struggles? — Where have you felt excluded or unwelcome? — How can art activism disengage from museums and galleries? — How do we share knowledge without language limitations?

Welcome

After almost a year of working together as a group we decided to open out again to the wider education community by organising this public event.

Our group has consisted of different people at different times, from students, artists, educators (primary, secondary, higher and alternative education), curators, art therapists and researchers, as well as people involved with direct action groups, community organising and activism.

We first got together after a meeting titled *New Terms: Radical Education Workshops*, organised by three ICA student forum members who wanted to do something that attended to the growing frustrations they and their friends were having regarding the state of the education system today. This first meeting involved group-based collaborative investigations. The themes explored at the time, included the effects of the monetisation of education and fees increases on arts education, and also by extension the effects on the way we produce and curate 'contemporary' art. It also included questions like the value of experimenting for experiment's sake, the possibilities of being 'radical' within institutional settings (and/or outside), and the value of working with groups and already established collectives/ communities.

New Terms have been meeting once a month utilising the ICA gallery's studio as a space for debate, production of discourse, films, and lots of notes, but also most often, just simply as a space for us to meet, share our thoughts, roles, positions, tasks and desires.

Within the process of trying to define ourselves as a group we have tried to transverse the different paths of action (engagement with experience and history), research and participation (life in society and democracy). We have done this by meeting other groups, being part of different collectives, attending public events together, sharing experiences, but also attempting to make a video (on the importance of skills-based learning), writing a manifesto, reading and sharing references, and researching case studies, for instance exploring the legendary Hornsey College of Art's sit-in (1969) and its resonances today.

We have discussed in-depth everyday translations of practices of neoliberalism within learning situations, different standardisation techniques, fees, loans and systemic dependencies, but also, and more specifically to arts education, themes like the role of theory, research, information technology, art history, collectivity, autonomy and precarity, manifestly bound with our insistence to position ourselves within the current transitions in education systems.

JOIN IN

We want to open up some initial results of our on-going research for public debate. But we also hope this public event will allow us to further expand our relations and potential collaborations with those committed to working transversally across public institutions, social movements and artistic strategies. We also endeavour to allow for new curiosities to come in through members of the public who are not necessarily invested in education or the arts but still feel the need to voice their opinion.

We invite you to visit our blog for further details of our investigations and points of reference: newterms.wordpress.com

New Terms would like to thank: Mark Banks, Tim Ivison, Sophie Priestly, Moraene Roberts and Hanna Blumhardt from ADT Fourth World, Boo Wallin, Deborah Herring, the ICA and all the members of the wider *New Terms* group.

New Terms is an open group. If you are interested in joining our collective investigations, see more information at: newterms.wordpress.com *New Terms* was initiated by Anna Kontopoulou, as part of the ICA's Student Forum.

Programme

— WHERE DOES ARTS EDUCATION HAPPEN ? 12.00 – 13.30 > Studio

This session will critically engage with current debates in arts education, while ensuring that a historical perspective remains a stimulus for current critical investigation into this highly debated topic.

The discussion will focus on different spaces and socio-cultural contexts in which arts education in the UK was and is currently embedded. We will focus on arts education in relation to social class, artistic autonomy and the emergence of different pedagogic spaces.

This will allow for a contextual debate on the value, structure and philosophy of arts education, which leads to further discussion on its relevance within a creative industries agenda that favours commercial practices rather than strong artistic positions.

New perspectives for the “survival” of art schools and independent pedagogic initiatives will be explored, which includes questioning existing institutional structures, funding systems and professional development trajectories.

Speakers:

Mark Banks (University of Leicester)
The Dance Goes on Forever? Class, Art Schools and the Myth of Mobility.

Tim Ivison (London Consortium)
Contestations: Learning from Critical Experiments in Education.

Facilitator: Silvie Jacobi

— THE DEMOCRATIC TABLE 13.30 – 14.30 Studio

Children learn to enact democracy by sitting down to a family meal, night after night. The collective table is a means of survival, a form of vulnerable existence, and an instantiation of community. The Democratic Table performatively stages a participatory learning experience—food preparation, eating, and conversing—to investigate how shared culinary encounters can create alternative (radical?) spaces for affective education.

Facilitator: Jessica Adams

— WHEN IS ART ? 14.30 – 16.00 > Studio

Crafting a trans-discursive response: this dynamic, participatory workshop opens an (inter)space for dialogue in response to the question, When is Art?

In a play environment, participants collage post-consumer waste (the spillage of collective cultural identity) into ubiquitous ‘like’ symbols, considering art as a way of looking at the world. Summarising their (shared) responses to indicate whether they believe they are currently engaged in art, a large wall ‘results chart’ of ‘like’ symbols acts as Visual Document to this relational pedagogical praxis, whilst inviting its own appropriation as art, by questioning institutional art validation within this very context.

Facilitator: Craig Schorn

— **CUTTING UP ARTS EDUCATION**
14.30–16.00 > Studio

Avenues of questioning such as William S Burroughs cut-up techniques, collage and other anti-narrative strategies to deconstruct institutional favouritisms are explored, by capitalising on silenced conscious and unconscious experiences and bringing these to the forefront of our enquiry. We ask: can radically-intentioned art be carried out in a way that doesn't lose its radical potential by being simply co-opted once it reaches the attention of dominant institutions? How close are artists allowed to hold a mirror to privilege?

Facilitators:

Himarni Moonasinghe & Anni Movsisyan

— **HUMAN LIBRARY**
15.30–17.00 “the snug” (café lounge)

The New Terms ‘Human Library’ provides an opportunity to share radical education experiences and opinions, by means of private conversations which take place in a safe and comfortable environment.

Individuals identify themselves as human ‘books’ with a specific ‘title’, in order to be ‘read’ by a member of the public. For example, Disgruntled Art Teacher might wish to discuss aspects of their work in the classroom. Disgruntled Student, likewise.

These ‘books’ might be members of the group, or other interested participants.

Facilitator: Mark Smith

— **JESSICA ADAMS**

is an artist and practice-based critical researcher interested in localised processes of collective decision-making and self-education. She is particularly interested in how food can be used to study an intersection of claims and concerns in a given locale. Recent projects include Free Tesco Chocolate Sundae Cupcakes, Barbican's Ram Place Fashion Market (2014), A Counter-Cartography of Marseille/ AteCCaReM, MuCEM - the Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations, Marseille, France (2013), and Come Dine with Me Romford, the Romford Contemporary Arts Programme (2013).

— **SILVIE JACOBI**

graduated from a Fine Art degree at Wimbledon College of Art in 2012, and has since then pursued a geography degree at King's College London, looking in particular at creative cities and the role of artists in gentrification. Currently she is developing her PhD research, which is jointly supervised by King's and Humboldt University Berlin. Born in Germany and educated in the UK, this brings together her critical intercultural thinking. She is interested in the notion of the traditional art school as a public cultural space and incubator for locally embedded cultural knowledge and network.

— **ANNA KONTOPOULOU**

is a curator, organiser and PhD candidate, London Graduate School, Kingston University. She holds an MA in Aural and Visual Cultures and a BA in History of Art, Goldsmiths, University of London. Her current interests include; the value form of participation within social practices, autonomous art's relationship to culture industry, 'curation' of autonomy and art's subsumption into university discourse. Kontopoulou's practice involves experimenting with different modes of knowledge formation, organising collective sound investigations and participatory action-research groups.

— **HIMARNI MOONASINGHE**

has been investigating how mediums such as digital collage and gif art can circulate 'radical', queer-feminist perspectives in image based online communities, through a youth focused workshop and blog platform. She also has a portraiture based practice and is currently a neuroscience undergraduate, interested in the similarities and differences between artistic and scientific modes of enquiry.

— **ANNI MOVSISYAN**

identifies as a woman artist of colour, occasional writer and activist interested in radical pedagogies and multiple struggles.

— **CRAIG SCHORN**

is an multi-media artist/activist confronting systems that construct value, how they exclude to perpetrate artificial truths, and the effect this aesthetico-political dynamic has on the construction of the self. He is currently completing a Fine Art Masters at Middlesex University, London.

— **MARK SMITH**

is an artist and teacher. He works collaboratively with art workers, students and educators from around the world. Mark's research is engaged with questioning the historical understanding of art, design and media education by utilising critical pedagogy theory to facilitate new understandings of the placement of contemporary artist canons and art practices within education. Mark is currently a funded PhD candidate at Loughborough University. He has also received funding from the Higher Education Academy, the Arts Council, the Singaporean Ministry of Education. Recent exhibitions include: *me*, a collaborative video installation, Pedestrian Gallery, Leicester (2012); *me, me, me*, a single channel elicited video work screened at the Disposable Film Festival, London (2012), *1.2.3*, a video ethnodrama triptych, Institute of Education, London (2010).



'Cutting up Arts Education', *New Terms*, ICA, 2014



'The Democratic Table', *New Terms*, ICA, 2014

New Terms Case Study: Hornsey College of Art, 1968/1969

One of the ways in which *New Terms* tried to engage historically with our thematic co-investigation on the state of arts education today was by studying the legendary student occupation of Hornsey College of Art, with a close reading of the *Hornsey Affair* (1969), written by the students and staff of Hornsey College of Art.²⁹ Hornsey served here as an insightful case study for our understanding of the contemporary issues at hand, and our attempts to connect these with Hornsey's students revolutionary demands. In our re-working of the *Hornsey Affair*, we created four manifesto-like posters that served as scores for future compositions. These work-in-progress posters were then used as an open 'score' for our public event. From there, I took them to the *State of Education* conference to be re-worked by the Radical Education Forum members and the Implicated Theatre group. Please see below *New Terms* posters as inspired by the *Hornsey Affair* (1969):

I. Elimination of Entrance Qualifications

Elimination of G.C.E. exams [...] only such sweeping reforms can solve the problems of entry and beginning a higher education in art and design. In Hornsey language, this was described as the replacement of the old 'linear' (specialized) structure by a new 'network' (open, non-specialized) structure.

II. Role of Theory/ Academic Studies

(A) There is no reason why a person intending to study art or design should be particularly fluent with the pen. Indeed, there is evidence that there is a negative relationship between ability in school subjects like English, languages, physics, chemistry and biology, and ability in art. In this case, G.C.E. debarbs a proportion of the most gifted students.

(B) The function of art history should not be to provide examinable material knowledge. It should inform and permeate studies in art and design. Art history as well as complementary studies should be available throughout the course both formally and informally, but not compulsory.

29 *Hornsey Affair*, written by the students and staff of Hornsey College of Art, London, Penguin, 1969.

III. Elimination of Distinction Between Vocational—Diploma Courses

(A) Was the idea to integrate art and design training more effectively into the life of our modern, capitalist society? Or to produce people and things good by some other criteria, things good in themselves regardless of trends and commercial needs?

(B) We want to create the culture and to be educated for this purpose, not be a consequence of its demands.

IV. The Present Apathy in the Schools

(A) A person, who designs, should be a person who is capable of having meaningful relationships; a person with imagination; a person with insight into and an understanding of the world around him and an ability to communicate.

(B) This individual should have these qualities first, and be a designer (or anything else) second.

(C) The fact that he may direct himself and his capabilities within a particular limited context (i.e. design) should be purely incidental.

(D) However, if this 'designer' does not have these qualities, he will not be able to relate what he produces to his social environment and hence to himself.

V. Implementation of a Network Structure to Education

(A) A 'network' organization of studies is a more open arrangement of courses which permits easier movement from one activity to another, and allows either a broader educational development or a more intensive specialization, according to individual needs at any given time [...] the logical unit of the network system is not the class, but the creative group, embracing both students and staff in a common project. Project work of course exists already, but as the exception rather than the rule.

(B) A 'network' system will give us this versatile person, capable of change, whereas the present linear system will not. The designer sewn up in a particular technology will not be able to make the jump and will be eliminated. The acquisition of particular skills is very important for learning how to transcend them.

VI. Research

We regard it as an absolutely basic that research should be an organic part of art and design education. No system devoted to the fostering of creativity can function properly unless original work and thought are constantly going on within it, unless it remains on an opening frontier of development. [...] it must be the critical self-consciousness of the system continuing permanently the work started here in the last weeks. Nothing condemns the old régime more radically than the minor, precarious part research played in it. It is intolerable that research should be seen as a luxury, or a rare privilege.

VII. Working as a Group

One of the most potent motivators of student interest is the cohesive group, the members of which are familiar with each other, and who work over a considerable length of time on the same or similar projects'.

VIII. Assessment

(A) It is more productive to use assessment as a means of feeding back information to a student (in order that he may more efficiently improve his performance) than to use it as a form of evaluation from which predictions of doubtful validity can be made'.

(B) Education should be role and not goal oriented. There should be a democratic transformation of education to the point where 'lecturers' and 'students' become partners engaged on the same task (as opposed to the authoritarian models still in use: lecturer as ruler, pupil as subject; lecturer as priest, student as acolyte).

(C) We believe that the learning process only takes place where the student is able to assess the relevance and context of the subject.

IX. Against the Absurd Schizophrenia of:

Separation of the intellect from the creative imagination and the feelings, in the curriculum; separation between courses along different lines of study; separation of potential talent from the conditions of its fulfillment; and of one class of students from another; and lastly, separation of teachers from students, and of students from one another in this ridiculous climate of frustration.

The State of Education 2014: Conference on Radical and Autonomous Education

Research, Organising, Facilitating the Arts Education Programme.
February 2014
Radical Education Forum (RadEd)/ Oxford House, London

For this conference on Radical Education and after a series of ‘research’ and ‘planning’ meetings together with other members of the Radical Education Forum, we decided to organise a session titled: ‘Another Roadmap for Arts Education: Glossary of Conflicted Terms’. Here we used forum theatre exercises (Augusto Boal) to re-work the posters from the Hornsey affair (as originally researched with the team of participants from *New Terms: Radical Education Workshops*), and in order to explore terms like: ‘cultural exchange’, ‘creative workforce’, ‘arts curriculum’, ‘radical education’, etc. which have become synonymous for a rigid, tokenistic, yet empty tick-boxing exercise around Arts Education (neoliberal cultural policies). By unpicking these terms we wanted to foster a conversation that looked at what actually is important to us as arts education practitioners, teachers, students and organisers. Amongst the questions that were discussed were:

What is education for? - What are the effects of information technology in education? - How can we connect with struggles for social justice, near and far? - Vocational education: Learning to labour or learning a craft? - What is the basis of an alternative critical ethical practice in teaching? - What is the way forward for anti-sexist education today? - What is the relationship between working in alternative contexts while engaging in mainstream sector struggles? - The personal, the political and the professional: how can we be ‘out’, in the LGBTQ sense and beyond? - Should we use Gove free schools in order to create alternative schools? - Why can’t school be a place where I can be happy? Or can it? - How to get out of behaviour management in the classroom? - How to resist and sabotage management techniques? - How can we politicise the curriculum? Does content matter? - What does it mean to be a radical teacher now? - How much autonomy can we give children of different ages? Does authority = authoritarian? - Practice exchange table: share an exercise or game that works well! - What might Ethical Education mean as a form of educational practice? (please see enclosed relevant documentation).³⁰

30 See *State of Education Conference* website here: <https://stateofeducation2014.wordpress.com/page/2/>

III. Elimination of Distinction Between Vocational— Diploma Courses

(A) Was the idea to integrate art and design training more effectively into the life of our modern, capitalist society? Or to produce people and things good by some other criteria, things good in themselves regardless of trends and commercial needs?

(B) We want to create the culture and to be educated for this purpose, not be a consequence of its demands.

IV. The Present Apathy in the Schools

(A) A person, who designs, should be a person who is capable of having meaningful relationships; a person with imagination; a person with insight into and an understanding of the world around him and an ability to communicate.

(B) This individual should have these qualities first, and be a designer (or anything else) second.

(C) The fact that he may direct himself and his capabilities within a particular limited context (i.e. design) should be purely incidental.

(D) However, if this 'designer' does not have these qualities, he will not be able to relate what he produces to his social environment and hence to himself.

- CAN ART SHOULD BE THE ONES THAT CREATE THE CULTURAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE?
- CAN YOU INVENT WHAT YOUR JOB MIGHT LOOK LIKE?
- YOU ARE NOT A LOAN!
- INTERDISCIPLINARY - CAN WE ACCESS OTHER DEPARTMENTS SPACES FOR PEOPLE TO MOVE FREELY SPACES FOR PEOPLE TO TALK - MEET
- ARE THE ARTS PROVIDING FOR A MORE EXPERIMENTAL SPACE?
- THE QUESTION OF ACCESS
- OBEYIENT WORKER ≠ WELL-ROUNDED PEOPLE
- LEARNING - KNOWLEDGE - INFORMATION - JOB!
- IS UNIVERSITY INTEGRATED INTO SOCIETY?

ALIENATION
COMMODIFICATION - FEELING - AUTONOMY
BEING ABLE TO MAKE YOUR OWN CHOICE
ACCORDING TO YOUR OWN NEED!

V. Implementation of a Network Structure to Education

(A) A 'network' organization of studies is a more open arrangement of courses which permits easier movement from one activity to another, and allows either a broader educational development or a more intensive specialization, according to individual needs at any given time [...] the logical unit of the network system is not the class, but the creative group, embracing both students and staff in a common project. Project work of course exists already, but as the exception rather than the rule.

(B) A 'network' system will give us this versatile person, capable of change, whereas the present linear system will not. The designer sewn up in a particular technology will not be able to make the jump and will be eliminated. The acquisition of particular skills is very important for learning how to transcend them.

VI. Research

We regard it as an absolutely basic that research should be an organic part of art and design education. No system devoted to the fostering of creativity can function properly unless original work and thought are constantly going on within it, unless it remains on an opening frontier of development. [...] it must be the critical self-consciousness of the system continuing permanently the work started here in the last weeks. Nothing condemns the old régime more radically than the minor, precarious part research played in it. It is intolerable that research should be seen as a luxury, or a rare privilege.

- WORKING WITH OTHER PEOPLE
- WHY?
- WHAT IF BEING PART OF A COLLECTIVE WAS A CONDITION FOR ACCESS TO UNIVERSITY?
- SPACE IS RESTRICTIVE
- COLLECTIVITY
- COLLABORATION
- COMMUNITY ORGANIZING
- WHO ARE WE? WHAT DO WE SHARE?
- THE DESIRE OF BEING/COMING TOGETHER.
- IS THE STRUCTURE OR THE MOTIVE THAT KEEPS US TOGETHER?
- DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION.
- INCLUDE - EXCLUSIVE.
- LEARNING FROM OTHER PEOPLE
- PATRONISING - DIDACTIC
- VERTICAL - HORIZONTAL DEMOCRATIZATION OF CULTURE
- DIALOGUE
- WHAT COMMUNITY ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
- ARTISTS USED FOR REGENERATION
- CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS - CAN IT BE TAUGHT?
- HOW DO YOU TEACH CRITICALITY
- CONFLICT - CONSENSUS - RAPTURE

Hornsey Posters reworked, *State of Education Conference*, 2014.



Arts Education, *State of Education Conference*, 2013.

Case study: On Hornsey Today

March 2014, New Terms, ICA, London

In view of the ICA's symposium *Just What Is It That Makes Today's Art Schools So Different, So Appealing?* (March 2014) and the organisers' attempt to situate today's art schools within the context of historical self-organised legacy, I was asked by the ICA to look back at the *Hornsey Affair* in order to interrogate its effects on the contemporary context of art and design education, and as a kind of self-reflexive process on my work with *New Terms*.

EDUCATION. LEARNING. EXPERIENCE.

'On May 28, 1968, the students and some members of staff of Hornsey College of Art, North London, took control of their college. It was a first step in a brave, inspiring, but short-lived experiment in communal education [...] For six weeks they reasserted in practice the age-old ideal of the university as a community of learning. That this assertion had to be achieved by a revolutionary act is a bitter comment on our current attitudes towards education', wrote the students and staff of Horney College of Art, forty five years ago, whilst resonating contemporary debates on arts education and the current lack of democratic experience altogether.³¹ The *Hornsey Affair* is a rare collection of demands, manifestos and documents like this, written by Hornsey students themselves during those six weeks of their legendary sit-in, nowadays viewed as a notable revolutionary moment in UK's art school education. Alongside reflections on the physical fragmentation of the college to high and low art departments, the class barrier as a condition of their alienation, or the division of education to labour oriented or not (vocational or Diploma of Art & Design), the student-occupiers also recounted some inspiring stories around the sit-in's 'radical' organisation structures, the role of 'talking' as a medium of agency, for example, or the teach-in as a life-changing learning experience altogether.

In this context, and in view of contemporary debates around art education, the story of Hornsey College of Art and its May '68 occupation,

31 Back cover of *Hornsey Affair*, written by the students and staff of Hornsey College of Art, London, Penguin, 1969.

is attracting a lot of attention lately, especially within art discourse, as a paradigmatic moment in 'radical' education history.³² A moment we should look back to, and admire as a unique instant of radical change within art school revolutionary history. Most of these accounts are contextualised within a backward looking, if not nostalgic form of 'curating', which unavoidably introduces an academic historicist approach to this transitional period altogether, eventually managing to safeguard a distance from today's students and their demands, rendering their resonances inaudible, if not irrelevant altogether.³³

Considering these arguments in today's increasingly marketised higher education climate and the institutionalised precarity that follows, like the decrease in job security, or even recent phenomena like the rise of mental health problems amongst academic researchers, it might perhaps be more fruitful to look at this manifesto-like book as a case study for examining not only the specificities of those students' particular demands for reform, in relationship to the political and economic changes going on at the time, but also the effects and consequences of these changes to today's situation. My contention here being that many (not all) of these demands have already been 'won', not necessarily in the way the students of '68 might have liked or anticipated, and that those of us in the arts education sector today are already perhaps experiencing the contradictory effects and consequences of that 'victory'.

THE TYRANNY OF CONTEXT

No system devoted to the fostering of creativity can function properly unless original work and thought are constantly going on within it, unless it remains on an opening frontier of development.³⁴

Back in 1968, the students of Hornsey demanded the implementation of research as an integral part of art and design education, arguing for a learning process where the student is able to assess the relevance and

32 Lisa Tickner, *Hornsey 1968: The Art School Revolution*, London, Frances Lincoln Ltd, 2008.

33 This pseudo-radicalism and backward looking nostalgia to the radical movements of the 1960s and 1970s is by now a trend amongst young contemporaries. See for example Marta Kuzma's account of 'Populism', an exhibition curated by Lars Bang Larsen in her article, 'Art in the Age of Political Reproduction'.

Marta Kuzma, 'Art in the Age of its Political Reproduction', *Radical Philosophy*, no.132, July/August 2005, pp. 54–6.

34 *Hornsey Affair*, written by the students and staff of Hornsey College of Art, London, Penguin, 1969.

context of the subject of their study. They envisioned education as role and not goal oriented, and a democratic transformation of the educational system to the point where ‘lecturers’ and ‘students’ become partners engaged on the same task. They wrote: ‘One of the most potent motivators of student interest is the cohesive group, the members of which are familiar with each other, and who work over a considerable length of time on the same or similar projects’.³⁵ Upon first look at these demands and their insistence against hierarchical structures involved within linear education structures, as well as the consequent separation of one class of students from another, or even the separation of teachers from students, one will soon recognise similar frustrations going on today. A separation of potential talent from its conditions of fulfilment is exactly one of the arguments against the recent increase in fees for example or the whole argument against monetisation and privatisation of education and the class barrier this might involve. The lack of long-term investments in group work and the individualistic career-like orientation an artist-entrepreneur must pursue instead.

Before mythologising this argument in terms of class struggle history however, and even though the impetus for revisiting these issues today, for the purposes of this paper, does originate from a genuine desire to connect such past struggles with today’s one, it is important that we try to unravel the contradictions these demands produce today, where the conditions of such democratic and ‘radical’ production have already been at least formally subsumed into the economy of consumption of the ‘new’, broadly defined by art school ‘cool’ and the cultural logic of late Capital. Where autonomous artistic knowledge production and commodification are no longer in an external relation of appropriation, but have increasingly become internalised to a more integrated system of ‘cultural economy’.

And where research itself has nowadays become art’s primary way of facilitating its own integration and by extension its own subsumption into university discourse, as a way of legitimising itself against fellow academic disciplines (and their sponsors), all bound with this new need for art to ‘curate’ and validate its social function altogether. With the merging of art schools into universities in the 1990s, and the consequent imposition of managerial ‘information control’, fixed academic systems of evaluation, and the introduction of computational technology for the administration of its own bureaucratisation, contemporary art eventually found new ways of

35 Ibid.

abstracting itself in the discourse of ‘new’ and ‘original’ knowledge for the university, through a series of artistic-practice-turned-research methodologies.

By extension, and in parallel with this ‘educational turn’ in the arts, one should also perhaps consider here the contradictions that arise with the simultaneous rise in the ‘curatorial’ as the ultimate interdisciplinary discipline that manages this, by now necessary, transference of artistic (non-) knowledge into information. Or perhaps by implication the effects this process of valorisation has on the ways we produce and display contemporary art altogether. Considering here the ‘relational turn’ in art, as a potential counter-action to this tendency towards academicisation, for example, all in an attempt to move from data back into the ‘living’. As a consequence of these almost cyclical process of transference and resentment, more problems begin to arise when art attempts to organise such ‘relational’ models for ‘democratic’ participation inside the conventions and hierarchical structures of existing institutional systems of valorisation, curation and exhibition, management and administrative control. It is not surprising then how art is now in crisis, as it eventually needs to play along and in fact curate its own translation into manageable information for the institution, university or gallery alike.

The appropriation of autonomous art by Culture Industry is not a new phenomenon, of course. The function of ‘legitimation’ via theory (nowadays followed by the research pathway) in fact, has always been a structural feature of art history, as well as its allied fields, art criticism, aesthetic philosophy, art practice, connoisseurship, the art market, museology, tourism, commodity fashion systems, and the heritage industry. Nowadays however taking that to a further legibility of the very ‘presentedness’ of presentation via the curatorial (the display of the display), where the artist’s skills and the curators abilities to make connections feed into each other, all part of the same signifying machinery that appears to be historically driven by the dominant, yet at the same time consists of a series of real antagonistic economies that do not necessarily find their way into that history altogether. The students of Hornsey however, prophetically warn us:

‘Was the idea to integrate art and design training more effectively into the life of our modern, capitalist society? Or to produce people and things good by some other criteria, things good in themselves regardless of trends and commercial needs?’ [...] We want to create the culture and to be educated for this purpose, not be a consequence of its demands’.³⁶

36 *Hornsey Affair*, written by the students and staff of Hornsey College of Art, London, Penguin, 1969, p. 129.

How does one teach art nowadays to begin with? And does this have anything to do with a collective experience? What if as a requirement for entrance into university (including art school) you had to be a member of some sort of collective? Would you be able to even imagine such an alternative today? If you could take control of your education, what is that you want from it? Does one even know what it is they want to know? I would thus like to end here with the question of criticality. It was towards the end of a recent symposium entitled ‘Art School: The Future for Theory’, and upon discussing the role theory plays within the process of art’s institutionalisation, when a member of the audience claimed that art itself can never be taught, since one cannot teach art, but only teach relationships.³⁷

After all, to be human, as the advocate of critical pedagogy and radical education Paulo Freire argues, is in fact to engage with others and with the world, as a being of relationships:

‘Men relate to their world in a critical way. They apprehend the objective data of their reality (as well as the ties that link one datum to another) through reflection—not by reflex, as do animals. And in that act of critical perception men discover their own temporality. Transcending a single dimension, they reach back to yesterday, recognise today, and come upon tomorrow’ writes Freire.³⁸ The dimensionality of time in fact, as Freire argues, is one of the fundamental discoveries in the history of human culture because ‘Men are not imprisoned within a permanent “today”; they emerge and become temporalised’.³⁹

In view of all of this and in order to avoid our potential imprisonment within the ‘contemporary’ context, and by extension, be able to develop a critical consciousness that can make connections with past struggles, recognise and relate to the contradictions embedded within the present and be able to imagine a way out, for the future to come, then perhaps one needs to be engaged in the production of knowledge that is in direct relation ‘with the struggles and pressures that emerge out of our ‘contemporaneity’ to begin with’.⁴⁰

37 In that same conversation philosopher Peter Osborne argued that art itself does not have a discourse, of its own, and quoted William’s ‘Philosophy is that which the history of philosophy is the history of...’, I would similarly suggest a paraphrasing along the same lines here, where in order to understand what constitutes art, and be able to teach it you, need to acknowledge that ‘Art is that which the history of art is the history of...’.

38 Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, London, Continuum, 1974/ 2008, p. 3.

39 Ibid.

40 For more on this see Irit Rogoff, ‘FREE’, e-flux, no. 14, March 2010, as found at <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/free/>, (accessed 10.06.2016).

To activate alternative pedagogic spaces that imagine a dialogue between organising and art, where we can relate to the world around us in a critical way, through an open-ended collaborative investigation of the terms and conditions of our own subject formation, with and through others. All bound with a belief in experimentation for experiment's sake, and an insistence on dialogue. As one of the Hornsey College of Art students wrote, in order to avoid the 'current apathy in schools' we need to produce:

a person that is capable of having meaningful relationships, a person with imagination and insight, and an understanding of the world around them, and an ability to communicate [...] For if this person does not have these qualities, he will not be able to relate what he produces to his social environment and hence to himself', and hence the apathy will continue.⁴¹

On A Side Note:

If the implementation of an emancipatory education requires critical agency and power and the students have none, how then is it possible to carry out the 'pedagogy of the oppressed' prior to emancipation, and without this always already getting subsumed into the master's desire to know? One aspect of the reply is to be found in the distinction between institutional curation, which can only be changed by an insistence on structural reform, and educational curatorial projects, which should be carried out with the students as co-researchers in the process of organising them. Curating educational initiatives that enunciate a dialogue between organising and art, participatory action research methodologies, organised listening and dialogical aesthetics.

This pedagogy has two stages: The participants unveil the world of contradiction and through the praxis commit themselves to its transformation. As participants change in the way they perceive the world, the reality of that world has already been transformed. In the second phase Freire argues:

41 *Hornsey Affair*, written by the students and staff of Hornsey College of Art, London, Penguin, 1969, p. 35.

This pedagogy ceases to belong to the established circle of oppressed (participants) and becomes a pedagogy of all people in the process of permanent liberation. Change through the expulsion of myths created and developed in the old order (which like spectres haunt the new structure emerging from the revolutionary transformation).⁴²

42 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, London, Continuum, 1968/ 2005, p. 54.

Democracy and Community Workshops

Research, Conceptualisation, Curation, Publication, Workshop Facilitation
March 2015–Today
TATE, London

After a series of experimentations with notions of participation, curation and dialogical aesthetics, I was very interested in curating a long-term educational initiative that would go beyond my familiar territory of the radical pedagogical spaces of London, and towards the wider education community. I was therefore interested in working with schools and teachers, testing out participatory action methodologies in more ‘hierarchical’ spaces, like the classroom or a museum. Is it possible to curate an open-ended educational project within the confines of fixed curriculums? What does it mean to take part in a cross-cultural online participatory community? How does one remain faithful to the facilitation of an inter-subjective experience when one needs to present a group’s identity to a much wider audience? How does one position oneself within the struggle of subjection to the value form, vis-a-vis corporate sponsorship.

I was originally commissioned by TATE galleries to research, conceptualise and curate a learning resource on ‘democracy and community’ (please see here: https://bpartexchange.tate.org.uk/resources_57.html, or enclosed hard copy) for the international education platform BP Art Exchange (2015). After the production of this publication, and upon my insistence on testing these learning activities in practice, I was also asked to adapt some of these exercises for schools all around the UK. What follows is a brief self-reflexive analysis of some of the workshops I facilitated together with students of different ages.

Democracy and Community workshops: Year 10 students

October/November 2015, Tate Britain Galleries



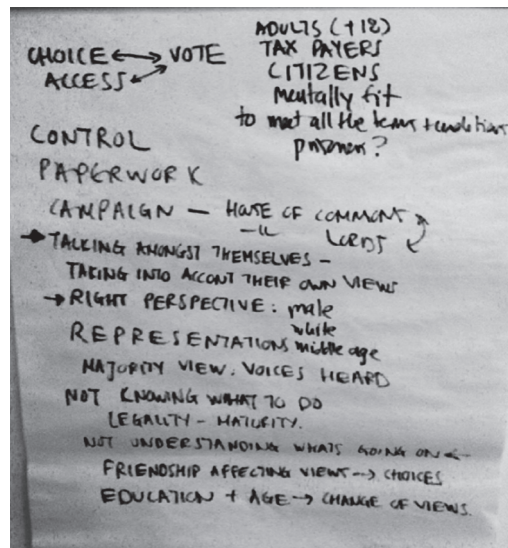
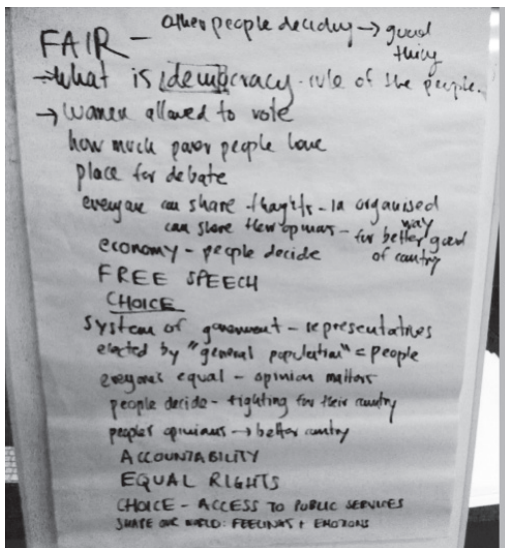
'The great game of power', Augusto Boal workshop with year 10 students from Lampton School, *Democracy and Community*, Tate Britain, London, 2015.

Looking back at my recent facilitating of *Democracy and Community* workshops, with different groups of students from primary and secondary schools, based here in London, I was once again reminded of the role 'active thinking', 'dialogue' and 'participation' play within the students overall development of a critical consciousness. I recognised once again the importance of having free and open spaces that allow for 'difficult conversations' to happen, especially for young people in formal education, and the prevailing general lack of 'democratic experiences' as a whole. Today we see more and more art spaces called upon to facilitate precisely this lack, as institutions reclaim their public nature, through their education departments, with series of curated discussions, events and workshops. Opening up spaces for dialogue and collective investigation of themes that feel near and dear to us all, is crucial here, especially if one takes into account the maze of social and political contradictions we find ourselves in, at different stages of our lives.

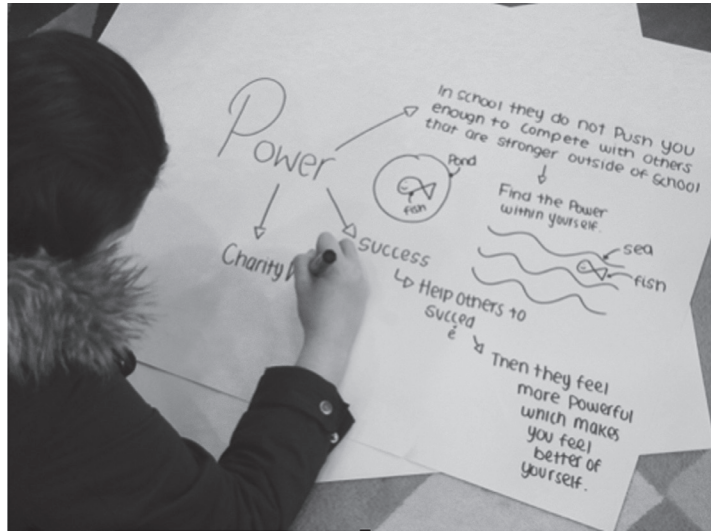
According to the advocate of critical pedagogy and emancipatory politics, Paulo Freire, to be able to develop a critical consciousness of your own, you need to be able to relate to the confusing and at times even contradictory set of relationships around you, in your own terms, with your own 'language'. To make connections with the past, embed and relate these to the present, all in order to imagine a way out, for the future to

come. It was with Freire's emancipatory philosophy in mind, and with an attentiveness to the different kinds of experiences and knowledge that people usually carry with them, that I originally conceptualised these *Democracy and Community* workshops for Tate Learning. The idea was that these workshops would also work together as a whole, connecting research, participation and action with the student's own life stories, struggles and frustrations.

The first hour of this day-long workshops involved a collective investigation of the theme of democracy, drawing from already 'established' knowledge and personal experience. What we think we already know. The aim was to allow for the students to voice their own opinions, but also listen to their peers, listen to themselves listening; eventually reaching that point where one's voice bounces back from the 'other' as an intersubjective analytic process. Students who had familiarised themselves with concepts such as democracy, governance, and free speech from before (within the context of their family, school, neighbourhood), seemed very engaged and genuinely interested in the subject, giving me all the supposedly 'correct' answers, whilst having fun and feeling comfortable in their own voices. When it came down to the more difficult task of relating such general concepts of what is 'true' and 'acceptable' to their own lives however, these same very enthusiastic students had difficulty transitioning from the abstract to the 'real', not really identifying with positions of power in the first place.



Notes from *Democracy and Community* workshops, Tate Britain, London, 2015.



Notes from Democracy and Community Workshops, Tate Britain, London, 2015.

When it came down to the issue of ‘having a voice’, and after a short visit to Tate Britain’s galleries and my introducing of two historical paintings: Emily Osborne’s *Aimless and Friendless* and Benjamin West’s *Pylades and Orestes*) –researching the soundness of our knowledge by looking at history and myth—one could recognise the affective qualities of students response (empathy, frustration, insight), especially as they started identifying with ‘other’s’ positions, i.e women, refugee children, non-citizens etc. Power relationships, accountability and representation, making more sense when students started relating the past to the present, projecting it into an imaginary identification with a symbolic image, they were now ready to enact in their own terms.



Introduction to Emily Osborne’s *Aimless and Friendless*: ‘The Rich Man’s wealth is his strong city, etc’ 1857. What would it feel like to have no money? no rights? no education?, *Democracy and Community*, Tate, London, 2015.



'Follow the Leader', Tate Britain, London, 2015.

Follow the Leader was another exercise where students were able to walk in the gallery's spaces freely, wherever it was 'safe' and 'publicly accessible', questioning the very idea of publicness and accessibility for themselves, whilst also alternating roles as 'leaders' and 'followers'. Many students seemed to enjoy this part, as they were free to explore the space in their own terms.

In the third part of this day of activities on *Democracy and Community*, the students engaged in a series of exercises inspired by Augusto Boal's *Theatre of The Oppressed* techniques of embodiment: hypnotising each other, completing the image, the great game of power etc. Overall and even though some students seemed to have all the answers about democracy, participation and their role as students from the very beginning, as the day progressed, and more and more contradictions started to surface, students seemed to be less naive about their own thinking, starting to consider people who might not have a voice for instance or their own role within society as students. As we then moved on to discuss our hopes and personal struggles, students for the first time in the day, revealed to each other their feelings about their own lives, their frustrations with the exams system for example, their alienation with the curriculum and other 'individual-meets-the-collective' issues which were very important as a closing kind of

discussion around 'what we have learnt'. Other groups of students seemed to lack the ability to relate to these issues in their own terms, lacking much experience in group discussion and forms of 'taking part'. It is through these moments of awkwardness and crisis that we learn most about ourselves and our relationships to otherness however. The group's identity can only form according to the group's own conscious articulations of needs, but also through their unconscious desires, which all come to the fore only if participants let go of what they know, or what they think they already know, and move on, collaboratively, to what they don't know they know. In that way the workshops served more as a potential trigger to enunciate alternative ways of thinking and working for these students, for a future to come. This participatory learning opportunity could perhaps be taken further if we worked with the students for a longer period of time, allowing enough time and 'mind' space for the students to negotiate the questions and contradictions that emerge from their thematic investigations, so that these can in turn become naturally relevant to theirs and their communities context.

So, I would say there was definitely a process around consciousness raising there, for the students, but the short term and ephemeral nature of this process also brought the question of time and whether we could be given more time to set up and organise what this consciousness can be. I thus experienced first hand here the dangerous effects of opening up a whole set of questions with nowhere for that learning to go, with the risk of furthering the alienation or producing reactionary positions. One of the things I learnt through this set of workshops thus was the importance of long term engagement processes and genuine relationships. Otherwise we produce a closed kind of hermeneutic environment or an artificial community who has no possibility for change in the first place. There is certainly a lot of learning involved here, even in the hierarchical context of the classroom, but still for a participation to be oriented towards change perhaps we need committed attitudes from curators and museums alike to maintain these learning relationships long term. This brings me to my most recent venture of adapting these *Democracy and Community* workshops' for primary schools students, where I specifically asked to work with the same students for longer period of time, both within a classroom context, but also in the streets, public spaces and the gallery. The museum and the school eventually permitted a two-day marathon of activities on democracy. But how do you engage 6 year old students in the game of democracy in the first place?



'Tableaux Vivants', *Democracy and Community*, Tate, 2015.

Democracy and Community Workshops: Year 3

February 2016, TATE Britain & Oakthorpe Primary School

What is democracy to you?

Reflecting on my recent facilitating of *Democracy and Community* workshops with artist Jack Cornell and students from Oakthorpe Primary School, year three (adaptation for 7 to 8 years old).

DAY 1, TATE BRITAIN

I have always tried to simplify things when teaching, believing that even the most complicated things can be explained in simple terms. As Paolo Freire has argued, making simple, translates into personal knowledge and seeds the knowing among persons in the universal. When investigating democracy as a representative system of power, however, and in view of how this translates in everyday life situations, simplifying things too much runs a series of other kinds of risks altogether. The very idea of common sense for example, seems to imply an acceptance of a general public's opinion; involving an assumption of what is right or wrong, what is fair, what is normal, what is good, what is beautiful etc for the majority of people. What does it really mean to identify with the 'general public' however? And, what on the contrary, does it mean to feel oneself as part of a minority? For many

people who have struggled throughout history to make their voices heard, for instance, the notion of a ‘general public’ is in fact their ideological enemy.

So how do you simplify things enough for year three students to understand what democracy actually means, while not letting go of the important questions that arise from this debate? How can you engage with seven year old students in their own terms, and in their own ‘language’, without ignoring the important lessons that history has taught us? I was initially very worried that the workshops might not be suited for this age to begin with. Maybe students of this age would not be ready for such difficult questions, or maybe they would find the subject irrelevant to their own lives, feeling bored or tired very easily. Little did I know, it would be one of the most fulfilling participatory interactions I have organised for a while, not only with regards to students level of engagement and overall learning experience, but also for me as a facilitator. Reminding me how sociability is actually formed from a very young age, and how ‘education for a critical consciousness’ in fact starts from kindergarten! The reference to the famous Thomas Aquinas sentence ‘man is by nature a political, hence social, animal’ (home est naturaliter politicus, id est, socialis’) comes to mind here. However, according to Hanna Arendt, Thomas Aquinas’ version was also a mistranslation. To her, Aristotle’s original citation (‘Φυσει μὲν ἔστιν ἄνθρωπος ζῶον πολιτικόν’) actually meant: ‘Man is by nature a political animal, despite being also a social one’...⁴³



‘Tableaux Vivants’, *Democracy and Community*, Tate, 2015.

43 Hanna Arendt, ‘The Public and The Private Realm’, *Human Condition*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1998, pp. 22–28

The most fun part of the day came when we actually practised out what power and responsibility actually mean: it is not always about what I want but also what is best for everyone. How do we negotiate that? Students seemed to get this balancing act of ‘self interest’ and ‘common good’ straight away, almost instinctively understanding and empathetically identifying with others, whilst playfully performing different roles in society.

The students soon started coming up with their own interpretations of what cooperation might mean.

At the end of the first day, we gathered outside the gallery space, by the main entrance. I brought with me a small pedestal for them to stand on and introduced them to the idea of the ‘speaker’s corner’. We then invited each child to speak out loud in the megaphone and leave their ‘word’ as a message for democracy. It was a very unique moment where everything seemed to make sense in a very spontaneous but at the same time rather determined way. One by one the students stood up there and proudly spoke their mind. They spoke of:

‘Power’, ‘Women’, ‘Individuality, like its your opinion’, ‘Exciting’, ‘Ancient Greece’, ‘Democracy’, ‘Cheering’, ‘Opinion’, ‘I’m important’, ‘Voting’, ‘Self Common’, ‘Community’, ‘Fun’, ‘I feed people’



‘Speaker’s Corner: Power’, *Democracy and Community*, Year 3, Tate and Oakthorpe Primary, London, 2016.



'Speaker's Corner: Power', *Democracy and Community*, Year 3, Tate and Oakthorpe Primary, London, 2016.

The second day of the workshops took place in the children's classroom, at Oakthorpe Primary. After re-capping on the previous day's learning outcomes as well as students feelings on what democracy means, and as a warming up morning session, students were now called upon to investigate Spiderman's motto "with great power comes great responsibility" in action, through a series of Augusto Boal's exercises. In the second part of the day we introduced a different type of self-organisational challenge with the desert island scenario.⁴⁴ We then took this democratic challenge further and introduced a change in the student's objective reality that threatened their individual and group interests by way of an environmental disaster (audio-visuals of an earthquake and storm). The island was now 'broken' in half, and the students were called upon to decide on the fortune of the 'outsiders'. I was very positively surprised as a facilitator to see how these students dealt with all the complex concepts and problems at hand, taking into account how questions around democratic participation have concerned humankind and philosophers for centuries. It seems to me that the student's enthusiasm and genuine curiosity, apart from reflecting the brilliance of their age, also somehow drew from their own sense of being in the world as children, i.e. as uncompleted beings conscious of their incompleteness. The children's attitude to learning and their approach to reality seemed a lot more open than students of older age groups, for example,

44 Inspired by Adelita-Husni Bay's, *Postcards from the Desert Island*, 2011, 4:3 SD video installation, 22'23" as shown at her *Playing Truant* exhibition at Gasworks (2013).

This project was also inspired by Annete Krauss's *Hidden Curriculum: In Search of the Missing Lessons* (ongoing) project as shown at the Whitechapel Gallery (2013).

who were a lot more conscious of themselves as persons or members of a group instead. In retrospect, I wonder whether these younger and much more ‘agile’ students were perhaps more open to embrace freedom, because they have not yet been fully introduced to different models of manhood, orders and prescribed behaviours. The authentic comradeship they showed compared to formalised gregariousness was inspiring.

Towards the end of these two days of learning, we introduced the concept of ‘tableaux vivants’ and by looking at different art works, explained how throughout history people have used different means to make their voices heard. ‘Tableaux vivants’ were used as one form of protest by the suffragettes, for instance, using poses from art to symbolically convey their message: women’s desire for the right to vote. As I look back at these two brilliant days with Oakthorpe students, I remind myself the importance of having fun and how that should never be overlooked. As Valeria Graziano explains in *The Politics of Residual Fun* (2013), ‘sociability’ is in fact the ‘play form’ of society, describing the ethical capacity of being enticed by the condition of being-in-common and to experience the pleasure of the ‘interacting interdependence of individuals’. Children can teach us so much about playful forms of sociability, a world in which a democracy of equals is possible without friction...⁴⁵

45 Valeria Graziano, ‘The Politics of Residual Fun’ in J.P. Martignon and I. Rogoff (eds.), *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating*, London, Bloomsbury, 2013, pp.151–163.



'Desert Island', Democracy and Community, Year 3, Oakthorpe Primary, London, 2016



'Complete the Image', Democracy and Community, Year 3, Oakthorpe Primary, London, 2016.



'Tableaux Vivants', Democracy and Community, Oakthorpe Primary, London, 2016.

On A Side Note:

When I was asked by the TATE to conceptualise these learning activities for their *Democracy and Community* learning resource, I was initially very hesitant, as at the time the project was funded by British Petroleum (BP), siding with many artists-activists colleagues who felt uncomfortable with the institutions relationship with this oil company, and who refused my invitation to take part in this initiative in the first place. At the time, in fact I was embodying ‘the subject of crisis’ par excellence, not knowing where my ‘curatorial solidarity’ stands with regards to the complex situations in terms of labour relations, funding and support, as my work had been so different before this. I soon realised however that a negative response would also be deeply entrenched in my position of privilege that allows one to say ‘no’ in the first place. I felt the need to discuss this with the institution’s curators in order to clarify my stand on how important it is to raise such issues with those people of power and authority who can affect policy and institutional agendas. It was a very difficult position to find myself in, taking into account how much I believed in the value of the project, especially as it involved the dissemination of this learning resource to an international platform of exchange between students of different ages, as well as self-organised groups from all around the world (including India, Mexico and Greece).⁴⁶

The BP funding has since then been withdrawn, thanks to Liberate Tate’s long standing campaign initiatives and effective public-awareness events, which I have also been supporting, (as a proper split subject of knowledge). In the end, however when looking back at these workshops, I realise that what counts for me and the students is that the surplus of our knowledge, as in the participatory value we co-produced, did not get completely subsumed in the knowledge economy of the institution or the corporation (with valuation forms, social media platforms and post-production), but instead for the most part retained a relative kind of autonomy of its own, with the learning returning back to the temporary investigatory community we co-created. The short term and ephemeral nature of the workshops remains very problematic still, especially if one takes into account the desire by the students to take this further in their own terms. What keeps me hopeful however is that at least the workshops seemed to

46 It is also really important to emphasise here perhaps that unlike other projects, for the first time I was not only properly commissioned but also given total liberty from start to finish (concept development-publication-workshop facilitation).

raise the right questions, with an open-ended process-based framework adaptable to the student's own frustrations and desires.

Projects like these could be the starting point for an engaged curatorial practice that stimulates exchange between organising and art, activating alternative social relations and contributing to a transition from symbolic participations to a collective inhabiting of critical agency. The problem of course is how to connect these kind of initiatives with the real life experiences and struggles around democracy, education, the politics of HIV / AIDS, processes of resistance to capitalism, anti-racism, public housing, citizenship, and migration. Having worked many times with young people and adults in universities and schools, I know very well by now, how institutional environments can be intensely hierarchical and punishing. Just being there however and allowing a space for students/ participants to think critically however is very important.

One of the most important things I have learnt thus from this series of educational curatorial initiatives is the need to develop frameworks of educational and curatorial practices that feed into social mobilisation movements and the communities behind them. Where relative autonomies and the aesthetics of organising are embodied in the way people come together, as self-organised and incomplete communities, that can interpret their own alienation.