

**PARSE**

02 ISSUE

# The Value of Contemporary Art

Lise Soskolne | Dave Beech | Hannah Newell  
| Alberto López Cuenca | Richard Birkett with  
Cameron Rowland | Donna Yates | Goldin+Senneby  
and Pip Day | Victoria Ivanova | Andrea Phillips  
| Vermeir & Heiremans

Issue Editors  
Jason Bowman, Suhail Malik and Andrea Phillips



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# The Value of Contemporary Art

## JASON BOWMAN

Jason Bowman is an artist with a curatorial practice and MFA: Fine Art Programme Leader and Research Representative for Fine Art at Valand Academy, University of Gothenburg. He is a member of the working group for PARSE. Until recently he was affiliated as a researcher to the EU project, NEARCH (New Scenarios for a Community Involved Archeology). Bowman was a co-researcher on the Swedish Research Council Funded Project, Trust and Unfolding Dialogue in Contemporary Art (2010-13) for which he edited the publication, Esther Shalev-Gerz *The Contemporary Art of Trusting Uncertainties and Unfolding Dialogues* (2013). He is currently principle researcher on Stretched, a three-year long inquiry, via the curatorial, into expanded and organizational practices within artist-led cultures, co-researched with Mick Wilson and Julie Crawshaw and also funded by the Swedish Research Council. Previous curatorial projects have investigated expanded and intermedia practices including Yvonne Rainer: *Dance and Film* (2010), the first European career survey of Rainer's extended practice. In July 2017 Bowman will curate *Accidentally on Purpose*, the first career survey of the work of the disbanded, interdisciplinary performance collective The Theatre of Mistakes, at London's Raven Row Gallery.

## SUHAIL MALIK

Suhail Malik is Programme Co-Director of the MFA in Fine Art at Goldsmiths College, University of London, and Visiting Faculty at CCS Bard (2012-2015). He is coeditor, with T. Keenan and T. Zolghadr, of *The Flood of Rights* (2015); and with C.Cox and J. Jaskey, of *Realism Materialism Art* (2015)

## ANDREA PHILLIPS

Andrea Phillips is PARSE Professor of Art and Head of Research at the Valand Academy, University of Gothenburg. Andrea lectures and writes on the economic and social construction of publics within contemporary art, the manipulation of forms of participation and the potential of forms of political, architectural and social reorganization within artistic and curatorial culture. Recent and ongoing research projects include: *Curating Architecture*, a think tank and exhibition examining the role of exhibitions in the making of architecture's social and political forms (AHRC 2007-2009: <http://www.art.gold.ac.uk/research/archive/curating-architecture/>); *Actors, Agent and Attendants*, a research project and set of publications that address the role of artistic and curatorial production in contemporary political milieus (in collaboration with SKOR 2009-2012: <http://www.skor.nl/eng/site/item/actors-agents-and-attendants-ii-programme>); co-director with Suhail Malik, Andrew Wheatley and Sarah Thelwall of the research project *The Aesthetic and Economic Impact of the Art Market*, an investigation into the ways in which the art market shapes artists' careers and public exhibition (2010-ongoing); *Public Alchemy*, the public programme for the Istanbul Biennial 2013 (co-curated with Fulya Erdemci); *Tagore, Pedagogy and Contemporary Visual Cultures* (in collaboration with Grant Watson and Iniva, AHRC 2013-2014: <http://art.gold.ac.uk/tagore/>); *How to Work Together* (in collaboration with Chisenhale Gallery, Studio Voltaire and The Showroom, London 2014-ongoing: <http://howtoworktogether.org/>).

**H**OW MIGHT CONTEMPORARY art's value be understood and analysed? What are the conditions that produce its value? What is the difference between the price of art and its value? These and other similar questions presuppose that art is, indeed, valuable — *a sine qua non* of art as such. But art's value is a conglomeration of economic and historically-shaped symbolic factors, and these factors promote and prolong the global circulation of artefacts and at the same time profoundly shape the lives and working methods of those who participate in art — dealers, auction houses, galleries, museums, educators, curators and their often unrecognised assistants, philanthropists, and not least of all, artists themselves.

This issue of PARSE sheds light on the ways in which art's market and operational conditions produce and distribute regimes of value. Measurement of any value (cultural, aesthetic or monetary) in the arts tends to be occasional, anecdotal, and disparate. Indeed, proposals to introduce systemic analysis and measurement into contemporary art are often treated with suspicion by those who oppose art's regulation as yet another infringement of accountability to metrics that, so it is supposed, would deny the idea that art's value is immeasurable. As with production in other artistic disciplines — theatre, music, dance, design, each of which has distinctively organised financial support systems — visual arts in Euro-American societies relies on the idea of intrinsic cultural value and, as with the other artistic disciplines, is deeply affected by the ongoing decreases in public funding over the last four decades, marking a significant transformation in the once cherished notion that artistic value was indeed non-measurable. How does the economic and subjective transformation of the past forty years affect concepts of value in the arts? And how might an analysis of arts' financing change the core concepts of value?

Indeed, how might art's conditions of display — in exhibitionary and relational formats — pre-empt and promote its valuation in the newly-developed terms? Can art's valuation still be separated diagnostically from other regimes of value at work in current political, social and cultural milieu?

These pressing questions cut to the quick of not only the terms and logics of art's circulation and exhibition, they also cut to the very conditions of art production as such — where it gets made, who makes it, what gets to count as art. The centrality of art's market to its public dissemination impacts not simply upon artists' support structures but also upon the ways in which their work is multiply valued. Moreover, if it is now a banal truism that the art market plays a fundamental role in the commissioning and display of contemporary art outside of the market itself — for example, through patronage, sponsorship, or other necessary subsidy of the public sector — it is also the case that the privatisation of art's financing cannot be separated from both the modes of speculation currently dominant in global economics on the one side nor, on the other, the ways in which artists, curators, and critics are educated and professionalised.

This broad, historically embedded privatisation of artistic and knowledge production fundamentally informs the contributions to this issue of PARSE in a number of distinct ways. The issue begins with a contribution by Lise Soskolne, artist and Core Organiser of W.A.G.E (Working Artists and the Greater Economy) in which the author writes autobiographically as an artist and as an activist campaigning for the improvement of artists' conditions of pay and position on the complex relationship between art making and political action. The following contribution by artist and academic Dave Beech puts forward an argument for art's "incomplete de-commodification", whereby state arts funding, particularly in northern Europe, leaves artwork suspended in an ambivalent status functioning

anomalously between capital and the public purse. Then curator and critic Hannah Newell specifically examines the cultural shifts apparent in the history of England's Arts Council as it moves rapidly towards embracing and demanding the values of entrepreneurship be evidenced amongst its clients. Alberto Lopez Cuenca, curator and educator, follows with an argument that drawing on Adorno similarly places artistic production in a "gray zone" between productivity in market terms and non-productivity. Lopez Cuenca draws on case studies that demonstrate artists and artists groups working with and, in his claim beyond, commercial and corporate culture.

In "Rotate the Pass-Thru", curator Richard Birkett, in dialogue with artist Cameron Rowland, describes an exhibition he developed and an artwork by Rowland, juxtaposed to a discussion held between Rowland, his dealer, and a collector on the nature and protocol of exchange in art's transactions, and, it is implied, the construction of value therein. Archeologist Donna Yates follows with an essay on the contemporary market for antiquities, especially those traded at global reach, and the requirements for proof of authenticity that are both bolder and perhaps more discursively available than those of contemporary art. Following Yates, artistic partnership Golden+Senneby publish an extract of documentation of an event that they produced for SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art in Montreal featuring the investment banker and art lover Paul Leong. As explained in the introduction to the video, written by Director Pip Day, Leong reflects on Golden+Senneby's work *M&A*, taking place in the gallery in which he sits, and the financial algorithm-driven nature of the length of its performance.

"Art's Values: A *Détente*, a *Grand Plié*" by Victoria Ivanova, curator, examines closely the relationship between art's 'truth' value, as expounded from late modernism through to our contemporaneity, and its financial value via a call for the systemic appraisal of art's valuation. Following this, academic and

organiser Andrea Phillips calls for a new political imaginary of devaluation, closely aligned to current de-growth debates, in order to repurpose the conditions and contexts of artistic and curatorial production. The edition closes with a series of images from *Masquerade*, a film by artist duo Vermeir & Hieremans which, based on Herman Melville's novel *The Confidence Man*, is set in a contemporary auction house where the duo themselves are being traded. The photographs are accompanied by a live algorithm constructed from a variety of ratings agencies including both global companies (for example, Standards & Poor) and the artists' own rating on ArtFacts.Net.

The persistent demand now being made for the study of social and economic impact imposes methodologies of metricisation and measurement on artistic and academic endeavours in order to secure dubious notion of "quality control" and generate trustworthiness in nebulous notions of authenticity. The question remains as to whether, when situated and confronted by these conditions, art can or should reconstitute its autonomy; and what conditions, modes of production and practices could produce the desired results. As a periodical concerned with the critical potential of artistic research, this edition of the PARSE journal mobilises the multiple perspectives of artists, thinkers, critics and curators on the problematics, discontents and possibilities of private capital as an unregulated yet assumptive producer of art's value, including its integration with state-funding. We have put emphasis on how this conditioning of art's production, circulation, reception and sale can be put to task. In particular, our interest has been to highlight how, while the endemic privatization of artistic and cultural resources is now a prerequisite of value construction, this condition no less allows key questions and suggests new possibilities for identifying the as-yet-unformulated or undisclosed conditions of markets themselves in general.

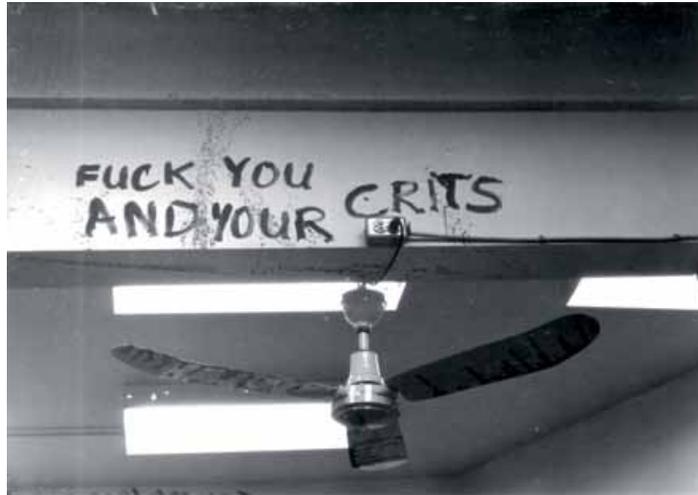


# You and Your Critics

## **LISE SOSKOLNE**

Lise Soskolne is an artist living in New York and core organizer of Working Artists and the Greater Economy (W.A.G.E.), an activist organization focused on regulating the payment of artist fees by nonprofit art institutions. An organizer within W.A.G.E. since its founding in 2008 and its core organizer since 2012, she has also worked in nonprofit arts presenting and development in New York since 1998 at venues that have included Anthology Film Archives, Artists Space, Diapason Gallery for Sound, Meredith Monk/The House Foundation for the Arts, Participant Inc., and Roulette Intermedium. In 2007 she was hired to use

artists to increase the property value of Industry City, a 650,000 square metre industrial complex on the South Brooklyn waterfront. There she founded and managed the arts component in its broader regeneration with the intention of establishing a new paradigm for industrial redevelopment that would not displace workers, artists, local residents or industry but would instead build a sustainable community of working artists in a context that integrated cultural and industrial production.



*Student revolt in the painting department at Emily Carr College of Art and Design, Vancouver 1993. Image by Lise Soskolne.*

*A text by Lise Soskolne, written for and read at “Painting-Politics”, a panel discussion at New York University on March 7, 2014.*

What follows is some biographical self-analysis in short form. Extending back to the mid-1990s, it reads as a symptomatic account of someone—a woman—navigating the politics of painting. By this I also mean the politics of the art world, and by the politics of the art world I also mean its economy, and by its economy I mean the creation of value.

*An excerpted speech by Lise Soskolne for W.A.G.E., delivered at the Museum fur Moderne Kunst in Frankfurt, Germany on March 1, 2013 at the invitation of artist Andrea Büttner as part of her exhibition.*

W.A.G.E. stands for Working Artists and the Greater Economy.<sup>4</sup> We’re a group of visual and performance artists and independent curators fighting for the regulated payment of artist fees by the non-profit art institutions who contract our labor.

**T**HE INVITATION TO SPEAK about painting and politics came because I have a bifurcated practice. Like others, I make paintings and I do things that are classified as political: But in my case one is visible and the other is not. What you can see are the politics, which make themselves apparent now through W.A.G.E.<sup>2</sup> and before that through Industry City<sup>3</sup> and, if you have known me, through working in art institutions.

What you don't see are the paintings, because I don't exhibit my work — I am not an *exhibiting artist*. I don't participate as someone who paints or through the things that I make in my studio. Or it's that I choose not to do what's necessary to operate as an exhibiting artist and so I don't participate that way.

And while I absolutely do not consider W.A.G.E. to be my art or anyone else's, the currency of institutional critique and social practice make it possible for me to participate as an artist through W.A.G.E.

I make presentations and I meet and correspond with directors and curators about the economy of art, which is what many institutions are at the moment looking to incorporate into and address through their programming. This happens with such efficacy and productive friction so as to render painting and the practice of painting a source of shame for its uselessness in that process and in the economy of critical art-making in general.

So let us be clear: painting may still command the highest prices at auction and in commercial sales markets, but it has for many decades now commanded very little in the way of critical or political import, and this is especially true today. Painting may not be capable

**T**HIS IS A SOMEWHAT strange situation because the artist Andrea Büttner and Frankfurt's Museum of Modern Art have generously invited W.A.G.E. to share in this very special meal inside of this important museum to talk about poverty and economic inequity in the art world.

W.A.G.E. is an activist group that addresses the role that non-profit art institutions play in preventing the artist's ability to survive within the greater economy by not paying us for our labor. So, W.A.G.E. may just indirectly bite the hand that is feeding us tonight.

And in this context there might appear to be some contradiction in our claiming impoverishment in the face of so much affluence, especially when we participate in the creation of wealth, and we benefit from it too.

How can we complain? Artists have the privilege of getting to do what we want, when we want, and how we want. And sometimes we get to present our work in great cultural institutions like this, in a space like this, and like this exhibition which has been mounted with such care and sensitivity that it affirms that what we make together—as artist and institution—has little to do with the creation of wealth.

So it seems kind of inappropriate in such a place and at such a moment and in such company, to talk about the fact that it has everything to do with the creation of wealth, and that this wealth is unequally distributed. And that most of the time artists don't receive any form of compensation for their work, and that most of us, while being culturally affluent, live in relative material poverty.

So it's exactly because this is the wrong moment and the wrong place

1. This text is revision of a lecture presented at the "Painting-Politics" panel discussion held at New York University, 2014-03-07.

2. Working Artists and the Greater Economy (W.A.G.E.) is a New York-based activist organization focused on regulating the payment of artist fees by nonprofit art institutions and establishing a sustainable labor relation between artists and the institutions that subcontract their labor. See URL: <http://www.wageforwork.com>.

3. Sunset Park's Industry City is 35 acre industrial complex on the South Brooklyn waterfront that was the context in which the Artist Studio Affordability Project (ASAP) was formed in 2013 by a group of artists forced out of their studios due to rising. See URL: <http://www.artiststudioaffordabilityproject.org/efforts/>

4. This parallel text is a speech for W.A.G.E. edited for publication. The speech was delivered at the Museum für Moderne Kunst in Frankfurt, Germany on March 1, 2013 at the invitation of artist Andrea Büttner as part of her exhibition.

These two partner texts run in parallel columns throughout this contribution

of addressing the urgency of the colossal reordering of the world under neoliberal capitalism, but to write painting off as the embodiment of wealth or to posit it as the single-handed stoker of the market is irresponsible. It's a convenient characterization made by champions of so-called politically engaged practices in order to obfuscate that they too participate in value creation. Knowledge production has currency, and painting is at best a sidebar discourse.

Anyway, I still go to my studio and paint. I still make paintings in excess, as excess, in storage, in private, with investment, and without expectation of a return on it as such. It isn't networked and it doesn't circulate and it therefore doesn't exit contemporary art or leave the art world. And because it comes into being via the shame of making something irrelevant and without an audience it can reasonably be asked: *why don't you just make W.A.G.E. your art?*

And so, in response to my friend and colleague, a male curator, who asked me that question, I'm going to briefly try and explain why not and how my politics came to find themselves via the shame of painting's failure, and the gendered nature of that shame.

The biography part of this begins in the place that most artists' engagement with the politics of community begins: in art school. For me this was in Vancouver in the early 1990s. Emily Carr College of Art & Design, a low rent education with no formal instruction and no required critical reading beyond *Art in Theory 1900 - 1990*. This meant that we learned by implication. Painting was dead – this was explicit, and, by implication, if made by women, was borderline unethical, indicted somewhere between the crisis of representation and identity politics, and then skewered by post-structuralism and appropriation.

Not explicit but unmistakably clear was that if you wanted to plug yourself into a conduit of any influence in Vancouver, if you wanted to participate in a discourse that wasn't regional, being an exhibiting artist there meant making things that photo conceptualists Jeff Wall, Ian Wallace, Roy Arden, Stan

to address it, that W.A.G.E. has been invited to speak here. And if I chose not to speak about inequity with candor tonight out of deference to the museum and the opportunity it has afforded me in being here, I'd be enacting the very relation that W.A.G.E. is working to overturn.

Demanding payment for services rendered and content provided is not an act of disrespect and there should be no shame in it. To bite the hand that feeds us because it's not feeding us what we deserve and need in order to live, and because it feeds us at its own arbitrary discretion, is really just to break with a relationship that is inequitable.

W.A.G.E. is focused on regulating the payment of artist fees because they are the most basic transaction in the economy of art. A fee is a rudimentary, crude and confused form of remuneration that bears no resemblance to the value of cultural labor today.

Artistic labor supports a multi-billion dollar industry and yet there are no standards, conventions or regulations for artist compensation. We sometimes receive artist fees if we ask for them, or they're dispensed at the discretion of the institution. As compensation for the work that we're asked to provide: preparation, installation, presentation, consultation, exhibition and reproduction, that sounds a lot like charity to us. And charity is a transaction.

But W.A.G.E. believes that charity is an inappropriate transaction within a robust art economy from which most get paid for their labor and others profit greatly, and we believe that the exposure we get from an exhibition does not constitute payment. We provide a work force. We refute the positioning of the artist as a speculator and call for the remuneration of cultural value in capital value.

We expect this from non-profits precisely because they are non-profit. They are granted special status because they serve the public good. This also means they're not subject to the laws of supply and demand for their survival. Instead they receive subsidies—charity, in fact—to do their work. A non-profit is by definition a public charity.

Douglas, or Rodney Graham would like. To that end, justifying not even painting's relevance, but painting's existence, period, was the starting point. And so began many years of thinking painting through the image grammar of contemporary media such as film, advertising, graphic illustration etc., and avoiding paint brushes, drawing, or anything that would indicate the presence of a subjectivity.

I had two solo exhibitions after undergrad and then moved to New York in 1998 and had two more. They were neither successful nor unsuccessful; they were a beginning. But there seemed to be something hollow in their execution — I was making exhibitions, not paintings.

Had I been able to do this with the kind of irony that was in ascension in the early 2000s this might have been a comfortable and even profitable position for me. But I couldn't, and instead I decided to withdraw from trying to have exhibitions and then inadvertently worked in isolation for five years between 2001 and 2006.

The through line during this period is the attempt to construct a subjectivity, one informed by a sense that such a constitution isn't really possible and is therefore always in jeopardy and perpetually failing. This takes place in the context of an artist community and a city changing radically in composition and character under the unprecedented dominance of commerce gaining deep traction after 9/11.

At the same pace I became increasingly disaffected and disenchanted, and instead of re-entering as an artist I found myself participating by critically engaging with the art institutions and people I worked for — a kind of embodied institutional critique that resulted in being fired three times.

Privately, in the studio, I was unable to make painting participate, to make it relevant, or to articulate an authentic subjectivity, despite the fact that I didn't even believe in such a thing, and my non-participation had become more of a form of resistance. My paintings were somehow getting dumber and more flippant, while my politics were getting riskier and more tactical. I think this was when the shame of painting transmuted itself into a politics.

A public charity also has a special moral status because it seems to operate outside of the commercial marketplace; it isn't subject to what profit demands from the rest of us. It doesn't have to compromise its ethics for the sake of capital.

Paradoxically though, it is this very moral authority that imbues artworks and artists with economic value in the commercial marketplace. The logic is that if it's exhibited in an institution, it must have value beyond commerce and it is exactly this perception that adds value to art when it reaches the commercial auction and sales markets.

Moral authority also enables the non-profit to raise money. The money that non-profits receive from the state, private foundations and corporate sponsors is given to them with the contractual obligation that they will use it to present public exhibitions and programs. That's what the money is given to them for. The non-profit is a public charity but it is not a charity provider and artists are not a charity case because we earn our compensation—just like the director, the curator, and the graphic designer.

A non-profit art institution is an economic anomaly in the free market because it maintains an unusual position in relation to profit and the role profit plays in determining wages. If it's true that wages are often kept low in order to maximize profit, then there is a real opportunity here—since profit is not the goal—to set wages in terms of their real value, and in direct relation to the cost of living.

Artists: you also bear some responsibility in this equation. Don't tell yourself you're lucky to be having an exhibition. You were subcontracted to produce content for an institution that receives charity for exactly that purpose. Exhibiting your work at an institution is a transaction. Even if €50,000 are being spent to produce your artwork, that €50,000 has been budgeted for and an artist fee should also be budgeted for separate from production costs so that you can pay your bills—just like the salary of the person who wrote the budget, the salary of the person who did the fundraising,

I would say now that the paintings and choices I made that led to this transmutation were unconsciously gendered. Internalizing failure is typically an assignment for women and in this case, my willful failure to participate as an exhibiting artist on the terms required of me — my perceived failure *to be* or *to be like* the male artists I learned through and appealed to through my work, occurred without a feminist consciousness.

Without an understanding at the time of this most basic mechanism, my perceived lack of success at making painting perform as a political actor and to place this agency in the public view of my peers did not seem to have anything to do with painting's inherent limitations, or how those limitations are further conditioned by gender.

Instead, what seemed like my own failure, what I can only describe as the private simple kind of shame that has no audience — perhaps the kind of fully internalized shame particular to women — became a fault line and then an active schism between two distinct practices: painting and politics. The shame of painting's failure turned in on itself, but it recapitulated as a motivation to act, launching directly out and back into the problem with the force of its repression.

So, the question: *Why don't I just make W.A.G.E. my art?*

As someone who now has the beginnings of a feminist consciousness, I can say that this question implies several things. It implies that efficacy equals success and that participation means having a public career. It implies that I should desire to have a public career and do so on the terms established by those who had and still have the power to determine whether I have a career or not; and that I must want what they have. And finally, therefore, this question implies that nothing much has changed since Vancouver in the mid-1990s.

and even the person who donated the funds—they got a tax break. None of this is luck, it's a system.

Institution: W.A.G.E. doesn't accept your claim of being a charity when you fundraise and a capitalist when you design your budgets. W.A.G.E. challenges you to use your moral authority and special economic status to set new standards for the compensation of labor.

Institution: have we bitten your hand? Have we shamed you into understanding why we can no longer accept being written out of the economic equation? If so, maybe this was in fact the right place and the right moment to have done so.

# Incomplete Decommodification: Art, State Subsidy and Welfare Economics

## DAVE BEECH

Dave Beech is PARSE Professor of Art at Valand Academy, University of Gothenburg. He is an artist in the collective Freee (with Andy Hewitt and Mel Jordan), as well as a writer and curator. His work has been exhibited at the Istanbul Biennial; the Liverpool Biennial; BAK, Utrecht; Wysing Arts, Cambridge; SMART Project Space, Amsterdam; the ICA, London; Centro Cultural, Montehermoso, Vitoria, Spain; the Collective Gallery, Edinburgh; International Project Space, Birmingham; and at 1000000mph Gallery,

London. He is the author of *Art and Value: Art's Economic Exceptionalism in Classical, Neoclassical and Marxist Economics*, (2015). He has written widely on the politics of art, including *The Philistine Controversy* (2002, co-authored with John Roberts) and *Art and Text* (2011). He is a founding co-editor of the journal *Art and the Public Sphere* (2011-). He also curated the exhibition *We Are Grammar* at the Pratt Institute, New York 2011 (co-curator Paul O'Neill) and edited a special edition of *Third Text* on "Art, Politics, Resistance?" (2010).

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF WELFARE ECONOMICS

between 1912<sup>1</sup> and 1959<sup>2</sup> not only propelled unrivalled social reforms that had been sporadically underway since the 1880s, and not only reimagined the state as an economic agent of the macroeconomic redistribution of wealth, it also, astonishingly, added art to the roster of those otherwise urgent social needs (health, old age, education, unemployment, housing) for which the state took responsibility to guarantee universal provision. Art does not seem a natural candidate for this list. That is to say, if the justification of the welfare state is *limited to providing the urgent needs of the poor*, then the rationale for the public subsidy of art will remain external to such a political rationale, and therefore, not only by comparison<sup>3</sup> but also on principle,<sup>4</sup> the public funding of art appears scandalous or unthinkable (except, perhaps, as an ideological ruse by which the majority came to fund minority culture).<sup>5</sup> However, Welfare Economics, albeit devised for nothing but minor operations, furnishes us with sharper tools for assessing the validity of public subsidy for art.

Prior to the advent of Welfare Economics, Otto von Bismarck's series of laws between 1884 and 1889, designed cynically to undercut the growing

socialist movement by guaranteeing national health insurance, a pension, a minimum wage, workplace regulation, vacation and unemployment insurance, together comprise the historical origin of the welfare state, although at the time it was given the name State Socialism despite Bismarck's preferred term "practical Christianity".<sup>6</sup> Since the "Nanny State" owes its existence to a militaristic chancellor of Prussia expressly engaged in a prolonged coercive and ideological campaign against socialism, the welfare state must be figured politically as a double-helix in which opposing political traditions are intertwined. Despite the clarity that can result from the comparative study of actually existing welfare states separated into distinct regimes (Esping-Andersen, for example, detects three: the corporatist, the social democratic and the liberal),<sup>7</sup> the welfare state is more accurately designated as *radically politically indeterminate* insofar as corporatist principles serve social democratic aims and liberal techniques pass themselves off as socialist measures.

Engels described the Bismarckian welfare state as "a kind of spurious Socialism" because State Socialism is not Socialist if the state in question is an authoritarian bourgeois capitalist state.<sup>8</sup> Karl Liebknecht said although "real benefits are offered",

1. Arthur Cecil Pigou's 'Wealth and Welfare', published in 1912, established Welfare Economics within the discipline of economics.

2. Richard Musgrave's book, 'The Theory of Public Finance' published in New York in 1959 by McGraw-Hill marks the high water mark of Welfare Economics.

3. David Edgar, in an article in *The Guardian* newspaper, writes: "In the zero-sum economy of austerity Britain, the arts are increasingly required to couch their case in terms appropriate to those basic services – social care, education, policing – with which they're in competition for dwindling public funds". David Edgar. Why Should We Fund the Arts? *The Guardian*. 2012-01-05.

4. The most complete statement of this position appears in William Grampp. *Pricing the Priceless*. 1989., in which the author contends that there is no economic rationale for public arts subsidies in any form and calls for their full and total abolition.

5. The same argument appears in neoliberal economics and Marxist cultural analysis. Alan Peacock, the pioneering opponent of state subsidy for the arts in the UK, suspected that subsidy to the arts was nothing more than the provision

of public money for the benefit of "certain high income people who like drama". (Gordon Tullock. Introduction to Alan Peacock's "Welfare Economics and Public Subsidies to the Arts". 1994. p. 149). Francis Mulhern, one of the editors of *New Left Review*, argues that the "evolution of [minority culture's] means of support furnishes material evidence of its loss of independence, passing from private patronage through state subsidy to commercial sponsorship". It is not clear, however, that art produced under conditions of private patronage is more independent than art produced from state subsidy or even commercial sponsorship. Mulhern leaves aside the issue of the sales of art through the art market and what mainstream economists call 'self-subsidy' (including artists taking on second jobs to fund their practice). Mulhern, Francis. *Towards 2000*, or the news from you-know-where. 1984. p. 10).

6. See Bismarck's "Speech Before the Reichstag: On the Law for Workers' Compensation" as published in Jan Golstein and John W Boyer (eds.). *University of Chicago Readings in Western Civilization. Vol. 8. Nineteenth Century Europe: Liberalism and Its Critics*. 1988. pp. 419-425

7. Gøsta Esping-Andersen. *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. 1990

the “underlying motive” of “Prince Bismarck’s state socialism [was] to force the workers under the double yoke of economic and political servitude”.<sup>9</sup> Note that the political tensions here are not to be understood as a politics of appearance versus a politics of actuality, but of a troubled unity of two opposing political tendencies. This is a *troubled* unity because it exists precisely insofar as one political tendency dominates over the other. Indeed, we might say that, although the welfare state is founded on a kind of political “transvesticism” (in which tyrants dress themselves up as democrats and consult with utopian socialists so that the workers movement appears to succeed through gifts from the ruling class), the preservation of capitalism and the continued hegemony of the bourgeois state remain constant.

When art is blessed with public funding it is simultaneously cursed by the state’s imperium. Art, we will see, enjoys a new attachment to the public *via* state subsidy but it also suffers from its reinforced attachment to the exercise of structural domination. Although government subsidies are the means by which the state captures art in bureaucratic procedures and governmental priorities, it is also the culmination of art’s entry into the public sphere and the basis of art’s decommmodification. Art’s

encounter with the welfare state, therefore, is neither completely benign nor utterly toxic but a fractured compound of instrumentalisation, compromise, privilege, incorporation, standardisation, gentrification, centralisation, co-optation, academicisation, recuperation, disciplining, protectionism, legitimisation, patronage, encouragement, democratisation, safeguarding, nationalisation, demarketisation, popularisation, universalisation, accountability and preservation.

Art was not among the protections stipulated in the inaugural settlement of the Prussian welfare state. This development required not only that the Bismarckean prototype of the welfare state be exported and spread across Europe but, more importantly, that in doing so it be transposed conceptually. Art was not bolted on to the early form of the welfare state as it drifted across Europe, adopted first in Denmark between 1891 and 1907, then in Sweden between 1891 and 1913 and eventually in Britain between 1908 and 1911. A number of artists received support in the 1930s, as part of the “New Deal”,<sup>10</sup> which introduced to American capitalism safeguards and welfare policies that had existed in Europe for some time. After WWII, however, Britain was the leader in developments of the welfare

8. Fredrick Engels. Anti-Duhring. In *Marx and Engels Collected Works*. Vol. 25., London: Lawrence and Wishart. 1987. p. 265

9. Karl Liebknecht quoted in Henry Tudor. *Marxism and Social Democracy: The Revisionist Debate 1896–1898*. 1988. p. 42

10. Artists were supported under the Works Progress Administration (WPA) which focused on relieving unemployment rather than supporting the arts directly. Artists were employed to make “Social Realist” murals and in other forms of creative labour (for instance, Willem de Kooning was hired to design window displays for a chain of New York shoe stores). Although the WPA also funded the production of paintings and amassed an enormous collection of them, it is evident in the way that these paintings were subsequently disposed of (sold by weight) that it did so as an indirect way of employing artists rather than developing a new form of state patronage for art.

state and it was at this historical conjuncture that art was integrated into an enlarged scheme of public subsidy. The post-war expansion of social security in Great Britain was rooted in the state's swelled powers during the war and the government's ambitious plans for reconstruction, leading to the 1942 publication of *The Beveridge Report*.<sup>11</sup> Alongside recommendations for dealing with poverty which Beveridge called "Want", the report called for the integration of social security within a comprehensive universal minimum state provision to combat idleness (that is to say, unemployment), disease, ignorance and squalor. Building on Beveridge's achievements, "Keynes devised forms of intervention that led to his being portrayed as the father of the welfare state".<sup>12</sup> Keynes was not only instrumental in extending and redirecting the welfare state in general, he was the leading figure in the establishment of a new system for the public subsidy of art.

Hubert Llewellyn Smith was the first to develop the case for a new relationship between art and the state in 1924 with his book *The Economic Laws of Art Production*, which argued that value in art eludes economics. In the first book length study of the economics of art, Llewellyn Smith proposed that the fate of art cannot be left to market mechanisms, which fall significantly short of the higher principles underlying artistic practice. Llewellyn Smith opposes exchange-value with "art-value" and does so by substituting the doctrine of consumer sovereignty with the sovereignty of the art expert. Although the

specific values that he assigns to art belong to an epoch of high cultural complacency, his contribution to thinking about art beyond the market is important insofar as it anticipated many of the themes that eventually took shape in the post-war establishment of state subsidy for the arts in Europe.

John Maynard Keynes became the first Chairman of the Arts Council in 1946, two years ahead of the founding of the National Health Service. Keynes did not primarily set out to secure funding for art but to establish an institutional framework for art subsidy that formally belonged neither to the state nor to the market. Funds for subsidy would be provided by the state, but in principle, the state would have no direct involvement in decisions about how the funds were to be disbursed. It would not be going too far, therefore, to say that there was no such thing as the *public* funding of the arts before Keynes, since he initiated a mode of subsidy that was neither state patronage nor private patronage, nor, it must be said, did it correspond to a market allocation of funds.

Although the state has always been a central agent within the funding of art, public subsidy is modern. Patronage, whether secured from the state, the church or private patrons may have been occasionally *in the name of the public*, but public subsidy strictly speaking is first achieved by protecting the choice over what to subsidise from the source of the funding. However, Keynes' new form of patronage is best understood as an amalgamation of the most

11. Sir William Beveridge. *Social Insurance and Allied Services (the Beveridge Report)*. 1942.

12. W.J. Backhouse and W.G. Bateman. *Capitalist Revolutionary: John Maynard Keynes*. 2011. p.131

conducive elements of all previous modes of artistic production. The Arts Council carried within it the most emancipatory institutions of art from the renaissance to the eighteenth century.

By convening panels of experts from the field to make judgements about funding, the Arts Council partly revived the guild system of the arts in which “the guilds were their own organisations in which they held office”.<sup>13</sup> Unlike the guilds, which regulated the activities of painters and sculptors as ordinary artisans, the Arts Council stressed the individual talent of the artist, derived from the Renaissance concept of genius that had generated more artist-centred forms of patronage. This type of patronage lasted until the seventeenth century when a new practice developed in which “painters did not always work directly to commission”<sup>14</sup> but kept a number of unfinished works in their studios, which they would show to visiting clients and complete on agreement of a fee. The Arts Council worked in a similar way, funding art production on the evidence of plans, proposals and incomplete works. The role of the patron was developed further in this direction in the eighteenth century. No longer the commissioner of bespoke works, the patron of the eighteenth century maintained artists primarily by purchasing works, ushering in a new period in which patrons were outshone by dealers, collectors and eventually corporate sponsors. The Arts Council does not initially purchase works but it is conceived as an instrument for the preservation and expansion

of a market in artworks.

But Keynes’ model for state subsidy of art is not built solely on economic precedents. It is also an economic structure that has non-economic goals. It is also shaped by the eighteenth century idea of the public. Habermas argues that a new sector of communications – news and mail – emerged at the end of the 1700s and established a new, broad literate public that regarded itself as *the* public.<sup>15</sup> For the first time, in the eighteenth century the public could be converted into a revenue source, occasionally, when artists exhibited their works independently and charged an entry fee. William Hogarth was prominent among another kind of artist who issued prints of their paintings to sell to art’s new public directly. At the same time, art criticism was developed<sup>16</sup> to knit together the experts, connoisseurs, artists, the public, society and “lay critic”. Art’s bourgeois public gives shape to the mission of Keynes’ Arts Council.

At the close of the eighteenth century, the art museum was invented as a public institution.<sup>17</sup> The most spectacular gesture of art’s new public was the invention of a national institution that literally transposed art from the sphere of aristocratic patronage to the bourgeois public sphere (and public ownership), the national, public museum of art. This occurred first in 1793, when the French revolutionary government nationalized the King’s art collection and declared the Louvre a public institution. “As a public space, the museum also made manifest the public it claimed to serve: it could produce it as a visible

13. Meyer Schapiro. *On the Relation of Patron and Artist: Comments on a Proposed Model for the Scientist*. 1964. p. 366

14. Francis Haskell. *Patrons and Painters: A Study in the Relations Between Italian Art and Society in the Age of Baroque*. 1963. p. 15

15. See Jurgen Habermas. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. 1989.

16. Terry Eagleton accurately states that “the modern concept of literary criticism is closely tied to the rise of the liberal, bourgeois public sphere in the early eighteenth century” (Terry Eagleton. *The Function of Criticism*. 1984. p. 10). It must be pointed out, however, that the origin of literary criticism, in discussions within and around new publications such as *The Spectator*, was simultaneously the origin of art criticism in the modern sense.

17. At the end of the 18th century the French Revolution established the first national, free, public museum of art, the Louvre, in which an unprecedented kind of institutional framework relocated art within social relations. See Andrew McLellan. *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth Century Paris*. 1994.

entity” Carol Duncan explained.<sup>18</sup> The Arts Council is not only a public institution in itself, it is also an organisation that inserts the public – both the art public (experts) and the general public (tax payers and voters) – at the heart of a new system of art funding.

While the advance of the art market liberated artists from aristocratic patronage in the eighteenth century, some level of artistic independence had already been installed by the non-market institution of the Academy, tied to the aristocracy and the monarchy rather than the church. The Salon, however, connected the art community to the general public in the form of great annual exhibitions selected by experts formed into a jury. The Arts Council’s panels of experts had their roots here. But Keynes’ vision of public patronage was equally based on discursive constructions of art and the artist such as the Romantic genius, another innovation of the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, which demanded that the independence of the artist be the centrepiece of a new conception of art.

The Arts Council model for public subsidy draws on the Humanist<sup>19</sup> tradition of patronage, the Guild system, the Academy, the Salon and Romantic ideology, but also the art market was a prerequisite for its apparent opposite: the public funding of art. The idea that artists produce works independently of patrons, working in a speculative and innovative way that risks finding no purchasers at any price due to its unfamiliar or shocking form (a modernist combination of Romantic ideology and the art market),

is the condition of art that the Arts Council was inaugurated to attenuate and sustain. The priorities of fifteenth century patronage, in which the interests of the church and the patron outweigh the interests of the artist, are inverted by public funding properly administered. Also, the tensions at the heart of the Salon in the eighteenth century, in which the values of art’s public are not identical with those of art’s clientele, were meant to be resolved in favour of art’s own values by the use panels of experts who are meant to judge works on their merit in the public funding of art.

Keynes said “if with state aid the material frame can be constructed, the public and the artists will do the rest between them”.<sup>20</sup> The Arts Council aimed to “provide facilities, infrastructure, and funding to fledgling and established groups”.<sup>21</sup> Keynes hoped, among other things, to support new artists before their works [were] accepted by the market.<sup>22</sup> By injecting public funds into the construction of theatres, galleries and concert halls, Keynes believed that the state could encourage the arts, artists and the public for art. The purpose of the Arts Council of Great Britain, he said in a BBC broadcast,

*is to create an environment to breed a spirit, to cultivate an opinion, to offer a stimulus to such purpose that the artist and the public can each sustain and live on the other in that union which has occasionally existed in the past at the great ages of a communal civilized life.*<sup>23</sup>

18. Carol Duncan. *Civilizing Rituals: Inside the Public Art Museums*. 1995. p. 24

19. The Humanist tradition of art patronage was formed during the Renaissance and afforded more freedom for the artists and put more emphasis on skill than the quality of materials used, a practice connected to the Humanist campaign to include painting and sculpture within the liberal arts rather than the mechanical arts.

20. John Maynard Keynes. *The Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes*. 1982. p 361

21. Anna Upchurch. John Maynard Keynes, The Bloomsbury Group and the Origins of the Arts Council Movement. 2004. p. 215

22. *Ibid.*, p. 212

The Arts Council was, in principle, an adventure in state intervention in the economy of art that combined innovative economic arrangements with a commitment to the liberty of the artist and the quality of art within a context of the bourgeois public sphere. In practice, however, it was immediately constrained by its own *social* formation. Senior members of the Arts Council staff were *appointed*, which led to the organization being run primarily by the British upper class. Raymond Williams, appointed as an expert rather than a grandee, was a member of the Council between 1977 and 1979, and remained both supportive and critical. He provides a vivid image of the contradiction between the social purpose of the new welfare state and the social constitution of its management:

*The extension of the social services, including education, is an undoubted gain ... which must not be underestimated by those who have simply inherited it. But it remains true ... that in their actual operation they remain limited by assumptions and regulations belonging not to the new society but the old'.<sup>24</sup>*

Instead of the original conception of the organisation being a launching pad for increasingly radical conceptions, the Arts Council lost faith in its original vision and withdrew from the commitments that set it apart from the officialdom of the art academy and the instrumentalisation of the

patronage of art by state and church. The Arts Council started out in a compromise with the establishment and proceeded to become successively more established and more bureaucratic, with an ever increasing focus on institutions rather than artists, and directed more and more by governmental priorities.

The advent of the Welfare State spurred on developments in Welfare Economics. At the end of the 1950s, Richard Musgrave augmented economics with the theory of a good that is publicly funded because it has merit. Merit goods are cousins of public goods. Clean air is an example of a public good, since everybody benefits equally from its provision. The consumption of clean air is, in the technical terminology of mainstream economics, non-excludable and non-rival. Exclusion in economics refers to private property and scarcity: if others cannot be excluded from consuming a product that they have not paid for, then there is no incentive to purchase it. “Non-rivalry means that the enjoyment of a good by one person does not reduce what is there for others to enjoy”.<sup>25</sup> Air, water and sunlight are non-excludable and non-rival, which is why classical economists said they could not fetch any sort of price.

Musgrave’s examples of public goods are flood-control, sanitary campaign, judiciary, and the armed forces. Since the market cannot ensure that those who pay for flood-control are protected while those who refuse to pay or can’t pay will not be protected,

23. Keynes quoted in Roy Harrod. *The Life of John Maynard Keynes*. 1972. p. 619

24. Raymond Williams. *The Long Revolution*. 1965. pp. 329-30

25. Ruth Towse. *A Textbook of Cultural Economics*. 2010. p. 28

then public goods, according to Musgrave, “cannot be satisfied through the mechanism of the market”.<sup>26</sup>

Since the same amount will be consumed by all, individuals know that they cannot be excluded from the resulting benefits. This being the case, they are not forced to reveal their preferences through bidding in the market. The “exclusion principle”, which is essential to exchange, cannot be applied; and the market mechanism does not work.<sup>27</sup>

Musgrave’s concept of merit goods is not limited to the technical features of public goods. It includes education, which is not a public good since it is both excludable and rivalrous<sup>28</sup>. However, if there is sufficient public commitment to the idea that education ought to be available for all children regardless of ability to pay and regardless of what pupils or their parents demand, then, Musgrave argues, there is an argument for providing such goods publicly. When goods are supplied publicly on this basis, the state provides merit goods.

Merit goods, which are publicly funded to ensure universal, equal and free consumption, contravene consumer sovereignty. It is a condition of merit goods that consumer sovereignty has no part to play in their allocation not only because the decision to produce them for universal consumption is taken by political leaders but because the principle of merit cancels out the principle of consumer choice. Another (non-economic) form of sovereignty takes precedence.<sup>29</sup> “Since the market mechanism fails to reveal consumer preferences in social wants, it may

be asked what mechanism there is”.<sup>30</sup> The answer is the mechanism of democratic collective decision-making, or, as Musgrave’s limited political conception has it, voting. Even if democratic and political techniques can be conceived that outstrip the vote in terms of participation and accountability, voting certainly reveals preferences that markets cannot.

Galbraith was the first major American economist to engage with the economics of art: initially in a lecture series at Harvard in 1963, then in the last of his BBC Reith lectures in 1966.<sup>31</sup> Like Musgrave before him, Galbraith paid close attention to the limits of economics and the limits of the market mechanism, in particular focusing on tensions between economic and non-economic priorities and values. He identifies three forms of conflict between industrial capitalism, on the one hand, and art the aesthetic life on the other. “The remedy, in each case”, Galbraith said,

is to subordinate economic to aesthetic goals — to sacrifice efficiency, including the efficiency of organization, to beauty. Nor must there be any apologetic nonsense about beauty paying in the long run. It need not pay.<sup>32</sup>

In the same year as Galbraith’s Reith lectures, William Baumol, an American economist who taught both economics and sculpture at Princeton, collaborated with William Bowen on a pioneering economic study, “Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma”, which both provided encouragement to the campaign for public subsidy in the US, and

26. Richard Musgrave. *The Theory of Public Finance*. 1959. p. 9

27. Richard Musgrave. *A Multiple Theory of Budget Determination*. 1957.

28. Private education is not available to non-fee payers and, if there are limited places, then one fee-payer excludes a rival potential fee-payer.

29. This is why Musgrave warned, very early on, that “the satisfaction of collective wants should be limited because of the compulsion involved”, see Musgrave. 1941. p. 320

30. Richard Musgrave. *The Theory of Public Finance*. New York: McGraw-Hill. 1959. p. 10

31. This argument contained in the BBC Reith Lectures was expanded in his book of the following year. Galbraith, J.K. *The New Industrial State*. 2007. [1967]

32. J. K. Galbraith, Lecture 6: The Cultural Impact. Reith Lectures. Transmitted 1966-12-08.

transformed the relationship between art and the discipline of economics.<sup>33</sup>

Baumol and Bowen studied the costs of labour in the performing arts. The high prices of tickets for the performing arts, they argued, is due to the fact that the labour required to produce them cannot be automated or made more efficient. Whereas in industry the division of labour can multiply output per worker and machinery can reduce the number of workers required to produce a given quantity of goods, the performing arts, according to Baumol and Bowen, always require the same number of musicians to play a Beethoven string quartet today as were needed in the 19th century. In general, they conclude, unlike other sectors of the economy, the productivity of the performing arts has not increased for centuries. Since the productivity of labour within the performing arts “cannot hope to match the remarkable record of productivity growth achieved by the economy as a whole”,<sup>34</sup> the costs of labour in the performing arts rises relative to the cost of more productive labour elsewhere. The effect of the static productivity of labour in the performing arts, which is the cause of the high prices of the performing arts, was named the “cost disease”. There is a “productivity lag” between industry and the arts. To fill the gap, they argued, “increased support from other sources will have to be found if the performing arts are to continue their present role in the cultural life”.<sup>35</sup>

Baumol has developed the theory of the cost

disease over the last several decades, both extending the case for the cost disease to include health care, education and other labour intensive services and, simultaneously withdrawing his emphasis on the performing arts. Although the theoretical principles of the cost disease have remained the same, other than adding the supplementary argument that the cost disease is its own cure<sup>36</sup> and therefore “yes, we can afford it”,<sup>37</sup> there has been no deepening of the case for the cost disease of the performing arts and no extension of this argument into the production of the visual arts. In his latest book on the cost disease, published in 2012, Baumol illustrates the productivity lag by contrasting the cheapness of manufacturing watches with the high costs of repairing old watches, which requires the time of a skilled technician. There is a productivity lag because the “maintenance and repair of products inherently resist automation”.<sup>38</sup>

As average costs drop through automation, the costs of those activities that cannot be automated rise year on year in relation to the average. Baumol explains this disparity in terms that imply a link to art and the arts more generally.

The items in the rising-cost group generally have a handicraft element – that is, a human element not readily replaceable by machines – in their production process, which makes it difficult to reduce their labor content.<sup>39</sup>

Baumol does not develop the handicraft element of the cost disease into an economics of

33. William J. Baumol and William G. Bowen. *Performing Arts: the Economic Dilemma*. New York: Twentieth Century. 1966.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 165

35. *Ibid.*, p. 502

36. William Baumol recalls that he received a handwritten note from the British economist Joan Robinson commenting on Baumol’s theory of the “cost disease”. Since the relative rise in costs of the production of goods and services that require intensive labour (nursing, education and so on) are produced by the very

forces that reduce costs in the economy as a whole (division of labour, deskilling, mechanization and automation), “society can afford them”. William Baumol. *The Cost Disease*. 2012. p. xviii

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 43–68

38. *Ibid.*, p. 37

39. *Ibid.*, p. 19

artistic labour but he extends it to include research and scholarship. Research suffers from the cost disease insofar as there seems to be little reason to believe that we have become more proficient at this handicraft activity than Newton, Leibnitz, and Huygens”.<sup>40</sup> While the same could be said, presumably, for painters, sculptors and other artists who produce artworks in ways that cannot be automated<sup>41</sup> and so is comparable with the labour of researchers and scholars, art is also a field in which research is practised extensively. Long periods of time for preparation, research and production are needed not only for certain kinds of art as well as the social production of artists but for curating, art history, art criticism, art education. As such, it is not merely the artist working in the studio that cannot be made subject to capitalist processes of productivity, efficiency and the technical division of labour.

“If we speed up the work of surgeons, teachers, or musicians, we are likely to get shoddy heart surgery, poorly trained students, or a very strange musical performance”.<sup>42</sup> This is true also for police officers, librarians, hairdressers, artists, art historians and curators. However, while there is growing popular concern about increasing the workloads of surgeons, teachers and the police, this is not the case for artists, who unlike dancers, actors and musicians, not to mention the “key workers” of the welfare state, tend not to be wage-labourers, which means that the costs of the cost disease on visual art will be more hidden.

The debate on art’s relationship to the market

and the state is not exhausted by the theory of the “cost disease”. Art’s economic exceptionalism<sup>43</sup> has been noted, albeit only in fragments, since the seventeenth century. One of the modern pioneers of thinking about art’s dual location within the economic and non-economic spheres is Tibor Scitovsky. In the 1970s Scitovsky argued that we “need to reclassify satisfactions according to some principle which will separate the economic from non-economic”.<sup>44</sup> The consumption of goods and services provided by others, he says, “may or may not be economic satisfactions, depending on whether or not they go through the market and acquire a market value in the process”. Scitovsky adds that labour itself “which produces market goods may be an economic activity, but the satisfaction the worker gets out of his work is not an economic good”.<sup>45</sup> While theories of art’s commodification and the “real subsumption” of artistic labour as immaterial labour might suggest that art is therefore completely bound up within the economic sphere, Scitovsky suggests an alternative analysis.

Artists, he says, are typically cut off from demand, “often not producing what the consumer wants”.<sup>46</sup> This means that the market, driven as it is by “consumer sovereignty”, cannot operate adequately in art. Despite his romanticization of the heroic artist, he understands the economic consequences of a mode of production organised around independent owner-producers: “one of the producers to whom consumers relinquish initiative

40. *Ibid.*, p. 114

41. By 1925 Ford’s automated production could produce each day the equivalent quantity as the yearly output that his craftsmen produced in 1908 and at prices that consistently dropped. Picasso, working in the same period, worked no faster and his paintings became more expensive.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 23

43. For a comprehensive theory of art’s economic exceptionalism see Dave Beech. *Art and Value: Art’s Economic Exceptionalism in Classical, Neoclassical and Marxist Economics*. 2015.

44. Tibor Scitovsky. *The Joyless Economy: The Psychology of Human Satisfaction*. 1992. [1976]. p. 80

45. *Ibid.*, p. 90

is the artist”.<sup>47</sup> Scitovsky, who countered “consumer sovereignty” with “political sovereignty” adds, here, the possibility of conceiving of something akin to “aesthetic sovereignty”, which is to say, that it is necessary to value art, and therefore to organise it economically, in a way that is independent of the forces of supply and demand. Without indicating anything about the kinds of infrastructure needed to accomplish it, Scitovsky here calls for art’s “decommodification”.

State subsidy has come to be identified with processes of decommodification but we need to think broader than this, not only to extend the range of techniques of decommodification but also to develop a more critical theory of the state. Socialism, for Marx, is the result of a revolutionary process in which the state is converted “from an organ superimposed upon society into one completely subordinate to it”.<sup>48</sup> Raymond Williams endorsed this view in the final chapter of *The Long Revolution* when, in speaking of the prospect of publicly-owned theatres, publishing and broadcasting companies, he said, “when the producers cannot themselves own the means of their work, these must be owned by the community in trust for the producers, and an administration set up which is capable of maintaining this trust”.<sup>49</sup>

Arguments about the public funding for the arts have always suffered from aggressive comparisons with starving children, cancerous bodies and workless families. Neoliberal economics has eroded the

principles underpinning state subsidy of art, resulting in historically unprecedented cuts to the arts across Europe, precisely by smudging the differences between a variety of rationales for public provision in favour of a single technical rule, namely “market failure”.<sup>50</sup> Mainstream cultural economists such as Alan Peacock and Ruth Towse rearticulate the problem of the public funding of the arts into a set of technical questions about market failure, which is understood as the consequence of one or more of three economic anomalies, namely, monopoly markets, public good, and externalities (all of which, at one time or another, have been ascribed to art). Neoliberals and heterodox economists disagree on the extent of market failure, the former regarding it as rare, while the latter regard it as common. The opponents of subsidy subscribe to the most narrow and restrictive definition of market failure,<sup>51</sup> while the proponents of subsidy subscribe to the widest and least restrictive definition.<sup>52</sup> The tightest definition of market failure requires the loosest definition of market success, and *vice versa*.

Tyler Cowen’s “In Praise of Commercial Culture” is a manifesto for the complete eradication of public subsidy and the universal application of market forces to culture.<sup>53</sup> Joseph Stiglitz, the leading heterodox economist, says, “[a]mong the “commodities” for which markets are most imperfect are those associated with knowledge and information’ Since knowledge in many ways “is like a public good” – namely, is non-excludable and non-rival – then,

46. *Ibid.*, p. 275

47. *Ibid.*

48. Karl Marx. Critique of the Gotha Programme. *The First International and After: Political Writings Volume 3*. p. 354

49. Raymond Williams. *The Long Revolution*. 1965. p. 368

50. Richard Titmuss distinguishes two types of welfare state, one that is restricted (to correcting market failure and assisting deserving groups) and a second that is universalistic and comprehensive. Titmuss in C Pierson and F Castles. *The Welfare State Reader*. 2006. pp. 40–48

51. Ruth Towse, for instance, argues that every effect of market operations must be excluded from being categorised as an example of market failure. Ruth Towse. *A Textbook of Cultural Economics*. 2010. p. 221

52. Joseph Stiglitz says, “whenever markets are incomplete and information is imperfect – that is, essentially, always – . . . there are, in principle, government interventions . . . which can make some individuals better off without making anyone else worse off”. Joseph Stiglitz. *Another Century of Economic Science*. 1991. p. 138

53. Tyler Cowen. *In Praise of Commercial Culture*. 1998.

Stiglitz argues, “firms may have a difficult time appropriating their returns to knowledge”.<sup>54</sup>

In Esping-Andersen’s concept of “de-commodification”, the Welfare State identifies certain key goods that are not to be allocated according to supply and demand but universally and for free as social rights. “The outstanding criterion for social rights must be the degree to which they permit people to make their living standards independent of pure market forces”.<sup>55</sup> According to Esping-Andersen, de-commodification is not “all or nothing”: the “degree of market immunity” is directly proportional to “the strength, scope, and quality of social rights”.<sup>56</sup> While the “social right” to art never had the urgency, popular appeal or political implications of the universal public provision of “the core areas of human need”,<sup>57</sup> the principal of engineering a degree of market immunity for something prized over and above its economic value is the same. However, it might be necessary to supplement the theory of

art’s public subsidy not only with the progressive processes of de-commodification but also the conservative defence of “pre-commodification”.<sup>58</sup> If the production of art had never been fully commodified in the first place,<sup>59</sup> and if art remained economically exceptional even while it functioned anomalously within capitalism,<sup>60</sup> then strictly speaking it would be impossible for art to be de-commodified. Public subsidy for the arts could, at best, be described as art’s de-commodification without art’s de-commodification. The public subsidy of the arts after the Second World War, therefore, may be more accurately understood as an example of the preservation, conservation and expansion of a pre-commodified sphere of culture. It is no less promising for that.

54. Joseph Stiglitz. *Markets, Market Failures, and Development*. 1989. p. 198

55. Gøsta Esping-Andersen. *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. 1990. p. 3

56. *Ibid.*, p. 37

57. *Ibid.*, p. 46

58. *Ibid.*, p. 38-41

59. In assessing whether and to what extent art has been commodified we need to consider two distinctions. First, there is the difference between the commodification of products (ie putting them for sale on the market) and the commodification of labour (ie the selling of labour-power as wage-labour). The latter, which is the basis of the capitalist mode of production has never occurred in art. The second of the two distinctions is that between “simple commodity pro-

duction” and “capitalist commodity production”, only the former corresponding to art’s mode of production. The general concept of commodification, including its application to art, fails to make this distinction. Ironically, the concept of commodification was coined by Western Marxists specifically to account for the fate of art within capitalism.

60. Meyer Schapiro says the artist “is an exception in modern society” insofar as “the artist is a producer who possesses his own tools of work and is personally responsible for his entire product, without any division of labour”. As a result, the painter “is not the dealer’s employee, nor is he a professional who renders the dealer a service: the relation is that of two entrepreneurs, one a merchant, the other a producer”. (Schapiro, Meyer. *On the Relation of Patron and Artist: Comments on a Proposed Model for the Scientist*. 1964.) Schapiro is correct here except for his categorisation of the artist producer as an “entrepreneur” given that the entrepreneur begins with capital or someone else’s capital rather than with their own labour.

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# Valuing the Arts

## **HANNAH NEWELL**

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1. Charles Esche's debate speech on "Politics, Economics and Culture: A different balance?" at the 4th Princess Margaret Awards, 19 March 2012, published online by the EFC YouTube channel, (updated 30 March 2012-03-30). URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0WOx12Ly2Y> (Accessed 2014-02-12).

2. *The Glory of the Garden: The Development of the Arts in England*. London: Arts Council of Great Britain. 1984. Cited in Rory Francis. *Managing Disappointment: Arts Policy, Funding and the Social Inclusion Agenda*. 2004. p. 134

3. Francois Matarasso. *Use or Ornament? The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts*. 1997.

**SPEAKING IN BRUSSELS ON RECEIVING** the Princess Margaret Award in 2012, Director of the Van Abbemuseum, curator and writer Charles Esche made a very ambitious claim for the importance of the arts in society today. Specifically, Esche endowed the arts with having the ability to (re)complicate and challenge, even refuse, a process of homogenisation by which all societal values are fundamentally expressed by the successful production of surplus capital. Esche argued that in the post-1989 period—a period characterised by rapid financial deregulation, the privatisation of the public sphere and the denial of alternatives, social or political, to free-market logic—economic interests alone have become the foundation upon which all else is built, and falls (it's the economy, stupid).<sup>1</sup> The idea that the arts can challenge capital's ability to assimilate and employ a multitude of meaning, worth and value within its own production is a bold statement when the much debated "value" of the arts is as deeply entwined with capital as it is today. Enmeshed within a distinctly contemporary idea of "culture", the arts' channels of dissemination are often just another byway for the global flow of capital.

If economics has conceptually and linguistically transformed politics via a neo-liberal ideology, redacting myriad measures of value and enveloping society, the replacement of the term patronage with "investment" within the language of arts funding clearly demonstrates this shift. In the UK, this change can be traced back to the early 1980s when The Arts Council of Great Britain, as it was called then, began to defend its legitimacy to society as economic, prompted by the implementation of a Financial Management Initiative by the Conservative government of the time, which demanded greater accountability for expenditure. The Arts Council responded with *The Glory of the Garden* report, merging state patronage with a new idea of state instrumentalism: a strategy of focused investment with accountable returns.<sup>2</sup> Those returns were defined by John Myerscouth's 1988 report, *The Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain*, introducing the idea of "cultural capital" as a national asset. This new model of the arts as economically and socially instrumental would go on to inform the cultural policy of the superseding New Labour Government, which took power in 1997. The same year a report by Francois Matarasso linked investment in the arts to the reduction of social deprivation via the "social impact" of participation.<sup>3</sup> As a government, New Labour would infuse political rhetoric with these ideals in order to "capture the value of culture" posing culture as a driving force within a new service based knowledge economy.<sup>4</sup> As such, the "creative" has come to be singularly idealised within the world of work, the figure of the artist seemingly corresponding with the romanticised

agent of entrepreneurial, creative wealth creation, thereby situating the arts within the framework of the “cultural industries” and the artist as a “cultural worker”: the idealised precariat.

Due to this blurring between culture and capital, art and work, the question of what the arts are “worth” to the state is predominately articulated in terms of economic risk and return, a risk that seems far, far greater in a time of bust. Esche’s statement arrived amongst an impassioned revival of the “cultural value debate”: a long-standing argument over the remits and limitations of quantitative and qualitative valuations of the arts, arguments which are keenly divisive in the current environment of austerity politics. The reality that, through the rhetoric of politics, economic value is allowed to outstrip and define all others has become increasingly transparent in those countries affected by the 2008 recession and the subsequent backlash of brutal cuts to state funding and services—of those things now defined as “unsustainable”. (Economic insecurity has exacerbated the doubt of more recent years that much of the so-called measurement of culture’s economic worth proved to be unfounded, badly implemented and poorly accounted for.) In the UK, this increased demand for apparently scarce resources requires the arts to advocate themselves as a good investment for society, as demonstrated by a wave of research projects and political campaigns from various institutional bodies and independent organisations in anticipation of an upcoming UK election in 2015. See the recent publication of the Warrick Commission’s 2015 report *Enriching Britain: Culture, Creativity and Growth*, the Art and Humanities Research Council’s ongoing Cultural Value Project, the Artist Information Companies’ Paying Artists Campaign, London advocacy group Common Practice and the recent formation of the Creative Industries Foundation as a parliamentary lobby for the arts, as examples. These studies and campaigns offer various opinions on to what extent artists and arts organisations should be supported and by whom, in what activities or roles and how the arts might, or should, become more independently sustainable from state support, or/and how the arts are in fact of great benefit to the economy.

Apparently trapped within a defensive position — a defence informed by the debatable concept of cultural value and a language of advocacy necessarily relating to expenditure — and curtailed by austerity and economic insecurity, can the arts become, as Esche hopes, the sector most primed to challenge to the dominance of capital over what is of value and import to society? Tellingly none of the above absolutely refute, even if they do question, the need to legitimise the support of artistic

4. Tessa Jowell in her 2003 speech “Government and the Value of Culture”, cited in John Holden. *Cultural Value and the Crisis of Legitimacy*. 2006. p. 13.

5. The three case studies are based on interviews with Jonathan Harvey (Acme), Tara Cranswick (V22) and Professor Andy Abbott (Black Dogs) conducted in 2013 and 2014.

activity as an economic return. To question how much weight Esche's idea might have in reality, I would like to turn to three case studies of arts organisations that all make similar basic claims as to why the arts and arts practice matter: Acme Studios, the art investment group V22, and the arts collective Black Dogs.<sup>5</sup> The ways in which these organisations respectively support, advocate and materialise that importance is radically divergent, allowing for intersections with other contrastive value formations in relationship to politics, property and the urban landscape, community, work and the market. In particular, the way in which they articulate what is at stake in supporting the arts—primarily by supporting individual artists, a group under-represented within contemporary funding structures in comparison to large administrative organisations focused on public engagement—exposes the intriguing slippage of meaning in the use of terms such as “risk” and “investment”. Alongside this comparative analysis, these three organisations were also chosen in order to paint a picture of the contemporary art-world in the UK and how it has evolved over recent decades. Together these organisations narrate different aspects of the arts' current relationship to capital and a concomitant journey toward an austerity-provoked crisis of legitimacy, each responding to that crisis in very different ways.

### **Acme Studios: “Safe as Houses”**

From its founding in the early 1970s to its current form today, the studio provider Acme Studios is an adaptive arts organisation that spans four decades of change in both the urban and arts-funding landscape of London. Over the years, Acme have become an advisory organisation and influential model for other studio providers, artists, funding structures and property developers alike, while its co-founders Jonathan Harvey and David Panton both received an OBE for their services to the arts in 2014.

Now the largest provider of artist studios in the UK, Acme began as a charitable housing association in 1974 set up by young arts graduates who were in need of a cheap place to work and live. By forging a relationship with local government via the then existing Greater London Council (GLC), Acme was able to utilise the wasted resource of empty housing awaiting demolition in areas pegged for redevelopment: an ongoing city-wide programme, but one that had been halted due to a lack of funds. While incredibly cheap short-term, the necessary return of buildings that were adapted and improved by the artists themselves to become homes, the studios and often the locale of productive communities consequently ended up feeling, as Harvey described it, like a severe loss of time and effort. Funds from the Arts Council, received from 1976 onwards, provided revenue funding and studio conversion grants that allowed Acme to take on longer-term leases, but still Acme was keenly aware of the inevitable loss — a pattern of gentrification and the displacement that we are now very familiar with. For Harvey, the “investment” of care made by artists and Acme were not returned, utilised by a combination of the state and private interests to regenerate areas of the city. As early as 1976, Acme noted in a newsletter their future ambition to become independent, secure permanent studio sites and “extend

what is viable as art patronage at a time when there is a shortage of public money and many demands upon it”, a sentiment that could easily have been written today. From its beginnings, Acme has striven to take control of patronage to protect an ethos of supporting artists and their work as valuable in and of itself, as opposed to interested “investment” that seeks additional returns or results from the arts. However, as an organisation Acme has not only benefited over time by this model of patronage as investment but has, in becoming independent off the back of that investment, essentially created a privatised system of patronage that relies on the property market, a system that we will see expanded upon by the younger organisation V22.

As of March 2015, Acme has not only secured permanent buildings, but has become a self-sustaining non-profit. Two conjoined accomplishments, Acme have become financially independent via the ownership of property and acting as an active (rather than passive) agent within the market. Acme’s initial acquisition of property was occasioned mainly by the advent of the National Lottery in the early 1990s. While during the previous decade public subsidy had been significantly revoked in favour of corporate sponsorship, in 1994 the newly subdivided Arts Council of Britain became the distributor of the National Lottery funds. Whittled away to half its previous size in 1987, the three arts councils of England, Scotland and Wales gained sudden momentum, like the severed head of a hydra. Where there had been none, suddenly there was unprecedented amounts of capital available, siphoned from the unwitting public purse in what has been called a “sneak tax on the poor for the patronage of the rich” and partly available to the arts.<sup>6</sup> This was the decade in which culture became strategically linked to inward investment: a combination of the arts with development as a strategy to increase economic wealth and sculpt prosperous urban landscapes. While Acme’s early years belonged to a city shedding its industrial chrysalis for the steely heights of finance and commerce, in the run-up to the millennium London was positioning itself as the capital of Europe’s financial services sector and “culture” took on a new role, branding Britain as a market force and as a destination. A swathe of large “aspirational” cultural projects were fuelled by private investments, but conjoined to an arts policy that advocated the arts as socially and economically inspiring to the general populace, the most symbolic element of which was of course the Tate Modern and later the “umbilical cord of gold”—the Millennium Bridge — that connected the new museum to the City.

When I interviewed Jonathan Harvey in early 2014, he mused that Acme’s pending independence was exceedingly well-timed. As a studio provider, Harvey observed, Acme would no longer fit current criteria for support due to instrumental arts policy’s requirement to define the value of the arts in terms of a quantitative measurement of social-economic impact—a return on investment now increasingly scrutinised for accuracy and accountability. While grateful to the Arts Council for their past support, Harvey criticised current policy as overly audience-led rather than artist-led, asking “what will there be for audiences to engage with” if artists are not supported? Acme has no specific art audience for its activities as its entire focus is to provide secure, functional and affordable studios in order to maximise the amount of time artists can spend in them, developing their practice and producing their work.

6. House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee. *The Operation of the National Lottery*. Paragraph 32 cited by Paul Bickley. *The National Lottery: Is it Progressive?* 2009. p. 11

7. *Great Art and Culture for Everyone: 10 year strategic framework 2010 – 2020*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2013. p. 3.

Crucially, Acme does not see artists as entrepreneurs in need of start-up capital, but likely “poor” and consistently so, and therefore in need of long-term support. While they do argue for the greater and local benefit of artist studios, Acme refuses to be prescriptive on who is awarded a studio or on what kind of work they should produce, and makes no demands that artists be socially engaged, describing the studio as “private” and separating themselves entirely from an instrumental arts policy. Interestingly, Harvey’s passionate argument for artistic freedom is riddled with jarring speculative terms, specifically the imperative to “invest” in artists, allowing them to take creative “risks”. However, here the financial risk is made in support of artists’ own financial risk-taking, in order to maintain their presence and potential production: “Our public benefit is through the relief of poverty — helping artists who cannot afford studio space on the open market”. As such the shift from at arm’s length “patronage” to interested “investment” takes place within the discord between Acme and the Art Council, which describes itself as the “custodian of public investment ... charged with getting the maximum value” out of the arts in terms of “entertainment”, “education”, “health”, “regional regeneration”, “tourism and our standing abroad”.<sup>7</sup>

For Acme, a crucial form of artist support, the provision of space to work, is ignored by state funding and therefore relies on their strategic reworking of the relationship between the artist’s studio and the profitable business of property development (essentially an inflected process of privatisation). The incredible speed at which pockets of London now convulse into the throws of gentrification means that the position of low-income inhabitants such as artists is increasingly insecure. In response, Acme has developed a pioneering, truly twenty-first century model of studio provision in the form of “planning gain deals” where developers are awarded projects by London councils due to their inclusion of studio blocks. Gaining high-quality, new-build and yet still-affordable studios in mixed-use developments, Acme has cleverly found a way to secure permanent studios in areas even after they have been gentrified and preventing artists from being priced out (although primarily in regards to studios as work spaces as opposed to living spaces). While refusing the expression of artistic value as “capital”, the bloated property market has become the essential condition of their operation. Distanced from policy and state funding, studio provision becomes locked into a relationship with gentrification as an agent that operates independently within, rather than against, an aggressive and overly powerful property market.

## **V22: “Investing in passion”**

In many ways, V22 is the millennial inheritor to Acme, being in part a London-based artist studio provider that seeks to use property investment to secure studio sites. But more than this, V22 administrates a larger relationship between art and capital, specifically through the art market and a contemporary art collection: a total mechanism to provide private patronage to artists. As such, V22 also fervently believes in the imperative of “investing” in the creative potential of artists and supporting their practice directly, something that, like Acme, V22 sees public funding to be unable to adequately provide through its instrumental, audience-led policy.

Unlike Acme, however, V22 casts artists as individual producers operating within the market and has created a structure that not only sustains itself through the capitalisation of that artistic potential via that market, but is also actively comfortable with and utilises the expression of the value of art quantitatively in terms of price: a distilled translation of art's other possible intrinsic values, whether they be symbolic, political, aesthetic etc.<sup>8</sup>

Founded in 2006 at the height of an art market bubble, V22 operates on the basis that financial investment in the art world fuels the art market and, in doing so, supports artists. As Director Tara Cranswick succinctly put it, V22 operates on the basis that “the market could be the best patron the arts has ever had”. This “economic symbiosis between the art market and finance” became common during the 1990s and early 2000s.<sup>9</sup> Over this period, a heightened interest in the collection of contemporary art “coincided with globalisation, deregulation and financialisation of the world economy, and, more pertinently, its resultant, phenomenal wealth creation”.<sup>10</sup> Yet another area for the speculative practices of financial investors, art became an “alternative asset class” and was accompanied by a spate of newly founded art funds in the first decade of this century, bringing art and financial experts together under one roof, much as V22 does. However, the belief that the market “could be” a perfect patron is dependent on its carefully coordinated management by the compound structure of V22.

A three-pronged organisation, V22 is a public collection of contemporary art listed on the stock market, a coordinator of an exhibition and events programme, and a provider of artist studios. The V22 collection, or V22 PLC, is the lynchpin of this networked structure and is at the heart of its ambitions. The first art collection to be listed on the stock market as part of a publicly owned company (that is, owned via stocks and shares), investment in the collection operates on a shareholder basis. “Investor-patrons” are able to buy shares in the collection at low investment thresholds, opening up the possibility of patronage to a wider support base, while collected artists also receive their chosen ratio of shares-to-cash as payment for their work. When I spoke to Cranswick in 2014, the collected artists owned almost 40 per cent of the collection, a figure she hoped to raise to over 50 per cent. Majority ownership for artists is an important goal for V22 as it strengthens artist control over the management of the collection and their influence over the life of their work. In essence, V22 seeks to counter the sway that very wealthy collectors can have over the art market, while also protecting an artist's work, and subsequently their careers, from being manhandled by the financial ambitions and individual taste of these influential players. For V22 the market “can be” a good patron if artists and a diversified group of investors (in terms of wealth at least) can gain access to the mechanisms of “patronage” and relies on a belief in the market as potentially a democratic tool. It also relies on the idea that investments are made “not only” in pursuit of profit and generally reflects the belief that privatisation can better provide for societal needs than the operations of a public sector. This is illustrated by V22's acceptance into the list of companies on the UK initiative, the Social Stock Exchange: a social finance intermediary that connects investors with social organisations.

Through a shareholder model, the patronage of the collection is seen to extend

8. See William Gramp. Pricing the Priceless: Art, Artists and Economics//1989. 2013. pp. 31-34

9. Melanie Gillan. Hedge Fund. In *The Market*. Natasha Degen (ed.). London and Cambridge: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press. 2013. p. 69

10. Natasha Degen. Introduction. In *The Market*. 2013. p. 12

11. StockMarketWire.com. V22 make sale from its contemporary art collection. 2013.

12. Collected artists include well-known names such as Phyllida Barlow, Martin Creed, Mark Titchner, Martin Westwood and Rebecca Warren alongside emerging artists.

13. Cited in William Gramp. Pricing the Priceless: Art, Artists and Economics//1989. 2013. pp. 31-34

14. Paul De Bruyne and Pascal Gielen. Introduction: Between the Individual and the Common. In *Institutional Attitudes: Instituting in a Flat World*. 2013. p. 5

financially over time. As a secure residing place for art work, V22 safe-guards and compounds the artist's "worth" within the art market and within the art world discourse via the prestige of collection and exhibition as part of that collection. Profit from sales — the very first of which was made in 2013, seven years after V22's founding for a 367% return — is then fed back into the collection in order to purchase more works (support more artists or support collected artists more), and in future, Cranswick intimated, will be used to invest in studio properties.<sup>11</sup> In conjunction with securing the sites of artistic production, the buildings are themselves important assets — part of a studio business that supports the networked structure of V22 — as is the public programme, run by the V22 Foundation, the only part of V22 that receives funding from the Arts Council England and which weaves a legitimising network of discourse and audience interaction around V22 and its artists. The collection increasingly gains in cultural posterity, for itself, the artists and, the organisation believes, for the art world and society at large, by finding a way to support the production and conservation of art that V22 believes is of "worth": a qualitative value judgement expressed quantitatively by the machinations of the art market.<sup>12</sup> Before instinctively shrinking from the summary packaging of art's valuation as price, it is worthwhile considering the similarity between how museums value work and how markets do: an understanding of value as located in the authorship of the individual artist. The story of the art work, its history within the narrative of the artist's career and their standing in the art world create what formidable wheeler and dealer of 1960's Neo-abstract art, Leo Castelli, called art's "myths".<sup>13</sup> Consolidated by art criticism, the unique, creative expression of the individual artist is a perfect formulation of value for the liberal, beneficent, free market, which has been capitalising on art in this way for more than a century: "in other words, the myth of the individual artist is a product of the mental space of free market capitalism, with works and signature often functioning as a brand".<sup>14</sup>

V22 essentially manages this brand, specifically in the interest of supporting artists—working, like Acme, not against but within an existent structure of art's entanglement with capital. However, V22 engages with that entanglement affirmatively and not only out of necessity. This is due to a critical belief that the market can and does respond quicker to artistic innovation than the bureaucracy of funding and its need for advocacy. In this scenario, the market as patron supposedly allows for greater artistic freedom, as the product of that freedom is attractive to the market.

Harrison and Cynthia White's recognised study, *Canvases and Careers*, locates the origin of this mutual pursuit of innovation in the transition from the hierarchical power of the salons in nineteenth century France to the modern system of critics and dealers: "the new-dealer critic system had a built-in motive for encouraging innovative work: encouraging speculation ... the financial speculation in art found its cultural counterpart in the speculation of taste".<sup>15</sup> V22 co-ordinates the "speculative" attribution of value to art works as expressed through price but reliant on an art world discourse through its combined arms of activity while the collection model allows art to operate as an asset; one that accumulates interest over time. Despite the apparent constrictions to what kind of work can be supported by the market in that it must

essentially be collectable and be seen as a “good” future investment — limitations that Acme, with its more hands off approach, does not impose — Cranswick believes that V22 still manages to (and crucially makes an effort to) collect what might be deemed “difficult” work by the standards of other collectors (such as the large scale installation work of Martin Creed and Phyllida Barlow or the film works of Elizabeth Price) because its core goal is not simply profit, but supporting the arts. Equally, Cranswick is very much aware that V22’s model of patronage is not appropriate for some forms of artistic production that will likely always require funding. But by supporting and including artists as shareholders alongside low investment thresholds, V22 sees itself as “democratising taste”: able to enrich how price houses meaning by providing a more “direct route” to patronage for both artists and the general populace. However, it can also be said that V22 more generally perpetuates an already existing and dominant narrative of value, by necessarily pandering to established discourse and financial expression as an “advisor<sup>2</sup> to its own investment in order to survive. (It is worth noting that sustainability and not profit is the goal for V22 as with Acme: reinvesting in the arts) This is how “good” art gets produced, according to Cranswick: through the semi-speculative risk taking of the market as opposed to out of touch funding structures, bogged down in bureaucracy and the need to defend spending. Whether expressed by the state or by the market, it seems as though the value of art to society is communicated via capital and in the face of the seeming failure of advocates of public subsidy to defend the inherent value of artistic production and creative potential, this “share-holder democracy” appears a pioneering alternative.

15. Harrison and Cynthia White. *Caravasses and Careers: Institutional Change in the French Painting World*. 1993. p. 6

### **Black Dogs: “Within, Against and Beyond”**

Originating from Leeds and the nearby Bradford, but now with members spread around the country, including London, the Black Dogs art collective heralds from a tradition of anarcho-punk collectivist action and alternative communities. The founding of this scene goes back to a counter-cultural movement which developed within the cleaved city infrastructure of Leeds during the 1980s — a utilisation of free, malleable space for self-determined activity that echoes Acme Studios’ early years. However, rather than turning away from the so-called “naïveté” of past practices, Black Dogs charts and revives the present possibility of these alternative histories, allowing them to “resonate” through the contemporary urban fabric by building up a set of narratives that challenge the dominant story of capitalist success.

In contrast to the organisations discussed above, Black Dogs operate on the basis of a radical refusal to define, legitimise or sustain their activities in economic terms. Organised around an ethos of “for love not money” belonging to Do-It-Yourself (D.I.Y) culture, the collective frame their social practice as counter-economic, specifically as a negation of “work”. Instead their practice is, in and of itself, the act of collective organisation done for-its-own-sake, at the heart of which is the constant critical self-reflection on why doing something, anything, for love and not money is so much more enjoyable and rewarding than the alternative. As part of this practice Black Dogs invites others to participate in, celebrate and create independent,

16. “Making Diverse Economies” was the first a series of events run by Charlotte Morgan and Julia Udall at Portland Works in December 2013 as part of Art Sheffield 2013, a festival of the arts. Referred to by Andy Abbott while in conversation with the author. See URL: <http://www.artsheffield.org/2013/events/making-diverse-economies-charlotte-morgan-julia-udall/>.

17. Recent research done by the Artists Information Company on *Paying Artists* suggests that artists prioritise the opportunity to make and exhibit work over and above anything else, including payment. The same dedication was singled out as a primary finding in the study *Career paths of visual artists* by the Arts Council of England in 1997. See S. Honey, P. Heron and C. Jackson. *Career Paths of Visual Artists*. 1997.

18. Quoted by Sven Luticken in *Three Autonomies or More. The Autonomy Project Newspaper #1: Positioning*. 2010.

done-for-its-own-sake examples of social organisation: transient spaces setting up temporary camp sites within capitalism as exhibitions, pub quizzes, self-published zines, festivals and gigs, live music, broadcasting, panel discussions and debates, mapping of histories, celebrations of amateurs and hobbies, games and learning new tricks.

In doing so, Andy Abbott, a co-founder of the collective, believes that there is a potential to “crack capitalism”: to open and expand those slivers of space and time where human endeavour is not defined by capital via an oppositional strategy of “within, against and beyond”. While V22 and Acme operate “within” contemporary capitalism, the protective spaces of art production that they have created do not outwardly challenge the dominance of capital, instead finding ways to pro-actively survive as part of that system. Black Dogs refuses any such compromise. Abbott channels the writer Raoul Vaneigem, stating “we don’t want to just survive, we want to live!”

Of course, this is a difficult proposition for many artists and it has been heavily critiqued by the organisations campaigning for artists’ rights to reasonable pay and employment security such as the London-based Precarious Workers Brigade (PWB). In a round-table discussion with the Abbott at Portland Works in Sheffield in December 2013, the PWB argued that an ethical distancing of cultural activity from work in order to create an alternative sphere actively encourages the exploitation of artists in the context of the professional art world.<sup>16</sup> Abbott’s response is ultimately to deny that context. In many ways this refusal to engage with the structure of professionalised practice is essentially also a refusal of its potential exploitation of artists’ general willingness to perform “for love and not money”.<sup>17</sup> In this regard, Abbott is keen to draw a line between the terminology of “self-organisation” and D.I.Y culture, a distancing that separates Black Dogs from the greater institution of art and critiques its uncritical construction of art practice as a career, from “the dominant narrative that, *of course*, you want to be part of the institution, that you want your art to be your living and that the ideal is to be paid”.

Once descriptive of a form of political resistance, the term self-organisation was affiliated with collective art practices during the late 1990s. Formalised and increasingly de-clawed inside the art institution as part of a mild-mannered economy of critique, self-organised practice became increasingly structural within the arts rather than being about actual political impact. This emphasis on structure—a combination of networked connections and self-sufficiency—also allowed self-organisational and collective practices to be all too easily subsumed into an exploitative pay-your-dues stage of progression within an artist’s career. “We are the avant-garde, but also the job slaves”, as critic Jan Verwoert succinctly puts it.<sup>18</sup> And naturally this is not confined to professionalised art practice. As Abbott put it, neither self-organisation nor D.I.Y can be seen as inherently radical as the form is taken on by late capitalism. Through the idealisation of the “creative” as the “aristocracy” of self-affirming work, the once resistant activity of self-organisation has fractured and dispersed within the language of entrepreneurial labour (and New Labour).<sup>19</sup> An increasingly pervasive work ethic means that we no longer demand less work—for time and space outside of capital

creation—but ask for better, more fulfilling work. Work becomes occupation and so occupies the subjectivity of the worker.<sup>20</sup> Entrepreneurial self-organisation is “what makes you feel free and empowered one day, but on the next will remind you that there is no other option”, a struggle that seems to be at the heart of art practice today and which drives organisations like V22 and Acme to create the kind of support networks they do.<sup>21</sup>

What does make D.I.Y. radical is its ethics, which reassert a political and social ethos by asking not “how” a project, an event or even art practice itself will continue, but “why”: what alternative political futures does that activity open up? In spite of, or perhaps more accurately, because of arts entanglement with capital, Black Dog’s counter-economic refusal may have the potential for living up to Charles Esche’s ambitious claims for the arts to challenge the dominance of economic value and reclaim a sphere of life from capital creation.

### **The Demands of Austerity**

The state of austerity is the overriding narrative currently controlling any articulation of value within the UK and placing the art sector constantly in a defensive position. Artists, arts organisations and collectives may be quite distinct and even antagonistic in how they envision and implement their role as facilitators, supporters and makers of art work, but the need to articulate that value, to defend and support that activity, is very much a shared endeavour. The language of the “cultural value debate” has directed how arts institutions and arts organisations need to articulate what value they can offer, and crucially, what worth they produce. As such, and because of the different starting points and socio-political organisational structures of these organisations, there is a confusing convergence of different language claims. Advocacy language such as “cultural value” is too broad, and necessarily too vague and empty in its attempt to encapsulate diversity and translate it into a common defence. Yet, due to an enforced environment of fear, and a belief that the necessity for austerity cannot be challenged outright (the “books” must be “balanced”), the self-defeating claim that the legitimacy of the arts should be ultimately judged in terms of economic return remains unreformed.

We should perhaps take the apparent difficulty in articulating the qualitative values inherent to the arts in quantitative terms not as a failure of the arts to claim a legitimate role in society but as the potential for perverting the summary expression of societal “good” in terms of economic success — success being always an expression of more, of expansion, of growth, rather than other ideals of a “good” society: one that we want to be a part of. The rupture in which the arts are posed as unsustainable — when the loss of the public sphere becomes blatantly visible — is perhaps also the time that an offensive becomes imaginable.<sup>22</sup>

It seems crucial that, despite their different methodologies and reasons for organising, all three of the above organisations attempt to protect artists against the exploitation of their capacity to operate on a basis of “for love not money”, even, as in the case of Acme and V22 when it means engaging with the market in order to negotiate a

19. Writing on the political merger between the artistic field and the world of work, James Heartfield observes that “a transformation of attitudes to work” in the late 1990s had turned “creativity into the stuff of Labour” referring to the rhetoric of the New Labour government which gained power in 1997. Heartfield, James. *The Creativity Gap*. 2005. p. 3

20. Franco (Bifo) Berardi. *Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*. 2009.

21. Jan Verwoert. All the wrong examples. 2013. p. 123

22. Gerald Raunig. Flatness Rules. In *Institutional Attitudes: Instituting in a Flat World*. 2013. p. 172

23. Lars Bang Larsen. The Paradox of Art and Work. In *Work Work Work*. 2010. p. 24

certain amount of protection and agency within it. Even while advocating the market as patron, Tara Cranswick of V22 argues that the arts will never be able to totally rely on “major private sector institutional support” as arts institutions “cannot make money” adding “and they shouldn’t be, really: making money, that is. Why would you not re-invest it in the arts?”

To an extent, all three organisations, Acme, V22 and Black Dogs are working “within, against and beyond” the capitalised realms of value and value making, even if it is only by supporting the practice of artists as organisers, as makers, as a productive force and example of value making that complicates and challenges a homogenised state of “value” even as it is entwined with capital, or perhaps more correctly because it is entwined. The arts may, as the critic Lars Bang Larsen suggests, provide a critical and discursive tool for articulating a culture devoid of borders—“the articulation of things that have grown together such as art and work, state and economy, left and right, politics and media, artist and entrepreneur, citizen and consumer, affect and production”—in the fluidity of values awash with capital.<sup>23</sup>

However, it also seems that in the defence of a semi-autonomous sphere for this activity to continue, the arts are being sequestered into a more and more privatised and separate area that is less and less likely to be able to articulate its role as part of society, and more easily seen as a luxury—as “unsustainable”. Both Acme and V22 provide support within but do not challenge those mechanisms that create the precarity they organise to alleviate. In comparison, Black Dogs’ negation of “love”, “passion” and “care” as “work” leaves artists and those who otherwise do things “for love and not money”, who do not measure the worth of their endeavours or express it to others in terms of profit, to bear the brunt of their precarious financial state, essentially “paying for” this kind of activity to exist. Care, doing something for love, thereby becomes something that cannot be valued collectively or supported by the state (there is no such thing as society) but something that must be maintained individually, and more easily afforded by the lucky, the wealthy and the few. Precarity as an essential condition of the arts, as a condition of non-capitalised value, remains cloaked by a supposition of choice, as a naturalised state of “risk” rather than as an enforced insecurity created by ideological economics and political austerity. To have the impact that Charles Esche hopes it might, rather than scrambling to sustain itself in these limited terms, to maintain its integrity as an autonomous sphere, the arts sector needs to work in conjunction with other “unsustainable” sectors of society to utilise the critical and discursive tools it has on hand and organise in favour of facilitating not just a way to survive, but a reason to live.

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# Economic Value, Equivalence and the Nonidentical: Contemporary Art Practices in the Grey Zone of Human and Commercial Economies

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**H**OW CAN WE THINK OF DIFFERENT WAYS to evidence values attached to contemporary art? What follows is a mostly theoretical answer to this question. I propose to elaborate on two apparently disconnected ideas: namely, Theodor W. Adorno's notion of the nonidentical and David Graeber's conception of human economies to show that one form of "value" at work in certain practices of contemporary art lies in their capacity to prompt unexpected social relations that are hardly relevant to the preponderant notion of economic value. Yet, I will stress that contemporary art engages in this prompting of social relations from within the very productive conditions deployed by contemporary capitalism.

A central concept in Theodor W. Adorno's *Negative Dialectic* is the nonidentical – an experience that lies beyond the grasp of conceptual thinking and that, through its very contrast with conceptual thinking, makes the latter possible. According to Adorno, there is no way of having "direct access" to the nonidentical. At most, it can be revealed by conceptual resonances or constellations and, indeed, paradigmatically, by art. Against the abstract principle of conceptualisation, Adorno thinks that art can manifest in its concreteness the heterogeneous nature of the nonidentical.

On the other hand, in *Debt. The first 5,000 years*, anthropologist David Graeber distinguishes between "commercial economies" and "human economies". The former are primarily focussed on producing and accumulating wealth; the latter are oriented towards creating, maintaining or severing relations between people. Commercial economies operate through the principle of abstract exchange that allows measuring objects and experiences that otherwise would be incommensurable; human economies operate through the concreteness and singularity of transactions qua social relations.

In this text, I want to re-read Adorno's highly speculative notion of the nonidentical in the light of Graeber's anthropological idea of human economies so as to figure out what sort of "value" can be mobilised by contemporary artistic practices in order to challenge the hegemonic notion of value defined for it by the capitalist market. Before doing this, I want to introduce Immanuel Wallerstein's concept of "world-system" to highlight how profit-driven economic exchange has come to globally articulate cultural differences and social inequalities. I will note also that none of the frequent crises of capitalism have managed to challenge its core notion of economic value as an abstract form of exchange. Following the insights of John Roberts and Gregory Sholette, I will call attention to the ways in which most contemporary artistic practices barely fit within this profit-oriented framework. If it is not just economic value, what are artists producing? Intertwined with my argument, I will comment on three artistic projects which answer this question and exemplify alternative or complementary modes of non-economic value creation. In all three cases, I will stress that they are located within that world-system of economic exchange while, at the same time, they do not primarily endeavour to produce monetary value.

## I

The idea of the world as an integrated totality took hold in modern European thinking during the 18th and 19th centuries, when just one path was imagined for universal

progress, whether it was political, economic or artistic. G. W. F. Hegel was categorical about this, stating that “[t]he History of the World travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of History, Asia the beginning”.<sup>2</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein has forcefully argued that such totalising ideas were made possible by the configuration of what he terms a “world-system”.<sup>3</sup> According to Wallerstein, this system has unified the whole world in economic terms since the 16th century through the availability of free labour and the production of an excess that was traded in the market. Unequal relationships have since been held together by a common economic system whose core value is the production of economic benefit. Wallerstein’s most important point is in fact that the configuration of the global economy as a “world-system” was intrinsically imbalanced. During the second half of the 20th century, developmentalist discourse held with modernist confidence that all nations could advance in the same path via industrialisation, yet Wallerstein makes clear that such a development was only possible for some nations that profited earlier from the economic exploitation and subordination of ample regions of the world. It is telling, in this regard, that Wallerstein defines a world-system quite simply “as a unit with a single division of labour and multiple cultural systems”.<sup>4</sup> Through the market logic of capitalism, these different cultural systems are articulated and tamed not to confront the inequalities provoked by that unequal division of labour. This is the basic principle of the capitalist world-system –the articulation of its different cultures by the single value of profit-driven economic exchange.

In the history of capitalism, economic crises have marked periods of revolt against its world-system. The financial crisis of 2008, which erupted with the fall of key investment companies and banks, will be most remembered perhaps for the dubious role of different states in holding together the financial and market machinery against the interest of their own people. The phenomenon reinvigorated debates around “value-measurement that is throwing up intense struggles between the capitalist value form and popular life-values”.<sup>5</sup> One frequent topic in this debate has been the distinction between financial capital and “real” economic assets.<sup>6</sup> Often conceived as fictitious, finance would result from sheer speculation, while the real economy would derive directly from concrete forms of labour. Yet, a stark distinction such as this would miss the point regarding how the production of economic value has evolved in recent decades. Moreover, regardless of its critical usefulness, the distinction does not call into question the very conception of value that prevails in the capitalist world-system. This would be “a form of social wealth constituted by a spatially and temporally generalising social relation of equivalence and substitutability”.<sup>7</sup> The point made by Mann here is that it does not matter how profound the 2008 crisis was, since such a hegemonic notion of value was not shaken. There has then been a crucial aspect of the crisis that has not been thrown into crisis: the category of value.<sup>8</sup> In this sense, the problem would not be so much that under capitalism labour is expropriated or not properly rewarded but that “labour is condemned to the production of value”.<sup>9</sup> It fundamentally keeps operating in terms of “equivalence and substitutability”.

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2. Georg W. F. Hegel. *The Philosophy of History*. 1956. p. 103

3. Immanuel Wallerstein. *The Rise and Future Demise of the World Capitalist System: Concepts for Comparative Analysis*. 2000.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 75

5. David McNally. *From Financial Crisis to World-Slump: Accumulation, Financialisation, and the Global Slowdown*. 2009. p. 35

6. See, for instance, Christian Marazzi. *The Violence of Financial Capitalism*. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e). 2010.

7. Geoff Mann. *Value after Lehman*. 2010. p. 177

8. *Ibid.*, p. 183

9. *Ibid.*, p. 175

10. Theodor W. Adorno. *Negative Dialectics*. 2007. p. 163

11. *Ibid.*, p. 146

12. *Ibid.*, p. 170

13. *Ibid.*, p. 155

14. *Ibid.*, p. 149

15. *Ibid.*, p. 53

16. *Ibid.*, p. 162

17. Theodor W. Adorno. *Aesthetic Theory*. 1997. p. 133

18. *Ibid.* p. 2.

19. Stewart Martin. *The Absolute Artwork Meets the Absolute Commodity*. 2007. See also, Stewart Martin. *Artistic Communism – A Sketch*. 2009.

In the frequent crises that capitalism has undergone, its value system may have been questioned and put under pressure. A crisis, however, only makes more evident what is plain to see. Despite being hegemonic in its world-system, profit-driven production is not the only economic value operating in the world. In other words, capitalism has not managed to incorporate all social practices into its logic of equivalence and substitutability.

This has been noted by different authors, most notably by Theodor W. Adorno. In *Negative Dialectics*, he was especially concerned with the status of what he termed the nonidentical – that which lies beyond the grasp of conceptual thinking. Elaborating on Hegel’s dialectic and the role of negativity in the constitution of identity, Adorno stresses that nonidentity communicates with that from which it was separated by the concept. “It is opaque”, he writes, “only for identity’s claim to be total; it resists the pressure of that claim. But as such it seeks to be audible”.<sup>10</sup> The rule of identification imposes itself over the heterogeneity of the nonidentical. This move is crucial for capitalism since identification underlies the principle of exchange. Only that which has a stabilised identity can be measured and then exchanged. The nonidentical has to be either integrated or repressed. In this sense, the principle of identification “imposes on the whole world an obligation to become identical, to become total”. In a key passage, Adorno relates identity and exchange:

*The barter principle, the reduction of human labor to the abstract universal concept of average working hours, is fundamentally akin to the principle of identification. Barter is the social model of the principle, and without the principle there would be no barter; it is through barter that nonidentical individuals and performances become commensurable and identical. The spread of the principle imposes on the whole world an obligation to become identical, to become total.*<sup>11</sup>

Against the abstraction presiding the principle of identity, the nonidentical is sided with the particular.<sup>12</sup> This particularity makes the nonidentical intractable and thus labelled and neutralised as absurd: “The mere attempt to turn philosophical thought towards the nonidentical, away from identity, was called absurd. By such attempts the nonidentical was said to be a priori reduced to its concept, and thus identified”.<sup>13</sup> That is, the urge to identify and nullify the excess of the nonidentical seeks to defuse any form of antagonism. In this sense Adorno claims: “The supposition of identity is indeed the ideological element of pure thought, all the way down to formal logic; but hidden in it is also the truth moment of ideology, the pledge that there should be no contradiction, no antagonism.”<sup>14</sup>

Still, even though they pretend to be definitive, concepts can be revealed as incomplete. Against the will of hegemonic discourse, no concept can attain an absolute identity. In Adorno’s words: “the determinable flaw in every concept makes it necessary to cite others”.<sup>15</sup> This would be the reason why the working of constellations can defy the principle of identity. Constellations illuminate the irreducibility of concepts and experiences. They don’t subsume them in an explanation but show how they are interconnected. As Adorno explains, “[b]y themselves, constellations represent from

without what the concept has cut away within: the 'more' which the concept is equally desirous and incapable of being".<sup>16</sup>

For Adorno, art was a paradigmatic materialisation of the working of constellations: "Artworks say what is more than the existing, and they do this exclusively by making a constellation of how it is...".<sup>17</sup> Moreover art does not merely illustrate the nonidentical through the construction of constellations. Its manifestation can actually embody the nonidentical, since the very concept of "art" is itself located within a historically changing constellation and thus "it refuses definition".<sup>18</sup>

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The perception of the world as an integrated totality has been especially strengthened by the pervasiveness of television's images and the Internet. Nothing seems to be left outside its reach. Sometimes, however, instead of integrating itself into the wholeness, the production of images seems to disintegrate it.

## II

Following in the footsteps of Adorno, Stewart Martin has insistently stressed that we must not lose sight of the fact that modern and contemporary art are cultural forms developed under the capitalist conditions set since the 18th century.<sup>19</sup> This much seems obvious: art is practiced within specific material conditions, and these have been the ones fixed almost indisputably by capitalism. It, however, does not mean that all artistic practices have been economically

**CANAL\*MOTOBOY** was a project orchestrated by Catalanian artist Antoni Abad in which a group of motorcycle delivery boys or "motoboys" in the Brazilian city of São Paulo organised themselves as a temporary community through the use of new media. In 2007, 12 motoboys were provided with last generation mobile phones to photograph, videorecord and tag their everyday encounters and street experiences and upload them into a webpage ([www.megafone.net](http://www.megafone.net)). The project was sponsored by the Spanish Public Agency for Cultural Action, public cultural institutions in Brazil and a private mobile phone company. The easiest interpretation would be to reckon these motoboys as producing their own images of their city and their lives. However, they were not just producing an alternative representation of themselves to be added to that of mainstream media. Beyond representing, they were enacting, through the use of new media, unexpected social relations. They held weekly meetings to discuss the group's strategy and define new tags to classify their data; they organised to have a meeting with representatives from the transit administration from São Paulo's town hall to discuss their group's status; and, most revealingly, they continued gathering and working together up to today once the "artistic project" was over. Even though canal\*MOTOBY was made possible by cell phones and private communicational networks, it can hardly be said that the primary or sole implication of such a project was to implement the media logic of image equivalence and substitutability.

In a previous work along the same line that took place in 2005 in the Spanish city of Lleida, Abad gathered a group of gypsy teenagers in canal\*GITANO. In this work, the call to have boys and girls meeting without relatives being present was already a challenge for the community's habits and imaginary. Around the use of cell phones, new approaches to the gypsy everyday life were developed. The participants held quite uncomfortable interviews with the male heads of their community (patriarchs) in which they would ask them to explain what it meant to be a "gypsy" or a "patriarch". Identitarian notions that were normally assumed had now to be explained and supported. "Internet's the Devil", one of the patriarchs told Abad.

It is specially revealing the use of cell phones in these projects. Technology is a key element in the spread of capitalism and its profit oriented productivism. Although cell phones are programmed to be nodes of abstract exchange in a communicational network, in these cases we find that they enact singularly heterogeneous social practices. By means of a device that is expected to produce and circulate exchangeable signs, the unexpected is brought into existence. Both projects disrupt the motoboy's and the gypsy's hegemonic representation by making present displaced and excluded practices. In this sense, a technology of equivalence is made to produce non-equivalent social relations through the specific practice of their users.

20. I have developed this argument in more detail in Artistic Labour, Enclosure and the New Economy. *Afterall. A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*. 30. 2012.

21. David Graeber points to this paradox in The Sadness of Post-workerism. 2011. p. 97

22. John Roberts. Art, 'Enclave Theory' and the Communist Imaginary. 2009. p. 355

23. Gregory Sholette. Swampwalls Darkmatter and the Lumpen Army of Art. 2008. p. 39

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*, 44

27. David Graeber. *Debt. The First 5,000 years*. 2011. p. 127

28. Régine Debatty. 2007. Interview with the BijaRi Group. 2007-05-10.

productive. It suffices to have a quick look at modern art history in order to notice that producing profit has been quite a marginal function for art.<sup>20</sup> Art was unique because it was immeasurable. Paradoxically, the high prices paid for works of art in the market depends on the perception that art is not made primarily to produce economic value.<sup>21</sup> It is crucial to note that art has not been economically marginal because it operated outside the market logic of capitalism. It has been marginal precisely because it operated within this logic. This is why it makes sense to ask how art can bring the nonidentical into the logic of "equivalence and substitutability".

In Aesthetic Theory, Adorno argues that works of art can develop their inner contradiction –i.e., being produced within the logic of capitalism and, at the same time, not being reduced to a standard commodity– and thereby unveil the principle of identification that underlies the workings of profit-driven exchange. While Adorno thought of modern art primarily as an object, the rise of performance, installation and so-called collaborative art since the 1960s points to social interaction as the lieu where contemporary art has been taking place. The contemporary shift from object to practice makes it possible to raise a critical point that did not have much relevance before, namely, to understand the nonidentical not as a manifestation of works of art but rather as the social process that artistic practices can unravel. That is, the focus should be, not on what contemporary artists produce but, on how they engage with the logic of production at large. This is cogent since the rise of finance economy has made experience, circulation and social relations new sources for the extraction of economic value. It should be in the practices of contemporary art rather than its objects that the constellations of the nonidentical should be taking place. Are artists producing for the art market? If not, what are they doing and how?

According to John Roberts, there is a growing mass of socialised art activity (by non-professional as well as professional artists) that remains hidden to the art market and yet now defines the terrain on which art is practiced.<sup>22</sup> In the same vein, Gregory Sholette has made a persuasive argument for the role of what he calls the lumpen army of art, "a legion of professionally-trained artists occupying a limbo-like space that is simultaneously necessary and superfluous to both the fiscal and symbolic economy of high culture".<sup>23</sup> According to Sholette, the vast majority of professional artists make up a "reserve army of unemployed".<sup>24</sup> This reserve works as the background "against which the small percentages of artists who succeed appear sharply focused".<sup>25</sup> By contrast with the successful artists, what sort of social relations are these "lumpen2 artists facilitating? If they are not about economic profit, what kind of values are they creating and mobilising? The conclusion reached by Sholette would explain the source from where the nonidentical in contemporary art may sprout. He terms it "dark matter" and argues that

*Dark matter presents a problem to mainstream market valorization because it embodies the overlooked, the discarded, and the superfluous as an actual excess of labor that, even under ideal economic conditions, would be impossible to openly and productively integrate under global capitalism.*<sup>26</sup>

This lumpen that does not join the ranks of the profit producers must then be producing something else. As we have already noted, whatever it is they are doing they are doing it within the material conditions set up by capitalism. This does not mean, however, that capitalism can absorb and transform into profit all that creative power force. These practices and the value they produce are difficult to track. The unconventional anthropologist David Graeber has been calling attention on the panoply of value formation from a social perspective overshadowed by capitalism. He writes:

*When we return to an examination of conventional economic history, one thing that jumps out is how much has been made to disappear. Reducing all human life to exchange means not only shunting aside all other forms of economic experience (hierarchy, communism), but also ensuring that the vast majority of the human race who are not adult males, and therefore whose day-to-day existence is relatively difficult to reduce to a matter of swapping things in such a way as to seek mutual advantage, melt away into the background.<sup>27</sup>*

Graeber is warning that we have lost sight of the sort of relationships that other forms of social practices create alongside the reigning exchange principle of market economies.

### III

Taking into account the culturally broad comparisons that anthropological narratives make possible, it seems easier to put into perspective the actual reach of the principle of equivalence and substitutability that characterises capitalism. Hegemonic as this principle may be, it is limited. Graeber goes on to stress that in certain social practices even money can work not as a medium to facilitate abstract exchanges but to “create, maintain and reorganize relations between people”:

*In fact, the term “primitive money” is deceptive for this very reason, since it suggests that we are dealing with a crude version of the kind of currencies we use today. But this is precisely what we don’t find. Often, such currencies are never used to buy and sell anything at all. Instead, they are used to create, maintain, and otherwise reorganize relations between people: to arrange marriages, establish the paternity of children, head off feuds, console mourners at funerals, seek*

**“AMBIGUOUS”** is probably the term that better describes the relationship of artistic practice to market capitalism. As I have noted earlier, under capitalism labour seems to be condemned to the production of economic benefit. Even though late capitalism seems to have managed better than any other period in recent history to make art a business force, it keeps being notoriously unproductive. Or, to be more precise, it produces other sort of values beyond the monetary. Such is the case of a clearly ambiguous Brazilian collective which characterises itself under the slogan “Art-Design-Attitude” (BijaRi). Founded in 1997, BijaRi was originally made up by architects and urban planners. Since the beginning of their activities, they have moved comfortably between the official and underground art scenes and also developing openly commercial projects.

*Diversity and elasticity always were our priorities, and we are constantly researching and linking diverse knowledge areas, in order to create more possibilities of transformation in our works as well as to extend the number of potential clients, something very inconstant in this market.<sup>28</sup>*

They devised Garage Project in 2011, an interactive installation of 26 G-LEC panels on the stage of a music event hosted by the French car company Citroën in São Paulo. They have produced all sort of projects (video, graphic design, on stage performances) for companies and organisations such as Motorola, Absolut Vodka, MTV, Green Peace or Philip Morris. At the same time, they have presented their artistic projects in mainstream venues such as the Havana Biennial (2003), the Architecture Biennial at Graz in Austria (2010) or the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (2011). Still, they argue that they are genuinely interested in challenging the power structure in late capitalist cities.

*[W]e conceived projects that question the functions of public place, revealing relations of power hidden in everyday settings. We did and do this by using artistic artifices that serve to crop and amplify some aspects of the city. In an inverted process of architecture that builds solid structures, we create almost ephemeral works that guide themselves by rupture of standards in each individual, allowing a reflection on the approached themes.<sup>29</sup>*

And so they did when DJs and VJs performed in downtown São Paulo to denounce the aggressive process of gentrification and to support local residents. Images of the conflicted city centre were projected on an impressive seven-metre-high white cube while music blasted and people hang around and dance. *Cubo* (2005) was meant to call attention to the struggle for the access and use of the recently renovated downtown area. In the same vein, *BijaRi* had undertaken “Our Air Space is For Sale” (2004) as an intervention to denounce gentrification in *Largo do Batata*, a mostly working class neighborhood located in a very wealthy section of São Paulo. Denouncing the process of homogenisation in the gentrified zones of the city, the project vindicated the local population, its habits and culture. As the collective itself claims: “The numerous interventions undertaken were intended towards establishing a dialogue with the local community as to create a shared sense of understanding such a ‘top-down’ process.”<sup>30</sup> By means of posters, postcards, inflatables, interviews and multimedia projections, *BijaRi* managed the situation in *Largo do Batata* so as to have ample media coverage and so as to solicit a political response to the situation.

*forgiveness in the case of crimes, negotiate treaties, acquire followers almost anything but trade in yams, shovels, pigs, or jewelry. Often, these currencies were extremely important, so much so that social life itself might be said to revolve around getting and disposing of the stuff. Clearly, though, they mark a totally different conception of what money, or indeed an economy, is actually about. I’ve decided therefore to refer to them as ‘social currencies’, and the economies that employ them as “human economies”. By this I mean not that these societies are necessarily in any way more humane (some are quite humane; others extraordinarily brutal), but only that they are economic systems primarily concerned not with the accumulation of wealth, but with the creation, destruction, and rearranging of human beings.<sup>31</sup>*

“The creation, destruction, and rearranging of human beings” is the point worth noticing here. For Graeber, to make something exchangeable “one needs first to rip it from its context.”<sup>32</sup> That is, to abstract it from its context of use. This is the first step to make something calculable. Considering the case of slavery, Graeber asks how this calculability is effectuated, how it becomes possible “to treat people as if they are identical”.<sup>33</sup> His answer invokes an anthropological example:

*The Lele example gave us a hint: to make a human being an object of exchange, one woman equivalent to another for example, requires first of all ripping her from her context; that is, tearing her away from that web of relations that makes her the unique conflux of relations that she is, and thus, into a generic value capable of being added and subtracted and used as a means to measure debt.<sup>34</sup>*

As I showed earlier, what Adorno termed the nonidentical, which he linked to the concrete and singular – be it experiences, relations or objects – was working against the backbone of bartering and its principle of abstract exchange.<sup>35</sup> The cases of artistic practices that we are relating to the nonidentical point in this direction. Instead of subtracting objects or experiences that can then be measured and exchanged, they add to the social complexity in which they are located. Again, it is important to stress that these artistic projects do not operate from some sort of privileged “outside” beyond capitalism. They are mingled with it. From the perspective opened up by Adorno’s notion of constellation, contradiction is not a burden

but the very condition of possibility to effectively intervene in the situation within which artistic practices are embedded. Actually, Graeber stresses this when he holds that all important economic and moral possibilities are present in any human society. Quoting Marcel Mauss' *Manual of Ethnography*, he observes that:

*[i]n any relatively large and complex system of human relations—as he puts it, “almost everywhere”—all major social possibilities are already present, simultaneously—at least in embryonic form. There will always be individualism and communism too; something like money and the calculation it makes possible, but also every sort of gift. The question then is which dominant institutions shape our basic perceptions of humanity.*<sup>36</sup>

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In their 2013 editorial to a special issue of *Performance Research*, Joslin McKinney and Mick Wallis called attention to the fact that over the last three decades “the aspects of cultural value that have become central to the rhetoric of cultural policy are those such as economic impact and cultural vibrancy, health and well-being, urban regeneration and community cohesion”.<sup>37</sup> They consider that other more “intrinsic” aspects of culture such as ethics were left out from serious policy evaluation due to the “ephemeral, shifting, incoherent and even irrational properties of cultural value” that make ‘any economic valuation of culture far from straightforward’.<sup>38</sup> Ethics would speak “not just of our personal experience, but also of our inter-subjective and social experience, exceed value measured in terms of an individual’s stated preference and willingness to pay”.<sup>39</sup>

There have been, however, numerous projects publicly and privately sponsored that have attempted to measure this “irrational dimension of cultural value”.<sup>40</sup> In fact, the urge to harness artistic practice to statistics and measurable standards is manifold. In his now classic *The Expediency of Culture. Uses of Culture in the Global Era*, George Yúdice named a series of social tasks that art and culture has had to undertake since the neoliberal turn during the 1980s: the artist as educator, activist and collaborator.<sup>41</sup> As neoliberalism took root, the welfare of the population was shifted onto civil society and it was defended that, if properly managed, the arts could solve almost any problem.<sup>42</sup> A recurring strategy in public policy has

29. *Ibid.*

30. URL: <http://www.bijari.com.br/?portfolio=the-selling-of-our-air-space>. (Accessed 2015-21-04).

31. Graeber. *Debt*. p. 130

32. *Ibid.*, p. 146

33. *Ibid.*, p. 159

34. *Ibid.*

35. Actually, for Graeber bartering is far from being rooted in abstract exchange. Bartering can work as the fabric of social relations beyond mere exchange. Chapter 2 of *Debt. The first 5,000 Years*, “The Myth of Barter”, is devoted to a criticism of bartering as an abstract practice of exchange. From an ample array of cases, Graeber demonstrates that bartering is always a situated and complex process of social bonding rather than a calculated exchange of goods.

36. David Graeber. *On the Moral Grounds of Economic Relations. A Maussian Approach*. 2010. p. 3

37. Joslin McKinney and Mick Wallis. *On Value*. 2013. p. 1

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Ibid.*

40. McKinney and Wallis mention the Arts & Humanities Research Council’s Cultural Value Project, 2012. URL: <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/funded-research/Funded-themes-and-programmes/Cultural-Value-Project/Pages/default.aspx>. (Accessed 2015-13-03). But there are many other examples by governments, universities and non-governmental organisations including: the European Commission, *European Cultural Values*, 2007. URL: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_278\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_278_en.pdf). (Accessed 2015-13-03); UNESCO/ONU. *Creative Economy World Report 2013. Widening Local Development Pathways*. URL: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/creativity/creative-economy-report-2013-special-edition>. (Accessed 2015-13-03); The Warwick Commission on the Future of Cultural Value. 2015. URL: [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/research/warwickcommission/futureculture/finalreport/warwick\\_commission\\_report\\_2015.pdf](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/research/warwickcommission/futureculture/finalreport/warwick_commission_report_2015.pdf). (Accessed 2015-13-03).

41. George Yúdice. *The Expediency of Culture. Uses of Culture in the Global Era*. Durham and London: Duke University Press. 2003. p. 300

42. *Ibid.*

**THE CURRENT IMMENSE** reserve army of professional and non-professional artists is not just waiting to be called up to join the exclusive ranks of the art market or submit individual career-oriented projects to be measured and sponsored by public agencies. Even though they may wish to do so, the most common situation is for them to organise and get involved in practices that are productively irrelevant to the art system. It is then more frequent that they engage with some other social actors and that they do so driven by other than economic values. This is the case of *Tranvía Cero*, an artistic collective from Southern Quito, capital city of Ecuador. They started working together since 2002 setting as their goal to “intervene and democratise public space” and doing so by joining ranks with the residents of the working class and mostly deprived neighbourhoods of the city South.<sup>43</sup> Among the different projects they have set in motion, the most ambitious is surely *al zurich* (a play on words with the city name of Zurich and “to the South” in Spanish) devoted to produce critical links between “art and community”. *al zurich* ran for the twelfth time in 2014, calling for interventions in public space between artists and dwellers. It is openly urban, mixed and popular. Even though the project is “independent and autonomous” and decisions are all made by artists and neighbours alike, since its inception it has received public funding from the city and national government.

Among the more than a hundred public interventions undertaken since 2002, one of them has been *Cartografía de la memoria* (*Cartography of memory*, 2011). It was developed in *La Argelia alta*, a neighbourhood made up mostly by settlers from inner rural areas in Ecuador. It sought to recount the migrant history of different families collected and written by their members in workshops. Once memory was recalled and recorded in a collective process, all of the information was gathered and made available in a Community Library run by neighbours. From the first call to participate in *al zurich*, the organisers made clear that artists and non-artists alike could submit proposals –sociologists, very young self-taught urban artists or even an association of blind people have joined *alzurich* at different times.<sup>44</sup> Even though all members of *Tranvía Cero* have received formal academic training in Fine Arts, the work of the collective seems oriented towards producing something that is neither art nor social activism. They may just be creating a constellation of different unrelated practices that make possible other nonidentical forms of social relations.

been to reduce the social value of art to those cases in which a proper administration of resources and outcomes could be measured. The logic of equivalence and substitutability has aggressively spread to the field of the arts and culture since the 1980s. The managerial turn has been crucial in the public policies regarding the social function of art, accompanying the expansion of the art market, commercial galleries, auction houses and professionalisation of art education and commodification of artistic venues. However, I have argued that most artistic practices do not yet circulate through these channels. Although they are inextricably intertwined with this managerial and commercial turn, they are not systematically meant to be commodities or consumed.

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As we have seen, Wallerstein defined a world-system “as a unit with a single division of labour and multiple cultural systems”. I have been trying to stress that within the capitalist world-system of exchange and substitutability there are artistic practices that dissipate the reach of that straightforward division of labour. Pace Adorno, we now have an overlapping of productive and unproductive social practices that has made it more difficult to generate contradictions and thus antagonistic forms of social relations. Rather than antagonism, it is ambiguity that is the thread in all of the cases I have presented in this text. They are not (actually, they can’t be) clear-cut examples of the deployment of the nonidentical by means of artistic practice. The nonidentical just can be invoked in a context in which the principle of exchange and substitutability rules.

43. OKR. Colectivo *Tranvía Cero* desde Ecuador. 2012. URL: <http://pazquinsur.blogspot.mx/2012/06/colectivo-tranvia-cero-desde-ecuador.html>. (Accessed 2015-03-13).

44. *Tranvía Cero*. *Arte y comunidad*. 2009. URL: <http://revistaplus.blogspot.mx/2009/12/arte-y-comunidad.html>. (Accessed 2015-09-03).

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# Rotate the Pass-Thru

## **RICHARD BIRKETT**

Richard Birkett is the Curator at Artists Space, New York. He has curated exhibitions including *and Materials and Money and Crisis*, with Sam Lewitt, mumok, Vienna (2013), *Terry Atkinson*, Yale Union, Portland (2014), and *Hito Steyerl*, Artists Space (2015). He has co-edited publications including *Cosey Complex* (2012), and *Bernadette Corporation: 2000 Wasted Years* (2013) and contributed essays to monographs and journals including *Zak Kyes: Working With...* (2012); *Andrea Büttner* (2013); *Afterall*; *Artforum*; *Flash Art*; *Starship*; and *Art in America*.

## **CAMERON ROWLAND**

Cameron Rowland (born 1988, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) is an artist based in New York. Recent solo exhibitions include *Bait Inc.*, Essex Street, New York, New York (2014); *An Agreement*, Wilfred Yang, Los Angeles (2013). He has also contributed to group exhibitions including *Slip of the Tongue*, curated by Danh Vo and Caroline Bourgeois, Punta Della Dogana, François Pinault Foundation, Venice, Italy (2015); *Overtime: The Art of Work*, curated by Cathleen Chaffee, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York (2015); *THE CONTRACT*, Essex Street, New York, New York (2014), *Conspicuous Unusable*, Miguel Abreu, New York, New York (2013). Forthcoming solo exhibitions include Artists Space, New York; and Kunsthalle Freiburg, Switzerland.

1. Georg Lukács. Realism in the Balance. 2002. p. 32

*In periods when capitalism functions in a so-called normal manner, and its various processes appear autonomous, people living within capitalist society think and experience it as unitary, whereas in periods of crisis, when the autonomous elements are drawn together into a unity, they experience it as disintegration. Georg Lukács<sup>1</sup>*

**T**HIS TEXT IS COMPRISED OF TWO parts and the nature of this bifurcation may require some explanation. The first part reflects on an exhibition I curated in collaboration with the artist Sam Lewitt at Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien (mumok) in November 2013 – February 2014, titled *and Materials and Money and Crisis*. This section focuses particularly on the work that Lewitt produced for this exhibition, which also included contributions by ten other artists. The second part, contributed by the artist Cameron Rowland, is an email exchange between Rowland, his New York gallerist Maxwell Graham, and a collector of his work, that speaks to the distinctive terms at work in Rowland's practice.

While the two sections are not directly related, they are joined by the emphasis placed in each case on the conjunction of the various agents at work in the narrative – artist, curator, museum, gallerist, collector – and, extending from this, the manner in which the semantics of the artworks in question are tied into the circuitry of display and collecting, no longer as a recipient or depository of those semantics but actively constructing and informing them. These conjunctions can be summarized by a passage in Rowland's contribution in which he describes an "attempt to use the exchange of the artwork to produce meaning, [just] like another material." *and Materials and Money and Crisis* was approached as an experimental proposition addressing the *matter* of capital as it exists in the artwork. Specifically, it sought to articulate questions around how, against the backdrop of a financial system in which the materiality of price is emancipated from any even illusory reference to physical property, aspects of materialization within art might be read as a response to crises in the process of establishing value.

The positioning of these two moments of cultural production alongside each other is instigated as a means to reflect on, to quote the editorial invitation to this issue of *PARSE*: "how art at once embodies conflicting terms of valuation, can propose and enact alternative economic notions, and at the same time is caught up in economies (not only financial ones) in which it is already doing plenty of work." On face value *and Materials and Money and Crisis*, as a group exhibition in a public museum, located artwork firmly within a matrix of curatorial and institutional mediation, whereas the work of Rowland, discussed in the email exchange, finds its primary site in the typically mediated relationship between artist, gallerist and collector. While both projects understand such loci of value formation as open to materialization within artworks themselves, what is of particular interest to me is the degree to which such artworks draw in and make palpable other social and cultural formations, and the potential for discourse outside the regime of contemporary art that emanates from this.

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At the core of *and Materials and Money and Crisis* was a desire to “ask after what resources help conceptualize the ways in which the constellation of materials, money and crisis hangs together,” and how this “may provide a basis for thinking the limits and possibilities for artistic practice in the present”.<sup>2</sup> In this, *and Materials and Money and Crisis* sought to articulate the open conjunction of its title’s terms as somehow parallel to the disposition of valuation and claim-making that delineates the “event” of distribution within contemporary artistic culture. Such declamation is not merely the purview of curators and institutions but of artists, critics, gallerists, collectors and viewers of art also, as nodes within an expanded field of display and reception. These claims may be as crude as to posit generational or regional characteristics evidenced by a particular group of artists’ works – a teleological form of cultural and sociological trend-spotting – or to call on what Lewitt has described as a “panoply of discursive support systems” in order to advance a distinctive argument *external* to the artworks’ material operations. Such rhetorical assertions of “interestingness” and importance – whether of individual artworks or practices, or of a collective countenance – attain object-form through the predominant apparatus of exhibition-making, yet are held in distinction from other less unitary modes of valorization that an exhibition and its contents are subject to.

Parallels can be drawn between this condition within the sphere of contemporary art and that of financialization. As the application of advanced financial instruments from the 1970s onwards has freed exchange value from perceptible material properties, so a concept of monetary flow has become embedded with that of permanent volatility and endogenous crisis. The processes of valorization attendant within the systems and structures of contemporary art appear disintegrated, similarly intertwined with a perceived state of crisis (the “failure” of art as an efficacious socially liberal project) as “the claim” hedges on possible futures of cultural, critical or social value distinctive from material conditions: to appropriate the words of media theorist Joseph Vogl when talking of the financial system, the sphere of contemporary art is constituted by “events that determine the production and representation of events.”<sup>3</sup>

*and Materials and Money and Crisis* endeavored to locate in relation to one another a number of artists’ practices that look to leverage such claim-making, addressing the visual, exhibitiv field as permeated by specifically capitalist relations of property. One of the basic starting points for the exhibition was the assertion that the material composition of an artwork is not limited to that which is physically present when we encounter it; rather, it includes many things we might otherwise consider to be immaterial – the language used to talk about the artwork, the relationships that enabled it to be made and exhibited, the conditions under which it is displayed, and the active forms of exchange the artist and artwork enters into. The artists corralled in *Materials and Money and Crisis* turn to the processes by which such materials exchange properties, values, and attributes; processes that belong to the world into which an artist is thrown, rather than being a capacity possessed by the artist. Perhaps as an echo of the “outsourced” nature of the exhibition’s mediation – curated by myself, acting independently yet “representative” of another institution, and also working in dialogue with an artist, who himself brought to bear a network of affinity with other artists in the

2. Unless stated otherwise, all quotes regarding *and Materials and Money and Crisis* are taken from Sam Lewitt. Materials, Money, Crisis: Introductory Remarks and Questions. In Richard Birkett and Sam Lewitt. *and Materials and Money and Crisis*. Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König. 2013. p. 35-39

3. Joseph Vogl. Taming Time: Media of Financialization. 2013. p. 75

4. Keller Easterling.  
*Extrastatecraft: The Power of  
infrastructure space*. London:  
Verso. 2014. p. 72

5. Gareth James. A Real  
Problem of Materials:  
Gareth James in Conversa-  
tion. 2011.

exhibition and also beyond them to a group of representing galleries – a dual, contingent movement marked the artworks in the exhibition: inwards towards their own institutionally bound set of relations, and outwards towards alternative sites of uneven production.

In a moment of political and economic crisis linked to dematerializing processes of speculation and derivation, the definition of “material” is rendered as contingent, changeable, and unstable. *and Materials and Money and Crisis* understood the status of contemporary artistic culture, fully immersed in an expanded field of tools, conceptual strategies, and technical processes, as equating to the contingent logistical future of production materials as “exchange-value tends towards its pure state as the idea that circulates through the system.” A primary motivation behind the exhibition was to move beyond questions of how art might serve to *represent* the insensible processes of neo-liberal capitalism. As Lewitt has speculated:

*In what ways can artworks eschew facile representational conventions – i.e. mere information about present conditions – while still making a claim upon the social imaginary that surrounds their material foundations? [...] The geography of global volatility continues to expand, even as value contracts to its idea and the paid labor force shrinks. Perhaps this modulation of expansion and shrinkage allows us to generate forms of material equivalence.*

Speaking of the matrix of infrastructural substrates that govern the space of everyday life, architect Keller Easterling has highlighted the importance of apprehending such forms through their “disposition” – that is, via the immanent relationship of the components of a system. The artworks included in *and Materials and Money and Crisis* could, in this vein, be collectively qualified through their attempt to capture technical supports and organizational systems in ways that might enact breakdowns, intensify internal contradictions, stage accelerations and cessations of the idealized circulatory system of exchange. Processes of materialization and formalization were employed to register the conflicting terms of valuation embodied by the artwork itself, as active “multiplier” within complex economies. As Gareth James – one of the artists included in the exhibition – has stated in relation to his own practice, the works turned to the possibilities of formalization to limit “the endless openness of the concrete situation in favor of making something intelligible within it that was previously inchoate.” *and Materials and Money and Crisis* had a somewhat unusual gestation in that, prior to any discussion of an exhibition, it took form as a one-day symposium at Artists Space in New York in 2012 that brought together artists, economists, and art and architecture theorists. The parameters of the symposium stemmed from a dialogue between Lewitt and myself, initiated in relation to the artist’s participation in the 2012 Whitney Biennial, for which he produced the procedural work *Fluid Employment*. I invited Lewitt to collaborate on the formulation of an event that would run parallel to this work’s presentation, honing in on questions around neo-liberal financialization and material agency that could be said to undergird the work. Lewitt responded with an extremely rich “abstract” that provided a guiding set of terms for the symposium, and

the subsequent exhibition and publication.

The questions that Lewitt raised in this text, and the related presentations from participants in the symposium speaking from varying disciplinary perspectives, seemed particularly pertinent when reflecting on an approach from Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien to curate an exhibition at the museum. mumok's reputation is largely grounded in its historical collection, and the production of temporary exhibitions presenting research into recent art history (for instance *Changing Channels*, a 2010 exhibition on the historical use of television as an artistic medium), alongside a "project room" series of solo exhibitions by young artists. The invitation to me to curate an exhibition on three floors of the museum that would engage with "emerging" discourse within current international art practice and theory, was out of step with the typical program, and seemingly born from the impetus of a new director, Karola Kraus, who has perceived a more vocal role for the museum beyond its primarily historical focus. A shift in address can be perceived in the invitation, from the retrospective to the prospective, the geological connotations of the word – the extraction of value within matter – resonating with both the object form and active form of the museum.

While the exhibition *and Materials and Money and Crisis* was decidedly not an exercise in site-specific institutional critique, it was grounded in a particular understanding of mumok as an active cultural form constituted by and through complex infrastructures, from the tangible to the symbolic. That symbolic space and history can be briefly summarized as follows: the Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien is an internationally renowned institution, founded in Vienna in 1962, with a diverse collection of modern and contemporary works (with, indicative of its conception in the early 60s and its geographical position, a particular leaning towards Viennese Actionism, Fluxus, Pop Art and Conceptual Art). This national collection was established through largely private means, initially formed of loans from the patrons Peter and Irene Ludwig – a situation later formalized by the creation of the Austrian Ludwig Foundation, through which a considerable number of works permanently transferred to the museum, and a program was put in place for the continued growth of the collection. In 2001 the museum moved to purpose-built premises, located in the newly branded MuseumsQuartier, a "dehistoricized" cultural zone in a former imperial stables, financed by the Austrian state and the state owned National Bank of Austria. The quartier includes new buildings housing mumok alongside the Leopold Museum and Kunsthalle Wien. Designed by architects Ortner + Ortner, the Leopold Museum and mumok are situated across a courtyard from one another, and materially signify their distinct cultural purposes – the Leopold houses a collection of mainly early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Austrian art acquired by Dr. Rudolf Leopold, and takes the form of a pale sandstone monolith; mumok, with its focus on late 20<sup>th</sup> century and contemporary works, was conceived as a similarly bunker-like form, but, in contrast to the Leopold, constructed with a shell of black basalt rock. The volcanic material was intended by the Ortner brothers to evoke the museum's function of presenting the boldly new and emergent, in contrast to the clastic geology of sandstone, and its suggestion of sedimentary accumulation.

On a surface reading, a dispersed character that emphasized seriality and atomization marked the positions taken by the works in the exhibition, in relation to the localized conditions evidenced in the building's physical structure. The artworks worked through their own material constitutions, questioning their status as both material thing and epistemic structure in distinctive ways. Works such as Pratchaya Phinthong's *Give More Than You Take* invoked, through the artist's own displaced actions, the transformations of material and value embodied in artistic labor, and that of others both within and outside the "network" of contemporary art; whereas Maria Eichhorn's *Meer. Salz. Wasser. Klima. Kammer. Nebel. Wolken. Luft. Staub. Atem. Küste. Brandung. Rauch. (Sea. Salt. Water. Climate. Chamber. Fog. Clouds. Air. Dust. Breath. Coast. Surf. Smoke)* used a climate chamber to materialize the state of suspension between linguistic comprehension, and the physical "delivery" of the artwork, as an active process.

It would be overly long-winded to go into detail here about how *and Materials and Money and Crisis* functioned holistically. But a more in depth discussion of Lewitt's work provides a sense of the exhibition's "disposition" – its intentions towards engaging with both material and symbolic infrastructures as a means to articulate the possibilities presented by art as a volatile point of contact between physical and linguistic forces, put into effect within the accelerating time of capital's increasingly insensible flows. The work also reflected Lewitt's collaboration on the conception of *and Materials and Money and Crisis*, in how it articulated itself schematically in relation to the museum's material and symbolic infrastructure.

Lewitt's contribution, titled *Weak Local Lineaments*, followed an organizational logic for the placement of distinctive objects that formed a "continuous tissue" throughout the exhibition, appearing sporadically almost as indeterminate mediating signs. The logic for this schema came from existing structural traces within the mumok building, primarily the tall slat-like windows that mark the largely homogeneous black basalt façade of the building, originally conceived by the architects to provide natural light to the museum's galleries and auxiliary spaces. After the museum's opening in 2001 the windows were deemed highly impractical by curatorial staff, with strong vertical strips of sunlight cast on wall and floor based artworks. The narrative is not unfamiliar, as the particular value formation of the institution contained within its architectural statement, rubs up against its supposed mutability with regard to the art it serves. The majority of the mumok windows, particularly those opening into the galleries, were internally shuttered. Lewitt's *Lineaments* – eight individual copper-clad laminate panels – were sited over the location of *and Materials and Money and Crisis*: some panels were mounted in front of still unblocked windows, such as in emergency exit stairways, others were placed to mark the existence of a window hidden behind a gallery wall, while several more involved the removal of wall sections to expose a window that had previously been covered up.

The *Lineaments* themselves were manufactured from etched Pyralux, a sheet material used in the production of ultra-thin flexible circuit boards in electronic equipment. Connecting and controlling circuits in devices such as cameras and cellphones, the substrate is valuable as a space-saving device, its flexible form enabling the

restructuring of different hardware designs. Lewitt printed and etched each laminate panel with a matrix of dots and connecting lines based on high-capacity LED screens, the scattering of light through a medium being linked to corrosion and technical mediation by differentiating layers of fresh and corroded copper. Long scrolls of the treated Pyralux were projected in front of windows or walls through the use of customized metal brackets, the material being held taut as a thin membrane-like screen delineating an architectural volume. In their materiality, positioning, and surface etching they presented the schematic of a technical system, yet one that does not cohere into functional image production. In Lewitt's words:

*the Lineaments follow the specific productive logic of the materials with which they are manufactured ... the work physically submits to the flexible control regime that is encoded into the world of materials to which Pyralux belongs. Yet the Lineaments 'submit' while making flexible control their subject, a subject filled with moments of lassitude and stress, corrosion and diffusion. At mumok, Weak Local Lineaments entered the museum architecture as if to "submit" to the pre-existing conditions of display, customized in scale to the slat windows and traversing different lighting scenarios. However, their installation reconstituted a delineating system of environmental regulation; and, equally, because the copper material's exposure to air resulted in slow processes of oxidation and surface coloration of the screens, they were no less affected by the conditions of their display. Concepts of flexibility were connected to physical and environmental vulnerabilities. As such, beyond the tracing of physical patterns of regulation, Weak Local Lineaments sought to:*

*throw into relief the symbolic regulation that functionally determines the space of exhibition, using the "window" as a conventional marker of a view into conditions that are aporetically both contiguous with the substance of the artwork as a marker of the contemporary, and a view to a reality outside of its immediate presence as an organization logic. If the mumok building itself is an extreme example of the 'black box' conditions that are necessary for the appearance of the 'white cube,' the Lineaments line the inside of the space as one that is both open and homogeneous.*

The *Lineaments* functioned within the interdependency of flexibility and constraint that physically regulates the mumok building, and by extension the subjects called into being by mumok as a distinctive cultural form – the artists, viewers, museum employees. As Lewitt has observed, the word “flexibility” appears three times in the description of the mumok building on the museum's website – not only a marker of the structure's supposed capacity for mediating multiple forms of display, but a wider signifier of the contemporary demands on the museum towards “cultural integration ... after the radicalism of a non-media specific art”. As the title of the work acknowledges, its logic was one of “weak localization” as opposed to that of site specificity or mooted autonomy. It's not then irrelevant to *Weak Local Lineaments* to consider mumok's status as a state-supported collecting institution, conditioned through both an ongoing responsibility towards the acquisition of internationally recognized

6. All quotations regarding *Weak Local Lineaments* are taken from Sam Lewitt. Notes for mumok piece. Unpublished text. 2013.

artworks and the increasingly hybridized public and private funding initiatives required to achieve such a goal. *and Materials and Money and Crisis* was embedded in this dynamic, with its emphasis on newly commissioned works activating a sequence of speculations in which contributions to production funds by artists' galleries were leveraged through the promise of acquisition, and acquisitions were leveraged through the courting of individual museum patrons.

Following the logic of such contingencies, *Weak Local Lineaments* constituted an indeterminate re-schematization of the space of exhibition, as if to encode its function with the potential of future iterations both "on" and "off" mumok's distinctive embraces – i.e. both in mumok's collection, and in unrelated contexts. As it transpired, the museum acquired a number of the *Lineaments* for the collection, but not all – a decision likely dictated by financial limitations, but also by the incommensurability of the work with the internalized vertical hierarchy of the building, which ordains defined levels to temporary exhibitions and presentations of the collection. The *Lineaments* placed in the mumok building functioned like unreliable "tour guides" to the systems of valuation of the work, the exhibition, and the institution itself, speaking not just to the "flexible logic of the institutional architecture itself" but also to "the bending of the subject of artistic culture to an unrestricted field of practices and media formats."

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The following section of this text does not relate directly to the exhibition discussed above. But the artworks and operations it addresses resonate with aspects of *and Materials and Money and Crisis*, while opening up further a consideration of the sites of value formation art might intercede in.

Cameron Rowland's two sculptures titled *Pass-Thru* (both 2014) emphasize, in relation to particular social and economic contexts, the materialization of customization, mediation and occlusion. In Lewitt's terminology, they "thicken" the regulation and conditioning of exchange by turning to the "daily, material activity of transacting" as that which "leverages [exchange's] conceptual efficacy." The *Pass-Thrus* are versions of an object commonly found in the world, one in fact seen both in mass-produced and "homemade" forms. *Pass-Thrus* consist of a rotating chamber, housed in a surrounding box, installed in some businesses to pass cash or goods back and forth. When used in post-offices or banks they are typically industrially fabricated with bullet-proof glass. Those commonly used in low-income urban areas, in liquor-stores or corner stores, are often made by hand, as in Rowland's versions, with basic Plexiglas as the cost of bullet-proof glass proves too expensive. Paradoxically such cost-saving measures, where one material is called on to "pass" for another, are often adopted in the small businesses most prone to being victims of criminal activity.

Rowland presented both *Pass-Thrus*, shown next to each other on the gallery floor, in his 2014 exhibition *Bait Inc.* at Essex Street gallery in New York – the commercial space that represents his work. They were similar in size and construction, apart from a sheet of cardboard on one – which blocked one open side of the Plexi box. This was

a feature carried forward from stores where, between transactions, employees block the *Pass-Thru* to retain heat or cool air on their side of the partition. Produced by Rowland, the *Pass-Thru* fulfills the conditions of being artwork (i.e. made by an artist), and of being functional as “the object it is”. They are, however, removed from a state of use to that of a disposition, in the sense given by Keller Easterling as “a tendency, activity, faculty, or property in either beings or objects – a propensity within a context.” They serve to construct a physicalized diagram of immanent exchange mediated by structural conditions, in which “the business owner, the clerk, the customer and the potential criminal (who the *Pass-Thru* protects against) all exist within the same network of subsistence, competing for limited resources.” Within low-income communities (“at the frontier of capital, where it serves the fewest,” as Rowland describes) the “normalization” of such security devices as the *Pass-Thru* rests on the immediacy of risk within exchange, and the materially conditioning need to retain property. The transposition of the *Pass-Thru* within the event of exhibition proposes an uneven equivalence with the regulation and structural organization of the space of contemporary art, and the transactions that underpin such ordering.

These transactional issues are all in play in the *Pass-Thru* sculptures themselves. One of the two was for sale while the other was to be transferred only using a rental contract, an intentional parallelism that is echoed through a similar split across Rowland’s work. The rental contract is considered by Rowland to be a “parasitic work” that operates on the exchange of another work – he has used it since 2014 as a condition attached to approximately half of his artworks. The contract is comprised of a boilerplate equipment rental form, and a background check or “Rental Order” form used at Rent-A-Center – a US company with over 3000 stores nationwide, that The background check employed by Rowland requires the provision of a Social Security Number, information on monthly income, and at least two references. These requirements impel consideration of the purpose of the work for the collector, and the impetus for its possession beyond accumulation. The construction of a transactional network of equivalences and in-equivalences Rowland instigates with regard to the artwork, via the rental contract, is further articulated by the following email conversation that took place between April - May 2014 involving Rowland, Maxwell Graham, and an unnamed collector.

7. Target Hardening: Cameron Rowland interviewed by John Beeson. April 2014.

8. Easterling. Op.cit.

9. Rowland and Beeson. Op.cit.

10. Rent-A-Center. URL: <http://www6.rentacenter.com/about-rent-a-center/company-overview>. (2015-04-30).

11. Sam Lewitt. Op. cit.

**Rental Information**

Apr 11

From: Maxwell Graham &lt;info@essexstreet.biz&gt;

To: \*\*\*\*\* &lt;\*\*\*\*\*@\*\*\*\*\*.com&gt;

Dearest \*\*\*\*\*,

Thanks so kindly for dinner last night.

It is great to share ideas with you and work on designing the future together. Attached is the Rental agreement for Cameron's *Pass-Thru*.

It is made up of two parts, a rental order and a lease. There are made two copies of each, both are signed by you and the artist. You get a copy of each and Cameron does also.

Cameron Rowland

*Pass-Thru*, 2014

Acrylic, hardware, 24-hour rotator disc

23 x 20 x 21 inches (58.42 x 50.80 x 53.34 cm)

3 Year Rental / \$200 a Month

In some places, businesses use a *Pass-Thru*, to pass cash or goods back and forth; this could be at a bank or a liquor store. The highest standard of *Pass-Thru* use bullet proof glass, although this material is far too expensive to be used as a protective measure by those business where it might be most effective. Therein plastic is used in place of bullet proof glass. They are either made by a manufacturer or by the shop owner. This *Pass-Thru* was made by Rowland.

**Re: Rental Information**

Apr 11

From: \*\*\*\*\* &lt;\*\*\*\*\*@\*\*\*\*\*.com&gt;

To: Maxwell Graham &lt;info@essexstreet.biz&gt;,

To all,

Regarding the *Pass-Thru*, exhibited together with copies of the lease agreement under glass, we're not convinced that the rental model is a sufficiently artful solution to deal with how commerce is transacted in poor neighborhoods and how that can be reflected in an artist-collector framework/transaction. The rental model also seems to be a bit

at odds with the *Pass-Thru* which by all accounts functions as a conduit for purchases. It may be unfair to drag in Felix, but he dealt quite elegantly and effectively with wanting to subvert both the preciousness of the art object and its possessability as a unique/collectible object. His certificate and model required sharing, dissemination and dematerialization - while at the same time operating (in a fashion) within the system. He had to eat and in order to eat he had to sell.

Let's give some more thought and discussion as to how we address this issue while embracing Cameron's intent and gesture. It would be a shame not to realize such a fully poignant and political installation.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Re: Rental Information**

Apr 11

From: \*\*\*\*\* &lt;\*\*\*\*\*@\*\*\*\*\*.com&gt;

To: Maxwell Graham &lt;info@essexstreet.biz&gt;

OK of course. Think installment sale. Buying on time. You miss an installment and the TV is repossessed. Real estate is leased. That's between a landlord and tenant. And it's generally for a somewhat long term. Not personal property. Who wants the TV back after three years. It's junk. Sent from my iPhone

**Renting**

Apr 15

From: CameronRowland &lt;cameronhrowland@\*\*\*\*\*.com&gt;

To: \*\*\*\*\* &lt;\*\*\*\*\*@\*\*\*\*\*.com&gt;, Maxwell Graham &lt;info@essexstreet.biz&gt;

The use of rental as a work is not meant simply to describe the way property is distributed to poor people but the way profits are made through these means. Rental is aimed at those who have little. Their scarce resources are turned into a profit by

Rent-A-Center, because the goods for rent cost much more than the object would outright. A tablet is a good example - this is based on current pricing at Rent-A-Center An 8" Samsung tab 3 costs \$249.00 on Amazon.

At Rent-A-Center it rents for \$23.99 per week. So if it is rented for more than 12 weeks the rental cost exceeds the normal sale price (a minimum of 1 month - 4.33 weeks is required). You can either just rent or rent-to-own at Rent-A-Center.

You can rent-to-own this tablet for 90 days for a total \$683.00 dollars. So you must pay 90 days of rent (\$308.00) plus an additional \$375.00. This total \$683.00 is called the "cash price," and is almost 3 times the typical retail price. If you don't pay in the first 90 days, the buyout price increases every day after that until the end of the term, which is 63 weeks for this tablet. If the renter does not pay the buyout price or return the product, the renter must pay the weekly rent through the end of the term. At the end of 63 weeks, the individual will have paid \$1512.00 for the tablet - 6 times the normal sale price. Each week after 90 days, the buyout price goes up, making it more difficult to buy the product. People who rent computers, sound systems, and furniture for shorter periods of time (1-6 months) without paying the buyout price never own the product. Although they may pay as much as or more than the product costs new, they are deterred from buying it out in 90 days, considering that this requires more than double the monthly payments. The accelerated increase in the buyout price after the initial 90 days further inhibits the potential for ownership. So renters either rent only, often paying the retail cost of the product, or they rent-to-own, paying somewhere between 3 and 6 times as much as the retail cost. The point is not that Rent-A-Center wants the product back because it's useful at the end; the point is to make as much money as possible.

Rent-A-Center uses a formula that functions like interest to calculate the cash price and the increased buyout price after 90 days. However, it is not referred to as interest - as it might be in a typical loan or car lease. This might be because the interest rate is enormous compared to, say, a car lease. This rate is justified partly because it is standard for all customers and independent of credit score (unlike a car lease). Everyone qualifies. If you don't put a deposit down, the background check I've included is used in place of a credit check.

I think standard behaviors and practices like these can be analyzed and questioned through their mobilization as artworks. The rental is less an attempt to dematerialize the object than to use the wide range of materials at play in an artwork. Exchange is a material, and it is often taken for granted in artworks. It is part of a work that artists don't often control. Gonzalez-Torres is inspiring in the variable form his works take as they result from instructions, and the way that distribution becomes part of the work. The certificate maintains the unity of it as a single work, while the distribution of material and the instructions that replenish those materials challenge that clearly defined unity.

Just as we can openly challenge the limit of what constitutes physical sculpture as it is filled and emptied, I think we can challenge how artworks are owned, at whose cost and benefit, for how long, and how the price is controlled. The rental attempts to take up these issues, which are taken for granted even in the case of Gonzalez-Torres and most artworks that are acquired privately. The goal is to raise these issues through the exchange and dissemination of the artwork. Not where dissemination is described or performed, but where it actually takes place undergirding most works. The rental is a kind of parasite that is designed to alter the otherwise normal exchange of a work. It's not meant to illuminate specifics of the work that is being rented, but rather intercede as another work within the exchange of that artwork. The contract

you keep records your interaction with both works. You can do whatever you want with this contract except resell it.

This arrangement is not devised to cheat the collector, but asks them to consider the questioning of these assumed terms of exchange, profit, and dependency within the greater economy and within the exchange of art, and, if this is valuable, to do this questioning, and play out its consequence (including the denial of speculation and the denial of financial profit for the collector) rather than only to refer to, or wonder about how the distribution of artwork might look differently.

In implementing this strategy, the works' ability to be "propertized", as I refer to in the text for the show, is limited. The rental also enacts the very real limitations of ownership and exploitative terms of this kind of rental. Although these issues (one theoretical and the other practical) might not be directly related, structural inequality is central to both of them. My attention to and deployment of them within the rental is an attempt to use the exchange of the artwork to produce meaning, like another material.

### **Cameron**

Apr 23

From: \*\*\*\*\* <\*\*\*\*\*@\*\*\*\*\*.com>

To: Maxwell Graham <info@essexstreet.biz>

CC: CameronRowland <cameronhrowland@\*\*\*\*\*.com>

Maxwell,

I agree with Cameron's statement. The rental arrangement is not simply about distribution but it's about how profits are made. And in the case of the Rent-A-Center, the profits are excessive to say the least. They are egregious! In the rent-to-own model, the incremental payment is clearly interest and the level of interest is clearly usurious. Why consumer affairs hasn't paid attention to this is

another question. Our system typically relies on disclosure rather than outright prohibitions. If there was adequate disclosure, I would think a consumer would see that it made a lot more sense to save up the retail price of an object and buy it rather than rent. But disclosure is typically thwarted by human nature which often seeks immediate gratification. The Rent-A-Center clearly looks to take advantage of this.

Cameron's rental model raises issues of the terms of exchange and profit, within the political context of dependency, coupled with the extreme societal disparity between those with resources and those without. The rental model certainly underscores and drives home these issues. In fact, it goes further. Since the model is a pure rental without the possibility of ownership (in contrast to the rent-to-own model), the possibility of resale and therefore financial profit is, as Cameron says, denied. The collector needs to take off his or her hat as a collector and put on some other chapeau. What should that be?

Cameron's principal gesture is the exchange — that is, the rental arrangement. It is not (as between the artist and the renter) inherent in or evidenced by the art object which is the subject of the rental. True, the *Pass-Thru*, in its real world application, functions as a conduit of exchange. But it is the rental agreement that denies the collector the opportunity to own the work and realize a profit. The *Pass-Thru* (other than its surrender) has no function in that regard. Cameron could have suggested any of the objects in the show for rental. All of the ideation as well as all of the physicality referencing the rental gesture is embedded in the rental agreement. And Cameron states that this piece of paper, this contract, cannot be treated as owned or as property since it cannot be sold.

There is no doubt, to Cameron's credit, that he has moved us out of our comfort zone. Or, at least, nudged us in that direction. That's interesting, no

doubt.

So – Maxwell - we are still thinking about this and I hope that’s okay with you time-wise. We will make a decision soon.

Thank you and, of course, thank Cameron, for the experience.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Re: Cameron**

Apr 23

From: Maxwell Graham <info@essexstreet.biz>

To: \*\*\*\*\* <\*\*\*\*\*@\*\*\*\*\*.com>

\*\*\*\*\*

,

Your response is very thoughtful.

For sure, any of the works in the show could have been rentals. Or any not. The rental is a kind of parasite onto the object.

We could sweeten the deal somehow...

Thanks, M

**Cameron**

Apr 23

From: \*\*\*\*\* <\*\*\*\*\*@\*\*\*\*\*.com>

To: Maxwell Graham <info@essexstreet.biz>

CC: CameronRowland <cameronhrowland@\*\*\*\*\*.com>

Maxwell,

Our dialogue is not about sweetening the deal. It’s an attempt to explore the conceptual basis of the work and its functionality. To be sure, we are not focusing on the *Pass-Thru* as the work. Rather, the rental transaction is the work (or the non-work, in a conventional sense, or a “parasite” work, as you call it) that we are focusing on. I think it fair to say that Cameron is attempting to mirror in an art world context a generic exchange that occurs every day in circumstances of “dependency within the greater economy”. These transactions are obviously

exploitive. However, Cameron is looking to consummate his rental arrangement under circumstances where “dependency” is not a factor. To accomplish this, the participation of the renter is essential. How do we describe the role of the renter in the context of the art world? Is it simply performative? If so, is the action of the renter just as much an artistic gesture as that of the artist? A collaboration I suppose?

Thinking about the rental under non-“dependency” circumstances, let’s further examine the terms of the exchange, the realizable profit, etc., etc., that Cameron wishes to critique or, using Cameron’s term, “challenge”.

Cameron points out that under one of the models at Rent-A-Center, a consumer would have to pay six-times the normal sales price of a product if they opted for a payment-plan to be funded over roughly a year. Presumably, if payment was extended over three years, the payments would amount to approximately 18-times the normal sales price. Your proposal, as the Rent-A-Center on Eldridge Street, is for us to pay \$200 per month over three years (before your suggested rent abatement). What if we pay you the entire rental upfront, when we first take possession of the piece? What discount would we be entitled to? By prepaying would we be entitled to pay only 1/18th of the aggregate rental payments of \$7200 (\$200 X 36) or \$400? We would, as prescribed, be required to return the work after 36 months. (Would we retain the non- salable rental agreement?) Let’s recognize that we are not renting a Samsung tablet which has a limited useful life — certainly no more than three years. Rather, we are renting an artwork which has an unlimited useful life and, as collectors, we would be fully relinquishing the opportunity to retain the work for an indefinite future period of time. That’s a lot of potential appreciation. How much is that give-up worth? On the other hand, the artist will, of course, have the benefit of having the *Pass-Thru*, coupled with the “parasite”, prominently exhibited in a high

profile collection.

Doesn't this prepayment discount structure effectively adapt the Rent-A-Center example to the non-dependency circumstances of the instant situation — recognizing, of course, that we've looked to "rotate the *Pass-Thru*."

Your thoughts?

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### **Renting May 6**

From: CameronRowland <cameronhrowland@\*\*\*\*\*.com>

To: \*\*\*\*\* <\*\*\*\*\*@\*\*\*\*\*.com>, Maxwell Graham <info@essexstreet.biz>

The rental work does not operate the way renting objects from Rent-A-Center does for a number of reasons. Not only because what is being rented is an artwork, but because the renter is not poor, and the primary impetus is not to profit from their inability to pay upfront. Each product at Rent-A-Center has a different relationship between rental price, "cash price," and its retail price outside of Rent-A-Center. The specifics of the rental artwork are not meant to approximate reality, but to use the rental agreement toward another end.

Part of my intention is to emphasize that this is a normalized form of production when it is directed at poor people. In an attempt to materialize this normalization as opposed to simply describing it, I've redirected it at those who would otherwise buy rather than rent. The discomfort this forms in the would-be buyer is inconsequential in comparison to the discomfort of someone who could only rent. The fact that this form of rental is indeed uncomfortable for those on whom it has little negative impact, and is acceptable for those on whom it has a much greater impact, is the premise of its exploitative function (producing profit on the financial weakness of the working and serving class). The rental also asks why the type of exchange and the terms of said exchange should be outside the purview of the work.

Although the critique of institutions is comfortably within the boundary of the artist, exchange often is not.

If the primary role of a work is to be bought at a price that is hopefully significantly lower than what it can be resold for, then the rental work is not valuable. The collector who rents is not a collaborator in this situation, but is integral in affirming the value the work may have. The rental asks whether a work can be valued (monetarily) for its significance without potential financial return. This question is posed by not offering any returns. However, there is still something to be gained: the social and cultural capital of renting the work may be the same if not greater than if it was bought. The rental isn't meant as a moralistic solution to contradictions of the market, but as a work that offers a number of additional problems. One problem you bring up is that of balance. The assumption that the artist and collector, through sales, typically have a fair and balanced relationship may be correct. However, this commonly held assumption seems to be more a result of normalized exchange practices than demonstrable fairness.

The rental is not a sales model, but is an artwork. I hope questions regarding its feasibility as an investment can be suspended in the treatment of it as an artwork. As a work, the rental is intended to unsettle expected forms of financial growth.

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If, as Rowland proposes, the exchange of an artwork is to be considered as a material from which to produce meaning, the rental contract draws the collector explicitly into the circuit of the value-making of the artwork in terms that are not only those of its market valuation, but which materialize the varying political moments and meanings of an exploitative form of production which in other contexts appears normalized.

In defining the terms under which Lewitt and Rowland's artworks function, and the manner in which they intersect through the systems of value-formation that they activate and are subject to, it is worth noting by way of conclusion the overlaps and distinctions between Lewitt's "weak localization," and Rowland's "parasitic" artwork.

– As Lewitt has adopted a term that in physics describes the anomalous transport properties of electrons in disordered systems, affecting the degrees of resistance within materials such as Pyralux, so his *Lineaments* "understand the architectural container that houses them as ... an interior whose character emerges from environmental regulation and constant structural reorganization." They are therefore neither dependent on their context nor autonomous from it. Rowland's notion of a parasitic artwork similarly considers the exchange of an artwork as a container, only appearing "as a functional entity once it is lined and delimited." The rental contract renders "normal" exchange discomfiting in its regulation and limitation of an artwork's "ability to be 'proper-tized.'" It insists at once on the customization of an artwork's exchange to pre-existing conditions of display, acquisition and collecting, and its incommensurability with those conditions.

– For Lewitt, the specific intention within the use of Pyralux as a material is not to isolate it as a subject for an artwork, or to present it as meaningful in its own terms, but to "submit" to its encoded propensity, its "disposition." Such comportment is not overt, in fact the material is both designed to occupy hidden spaces, as much as its properties allow for abstracted forms of technical mediation and interface. *Weak Local Lineaments* seeks to "thicken" a comprehension of such undeclared disposition as contiguous with a broader world of flexible control – that which connects globalized labor, the dislocation between material use and production, speculation and derivation as measured in velocity, and the "dehistoricized" integrated

cultural quartier as national identity. When schematized as "as distributed and remotely controlled as any matrix of data centers," the ordering of the contemporary cultural form, such as mumok, emerges as a site of contradiction and crisis.

And within Rowland's application of the rental contract and in his work generally, there is a similar turn to infrastructural mediation. Yet what is abruptly clear for Rowland is the distinction between Rent-a-Center as a particular social formation rooted in the maintenance of poverty, and that which is constructed by an institution such as mumok, ordered around wealth and propertization. It is important to note that at a certain juncture, Rowland willfully resists "submitting" to the contemporary nature of exchange wherein the distinction between actual transaction, and its mediation, performance and description, is blurred. The Rent-a-Center contract operates through an obfuscated technics, and an abstraction of value and temporality of ownership that relies on and exploits the reality of social and economic contexts in which the risk attached to exchange is immediate, and the difficulties of retaining property are at their most extreme. Rowland's assertive use of such a mechanism to challenge "how artworks are owned, at whose cost and benefit, for how long, and how the price is controlled" is an insistence on the lack of equivalence across the "concepts of flexibility and constraint" that order "contemporary cultural forms."

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# Value and doubt: The persuasive power of 'authenticity' in the antiquities market

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## Introduction

In the antiquities market value is intimately tied to the concept of authenticity. While beauty, form, function, and rarity are important factors in determining the price an artefact will fetch on the market, none of these matter to most buyers unless the object is “real”. If an antiquity is not ancient, it loses its meaning to buyers: it is valueless. Research into the global antiquities market has revealed extensive market deception regarding the legality of much of the artefacts that are bought and sold. Criminal activity of various kinds exists at all stages and at all levels of the trade. Although it would seem that engaging in a potentially illegal market with very real punitive consequences should be of primary concern to buyers and dealers, in antiquities sales the specific legality of an object is rarely presented directly or openly discussed. In contrast, scientific testing and certificates of authenticity are featured prominently on dealer websites and storefronts. Provenance research may have the side benefit of potentially proving that an antiquity is not illegal, but its primary purpose is to establish an impeccable chain of connoisseurship and thus authenticity.

In this paper I will discuss how the increase in monetary value associated with proof of artefact authenticity has been used to discourage the illicit trade in looted cultural property and prosecute offenders. This can be seen in two phenomena, which display the persuasive power of the concept of authenticity on the antiquities market. The first is the frequency in which antiquities traffickers and other intermediaries photograph looted artefacts in the ground or in transit. Although creating a physical record of their crimes might seem counter-intuitive, this photographic proof of the authenticity of a piece increases its value to collectors and thus the monetary gain for the traffickers. The second phenomenon are attempts made by certain source countries to disrupt the market for illicit antiquities by publicly questioning the authenticity of objects for sale at auction. This emerging strategy, usually

undertaken in response to a failed bid to halt an antiquities auction in the US or Europe, involves an official declaration that a number of antiquities for sale are, according to experts, fakes. The alleged fakes are not specifically identified, casting doubt on all the pieces for sale and potentially reducing the antiquities’ value in the minds of potential buyers. Through these examples I will offer a general overview of how authenticity-based value is created in the antiquities market as well as how it is subverted.

## Background

The material remains of the past have monetary value. They are collected, bought and sold. All major auction houses and many smaller houses, host a number of dedicated antiquities sales, offered by region, material or art market classification. Antiquities are available on eBay, via online dealers and in dealership storefronts around the world. Although most antiquities sales are private, it is clear from the scale of what is on offer publicly that artefacts command high prices in a market that does not lack demand. Yet for over 100 years individual states have attempted to restrict or completely ban the excavation of ancient objects by non-archaeologists as well as the export of antiquities for sale. Most antiquities ‘source countries’ claim ownership of all antiquities in their national territory, even objects that have yet to be discovered.<sup>1</sup> Broadly speaking, removal of these objects from the ground or from the source country without a permit is illegal and permits are not issued for anything but academic archaeology. A very limited number of antiquities entered Western private collections before these laws were put in place. Many, perhaps most, of those objects have since entered public collections and, thus, are not longer available for sale. This means that the market has access to very few fully legal antiquities and demand far exceeds supply. Yet where a lucrative demand exists another supply is found. Archaeological sites are destroyed, antiqui-

ties pass through the hands of organised criminal networks, and people are hurt or even killed, all to feed the insatiable market for these items.<sup>2</sup> The looting of an archaeological site destroys fragile contextual information that cannot be recovered.<sup>3</sup> Looted antiquities on the market represent incalculable information loss; they are the tattered remains of the cultural heritage of humanity. Nearly all the antiquities available on the international market are tainted by crime.<sup>4</sup> Many are outright illegal.

Penalties for antiquities looting, trafficking, and receiving range from object seizure through to fines and even to imprisonment. Especially in jurisdictions in which so-called good faith purchases of stolen goods are legally complicated or impossible, antiquities collectors and museums risk a complete loss of their investment should they purchase a looted antiquity that is later seized. Dealers, collectors and museum officials who have knowingly purchased looted antiquities have faced jail time.<sup>5</sup> Because of the intense risk, one might think that legality and complete provenance would be the primary issues for those valuing antiquities and those buying them. Yet the issue of artefact legality is never mentioned in auction catalogues<sup>6</sup> and rarely discussed in dealer advertisements or on their websites. Prominent collectors have gone on the record to say that issues regarding legality rarely enter their mind.<sup>7</sup> A valuable antiquity is not necessarily a legal one. A valuable antiquity is a ‘real’ one. On the antiquities market value is inextricably tied to authenticity.

## Value in authenticity

There are a number of factors that determine how much a buyer is willing to pay for an artefact. Beauty, for example, is of primary concern to many antiquities buyers, be it via superior craftsmanship, sublime physical forms, or how well the artefact has weathered the test of time.<sup>8</sup> Beauty is a determinant of artefact value because these objects are, to some extent, being purchased for visual purposes and display. A truly beautiful (or “fine”) antiquity is, thus referred to as “museum quality”. Beautiful objects command higher prices. Of course the popular definition of beauty changes over time. Antiquities that conform to contemporary aesthetics (e.g. the schematic marble Cycladic figurines that inspired as well as resembled the work of such artists as Moore and Modigliani) are often the most valuable.<sup>9</sup> Pop appeal, then is an important factor in determining the value

1. See Neil Brodie, Jenny Doole and Peter Watson. *Stealing history: The illicit trade in cultural material*. Cambridge: McDonald Institute of Archeology and the International Council of Museums. 2000; and Donna Yates. *Archaeology and autonomies: The legal framework of heritage management in a new Bolivia*. 2011.

2. See Neil Brodie and Colin Renfrew. *Looting and the world’s archaeological heritage: the inadequate response*. 2005; Simon Mackenzie. *Illicit deals in cultural objects as crimes of the powerful*. 2011; Simon Mackenzie and Tess Davis. *Temple looting in Cambodia: Anatomy of a statue trafficking network*. 2014; Donna Yates. *Church theft, insecurity, and community justice: The reality of source-end regulation of the market for illicit Bolivian cultural objects*. 2014; and Donna Yates. *Displacement, deforestation, and drugs: antiquities trafficking and the narcotics support economies of Guatemala*. 2014.

3. Colin Renfrew. *Loot, legitimacy and ownership: the ethical crisis in archaeology*. 1999.

4. Brodie cited in Allison Smale. *Stemming a tide of cultural theft*. *New York Times*. 2014-12-17.

5. See for example Patty Gerstenblith. *Schultz and Barakat. Universal recognition of national ownership of antiquities*. 2009; and Peter Watson. *The fall of Robyn Symes*. 2004.

6. Christopher Chippindale et. al. *Collecting in the Classical world: first steps in a quantitative history*. 2001; Christopher Chippindale and David W.J. Gill. *Material consequences of contemporary Classical collecting*. 2000; Elizabeth Gilgan. *Looting and the market for Maya*

Yates, Donna. *South America on the block: the changing face of Pre-Columbian antiquities auctions in response to international law*. MPhil Thesis. University of Cambridge. 2006. *objects: a Belizean perspective*. 2001; and Donna Yates. *South America on the block: the changing face of Pre-Columbian antiquities auctions in response to international law*. 2006.

7. See Christian Levett in Lucinda Bredin. *Platform: What Made Him Tick*. 2013.

8. Ortiz, George. *Overview and assessment after fifty years of collecting in a changing world*. 2006; and Shelby White. *A collector’s odyssey*. 1998.

9. David W.J. Gill and Christopher Chippindale. *Material and intellectual consequences of esteem for Cycladic figures*. 1993.

10. Thomas Hoving. *Making the mummies dance: inside the Metropolitan Museum of Art*. 1994.

11. Souren Melikian. Antiquities, with a proven record, drive auction market. *New York Times*. 2013-06-14

12. Kenneth D.S. Lapatin. *Mysteries of the snake goddess: art, desire, and the forging of history*. 2002.

of an antiquity. Increased pop appeal of certain types of antiquities may relate to the fame of a particular collector, the visibility of a museum exhibition of that type of object, or even to announcements of major archaeological discoveries. Related to pop appeal is an antiquity's sex appeal. Erotic antiquities, weapons and other warfare items, artefacts made of gold and precious jewels, skulls and mummies, and other such antiquities are all salacious and titillating. Thus artefacts that exhibit a trait that we would consider sexy, for want of a better term, often come with a price premium attached. Another significant determinant of value is rarity. Collectors and museums place emphasis on objects that are one of a kind and compete for the rarest of the rare.<sup>10</sup> The most valuable antiquity is a unique antiquity and the most expensive antiquity is one that is unparalleled and unmatched. Finally, legality is a factor for many buyers, although certainly not all of them, and some are likely to be willing to pay more for an antiquity from a legitimate source.<sup>11</sup>

Yet authenticity is the deal-breaker, the primary concern of all buyers and the most important factor in determining an artefact's value. The most beautiful, most popular, sexiest, and rare antiquity in the world is valueless if it is a fake. For example, the "Minoan" Snake Goddess", bought by the Museum of Fine Arts Boston in 1914 for \$950 (over \$22,000 adjusted for inflation) is very beautiful, popular, sexy, extremely rare, and as legal as any other antiquity of its day. It was treasured and on display for nearly 90 years until tests in the early 2000s determined that it was a fake.<sup>12</sup> It is no

longer on display and, it can be assumed, is of little monetary value. The Getty Kouros, an 'Archaic Greek' statue, was purchased by the Getty Museum in 1985 for \$9 million (\$19.5 million adjusted for inflation). The object's beauty, its sex appeal, and its rarity determined that high price tag: the Kouros was billed as a piece that was at the cusp of new naturalistic 'Classic' Greek sculpture. Yet it has since been widely dismissed as fake. So fake that when the statue travelled to Greece in 1992 for a conference to determine its authenticity, the Greeks declined to seize it.<sup>13</sup> If it were real, the Getty Kouros would have had to have been looted and trafficked from Greece. Greece, however, considered it fake and valueless. To restate, even when an 'artefact' displays every other indicator of monetary value and even when shocking sums have been paid for it in the past, the piece becomes valueless if it is found to be not ancient.

But why is authenticity so important if an object is beautiful and rare? Because the people and the institutions that buy antiquities do so from desire to form a connection to the ancient past. The specifics of these connections are certainly personal and varied, such as a drive to experience the roughest kernels of humanity by collecting objects of archaic form or simply a genuine interest in archaeology. Humanity likes proof of its age and legitimacy. We like survival and evidence of our past greatness enriches our present identities. We are awed by objects that are so very old yet so very familiar and by the durability of the material remains of ancient lives. It makes our own personal existence seem less ephemeral. Ancient objects

are immortal. Antiquities collectors are tapping into this tangible immortality: by owning it, they incorporate it into their own lives. As long as an antiquity is genuine, as long as it is ancient, the connection is there. A fake, however, is modern. It lacks any of these intangible qualities. An antiquities collector collects the past through physical objects. Without the past, they are just left with physical objects and the objects, however beautiful, lack past-based value.

Because of the value of authenticity in the antiquities market, determining authenticity is of primary concern to sellers and buyers. There are only two ways for an antiquities buyer to know, for a fact, that an artefact they are buying is authentic. First, a buyer knows that an antiquity is authentic if archaeologists excavated it during the course of legal archaeological investigation. As previously stated, new archaeologically excavated objects have not been available to the market for over a century and antiquities excavated and exported after antiquities laws were put in place are rarely available for sale. Second, an antiquities buyer could potentially loot an archaeological site with their own hands, stealing artefacts for themselves. This is not unheard of by any means (e.g. the stories of adventurer looters in Mesoamerica are recorded in Graham (2012); hobbyist pot hunting in the American Southwest and metal detecting in Europe) but it is unrealistic and unappealing to most: it represents a significant risk for the collector and it is very hard work. Thus buyers are faced with a market mostly comprised of looted antiquities and although they desire real artefacts they are left

with an incomplete toolkit for determining authenticity. Antiquities dealers and auction houses, then, are tasked with quelling buyers' fears.

Perhaps the most common way antiquities sellers assert authenticity is through expert opinion: if a trained and respected archaeologist says an antiquity is real, it seems real. That said, it is considered unethical for archaeologists to engage in the market for illicit antiquities, even though some do.<sup>14</sup> Publication in a scholarly article is considered proof that scholars consider an artefact to be authentic. Because of this publication history is featured prominently in antiquities sales catalogues. Yet, once again, archaeologists have become wary of this authentication by proxy. Publication of looted antiquities in scholarly journals is now considered to be dubious at best and professionally unethical at worst. Because of an increased reluctance of scholars to participate in market authentication, auction houses especially and many dealerships promote the skills of in-house 'experts'. The vested interest these 'experts' have in declaring their own business' wears as 'authentic' is rarely mentioned.

Provenance or ownership history research is a second method through which some degree of authenticity is established in the minds of buyers. Although buyers place value in the rare and new, antiquities that can be shown to have been in private collections for decades or centuries feel, at least to buyers, to be more likely to be authentic. In some cases this is correct. The previously mentioned Cycladic figurines, mercilessly faked at the height of their

13. Bianchi, Robert Steven. *Saga of the Getty Kouros*. 1994; and Angeliki Kokkou (ed.). *Getty Kouros Colloquium: Athens, 25–27 May 1992*. 1993.

14. Neil Brodie. *Congenial bedfellows? The academy and the antiquities trade*. 2011.

15. David W.J. Gill and Christopher Chippindale. *Material and intellectual consequences of esteem for Cycladic figures*. 1993.

16. Karen Olsen Bruhns and Norman Hammond. *A visit to Valdivia*. 1983.

17. Geraldine Norman and Thomas Hoving. *Inside the silver syndicate*. *Independent on Sunday*. 1991-12-29

popularity, were completely ignored by 19th century buyers and no fakes were produced at that time.<sup>15</sup> The very few Cycladic figurines acquired before the faking boom, then, are certainly real, but authenticity questions exist about almost all of the others. Cycladic figurines are a rare case and fake antiquities exist from all time periods. There is also evidence to suggest that antiquities faking industries start up quite quickly and for reasons unrelated to the international market. If, for example, evidence exists that Valdivia figurines from Ecuador began to be faked shortly after they were first discovered by archaeologists and long before an international market developed for them.<sup>16</sup> Also, sterling provenance can be faked. Forged documents accompany fake antiquities.<sup>17</sup> Provenance, then, does not assure authenticity.

Recently we have seen a rise in the use of various scientific techniques to determine the authenticity of antiquities on the market. The 'Minoan' Snake Goddess was exposed as fake via a radiocarbon date of 1000 to 500 years old, not 5000 years old as the MFA certainly hoped. Radiocarbon dating, although not perfect, is probably the best technique for determining if an artefact is ancient or not, however it is only possible to carbon date organic material (e.g. the ivory of the Snake Goddess). Antiquities made of non-organic material such as stone, clay, or metal cannot be carbon dated. Nearly all of the antiquities on the market are made from inorganic material. Furthermore, radiocarbon dating can be tricked. If the Snake Goddess had been made in modern times from an ancient piece of ivory, the carbon date would come back correct. Fakers know this.

For ceramic items, thermoluminescence (TL) dating can be used and it is common for dealers to advertise the TL dates of ceramic objects they have for sale. Beyond the technical drawbacks of this technique, fakers can get around TL as well. Pottery fakes have been found in which ancient pottery pieces were ground up and incorporated into the clay, thus skewing TL dates. A well-known African piece, also in the MFA, was found to be half modern and half ancient, the fake half being added to increase the price of the object (Brent 2001). TL dating was performed on the ancient part. Other techniques are used to detect chemical vs. natural ageing, the 'freshness' of tool marks, the concentration of inclusions in metal, and the source of rock or other material that the objects is composed of. Again, each of these techniques has its limits and fakers have been documented as getting around all of them. That said, science is considered to be very convincing proof of authenticity in the eyes of buyers.

A final technique for "proving" the authenticity of looted antiquities is to provide potential buyers with photographs of the object either in-situ as it is being looted, in pieces and covered with soil before conservation, or otherwise in a situation that strongly implies that the object is not modern. Photographs, of course, provide absolute proof of criminal activity: of looting, smuggling, and illicit sale. Those in the photographs or who are found to have such photographs in their possession risk criminal prosecution. Those who buy looted antiquities featured in 'looting' photographs that are later seized risk being forced to repatriate the pictured objects and also may face

criminal sanctions. Yet the value of authenticity in the antiquities market is so great that looting and trafficking photos are not uncommon. It appears as if the increase in monetary value for an artefact that can be shown in situ, and thus shown to be authentic, is worth the added risk in the minds of looters, traffickers, sellers, and buyers.

### **Authenticity photos**

In a number of high profile illicit antiquities cases, police have seized archives of images of specific artefacts being looted, transported, and restored. These photographs provide a clear and definitive date when an object was looted or smuggled, and thus prove that the antiquity is stolen and illegal. Cases in which there is photographic evidence of theft and trafficking are far more likely to result in a conviction or repatriation than other antiquities crime cases. Why, then, do those who trade in illicit antiquities take the risk? Because the photographs offer proof to buyers who desire evidence of authenticity. The increased value of antiquities that can be shown to not be fakes is high enough that criminals are willing to risk self-incrimination.

### **Greece and Italy: the Becchina and Medici photo archives**

The most famous examples of photographs being used to increase the value of looted antiquities by proving authenticity are the archives of Polaroid instant photos compiled by the Italian dealers Gianfranco Becchina and Giacomo Medici, who were contemporaries and rivals. Both of these cases involved some degree of Italian organised crime and

both cases involved the movement of freshly looted antiquities out of Italy and in to the hands of collectors in the USA and Europe via Switzerland. While these complex smuggling networks are better covered in several popular books,<sup>18</sup> both the subsequent convictions of Medici and Becchina and the ongoing identification of their looted antiquities in public and private collections hinged on the photos that these men kept.

It appears as if Becchina and Medici served an important role in the smuggling chain: they were “Janus figures”.<sup>19</sup> They received looted antiquities from local Italian looting gangs, cleaned the objects (both literally and figuratively), and then sold them on the ‘legitimate’ market. As intermediaries they served to convert stolen goods from the underworld in to classy art objects for the great museums and collectors to vie for. Because authenticity is of paramount importance in antiquities sales, these men both received photographs of objects in situ from looters hoping to sell to them as well as provided photographs of objects within their warehouses in a pre-restoration state to potential buyers. Fragmentary antiquities with soil still attached seemed, to Becchina and Medici as well as their buyers, to be authentic and thus more valuable.

The scale of the Medici and Becchina archives is staggering. Over 4000 photos of looted antiquities were seized from Medici’s Swiss storerooms in 1999 and over 8000 photos of looted antiquities were seized from Becchina’s Swiss storerooms in 2002.<sup>20</sup> Both men were convicted of numerous charges and high profile museums, collectors, and auction

18. Jason Felch and Ralph Frammolino. *Chasing Aphrodite*. 2011; Vernon Silver. *The lost chalice: the epic hunt for a priceless masterpiece*. 2009; and Peter Watson and Cecilia Todeschini. *The Medici conspiracy*. 2006.

19. Simon Mackenzie and Tess Davis. *Temple looting in Cambodia: anatomy of a statue trafficking network*. 2014.

20. Peter Watson and Cecilia Todeschini. *The Medici conspiracy*. 2006.

21. Karl E. Meyer. *The plundered past*. 1973.

22. David Freidel. *Mystery of the Maya facade*. 2000.

23. Karl E. Meyer. *The plundered past*. 1973; and David Freidel. *Mystery of the Maya facade*. 2000.

24. William H. Honan. Art for whose sake? Trading in antiquities; rare Pre-Columbian relics, at any cost. *New York Times*. 1995-07-31.

25. *Ibid.*

houses have been forced to return Medici or Becchina antiquities with no compensation, primarily because of the existence of these photographs that likely only existed to prove the artefacts in question were authentic.

### Three Maya cases

Moving to the Americas, there have been several illicit antiquities cases that involved the seizure or exposure of photographs of Maya artefacts in situ or in transit. Unfortunately, unlike the previous cases, none of these have resulted in any criminal convictions. One such example is a series of nearly 50 photographs taken during the looting of a massive stucco temple facade at the Mexican site of Placeres. Contemporary accounts indicate that the facade was discovered by a looting gang and photographed, and that the photographs were sent to an American antiquities dealer.<sup>21</sup> The dealer then approached several collectors with a photograph of the facade in situ and offered to have the piece looted to order. One Mexican collector is recorded as turning down the piece because he did not want to see the temple destroyed, however he did not report the dealer to the authorities. Eventually the dealer self-financed the looting at Placeres and the man hired to oversee this undertaking took a number of photographs of the facade's extraction.<sup>22</sup> He is pictured in the images confirming his participation in what was and still is a crime in Mexico. These photographs were circulated to potential buyers as absolute proof that the facade was authentic. The facade was returned to Mexico after the Metropolitan Museum in New York, who had the facade on their property at that point

and had seen the looting photos, notified Mexican authorities.<sup>23</sup> In this instance the shocking photos of a temple being sawed were just a bit too real, the piece too authentic. The dealer and the primary looter have never faced charges for this theft.

In another case, a man named Val Edwards approached the *New York Times* in 1995 claiming to have smuggled around 1000 Pre-Columbian objects from Mexico and Guatemala into the United States.<sup>24</sup> He provided the paper with numerous photographs of these objects in transit and claimed that his clients were among the most reputable dealers in New York City. The photographs are classic 'authenticity' shots. Although most of them were said to be taken in hotel rooms, they show the antiquities in pieces, uncleaned, and pre-restoration. Two of these objects were positively identified as having been offered for sale at Sotheby's auction house in November of 1994 after they had been smuggled. Sotheby's initially claimed that a "European Collector" had consigned the antiquities. They later admitted that they had been consigned by Costa Rican antiquities dealer Leonardo Patterson who at that point had been convicted twice on felony charges related to antiquities trafficking.<sup>25</sup> Val Edwards claimed that he went public with the photos because his trafficking partners, who may have included Patterson, had cheated him. It is unknown if Patterson, famous for being at the epicentre of a number of antiquities forgery cases, provided transit photographs to potential buyers to combat his poor authenticity reputation. Patterson was not charged with any

crimes related to the antiquities in the photos, but is, at the time of writing, facing unrelated antiquities smuggling charges in Germany.

Other smuggling cases from the Maya region indicate that most trade and academic experts assume antiquities traffickers photograph their wares. In 1984 a spectacular Maya jade mask appeared on the US market which, based on an inscription on the piece, was almost certainly looted from the painted tombs at the remote Guatemalan site of Río Azul.<sup>26</sup> The looting would have taken place sometime between 1978 and 1981 and would have destroyed one of the most informative Maya ritual contexts that archaeologists can imagine. Even though it was obvious that the mask had been stolen from a recorded site and that it had left Guatemala illegally, without proof that it was in Guatemala in the 70s or 80s, little could be done to try and recover it. Around 1986 National Geographic, partnering with the Guatemalan Institute of Anthropology, offered a reward of \$10,000 for a photograph showing the mask in situ in the tomb with the hopes that such a photograph would aid legal proceedings for the mask's return.<sup>27</sup> Sadly no photograph has yet surfaced and the mask is said to be in a private collection in Switzerland or Germany, surfacing once in 1999 and never seen again.<sup>28</sup> While there was no proof that an in situ photo existed, at least no proof that has ever been made public, the specialists assumed that because the mask was so very fine looters and traffickers would need to provide photographic assurances of authenticity if they hoped to sell it at a high price.

### **Discouraging the illicit trade with the value of authenticity**

Legal penalties exist for engaging in the illicit antiquities market, yet the trade continues. Fines and the threat of jail time are only partially effective deterrents at best as looters, traffickers, and buyers seem to judge the reward of dealing in antiquities as worth the risk. However, soft control measures, which emphasise social behavioural change rather than criminal penalties, might serve to disrupt this criminal enterprise, especially at the market end of the chain. As we have seen, authenticity is paramount to the value of an antiquity on the market. If an antiquity is fake it has no value and collectors will not pay for it. If an antiquity might be fake, buyers will think twice before purchasing it, the doubt about authenticity eroding at the monetary value of the piece. Buyers might consider that purchasing a questionable antiquity is a financial risk that is not worth taking. If the goal is to discourage the trade in looted or stolen antiquities, introducing doubt about the authenticity of the pieces in question may be an effective way to do this.

Although no country has yet made a direct statement about employing this specific soft-control method, a number of countries and nations, as part of their quest for antiquities repatriation, are starting to publicly question the authenticity of objects that are prominently for sale. In this model, the country or group attempts to have an antiquities auction stopped via legal means and when that fails top experts from the Ministry of Culture or equivalent body announce that a certain number of the antiquities in the auction are fakes. They often say

26. Richard E.W. Adams. *Río Azul: an Ancient Maya city*. 1999; and Stephan Salisbury. The struggle to save a past from plunder. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. 1986-05-11.

27. Stephan Salisbury. The struggle to save a past from plunder. 1986.

28. Edgar Herlindo Sánchez Hernández. *La máscara de Río Azul: un caso de tráfico ilícito del patrimonio cultural de Guatemala*. Universidad de San Carlos De Guatemala: Licenciado Dissertation. 2008; and Juan Antonio Valdés. Management and conservation of Guatemala's cultural heritage: a challenge to keep history alive. 2006.

29. Stéphane Martin. Jean Paul Barbier-Mueller: Connecting with cultures. *Sotheby's At Auction* 2013-02-15.

30. See Nancy L. Kelker and Karen O. Bruhns. *Faking ancient Mesoamerica*. 2009; and Bruhns and Karen O. Bruhns and Nancy L. Kelker. *Faking the Ancient Andes*. 2009.

31. Robert Kozak. Peru's government seeks to recover art planned for Sotheby's auction. *Wall Street Journal*. 2013-02-28.

32. Mark Stevenson. Mexico demands Sotheby's halt auction of artefacts. *The Washington Post*. 2013-03-23.

33. Donna Yates and Greg Lee. *The power of plausible provenance? Sotheby's sale of Pre-Columbian antiquities from the Barbier-Mueller collection*. Paper presented at the Society for American Archaeology Meeting, Austin, 2014.

how many of the objects are fake, but they do not specify which ones, thus instilling authenticity doubts for all the antiquities for sale. Buyers, they say, are risking spending their money on an artefact that, at any time, might be exposed as being fake. The goal appears to be to disrupt the sale, lower the sales prices for the antiquities, and to tarnish the reputation of the auction house. Two recent cases indicate that Mexico has made authenticity questioning a strategy in their push for the return of cultural property and the prevention of further antiquities looting.

### **Sotheby's Paris Barbier-Mueller auction (2013)**

In 2012 the Museu Barbier-Mueller d'Art Precolombí, a private museum located in Barcelona, closed. The owners, Jean Paul and Monique Barbier-Mueller, announced that this collection of primarily Pre-Columbian antiquities would be sold via Sotheby's Paris. Both Sotheby's and the Barbier-Muellers encouraged the idea that the collection was "century-old", although very few pieces offered had such an early collecting history.<sup>29</sup> This emphasis on old provenance is likely a result of a perceived authenticity problem with several of the artefacts for sale. A number of the items are types that have been (controversially) called fakes by Karen O. Bruhns and Nancy L. Kelker.<sup>30</sup>

Such a high profile auction of Latin American antiquities did not go unnoticed. Peru was the first country to attempt to intervene in the sale by requesting the return of about 67 objects that their government considered to be stolen cultural property.<sup>31</sup> In the

weeks leading up to the auction seven countries (Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela) either made return requests to French authorities or made public statements that they were considering formal action against Sotheby's. Each of these countries claimed that certain Barbier-Mueller artefacts represented their national cultural property and that they were stolen objects that had been exported illegally. Despite these allegations, French authorities did not intervene in the auction.

Shortly before the sale, Mexico's Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH), which had been lobbying hard to halt the sale, sent a diplomatic note to the French government that was also given to the press.<sup>32</sup> In it they state that: "Of the 130 objects advertised as being from Mexico, 51 are archaeological artefacts that are national property, and the rest are handicrafts"; "handicrafts" in this sense means modern fakes. In other words, Mexico was telling potential buyers that there were more fakes in the auction than real antiquities, that they were not going to say which of the objects were fake, but that at some point after the sale they may go public with the list of fakes, essentially rendering the buyers' investments valueless.

This strategy may have been effective. The Barbier-Mueller auction fetched €10,296,300, a large sum but only half of the pre-auction estimate, and 165 of the 313 lots did not sell. This is not the whole picture and statistical analysis of the auction shows a variety of conflicting buyer behaviours.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, we do not know if the authenticity question

scared buyers away or if they were discouraged by the negative publicity associated with the sale or some other factor. That said, if the introduction of doubt did play a role in disrupting this sale, the method was cheap and easy. Mexico has chosen to repeat it.

### **Bonham's New York African, Oceanic and Pre-Columbian Art auction (2014)**

On 11 November 2014, the day before Bonham's auction house's annual sale of African, Oceanic and Pre-Columbian Art, Mexico's INAH announced that at least 50 per cent of the Mexican antiquities offered in the sale were fakes, including five objects that were being billed as being among the finest in the auction.<sup>34</sup> The INAH reported that the inspections were made by their own top experts, in person during a public showing of the artefacts. In another statement, issued on 12 November, the day of the sale, the INAH stated that they had previously warned Bonham's that the auctioneers were about to sell looted Mexican cultural property via Mexico's Consul General in New York, but were ignored.<sup>35</sup> The auction house's refusal to respond to the Consul General resulted in Mexico filing a criminal complaint on 11 October 2014, which did not prevent the sale from going through, leaving Mexico little option but to turn to the media.<sup>36</sup> The INAH also allege that Mexico offered to provide specialists who could determine the authenticity of the artefacts for sale, but that Bonham's denied the offer. Neither press release states which items were determined to be fakes. In the second, the INAH accuses Bonham's of committing "a fraudulent act" by knowingly selling fakes to buyers.

Due to the relatively recent nature of the auction it is difficult to see if Mexico's introduction of authenticity doubt was an effective sale disruption technique. The results of this particular auction are skewed by negative publicity surrounding the sale of two certainly authentic, but ethically dubious Pre-Columbian antiquities that are unrelated to Mexico's complaint (Cascone 2014). Whatever the result, Mexico has clearly hardened its language concerning authenticity since the Barbier-Mueller sale, accusing the auction house of an outright fraud perpetrated on buyers. They paint a picture of the auction house wilfully turning down expertise to knowingly pass fakes on to bidders. This turns the usual tables, and creates a discourse where Mexico and potential antiquities buyers are somehow on the same side trying to out an auction house that is engaging in fraud. It appears as if Mexico has rightly determined that challenging the legality of antiquities for sale rarely produces results, but questioning the authenticity of pieces may cause prices (and buyers) to bottom out.

### **Closing thoughts**

Although archaeologists, governments, and policy makers are primarily concerned with the legality of antiquities for sale on the art market, dealers and buyers, although cognisant of the law, are far more concerned with artefact authenticity. A valuable antiquity is a real antiquity, but it is not always a legal antiquity. Despite the clear association of authenticity with value, there is a growing sentiment among antiquities dealers and buyers that the market can police itself

34. INAH. Después de análisis in situ, 50% de piezas que busca subastar Bonhams es de reciente manufactura: INAH. Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia. Press Release.

35. INAH. INAH reprueba la subasta de Bonhams. Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia. Press Release. 2014-11-12.

36. Elena Reina. México acusa de fraude a una casa de subastas neoyorquina. *El País*. 2014-11-13.

37. Souren Melikian. Antiquities, with a proven record, drive auction market. *New York Times*. 2013-06-14

38. Jason Felch. Feds pursue Manhattan art dealer suspected of smuggling. *Los Angeles Times*. 2013-06-11.

with regards to looted cultural objects. They state that over regulation causes the black market for antiquities, not demand, and that buyers will simply choose to stop buying from dealers who deal in looted artefacts.<sup>37</sup> However, this has not been the case historically and there is no evidence that this so-called autoregulation of the market would be successful, primarily because legality is not necessarily required for an antiquity to be valuable. Like it or not, looted antiquities are fresh, new, and real antiquities, thus they have value.

While we can, it seems, trust that antiquities traffickers will photograph looted objects to prove authenticity to potential buyers, it is unlikely that we can depend on the seizure of massive Polaroid archives like those recovered in the Becchina and Medici cases. In the crime world, like everywhere else, everyone has moved to digital formats. The lack of physicality in images does not necessarily mean that authorities will not intercept authenticity photos, especially when dealers and intermediaries lack the technical skills to ensure secure communication and data storage. Images of an unrestored and in transit Shiva Nataraja statue stolen from an Indian temple in 2006 and bought by the National Gallery of Australia were found on the mobile phone of antiquities dealer Subash Kapoor.<sup>38</sup> Kapoor is currently facing a host of antiquities smuggling charges in India. Although mobile phones and careless transmission of digital authenticity photos of artefacts will likely be the new photo archives for authorities to work with, it is not unreasonable to expect increasingly 'tech savvy' thieves to employ out-of-the-box secure messaging application to share such photos, making

them more difficult for authorities to locate. To put it another way, if we wish to use the value associated with the authenticity of antiquities to disrupt the illicit market, we cannot simply wait for photographs to surface.

From a control perspective, the idea of introducing soft control techniques centred on authenticity to discourage the market for illicit antiquities is intriguing. Such techniques would pay close attention to antiquities buyers' needs and desires, and would focus on their definition of value, rather than the archaeological definition of value. This could come in many forms: promoting the ways scientific techniques are thwarted, showing how easy it is to forge an in situ artefact trafficking photograph, or even calling into question the 'for pay' expert opinions offered by the auction houses and dealers. Mexico's method of saying a set number of artefacts in a sale are fake but not saying which ones is worth watching. These methods all have the benefit of being very cheap or free, an important factor as most antiquities source countries are located in the developing world. The power of authenticity is persuasive in this market. Remove authenticity and an antiquity loses all value.

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# M&A: Interview with Paul Leong (investment banker)

The Goldin+Senneby video documentation is viewable online at [parsejournal.com](http://parsejournal.com)

## **GOLDIN+SENNEBY**

"Goldin+Senneby define themselves as a 'collaborative framework exploring juridical, financial and spatial constructs.' The elusiveness of this description is somewhat apt. Since 2004, when Simon Goldin and Jakob Senneby started working as a duo, they have speculated around the layerings of contemporary economics, analyzing and employing different dimensions of financial markets. Their collaborative strategies have shaped a withdrawn approach wherein the artists are akin to puppeteers: their production mostly comprises choreographing the labour of others." (João Laia, *Frieze*, 57, September 2013.)

## **PIP DAY**

Pip Day is Director/Curator at the non-profit exhibitions and research centre SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art in Montréal. Prior to this, Pip worked as an independent curator, writer and educator in the arts for 12 years, primarily in London, New York and Mexico City where she founded the first graduate level curatorial studies program in Latin America; RIM, a residency program for curators and critics; and *el instituto*, an organization dedicated to culture, politics, activism and research. This work was partly supported through Pip's Andy Warhol Foundation Curatorial Research Fellowship, which she received in 2011. She has published texts on art and culture in numerous catalogues, books and journals including *Afterall*, *Untitled and Curare*. She has taught in curatorial Masters programs at Bard College and at Goldsmiths College, and has lectured widely in university and other cultural contexts. In the late 90s she worked as Curator at Artists Space in New York. Pip is a member of the curatorial team for the *SITElines Biennial* in Santa Fe, taking place in July 2016.

1. Aldous Huxley. *Brave New World*. London: Chatto & Windus. 1932.

2. All italicized passages are from Jo Randersén's script for M&A.

**Introduction to Goldin+Senneby's M&A: "And this," said the Director opening the door, "is the Fertilizing Room."<sup>1</sup>**

**Pip Day  
Self-adjustment**

*ACTOR (off the script): We apologise if the outcome differs in any way from the intended results. What does that mean – intended? Like – that I really hope something would happen but if it doesn't... if it doesn't, then...<sup>2</sup>*

The story begins with the sovereign King Gustav III of Sweden. In around 1780, in anticipation of strategic military moves, the king employs mineralogist August Nordenskiöld, ostensibly as a prospector, but secretly to pursue the Philosopher's Stone and its promise of gold. While the king's interest is in amassing the means to support his military campaign into Russia, Nordenskiöld's furtive goal is to alchemically create a surplus of gold – enough to render the precious metal, and the very notion of money itself, valueless. The mineralogist's extra-economic move banks on the notion that by capitalizing on and disseminating his mystic knowledge to common folk, the widespread extraction of surpluses from "nothing", would result in the sovereign power of gold foundering, presumably bringing down with it Gustav III's war machine, and by extension, emergent capitalist systems of economic and political power.

*He eventually finds a black hat.  
He taps the hat with a pencil, and  
swirls his hand around it as if this  
will make magic.*

*With great aplomb, he reaches into  
the hat for something, but there is  
nothing there.  
His trick has failed.*

For M&A the Swedish duo Goldin+Senneby renewed Nordenskiöld's eighteenth-century pursuit. They contracted New York-based investment banker and contemporary art collector Paul Leong to develop an algorithm to be used by the duo in the management of their production funds which were destined to pay the salary of an actor who, in turn, would rehearse daily in the exhibition space for as long as the fund held out. Leong developed an algorithmic product which could detect early market signs of corporate mergers and acquisitions. As Leong describes, possible signals of merger and acquisition activity of companies listed in the stock market are detected by marginal shifts in the market itself: prices of stock dip slightly at specific moments, value falls where perhaps it should otherwise rise ... These serve as indicators that specialists (or in this case, algorithmic managing computers) can analyse in order to ascertain whether a merger or acquisition will likely fail or proceed.

In parallel, Goldin+Senneby worked with playwright Jo Randersén on a script to be "rehearsed" in the exhibition space by the actor. He or she – in this case "he" – plays an actor, a broker and an artist of sorts. The actor's contract is open-ended, and he must commit to being available for the full run of the exhibition, but also agree that the length of the contract depends on the performance of the market and of the success of the algorithm. If and when the

invested money runs out, the contract is over. The actor takes a calculated risk, but at base must submit to precarious labour conditions as a prerequisite for being hired. His job is dependent on an abstraction over which he has no power. *ACTOR: I can't talk now. I'm acting. I don't know. Maybe another day? (Pause.) How much is it? (Pause.) I'm not interested. Are they American? (Pause.) How much are they selling? Are they like going up or like going down? (Pause.) No I'm not interested.*

One could speculate that risk is the ontological condition of contemporary life, but when asked about the risk involved in the algorithmic investment strategies, Leong not only chuckles at the notion that a \$6000 investment could be considered “risky”, he also describes a built-in self-adjustment mechanism, designed to beat the fluctuations in the market. At any 10% fall in value, the fund self-corrects by re-distributing invested funds. If this machine-generated self-adjustment can compensate for the effects of affect on the market, and human implementation eradicated, where does the precarity of the market reside?

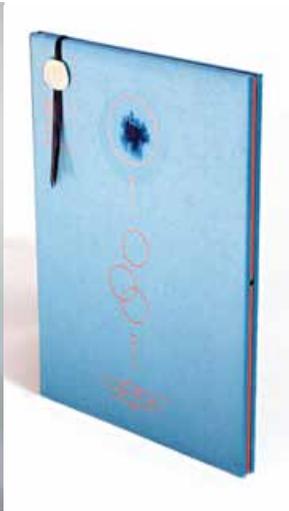
*ACTOR: I just do it until they tell me to stop. (Pause.) I don't know! Another three days? A week? (Pause.) No-one knows how long it's going to last. It's an experiment. (Pause.) Is it a main part? (Pause.) I have to think about it. Is it profit share? Are they like going well or badly at the moment? (Pause. He looks at the audience and gestures to show 'sorry, almost finished').*

There is a lost actor/artist/broker moving around the gallery space, then, throwing paint on walls, as scripted; asking audience members to “direct”

scenes; perpetually rehearsing oscillations between the abstract and the real; enacting behaviours that seem to erratically fluctuate, echoing both the financial and art markets. Making three-dimensional within the exhibition space the abstractions that are the markets, the actor embodies the speculative, occupies the precarity that the host institution is complicit in establishing, and represents, in very concrete ways, the extent to which we're all subject to the effects of money/market capitalist economies. While writer Sven Lütticken would assert that gold is “the ultimate concretization of the real abstraction that is money”,<sup>3</sup> for Leong, for the actor and presumably for sovereign Gustav III, where this story began, there is nothing more concrete than dollars and cents.

*ACTOR: Hello? Yes? Yes? High or low? Great. D-d-d-debt? Great. And good valuation? Great! Yes! Do it! Right now! We're on! Oh my God, it's happening, it's finally happening! This is the part I was waiting for!*

3. Sven Lütticken. Inside Abstraction. *e-flux journal* #38. Oct 2012. URL: <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/inside-abstraction/>. (Accessed 2015/04/30).



Goldin+Senneby, "Merger Prediction Strategy" with Paul Leong (investment banker), 2013. Photos: Karin Alfredsson

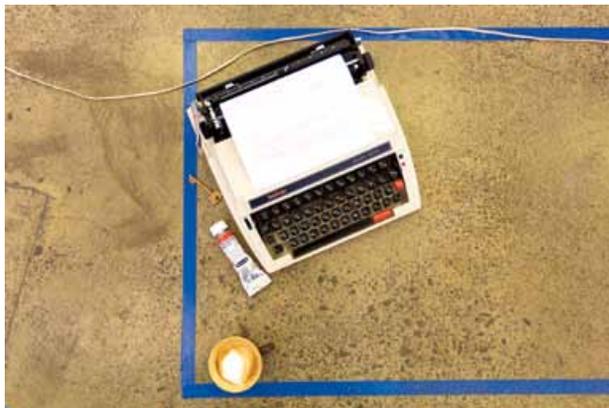


Goldin+Senneby, "M&A" with Paul Leong (investment banker), Jo Randerson (playwright), Ybodon (computer scientist), Anna Heymowska (set designer), Johan Hjerpe (graphic designer), Gerard Harris (actor). Exhibition view: SBC Gallery, La Biennale de Montréal, 2014. Photos: Guy L'Heureux





*Goldin+Senneby, "M&A" with Paul Leong (investment banker), Jo Randerson (playwright), Ybodon (computer scientist), Anna Heymowska (set designer), Joban Hjerpe (graphic designer), Gerard Harris (actor). Exhibition view: SBC Gallery, La Biennale de Montréal, 2014. Photos: Guy L'Heureux*



*Goldin+Semeby, "M&A" with Paul Leong (investment banker), Jo Randerson (playwright), Ybodan (computer scientist), Anna Heymowska (set designer), Johan Hjerpe (graphic designer), Gerard Harris (actor). Exhibition view: SBC Gallery, La Biennale de Montréal, 2014. Photos: Guy L'Heureux*

# Art's Values: *A Détente, a Grand Plié*

## **VICTORIA IVANOVA**

Victoria Ivanova is a curator and writer living in London, and currently Assistant Curator for Public Programmes at Tate. Ivanova has previously worked in human rights, co-founded a cultural platform in Donetsk, Ukraine, and worked as Assistant Editor in the relaunch of the Center for Curatorial Studies' online journal. She has recently co-edited a reader *Turborealism: Neither Bow nor Arrow*

*(thinking with a movement that almost was)* (2014). Ivanova is one of the founding members of Real Flow—a research and development platform for socializing finance. Ivanova holds a BA in Politics and Philosophy from the University of Leeds, a Masters in Sociology from London School of Economics and a Masters in Curatorial Studies from the Center for Curatorial Studies Bard College.

1. The term “ethical” in this context exceeds associations with morality and is used to circumscribe positions that relate to the referent’s non-instrumental qualities.

2. The term “functional” in this context is used to circumscribe positions that aren’t necessarily related to the referent’s instrumental qualities but allude to its “use-value” to society in non-economic terms. For example, the cultural sphere is often said to be socially functional when it provides for different constituencies to have claims to visibility.

3. This line of response is best represented by the mission statements of contemporary art institutions.

4. For example, the negative reaction to Paul McCarthy’s giant “butt-plug” inflatable sculpture on Place Vendôme in Paris in October 2014.

5. This approach chimes with the “push-back” by representatives of the art field to the funding bodies’ demand to have rationalized and quantifiable justifications in applying for art grants.

6. See for example Andrea Fraser. *Le 1%, c’est moi. Texte zur Kunst* 83. September 2011. pp. 114-127

**T**HE TERM “VALUE” INVITES THREE obvious readings: ethical<sup>1</sup>, functional<sup>2</sup> and economic. Depending on the referent, the three readings may appear to be distinct, intertwined or identical. The question of “contemporary art’s value” likewise elicits a multiplicity of knee-jerk reactions. For one, what is at stake at the level of value is quickly attributed to “the artwork” as art’s pinnacle unit. Some are then inclined to affirm contemporary art(works) as valuable contribution(s) to the world that they inhabit<sup>3</sup>; those not so keen would call out contemporary art’s irrelevance, ludicrousness or even harm.<sup>4</sup> Another approach is to argue that the question shouldn’t be posed in the first place since artworks defy blunt rationalization or may be threatened by it in some fundamental way.<sup>5</sup> What these responses suggest is an understanding of value that is a mix of ethical and functional readings, while the tendency to forefront objects and their discursive claims as the truth of art lurks as a suppressed premise. Often kept entirely separate is the question of contemporary art’s monetary valuation, which no longer presumes a primary link to artworks but which instead poses “the market” as the domain that subjugates “artworks” to its rationale.<sup>6</sup> The “market dimension” is thus often left occluded as an account that threatens contemporary art’s value with narrow economic instrumentalization. In a similar key, contemporary art’s socio-institutional ecology may be perceived as crucial to determining conditions for artistic production and artworks’ circulation but only is so far as it *affects* art rather than *acting* as one of its determinants.

For the purposes of the presented argument, the ambiguities inherent to the term “value” in the English language are taken as a convenient launch pad for a discussion on the schism that exists at the level of contemporary art’s ontology, which prioritizes singularity over systematicity. This essay contends that there exists a fundamental rupture in the notion of contemporary art’s value between, on the one hand, the socio-cultural and political claims of artworks and, on the other hand, their economic and infrastructural realities. This predicament is here elaborated from the perspective of contemporary art’s historical inheritance as a paradigm that understands itself through its object-particulars rather than as a systemic totality. This disarticulation permits the ethico-functional value to stand at stark odds with the infrastructures that carry it, which not only leaves contemporary art vulnerable to attacks of disingenuous discourse but perhaps more crucially inhibits art from moving beyond critical reflection and representation, perpetuated at the expense of self-effacement, towards a constructive participation in the real.

The essay sets the scene by sketching out how the evolution behind contemporary art has been predicated on the project of perpetually redefining the art object, pausing on conceptualism and the post-structuralist turn as the inaugural moments of critique’s supremacy in defining art’s value within a semantic configuration. While allowing for greater integration of art’s socio-institutional ecology within art’s ontology, the emphasis on semantic singularities continued to obstruct their seeping into art’s operationality. The attempts to affect a transformation aimed at systematicity at that specific historical juncture offer important case-studies for speculating on the reasons of their failures and the possibilities for repurposing their logic in the present moment. Approaching the contemporary moment from this side of “now”,

a discussion is launched on the more recent methodological formations in art that have taken shape with the infrastructural innovations brought about by the internet and the concomitant resurrection of artistic interest in systemic intervention and enactment as the necessary means of moving art beyond critique's deflation.

## Scene I: The Rise and Fall of Critical Art

From late 19th century French modernism's revolutionizing of painting and sculpture to art's complete semantic overhaul in the 1960s, the trajectory that has led to contemporary art as the art paradigm *du jour* is one of art's ontological liberalization—loosening up of norms that dictate what art can be.<sup>7</sup> Conceptual art, underwritten by Duchampian “anarchism”, marked a crucial transition. Divesting the artwork from materiality as a foundational pillar, conceptual art opened up a new plane of ontological possibilities by eliciting a shift from the developmental basis of art rooted in linear transformations of art's formal concerns to a paradigm where art became a plane for renegotiating semantics.

The emerging theoretical spectra of post-structuralist critique were put to use as engines for shredding the oppressive mechanisms of traditionalism and socio-cultural taboos. Emancipatory agendas geared towards the dissolution of gender inequalities, heteronormative dominance, white supremacy, classism and sexual repression found an outlet in the increasingly daring and transgressive artworks that no longer had to be contained by formal pressures. To this extent, the emancipatory zeal in conceptual art's ontological orientation found its match in the post-structuralist socio-political *Weltanschauung*, signaling a shift away from an art *necessarily* linked to its formal qualifications to one that instead employs context reflexivity and socio-political sensitivity as key determinants of its objecthood. This developmental trajectory allowed for the sociological and the contextual dimensions of art to become more embedded in art's ontology, tying art's value to the more general societal conditions and operations.

The art object of the 1960s and 1970s became a prism through which these various environmental conditions were brought into focus. While the notion of infrastructures is more aligned with the notion of “environment” here, in many ways it was minimalism's focus on the more narrow understanding of the term that opened up the possibility for integrating larger systemic concerns into art's agenda. For example, the logic by which minimalism accentuated the ontological ties between the art object's presence and its physical environment was schematically mirrored in the more openly socio-political works that strove to comment on a certain state of affairs by playing on the aesthetico-conceptual disparity between the artwork and its societal habitat.<sup>8</sup> This intentionally created “disparity,” or the pivotal *critical* gesture, would open up a semantic field for a more nuanced or a completely contrarian understanding of the targeted conditions, which in turn qualified *difference* as the prime organizational feature of art. Hence, while the idea that Abstract Expressionism (which ontologically resonates far more with pre-conceptual practices) served an important role in propagating liberalism and America's export of “freedom” during the Cold War, something similar

7. John Roberts. *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art after the Readymade*. London: Verso. 2007.

8. Another way of looking at what Michael Fried called minimalism's “theatricality.”

9. This is evident, for example, in the separation between the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (1966) and its counter-part the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (1966) in the field of human rights—another crucial system for liberal global ordering. The separation was justified by the idea that while negative freedoms need to be adopted universally, economic rights were conditional on the country's opportunities. This in effect justified policies that proclaimed high moral values but permitted bullying newly independent colonies into signing economic agreements that put them at a significant economic disadvantage for decades to come.

10. Perhaps most starkly represented by the global scale hypocrisy of the “War on Terror”, which attempted to defend liberal values, most prominently the rule of law, by acting outside of law of altogether (as evidenced by extraordinary renditions and secret camps for the terror “suspects” detained without due process).

11. Both were against the position that keeping art at a distance from social reality was what guarded art's ethico-functional value.

12. Jack Burnham. Systems Esthetics. *Artforum* 7. no. 1. September 1968. pp. 30-35

could be said about practices driven by critique, even if playing into larger (predatory) political agendas was not (and perhaps even contrary to) critique's aims. The logic of critical differentiation, as it was and continues to be manifested in critical art, is a *de facto* contribution to validating the liberal-democratic agenda as an ethico-functional imperative, which positions negative freedoms and respect for difference as society's foundational pillars, while occluding society's material organization.<sup>9</sup>

Critique's normalization with the seemingly endless proliferation of critical agendas and corresponding art objects as signs and signifiers detached from their signified is part and parcel of post-structuralism's self-ghettoization in the realm of semantics. On the one hand, the claims of critical art are understood to require the real for content, but on the other hand, their socio-political value to *the real* is delimited by art's contribution to discourse and viewer experience. Consequently, the idea that the value of art can only be assessed discursively and/or phenomenologically has streamlined the notion of art's autonomy into governing what art's value may be, thus reaffirming the schism between content and the systemic.

At the same time, given the changing conditions of global ordering and the generally acknowledged failures in the implementation of the liberal project in recent decades<sup>10</sup>, the critical gesture in art no longer possesses the same kind of political currency as when it was believed to function as a counter-force to oppression (at least discursively). While contemporary art has become a global phenomenon and criticality its defining feature, the devastating repercussions of economic liberalization and the sense in which precarity and (existential) risk have come to structure the lived experiences of the majority of the world's population pose an uneasy contrast. As a result, viewed from the perspective of art's value to society, context-sensitive critical art seems to have arrived at a cul-de-sac as a progressive socio-political paradigm even, or especially, when its monetary valuation has soared.

## Scene II: A *Détente* Attempted

The displacement of materiality as art's ontological prerequisite in favor of a tension between the object and its environment, as established by conceptual and minimalist practices, also effectuated an evolutionary branch of art that prioritized oneness over autonomy. Deviating from the critical mode, this integrationist approach was methodologically and strategically more aligned with the Russian Constructivists' and Bertolt Brecht's vision of art's value.<sup>11</sup> While remaining historically marginal, and having broken off at various junctures, the integrationist approach that emerged with the conceptual/post-structuralist turn made important inroads to reconciling art's proclaimed values with art's infrastructural and economic realities.

Responding to the new vistas opened up by post-war technologies in the dissemination, management and processing of information, what felt urgent to such visionaries as Jack Burnham was for art to step into a leadership role in steering and defining systemic developments.<sup>12</sup> Taking the conceptual turn as a cue for bringing the dissolution of the object's material base to its logical conclusion, Burnham's “systems

esthetics” advocated for the object’s complete submergence in societal infrastructures.<sup>13</sup> The approach was staunchly opposed to preserving a special—or “autonomous”—status for art as a hangover from modernism:

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*

*In the past our technologically-conceived artifacts structured living patterns. We are now in transition from an object-oriented to a systems-oriented culture. Here change emanates, not from things, but from the way things are done. The priorities of the present age revolve around the problems of organization. A systems viewpoint is focused on the creation of stable, on-going relationships between organic and non-organic systems, be these neighborhoods, industrial complexes, farms, transportation systems, information centers, recreation centers, or any of the other matrixes of human activity.<sup>14</sup>*

The increasing ubiquity of the television and the advancements made in computational technologies were taken by Burnham as signs that the speed and scale by which these technologies could *order* the world would make the spatio-temporally bound nature of individuated experience less and less relevant as far as its impact on the overall system is concerned. For Burnham, objecthood had to be debunked in favor of systemic interventions that not only made use of the existing technologies but *directed* them with a political imperative in mind:

*In an advanced technological culture the most important artist best succeeds by liquidating his position vis-a-vis society. [...] The significant artist strives to reduce the technical and psychological distance between his artistic output and the productive means of society. Duchamp, Warhol, and Robert Morris are similarly directed in this respect. Gradually this strategy transforms artistic and technological decision-making into a single activity—at least it presents that alternative in inescapable terms. Scientists and technicians are not converted into “artists,” rather the artist becomes a symptom of the schism between art and technics. Progressively the need to make ultrasensitive judgments as to the uses of technology and scientific information becomes “art” in the most literal sense.<sup>15</sup>*

In Burnham’s vision, objecthood’s dissolution was a far cry from art’s destruction or putting artists “out of work.” On the contrary, for Burnham art had the potential of becoming the directing vector of society’s advancements in virtue of art’s/artists’ inclination to make use of the existing mechanisms with an agenda that escapes the narrow rationalizations and prescriptive functionalities attributed to these infrastructures within their “home” domains (be it physics, IT, finance or media).

The strength of dedicated disciplines and professional spheres lies in their ability to create sophisticated instruments through their precisely defined knowledge systems and self-perpetuating logics. This in turn is also their greatest weakness in keeping sight of the all-encompassing oneness that defines far-reaching horizons. Propelled by a commitment to their established codes, these spheres and disciplines are themselves in part “victims” to modernity’s heritage of parcelling out knowledge systems

16. As exemplified by Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Random House Inc. 1994.

17. Marcel Duchamp's "readymade" showed that art is what is legitimated as art by those that have the authority for such a "baptism." This is exactly the logic that gave birth to branding as a trigger for desired consumption. Meanwhile, Andy Warhol understood the allure of mass production coupled with marketing, and presented as art (thanks to Duchamp).

18. In other words, reduced to the bare logic of their operation as symptomatic conditions.

by granting each entitlement to autonomy.<sup>16</sup> Yet, while the emerging "self-dedicated" sphere of (for example) information technology deploys autonomy to create ever more sophisticated products aligned with a set of internally-set criteria (e.g. computing power, functionality, but equally growing/business-sustaining profit margins), the ontological dispersal of art that Burnham wished for would have meant that art could make use of its status as *nothing-in-particular* and *potentially-everything* in becoming *that* which keeps sight of far-reaching horizons. The *value of art* that Burnham's approach advocated for had highly ethical connotations and thoroughly functional repercussions.

The unlocking of art's potential initiated by conceptualism was for Burnham a reason to see art as an instrument through which systemic advancements could be utilized and probed while being subjected to criteria that go beyond the immediate interests of that specific discipline/technological advancement and with consequences that are practical rather than simply discursive. The latter condition establishes an essential distinction from what may otherwise appear as an elaborate critical artwork: Burnham's artist operating at the level of systems esthetics is an infiltrator, not a tourist.

The artistic practices that Burnham provides as his examples, however, are somewhat discordant with Burnham's vision given what we know about them decades later. Both Duchamp and Warhol, each in their own way, succeeded in importing nascent systemic advancements into art; branding in the case of Duchamp, and mass production and marketing in the case of Warhol.<sup>17</sup> Duchamp's and Warhol's ability to incorporate novel business tools into their artistic production through literal capitalization is definitely part of Burnham's design for art. What is missing, however, is a transformative (or at least a transformation-driven) intervention into the operational domains of these systems that transverses the divide between art and "the world" by attempting to modulate the system as one. Instead, both Duchamp and Warhol end up reaffirming systemic developments by "progressive" capitulation disguised as artistic strategy that hinges on, and preserves, art's separation from "the world."

On the other end of the spectrum from Duchamp and Warhol, are such artists as Robert Morris, Donald Judd, Les Levine and Allan Kaprow. Reading their practices on purely schematic terms<sup>18</sup>, and with the knowledge afforded by hindsight, it is evident that their preoccupation with the systemic, and experiments in diluting the spatio-temporal prescriptions of gallery-sited objects, were shortchanged by the implicit insistence on the unique status of the phenomenological experience of art. The latter proved to be a way of reasserting the auratic principle of art by redefining and expanding what an art object could be, thus remaining within the prism of objecthood's singularity even if the object's content could now deal with the myth of the singular authentic manifestation.

The artistic strategies that resemble a Burnhamian undertaking more closely are those that have attempted to use "art" as a "supplemental" mode in infiltrating systemic configurations in order to rewire them. In his "manifesto" on systems esthetics, Burnham mentions Hans Haacke. Indeed, the artist's early projects from the 1970s aimed to undo the assumed neutrality of certain power figures/institutions

by showcasing their integration into a wider array of predatory interests.<sup>19</sup> Haacke's practice thus seems closest to Burnham's vision from all those mentioned by the author. However, despite Haacke's interest in causing a shift in society's systemic arrangements through his practice as an artist, the deconstructionist undercurrent of his work encouraged a stand-off between the proclaimed and the real. While Haacke's work appeared as a powerful critical statement, it lacked as a functionally prescriptive mechanism. The trade-off between offering a valuable "reveal" propelled by astute criticality and, on the other hand, establishing a programmatic instrument, is characteristic of most practices that come under the rubric of "institutional critique" or those that engage with mapping/understanding/revealing capital (relations).<sup>20</sup>

The impetus behind the creation of the Artist Placement Group, spearheaded by Barbara Steveni and John Latham, and operating in the UK between the late 1960s and early 1970s, resonates with systems esthetics in its mission to streamline art into society's general productive processes. Overseeing artist placements in various institutions and corporations, APG sought to foment a new culture of production, in which the artist's supplemental role would become integral to directing the development of society's productive forces. The vigor of APG's theoretical agenda was, however, undermined by the practicalities of implementation and sustainability. Some reports attest to the failure of formulating concise enough terms of engagement for the collaborations to be effective. It may also be the case that hosting companies were not ready to engage with artists as colleagues, since the latter's role was most likely understood in a very traditional way (i.e., as providers of representational imagery). One of APG's last projects at The Hayward Gallery was organized as a series of workshops and meetings between representatives of the business world and artists. The Art Council of England, which provided APG with most of their funding, responded unfavorably to this project, putting an end to their financial support by proclaiming that "the group was 'more concerned with social engineering than with straight art.'"<sup>21</sup>

Although APG's short-lived history has been funneled into the category of "socially embedded art,"<sup>22</sup> it seems that what Latham and Steveni attempted to do exceeds the ad hoc tourism of most socially-oriented (critical) art projects that tend to be more preoccupied with producing interesting social sculpture (à la Thomas Hirschhorn) than with causing systemic shifts.<sup>23</sup> While APG's placements were organized on an ad hoc basis, APG as a platform was an act of institution-building. The institution's mission to straddle art's ethico-functional value with economically organized infrastructures in fact goes above and beyond the ethico-functional purview of Burnham's systems esthetics. In comparison to APG's resolutely all-encompassing approach to art's value, Burnham's vision occludes the economic dimension even while proposing a radically different mode of doing art. What Burnham fails to account for is the resource dependency that is *always* the other side of any productive process, requiring an equally attuned and thought-through paradigm in order to stay true to the process' purpose.

Seth Siegelaub's "The Artist's Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement" (1971) attempted to address just that, albeit in reference to art as object particulars.<sup>24</sup> Siegelaub came up with an implementable legal structure that gave artists 15% of

19. Examples include *MoMA Poll* (1970); *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, A Real Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* (1971); *On Social Grease* (1975); and *A Breed Apart* (1976).

20. Which in part explains the domestication of "institutional critique" and the full embrace of "Haacke"-like artworks in today's contemporary art institutions which continue to embody the problems that these works refer to.

21. Maris Jahn (ed.) *Byproduct: On the Excess of Embedded Art Practices*. Toronto: YYY Books. 2011. p. 40

22. *Ibid.*

23. From a conversation with the artist, Thomas Hirschhorn, at *Gramsci Monument* (2013) in the Bronx, NY, in which he stated that his concerns cannot be systemic since what is at stake in his work is sculpture.

24. Seth Siegelaub. The Artist's Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement. 1971. URL: <http://www.tenstakonsthall.se/uploads/58-Seth-Siegelaub-The-Artists-Reserved-Rights-Transfer-And-Sale-Agreement.pdf>.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Suhail Malik. The Value of Everything. *Texte Zur Kunst* 93. Summer 2014. pp. 66-79

profits in future resale of their works, greater control over exhibition and circulation, while also structuring their relationship to dealers by proposing that galleries receive one third of the artists' 15%.<sup>25</sup> Whereas Burnham foresaw that the merger between society's technological developments and the underlying morphability of art after conceptualism required new modes of structuring that relationship, something similar could be said of Siegelau's understanding that with conceptual art the art market was about to get much bigger and that there were hardly any structures in place to direct that expansion. The model that Siegelau proposed would have given artists far more leverage in setting the terms for art's development ethically, functionally and economically.

As we know, Siegelau's project did not get taken up by artists and their dealers. The benefits of an opaque valuation system, lack of transactional transparency and a "no strings attached" approach to trading in art commodities, were much greater for marketing such "exotic" products as conceptual artworks than a more onerous entitlements system, which might have made a lot of sense for artists and galleries (and even collectors) in the long term, but which did not sound attractive in the contemporary art market's start-up phase. Aided by the myth that the artist should focus on art while galleries deal with the commercial aspects of the artist's career, the foundational segregation of contemporary art's primary market (i.e., the gallery system) from art's ethico-functional value has permeated the whole organization of (contemporary) art to such an extent that it continues to exert force on today's reality on a global scale.

Attempts to reintegrate the economic dimension into art's value have been undermined or directly shut down, as was the case when APG was "penalized" by the Art Council for "overreaching" the "proper limits" of art, or when Haacke's exhibition revealing the socially disastrous consequences of a real estate developer in New York was cancelled by the Guggenheim, or when Siegelau's efforts to structure the art market were marginalized into a whimsical eccentricity. However, what did gain strength was a tactic of critical commentary that knew its proper bounds and has become the art historical norm: the artwork as a singular objecthood with claims to a unique phenomenology.

### **Scene III: Branding's *Grand Plié***

Today's ubiquity of critique, and the inconsistencies of its value commitments in contemporary art, appear as horizon-less norms and crisis conditions at the same time. This status quo is *normal* because a schism between art's ethico-functional dimension of value, and its socio-institutional and economic infrastructures, is where the power of the contemporary art paradigm as a mostly unwitting—or disavowing—accomplice to free market economics and global liberalism lies.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, the predicament is a crisis if the artwork's critical demands on reality should have value beyond enriching the discursive and the market's "invisible hand."

Just as with art's past systemic constellations, the resonance between the state of art and the state of "society" is instructive. A seeming lack of viable political

alternatives to the neoliberal order has meant that intervention is only possible in highly localized and temporally limited instances. The deflation of critique as a viable strategy for causal intervention may be seen as part and parcel of the more general failure of agendas that define themselves in response to the various symptoms of the dominant order, yet lack in a prescriptive program. Responding to the evident inefficacy of localist leftist counter-politics, Nick Srnicek's and Alex Williams' "Manifesto for Accelerationist Politics" addresses the issue of the Left's crisis as one of its inability to make use of the existing technologies and infrastructures:

*We believe the most important division in today's left is between those that hold to a folk politics of localism, direct action, and relentless horizontalism, and those that outline what must become called an accelerationist politics at ease with a modernity of abstraction, complexity, globality, and technology. The former remains content with establishing small and temporary spaces of non-capitalist social relations, eschewing the real problems entailed in facing foes which are intrinsically non-local, abstract, and rooted deep in our everyday infrastructure. The failure of such politics has been built-in from the very beginning. By contrast, an accelerationist politics seeks to preserve the gains of late capitalism while going further than its value system, governance structures, and mass pathologies will allow.<sup>27</sup>*

Existing infrastructures are put forward as pivotal stages for rewiring societal codes and socio-economic processes towards a post-capitalist future. At the core of the accelerationist program is an emphasis on thorough-going systematicity that does not disavow the innovative base for ordering society under capitalism but instead makes maximum use of it for an alternative political program.

Measuring contemporary art up to left accelerationism's program, it is starkly evident that critique's atomized counter-poising, locked in singular artworks, cannot satisfy the value demands placed on art by a commitment to systematicity. Critique poses reduced characteristics of existing infrastructures as intrinsically bad or faulty objects, and it separates the content of artworks from their operational reality. While art-objects articulate a "rejection" of existing infrastructures, these same infrastructures ineluctably organize the objects and their agendas as mechanisms for perpetuating the status quo, which in turn continues to be repositioned as a begrudged reality, re-trenching the schism in art's value as a semantic field at odds with its operational reality.

The accelerationist approach presumes that new technologies and global infrastructures are systemic conditions that must not only be addressed as objects of critique but engaged with operationally. To this extent, accelerationism may also be seen as a strategy for reconciling the various denominations of "value" into something inherently unitary, thereby resonating with Burnham's systems esthetics, but only if coupled with a Siegelaubian programme for integrating market dynamics into art as a systemic undertaking.

Accelerationism's *Zeitgeist* and the echo of late 1960s/early 1970s efforts to transform art into a practice of system-oriented enactment are implicitly present in the

27. Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek. #ACCELERATE MANIFESTO for an Accelerationist Politics. In Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian (eds.) #Accelerate# *The Accelerationist Reader*. Falmouth: Urbanomic. 2014. pp. 347-362.

more recent attempts to mobilize existing platforms as the very content of art. While it would be wrong to identify these efforts with the political imperatives behind Srnicek and Williams' political project, for the purposes of the current discussion what matters is the cross-cutting ethos of addressing value in a unitary fashion, which does not necessarily reveal anything about the project's ideological dimensions.

The "classic" mid-1990s remix of "cool/cold" corporate anonymity, vibrant party scenes, megalomaniac celebrity culture and the mainstream's "passion for fashion" came together as modes of (artistic) action by an elusive pseudo-collective known as the Bernadette Corporation (BC). Conflating all manners of identities and practices, the Bernadette Corporation dipped in and out of a variety of "real" scenes (film, fashion, publishing, art gallery-business, clubbing, etc.), morphing and remorphing with versatility as circumstances and the group's penchant for adventure demanded. The schizophrenic or "multilateral" nature of BC's practice functioned as an incisive application of vertical and horizontal integration by which corporations were gaining unprecedented power as national and transnational actors. In a Duchampian-Warholian manner, BC adopted a key mechanism for organizing power from the world of business and global politics, therefore transforming art-making into brand-making that used the framework of "mergers & acquisitions" to "conquer" new terrains.

"Art-making as brand-making," begun in part by Duchamp and Warhol and expanded on in a more nuanced and sophisticated manner by Bernadette Corporate, has become *the* formula for emulating "existing infrastructures" which, in a world dominated by transnational corporations and finance, makes total sense. In fact, looking at a significant cross-section of practices that quite clearly (and perhaps consciously) diverge from the critical model, "brand-making" emerges as the most dominant framework for attempting to leave behind contemporary art's historical inheritance of representational referentiality. Understanding art through branding also offers a different approach to understanding value. The three facets of value—ethical, functional and economic—become mutually reinforcing and interdependent. The "ethics" of a brand are reduced to its image, which defines its functions and organizes its economic dimension. In turn, the latter two allow the image to either be sustained or transformed along with the brand's strategy. On the surface, the brand-making model fulfills the demands of systems esthetics in so far as art is freed from its lockdown in singular objecthood (although "art objects" can be a component of brand-making). What is more difficult to achieve, however, is the subjugation and rewiring of market dynamics that harbors the potential for systemic transformation at the economic level. Artist brands such as Bernadette Corporation and its more contemporary counterparts such as DIS, AutoItalia, AIDS-3D, SONE but also Superflex (which is from a somewhat different strand of practices but nonetheless still corresponds to the outlined characteristics of brand-making), tend to fall back on the existing infrastructures of an opaque primary market, at best securing greater agency for themselves by leveraging on positions that allow them to *be* market actors. In other words, these brands may either themselves set up commercial gallery spaces (e.g. Reena Spaulings vis-a-vis Bernadette Corporation; AutoItalia) or mold into a market

player in a different pre-existing market (e.g. DIS's Kenzo advert, or SONE's "stock" as a video product on Getty Images).

While arguably no transformation is affected in terms of "rewiring" existing infrastructural arrangements or market dynamics, what is affected is the deep-rooted orthodoxy that reaffirms art's autonomy by not only keeping artists "separate" from the market as its active players but also keeping the art market separate from other markets. The economic intertwining that is effectuated by artist brands consolidates a more integrated understanding of value both as a continuum of ethico-functional and economic dimensions, and of diverse industries and markets. This might seem like a far cry from Siegelau's "rights"-oriented vision for the art market, but what these practices do is use the very mechanisms of neoliberal market dynamics as conditions for intervention, thus in the very least debunking the assumption that is embedded within the critical contemporary art paradigm that positions the market as an exterior force on art (qua 'object particular' artworks).

In a similar vein, what has been dubbed with the (almost immediately) discredited term "post-internet art"<sup>28</sup> once held the promise of transforming pre-internet realities. This post-millennial wave was ushered in, to seemingly release art from atavistic constraints at the levels of authorship, objecthood, distribution and circulation, while claiming to redefine what it means to be a producing artist and to have an audience.<sup>29</sup> The new constellation afforded by the infrastructural ubiquity of the internet meant that materiality neither had to be tied to the physical object nor juxtaposed to the conceptual: the virtual collapsed this distinction by departing from a one-to-one correlation of the material to objecthood. Since what has precedence in a networked environment of never-ceasing circulation is virality, art's value was claimed in this formation to be generated by the latter's intensity. Consequently, the value of the *singular* authentic artwork (whether object or concept) presumably disintegrated. Instead, art could be understood through its expansiveness both on the lateral plane of associative links and in the temporal dimension of information flow. In Artie Vierkant's words, "nothing is in a fixed state."<sup>30</sup> Authorship presumably becomes muddled as content passes hands.

In these conditions, value becomes located not in authenticity but in the inherent malleability and propensity for decontextualization of digital content. Within an idealized reality, the endless stream of information in the boundless online flattens out the peaks of power concentration present in the offline constellation of individual authors, individual artworks and narrow access corridors to art distribution. In a similarly idealized vein, another physical-world distinction that is presumably collapsed is one between artist (producer) and audience (viewer/consumer).<sup>31</sup> While the critical model necessitates artist's production for further semantic completion by the viewer, the "post-internet" model requires consumption as a pre-condition of production—the now all too generic "presumption."

Perhaps the most idealistic vista associated with (what shouldn't be called) post-internet art is the possibility for a non-mercantile economy. Since the overhead costs of producing on the internet are equal for artists and non-artists, this briefly upheld the optimistic scenario of cost-free production, lack of barriers to distribution and art

28. In part, today's disdain towards the term, apart from it being reductive and imposed as a catch-all blanket term institutionally, might stem from the embarrassment of the initial overexcitement that the possibilities afforded by the internet could transform art as we know it.

29. Artie Vierkant. The Image Object Post-Internet. 2010. URL: [http://jstchillin.org/artie/pdf/The\\_Image\\_Object\\_Post-Internet\\_us.pdf](http://jstchillin.org/artie/pdf/The_Image_Object_Post-Internet_us.pdf). (Accessed 2015/04/30).

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Ibid.*

32. For example see Alex R. Galloway, *Protocol. How Control Exists after Decentralization*. Cambridge: MIT Press. 2004; Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Control and Freedom: Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics*. Cambridge: MIT Press. 2006; Shane Harris, *@War. The Rise of the Internet-Military Complex*. Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing. 2014.

33. Brad Troemell. Athletic Aesthetics. *The New Inquiry*. 2013. URL: <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/athletic-aesthetics/>. (Accessed 2015/04/30).

34. As propagated by such figures as Jeremy Rifkin in *The End of Work: The Decline of the Global Labor Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons. 1995; and *The Age of Access: The New Culture of Hypercapitalism, Where all of Life is a Paid-For Experience*. New York: Penguin Putnam Inc. 2000.

35. It is telling that the attempts made to provide a more clear structure for economic transactions for works with online provenance has followed a typical "offline" script, as is evidenced by such projects as Monegraph, Rafaël Rozendaal's *Art Website Sales Contract*, *NewHive*. URL: <https://monegraph.com> (Accessed 2015/09/20).

that is free (or at least equivalent to the overhead costs of its production, i.e. whatever it costs to access the internet, which offers a model for pegging art's valuation in a way that is in direct contrast to the opaque valuation mechanisms operative on the contemporary art market). This proposition resonates with an image of art that has overcome its value schism by integrating its infrastructural reality within its content and vice versa. The two function seamlessly as innate components of a unitary ethos: art that is the system that it desires for the real because it is the real. Art's sociology and transaction unite to construct art's value and a system for its valuation as one. Art's ontology is enriched by the inclusion of its historically oppressed other: transaction.

### Scene IV: A Grand *Plié* of Little Consolation

In reality, the idealized scenario associated with the most profound techno-infrastructural advancement since Burnham's era has been lacking. As numerous critics of the internet have shown, the online disguises and entrenches offline hierarchies, inconsistencies and inequities, while also producing plenty of new ones.<sup>32</sup> The fierce competition for attention means that *quantity* of content often comes at the expense of thinking through published material, for example leading to the phenomenon of "athletic aesthetics" as coined by Brad Troemell.<sup>33</sup> This type of acceleration is anything but resonant with the accelerationism implied by Srnicek and Williams where contentful principled orientation is a necessary precondition for understanding how to operationalize existing infrastructures towards new ends. The proliferation of content that is encouraged by post-internet's "free-market" attention economy sows the seeds for automatized hyper-production divorced from any other criteria than trending and popularity.

Similarly, the idealized paradigm of almost cost-free production for almost cost-free consumption fails to stand up to the lived realities of embodied existence.<sup>34</sup> While in theory, everyone can be an internet artist during one's free time, the source of one's livelihood must be secured elsewhere, which means that as an artist operationalizing a model of art that presumably transcends capitalist realities one is nonetheless subsumed by the economy's hegemonic formation at the basic level of social survival. At this juncture, the democratizing claims for online distribution starts to fade in attractiveness and invites the most intense versions of precarious labour. The implicit desire to transcend the existing hierarchies within the contemporary art institutional complex remains a false promise in so far as no alternative institutional setting capable of allowing online users to earn and live via social goods and offline consumption is offered.<sup>35</sup> As a result, the tendency is to fall back on the offline complex.

At the heart of the quagmire is a question of political economy: the technology may be changing the infrastructure but that infrastructure is wired to function according to specific objectives, and ultimately no technological change can elicit an overhaul of these objectives without directed political intention. This is a deviation from the prevailing techno-utopian/dystopian views where technological agency remoulds everything, including ourselves, which upholds the inevitability of the

current ideological formation—also known as right accelerationism.<sup>36</sup> Viewed from a slightly shifted angle, working through the internet may provide artists with an alternative means to asserting comparative advantage, or as Brad Troemell puts it, (successful) internet artists have a greater “leverage to sell more inherently scarce goods” (i.e. singular artworks with physical presence).<sup>37</sup> Thus, what is essentially offered by the online dimension of artistic practice is an alternative route by which artists may re-enter the existing infrastructures, both at the institutional and market levels. Here, the internet’s potential for self-branding and self-marketing becomes the pinnacle of the artist’s success in the “real” economy. Once again quoting Troemell, “the artist’s personality becomes the sellable good” developed through online presence and consolidated as a commodity in a tradable artwork.<sup>38</sup>

In this particular trajectory of the “post-internet,” branding once again becomes the overarching motivation for mobilizing existing infrastructures, which is then used as leverage in becoming a more successful market player. While this presents a much less self-occluding and convoluted model than the one where the market is artificially kept separate from art, what isn’t clear is the branding operation’s ultimate mission beyond its market success. As has been already stated above, the initial attractiveness of art making as branding is the way in which the notion of value coalesces into a well-integrated whole, in stark contrast to the value schizophrenia of critical art. But the question then is what this formal shift achieves systemically.

The reason why an integrated conception of value is important is because by closing the gap between the ideological make-up of claims that are traditionally associated with content and environmental realities, content need no longer be monopolized by discourse but can *function* as an intervention into *the real*. While the power of branding is in its functionality, the fact that branding is a functional operation to further the product/service within an existing socio-economic environment does not necessarily reveal anything about its content’s ideological orientation. In other words, “an intervention into the real” is not a victory prize in itself because in fact that’s the most mundane description of what advertising companies, political lobbies or private citizens paying (or not) their taxes do all the time anyway. The reason this becomes an important standard against which to measure contemporary art as an ordering system is because of its structural propensity to split *the real* into the discursive as a foundation of what art *does*, and the infrastructural as a coincidental reality that art (unfortunately) has to *deal with*. Meanwhile, artist brands that capitalize on existing platforms that aren’t based on that split may accordingly eclipse that predicament but that does not mean that they are doing something above and beyond what these platforms are doing already; at least not in terms of eliciting a deviation from the existing ideological orientation.

The question of the *value* of non-self-effacing value in mobilizing existing infrastructure to systemic transformations is a crucial one because it brings to the fore a tension between left and right accelerationism. The latter is in effect an intensification of the existing conditions through its reaffirming reproduction of the existing infrastructure’s internal logic. Left accelerationism, on the other hand, requires a modulation in the platform’s logic despite the capitalization. In essence, this implies undoing

36. Nick Land. *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987–2007*. Falmouth: Urbanomic. 2011.

37. Brad Troemell. *Athletic Aesthetics*. *The New Inquiry*. 2013. URL: <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/athletic-aesthetics/>.

38. *Ibid.*

the foundational logic of perpetual private gain towards modes of social redistribution. By way of a very simple example, this would mean that the mechanics of desire that drive the advertising industry would be adopted to recode private consumption into engaged citizenship. Or, perhaps, the utilization of financial market mechanisms would be a means of reconfiguring financial entitlements.

This does not seem to be the impetus behind the existing artist branding strategies, or at least, no articulated ideological position that leans in that direction has been put forward. In part, this may be due to the fact that political alignment is a flawed branding strategy because for one it looks too similar to critique, and, also, it is unlikely to get much traction within a socio-economic environment that is staunchly apolitical at the surface and neoliberal at heart. The pressure is then on the specific terms of engagement with these platforms and the nuances through which the operationalizing takes place. Changes to systemic conditions need not be immediately tangible or game-changing, but the impetus needs to be discernible if art's value is to have integrity that isn't just a matter of formal integration of its component parts. Formulated in a slightly different key, the intended integrity of critique should not be thrown out with the bath water; it just needs to find its reentry into art at the level of operationally that isn't disavowed as extrinsic to what art *is*.

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What has been sketched out here is a terrain for understanding the repercussions of art's value as a fragmented composition and as an integrated constellation. The two approaches were grounded in specific historical trajectories both within the narrow field of art history and in the context of more general societal conditions and systems of ideological ordering. The conceptual turn in art was put forward as a pivotal moment for reorganizing the principles that govern art's ontology, taking Burnham's systems esthetics and Siegelau's "Artists Resale Rights Contract" as setting the tone for more contemporary models that follow an integrationist approach to value.

It was argued that while "post-internet" does introduce new notions of what counts as materiality and arguably creates alternative access routes to the professional field, both of which may count as formal and sociological innovations, the funneling of all infrastructural claims back into singular artworks through digital channels becomes first and foremost an exercise in branding. Branding is also singled out as the chief operational mechanism for artistic practices that do art by capitalizing on existing non-art platforms. Despite the formal echoes with new ideological formations summarized by accelerationism, it was concluded that these practices resound more with accelerationism's right/conservative variant (not necessarily intentionally) given that they are ultimately geared towards capitalization as a means to market success rather than as a strategy for socially transformative intervention.

The main assertion motivating this line of argument is that conceptual art did not go far enough in transforming art's ontology. Today, having learned the "lessons" of critique, it is paramount that singular objecthood becomes finally dispensed in favor of an integrated value system. However, it is also evident that this is not in itself a

necessary condition for socially transformative art. The default tendency of systemic dispersal is to reaffirm the logic of economic atomization and comparative advantage in a world governed by second-order observation logic. What needs to be overcome is the agent-brand conception of a networked society, which is itself so foundational both to post-internet practices and those that utilize existing non-art platforms, and it needs to be overcome in favor of a systemic activity that goes beyond liberal conceptions of socio-economic organization. Ultimately, that might lead to art as a program “branding” rather than the individual-product branding that it is today.

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# Devaluation

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2009-2012: <http://www.skor.nl/eng/site/item/actors-agents-and-attendants-ii-programme>); co-director with Suhail Malik, Andrew Wheatley and Sarah Thelwall of the research project *The Aesthetic and Economic Impact of the Art Market*, an investigation into the ways in which the art market shapes artists' careers and public exhibition (2010-ongoing); *Public Alchemy*, the public programme for the Istanbul Biennial 2013 (co-curated with Fulya Erdemci); *Tagore, Pedagogy and Contemporary Visual Cultures* (in collaboration with Grant Watson and Iniva, AHRC 2013-2014: <http://art.gold.ac.uk/tagore/>); *How to Work Together* (in collaboration with Chisenhale Gallery, Studio Voltaire and The Showroom, London 2014-ongoing: <http://howtoworktogether.org/>).

**O**VER THE COURSE OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> century the market for contemporary art has emerged to dominate perceptions and discussions of art's value. This is not to say that perceptions of value in the arts have not been subject to the impact of the taste-shaping and judgment exercised through commercial practices in previous centuries, but today art's market provides a fulcrum for debate like never before. This is in part due to our ability to access limited information on art's global trade and its mechanisms, and partly due to the industrialization of the production of art through the proliferation of art education and exhibition. The art market has become dominant in two ways: firstly by the production of a spectacular narrative of financial value in the arts, in which a very small minority of artists have their work traded for high profile sums of money; and secondly by trading in such a way as to disguise the financial exchanges of the market with a very different narrative in which trade is a word that is subsumed under a widely accepted ethos of art's value being *conceptually priceless*. This contradiction between price and value is significant and unique to art inasmuch as it is the most abstracted and least industrialisable of luxury goods.

This essay will claim that core to art's market is the condition of value itself. I will argue that, whilst transparency of political and economic transaction in the market would go some way to exposing unevenness of financial distribution and thus the production of inequality between the many actors that make the market – artists, curators, dealers, collectors, museum and gallery directors, state funders, private patrons etc., – it is the broader and historically shaped condition of value that in fact produces the habits, mythologies and rituals that in turn make the market itself. My argument will be that instead of trying to find alternative values through different aesthetic and social arrangements, we need to turn to radical forms of *devaluation* in order to reposition art's work within its social context (and confront the fact that art might not have a role within any such scene). The argument will begin with an equivalence to devaluation in recent political-philosophical discussions of dispossession, it will then proceed to describe the concept of value in sociological terms, analyse the processes (and ambivalences) of art valuation mechanisms before beginning to open up the idea of devaluation and its potential impact on contemporary art.

## Dispossession

In their 2013 publication *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*, Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou twist the concept and process of dispossession into a subjective mechanism that links the fact of having one's goods and properties taken away to the philosophical or ethical category of being redacted or recategorised – changed in the face of – the circumstantial, physical other. Written as a series of email exchanges in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis (which was produced in large part through the extreme inequalities of housing desire and possession and the financial mechanization of ascendant property desire), as well as in the light of large-scale social movements objecting to the globalized endemicity of neoliberalism (Athanasiou in particular was writing from her location in Athens), the book traces

links and refrains of friendship and communities in common via Levinas, Derrida and Nancy. These are juxtaposed with the realities of dispossession as it is felt and understood by communities of the disposed – migrants, exiles, people who have had their homes repossessed, people who have been ethnically cleansed or the recipients of institutional racism, LGBTQ communities of resistance, and the histories of feminist resistance to hierarchies of possession. Butler and Athanasiou, in the writing together of these two politics, demand that we use the radical alterity brought into being through philosophical dispossession to counteract – understand and find alternative mechanisms to combat – the violence of economic and physical dispossession. Butler says:

*It is true that dispossession carries this double valence and that as a result it is difficult to understand until we see that we value it in one of its modalities and abhor and resist it in another. [As Athanasiou says], dispossession can be a term that marks the limits of self-sufficiency and that establishes us as relational and interdependent beings. Yet dispossession is precisely what happens when populations lose their land, their citizenship, their means of livelihood, and become subject to military and legal violence. We oppose this latter form of dispossession because it is both forcible and privative. In the first sense, we are dispossessed of ourselves by virtue of some kind of contact with another, by virtue of being moved and even surprised or disconcerted by that encounter with alterity. The experience itself is not simply episodic, but can and does reveal one basis of relationality – we do not simply move ourselves, but are ourselves moved by what is outside us, by others, but also by whatever outside ‘resides’ in us.<sup>1</sup>*

Both authors ask their readers to think how disconcerting dispossession, or what they call, citing Derrida, “social disaggregation” may be; how forms of displacement of the self might transform normative political systems. Core to this is the disaggregation of property.

*Athanasiou: To ask and answer the question of how we might still articulate normative aspirations to political self-determination – taking into account the relational, ec-static, and even property-less character of human subjectivity but also the foreclosures through which this is distributed and delimited – is to engage with a politics of performativity.<sup>2</sup>*

Rather than a dialectical method, Butler and Athanasiou, in their attempt to describe the heterogeneity of the subject who is dispossessed, move beyond a threshold of having or not having, in the understanding that this dialectic is the fuel of capital (as Wendy Brown says, “[w]ithin neoliberal rationality, human capital is both our “is” and our “ought” – what we are said to be, what we should be, and what the rationality makes us into through its norms and construction of environment.’<sup>3</sup>). They can be accused of romanticism of dispossession. However, their objective of moving beyond descriptors of neoliberalism towards tactics of transformation, however polemical, is rooted in the reality of circumstance:

1. Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou. *Dispossession: the performative in the political*. 2013. p. 3

2. *Ibid.*, p. 99

3. Wendy Brown. *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*. 2015. p. 36

4. *Op. cit.*, p. 7

*Butler: ... we might ask why certain forms of human deprivation and exploitation are called 'dispossession'. Was there a property that was first owned and then was stolen? Sometimes yes. Yet, what do we make of the idea that we have property in our own persons? Are persons forms of property and would we be able to understand this legal formulation at all if it were not for the historical conditions of slavery and those forms of possessive individualism that belong to capitalism?'*<sup>4</sup>

Within a political imaginary, this method of dis-concert and displacement of individualized property and self-authorship is an assertion of weakness in the face of normative power. Such an assertion can now be readily understood as the methodology of the Occupy movement or the organizational form of protests in Taksim Square and Gezi Park in 2013.

I'd like to link this "double valance" of weak/violent dispossession to the market for contemporary art. This will take some precarious steps. I want to suggest that, in the same way that Butler and Athanasiou take up the theme of dispossession and warrant it with a process and meaning that directly undermines the financial and ethical system that it serves to destroy (i.e., to dispossess a house is to destroy its inhabitants economically and psychologically under current conditions of property aspiration and property's link to cultural ascendancy), so *devaluation* might act in the same way in the art market. I'd like to suggest that in the same way that a property's dispossession would initially seem disastrous, so too under the conditions of the contemporary art market, the devaluation of an artwork is seen as entirely destructive of an artist's career – prompting a whole set of desperate financial, exhibitionary and social movements on the part of the artist and her dealer (if indeed she has one) to shore up value in the face of its dissipation. But is there a form of artistic organization beyond that of symbolic and economic value accrual that comes into being through a radical embrace of devaluation? Or would the system of Anglo-European artistic production simply collapse within such conditions – or be transformed into something that simply does not resemble current regimes of artistic production?

But in order to make this argument, and before returning to the dispossession/devaluation corollary in political-philosophical terms, I need to briefly trace the history of sociologies of value and their application and understanding within the contemporary art market. "Value" is a widely used term, and one increasingly necessitating a political understanding in the arts. The suppositions of – and defense of – the symbolic value of art is at once supported by all investees in art and increasingly undermined in contemporary governance (which is to say, an increasingly global governance) by the ideological translation of art's value into rough financial terms. At the same time, art's value is presupposed by its relation to forms of property and propriety that propel long-held and systematic liberal forms of social and political organization forward. Art has a market (I will go on to describe this market), but it also has a value system that avoids economic analysis of any great extent. Contemporary art, in particular, is produced, at least in the West, between these two values – the economic value of art's trade, and the liberal value of its cultural significance supported (to a decreasing extent) by state subsidy.

There are of course many inequalities in art's value terms – in fact, value is a term that creates inequality synchronically with its application, as I will go on to argue. In terms of gender, for example, it goes without saying that female artists' works sell at lower prices than those by men of a similar level of training and experience. (The history of pathological misogyny in the art world on the part of curators, museum directors, gallerists, collectors and, importantly, artists themselves has been well documented.<sup>5</sup>) What happens when demands for market equality for women's work meets the inequities embedded in the desire for value itself? (This question is in my mind linked clearly to the correlation between value and devaluation as I will hope to explain.) In current art rankings (which I will describe below) only three of the top 30 artists are women<sup>6</sup>. Yet such inequalities are masked by a chaste description of the production and dissemination of art, a description shored up by most sociologies of value.

## What is value?

Art's value is historically shaped through the liberal norms of taste, perceived skill on the part of the artist and aesthetic judgment on the part of the contemplator: these values have morphed in the past 200 years into civic values, largely through social changes wrought by European and American revolutions, industrializations and their concomitant colonialisms. As described, this morphing between private taste and public morality entrenched in the structure of liberalism and its configuration of patronage is critical in the value form inherited in contemporary art.

In *The Worth of Goods*, Jens Berkert and Patrik Aspers consider:

*What makes a product valuable? Value has several interrelated dimensions. In social life, different forms of value are present simultaneously, such as moral value, aesthetic value, and economic value. Each form of value has a scale used for evaluating the things that value covers. An activity may be judged as more or less ethical, and an object may be more or less beautiful, more or less appropriate, or more or less expensive. These different scales of value exist concurrently...*<sup>7</sup>

The concurrent forms of value might be:

1. The amount of monetary worth – financial value;
2. The measure of the benefit that will be gained from using a product or service – use value;
3. The significance and esteem of an object, service or person – qualitative value;
4. The agreed or appointed terms of a collective ethic – social value.

In addition, and of particular importance in terms of art, there is symbolic value, in which other forms of value are abstracted and distilled. What anthropologist Arjun

5. Feminist histories of art that cover this ground include Linda Nochlin's 1971 essay "Why Are There No Great Female Artists?" and Christine Battersby's 1989 book *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics*. More recent revisions of the topic include *We (not I)*, a project developed by artist Melissa Gordon and writer Marina Vischmidt (see <http://www.southlondon-gallery.org/page/we-not-i-symposium> for an example of part of the project) and "Feminist Duration in Art and Curating", curated by Helena Reckitt for the Goldsmiths, University of London Art PhD (see <http://art.gold.ac.uk/research/>).

6. See ArtFacts.Net for ranking at time of writing: URL: <http://www.artfacts.net/en/artists/top100.html> (Accessed 2015-09-07).

7. Jens Berkert and Patrik Aspers. (eds.) *The Worth of Goods: Valuation and Pricing in the Economy*. 2011. p. 6

8. See Arjun Appadurai. *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. 1986.

9. Pierre Bourdieu. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. 1986. p. 228

Appadurai calls different “regimes of value” are wrapped up in the art object in such a way as to obfuscate any particular scale or measurement.<sup>8</sup> What Bekert and Aspers call the “radical subjectivation of value” that is one of the principles of neoclassical economics – where value is understood to be ontologically individualized – can be clearly related to art. Perhaps the clearest example of the subjectivation of value, in fact, is in the arguments we might have about the merits of one artwork over another. Instead of the value of an artwork being understood in a Marxian sense as the sum of the labour put into it, value acquires an individual life outside of the process of its making. In the “value regime” of Western neoliberal economics, art’s value is both individualized and an assemblage of different types of value – use value, financial value, social value, etc. It is, according to the Fabian Muniesa, “performative”.

This idea of value’s performativity is key to any understanding of the value of contemporary art. This short description of sociological approaches to understanding value suggests that value is always enmeshed in the abstract and the social; that value is a belief structure and that what is valuable at any one time has value precisely because the condition out of which it arises necessitates its valuation. As Pierre Bourdieu proved in his extensive commentary on culture, value in the field is experiential, contingent, social and above all political:

*[C]ultural capital only exists and subsists in and through the struggles of which the fields of cultural production (the artistic field, the scientific field, etc.) and, beyond them, the field of the social classes, are the site, struggles in which the agents wield strengths and obtain profits proportionate to their mastery of this objectified capital, in other words, their internalized capital.<sup>9</sup>*

Of course this is not just in the arts, but as any stock market analyst will tell you, value is manipulable, fictional.

To adequately diagnose this situation as it pertains to Anglo-European developments in the cultural industries, it is necessary to historicize the relation between liberalism and the aesthetic worth of art. Post-Enlightenment, transformations in the figure of the artist, along with the slow development of cultural institutions such as art museums and philanthropic educative and social infrastructures, positioned the artwork (and its supportive edifice) as both valued ontologically and in terms of social worth. Here is the specific contradiction that still holds true today. In addition, the increased (though not new) focus on art’s financial valuation, has led to a series of semantically and economically crossed wires, all of which remain profitable to art’s core value. This core value migrates without constraint across nominally public and private domains, and is able to supersede any complaint concerning inclusion and exclusion, labor and living conditions, fair pay, equal access or any ambition to create anything other than temporary solidarity around such issues: i.e., what might be considered issues pertaining to civic equality.

Writing on cultural policy, Dave O’Brien diagnoses this process of slippage between the private, the public, what is considered civic and what is considered of value as embedded in the DNA of contemporary policy-making itself, specifically

cultural policy. He says:

*[P]olicy on funding is a policy on cultural value that is, in turn, a value judgment on the legitimacy or illegitimacy of a community's or individual's culture. ... cultural policy is ... a legislative practice as much as it is an interpretive one.<sup>10</sup>*

In this further complication of any understanding of value, in his book *Cultural Policy: Management, Value and Modernity in the Creative Industries*, O'Brien provides ample evidence of the entanglement of liberal state policy on culture, the systematic politicization of value as a tool of moral embedding and its role in the production of citizenship itself, including theoretical description and analysis:

*[I]t is possible to understand public value as both a reaction to historically and culturally specific theories of public administration, whilst operating within the constrained circumstances created by those theories and practices.<sup>11</sup>*

## Measuring value in the art market

It is instructive to look at the language used by two dominant digital art measurement tools to find further proof of the confusion, or what I have termed profitable ambivalence, in the construction of art's value through assemblages of cultural policy, civic morality, education, financialisation and liberal taste. Firstly, the ArtFacts ranking system, which promises to give "real statistics on which artists are trending where now".<sup>12</sup> ArtFacts has developed a points system that is used to rank artists according to the amount of attention they have received from a similarly ranked set of museums and galleries around the world. ArtFacts says that "these points help to determine the artist's future auction and gallery sales".<sup>13</sup>

*Have you ever felt overwhelmed by the sheer variety of contemporary art production? We have always felt challenged by this, particularly due to the fact that so much of the time great art is discovered by accident. This is why we began structuring the mass of information available on art production today. The first thing we created was the widely appreciated online art guide, ArtFacts.Net™ where we compiled tens of thousands of artists, exhibitions and institutions into a comprehensive and easy-to-use online tool.*

*In spite of its success, we were not completely satisfied with the system of listing artists alphabetically. We were eager to devise and exploit even more effective ways to organise artists and their exhibitions. So, we asked ourselves if it would be possible to predict an artist's career using econometrical methods.<sup>14</sup>*

ArtFacts.Net is very clear about the function of art professionals in value accrual and thus the apparently sound rationale for their data device:

10. Dave O'Brien. *Cultural Policy: Management, value and modernity in the creative industries*. 2014. p. 49

11. *Ibid.*, p. 114

12. ArtFacts.Net URL: <http://www.artfacts.net/>. (Accessed 2015-09-06).

13. ArtFacts.Net URL: [http://www.artfacts.net/about\\_us\\_new/](http://www.artfacts.net/about_us_new/). (Accessed 2015-09-06).

14. ArtFacts.Net URL:  
<http://www.artfacts.net/tour/artist-ranking/>. (Accessed 2015-09-04).

15. ArtFacts.Net URL:  
<http://www.artfacts.net/tour/artist-ranking/>. (Accessed 2015-09-04).

16. ArtFacts.Net URL:  
<http://www.artasanasset.com/main/artinvesting.php>. (Accessed 2015-09-04).

17. ArtFacts.Net URL:  
<http://www.artasanasset.com/main/artinvesting.php>. (Accessed 2015-09-04).

*Capitalist, or economic, behaviour is based on property, lending money and charging interest. [...] [T]he curator (also the museum director or the gallery owner) acts as a financial investor. The curator/investor lends their property (their exhibition space and their fame) to an artist from whom they expect a return on their investment in the form of more attention (reputation, fame etc.)<sup>15</sup>*

Basic ArtFacts data is available online. But in order to find more bespoke and granular data, it is possible to pay an annual subscription (again, it is revealing that the costs of this subscription vary – a “personal” subscription is currently \$240 per year; an artist pays \$360 and a gallery \$480, suggesting that in fact the data is more useful for investees than investors).

An alternative system of ranking is offered by Beautiful Asset Advisors. Rather than a ranking system based on subscription and attention, this system, The Mei Moses set of fine art indexes, is based on secondary market (auction) trades:

*The Mei Moses® family of fine art indexes is used on this website to study the historical performance of art as an investment and asset class based on auction transactions. The indexes have been developed from a proprietary database, collected over the past 20 years, of over 30,000 purchase and sale price pairs for objects that have sold at public auction more than once. To measure relative performance these indexes are compared to equities, government bonds gold, cash, real estate etc. In particular return, risk and correlation among the assets over many time periods and holding periods are analyzed in detail.<sup>16</sup>*

The Mei Moses index can be accessed for a price of between \$100–250 a year based on the level of access required. Whilst this analytic performance is based on economic logic, Mei Moses goes on to say:

*The beauty and uniqueness of art as an asset class is that it gives individuals the opportunity of gaining pleasure and excitement from its ownership in three distinct ways. The first beauty of art is the obvious one of emotional appeal obtained from the visual image of the object. The second beauty of art is the enjoyment most individuals obtain from the process of its acquisition. This includes, but is not limited to, knowledge acquisition, socialization with like-minded collectors and experts, excitement of the chase, meeting its maker, etc.*

*The third beauty of art is its longevity and financial performance<sup>17</sup>*

Neither ArtFacts nor Mei Moses base their advisory value systems on primary market data (this is the figure that artworks are sold at by art dealers usually using galleries and art fairs as their main marketing tools). This data is virtually impossible to access, and those figures that are accessible are often proxied. This is not only extremely critical for any approximation of contemporary art’s economic contribution to a national GDP, for example (a data set that many believe would be useful to support

arguments for continuing governmental investment in the arts given the symbiotic relation between public and private finance currently necessary to maintain artistic production and display in many advanced capitalist states), but it is also symbolic of a complex system of subscription and attachment that lies within and around primary trades.<sup>18</sup>

In her study of the pre- and post-impressionist art market in Paris at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, sociologist Raymonde Moulin describes the difficulty of extracting information from dealers and artists. Based on interviews conducted between 1958-9 and 1962-3 in Paris (just before the centre of the art market moved to New York), Moulin later observed:

*The art market is the place where, by some secret alchemy, the cultural good becomes a commodity. Deliberate mystery shrouds the way dealers handle the art commodity, for the dealers' stratagems, though they add to the work's economic value, detract from its cultural value. The mechanism of price formation is not transparent. Some deals are made in secret. Unquantifiable or hidden influences affect prices more than obvious, measurable influences. The analyst must contend with the reticence of participants in the market to discuss their activities, reticence due to not only worries about the tax authorities (mentioned by all my interviewees) but also to a rule of silence invariable observed by insiders. Even those that urged me to "demystify" the art market were not prepared to divulge what they knew. "You will never find out anything," I was told. And "what you do find out you won't be able to print because you'll have no proof."<sup>19</sup>*

The weakness of art's demand for financial support (and righteous indignation when critics suggest that it is simply an elite and bourgeois cult along with its consistent attempts to popularize the activities of its mainstream institutions) is now the core of art's value construction. Ongoing assertions of art's embedded cultural value in terms of national and international health, education, emancipation and openings for trade routes, etc., are weak claims based on belief structures that are, in turn, the producers of value. Value is at the core of art's self-belief. Art's value is its export; its general liberal value regime is exported across the world, masking anything from human rights atrocity to local labour debates.

## Devaluation

Inequality is highly visible in the field of art, embedded and masked by the contradiction of value that I have described. Despite the prevailing modes of psychic and socially-claimed, civic values of openness and fairness, freedom of expression and rights to affective community-building proposed by many artists, institutions and their funders (under the rubric of providing a public good), new generations of artists are emerging from arts schools to be faced with no future of any sort – no accessible funding to build their own practices, no cheap spaces in which to work, lack of will and/or connections in order to sweet-talk the rich elite into sponsoring them, but

18. In 2011 Dr Suhail Malik (Art Department, Goldsmiths, University of London), Andrew Wheatley (Co-Director, Cabinet Gallery, London), Sarah Thelwall (arts consultant, London) and I set up a research project called "The Aesthetic and Economic Impact of the Art Market". The intention of the project is to close the knowledge gap between the primary art market and state funding for the arts through analyzing the relation between quantitative data gathered from the commercial contemporary art market, the way in which contemporary art is commissioned, displayed and collected and the development of artists' careers and reputations. We hope to bring about significant advances in our understanding of the relation between the commercial art market and civic cultural infrastructures particularly in the UK, and thus contribute substantially to new understandings of the creation of value within and through these structures and support mechanisms. Much of the thinking on this paper has been inspired by discussion with these colleagues.

19. Raymonde Moulin. *The French Art Market A Sociological View*. 1987. p. 3

20. For example, see Lisa Adkins and Celia Lury. (eds.) *Measure and Value*. 2012.

21. In his recent texts and lectures Michel Feher has discussed the idea of “investee activism”, a process whereby instead of opposing systems of capitalist investment, workers instead identify themselves as that which investors are investing in and thus use collective tools to persuade investors to change the direction and mode of their investment. See: <http://blogs.mediapart.fr/blog/michel-feher> and <http://www.gold.ac.uk/visual-cultures/guest-lectures/>

perhaps most of all lack of generational learning about cooperative modes of working and political organizational skills at a unionized level. These people see inequality clearly at the Biennial, at the art fair, at the museum dinner (to which they are not invited). They are mainly speechless. Their dispossession is done in the name of art’s general value.

So where is the solidarity that might form anti-value action? The liberal conditions of artistic value that shape the historic and contemporary immeasurability of art are the very conditions that residualise resistance. Artists are trained – both professionally and in the mythologised ontology of their own object production – to make, desire and expect freedom of expression, autonomy, creative choice and forms of separation from the common world. These are the values of art that, in turn, price the market.

Demand for institutional change is hampered in the specific case of the arts by the desire not to break the bubble of value homologation. Demand for financial, corporate, working conditions transparency is annulled: why reveal the donation of an arms trade dealer when she is providing you with the money to keep your building open?

Within this artistic capital, what needs to change? Firstly, we need to transform our institutions, and embed within them different forms of producing and sharing civic spheres of political experimentation using artistic, poetic and other tools. In many ways, rather than transversalise value by replacing it with alternatives (the much mooted move from value to values, for example<sup>20</sup>), we may need to rid ourselves of the concept entirely, firstly by beginning to experiment with radical forms of devaluation. We need to understand that value is capital, and value causes inequality. Poetic forms of transvaluation may or may not be the answer in this circumstance. The process of devaluation – of demeritocratising the aspiration to value that propels the art world as an intrinsic process of capital production – is a complex political tool. If value is capital, can we bring about a world of art in which we can rid ourselves of its propriety grip on our systems and our psyches? Can we dispossess ourselves of value as an economic and aspirational asset class?

Devaluation in the system of artistic production needs to be thought through at a number of levels and circumstances. To begin, the process of educating artists to aspire to forms of autonomous individuality – in procedures that mark their artworks apart from others – would need to be dismantled. There are many important ways in which artistic skills can be used in different ways to develop projects that do not necessitate individualized value as a form of capital expansion, but at the same time artists need to be able to eat. There are many good uses for which the spaces, equipment and pedagogical skills embedded in art schools can be repurposed, but they will still need to be lit and kept warm. The issue of funding and economic survival remains. How might artistic-financial mechanisms of investment be transformed?<sup>21</sup> Such suggestions have a recognisable history within the productivist movement in the USSR in the early 1920s but also within non-artistic forms of seeking to defer value or devalue in the name of equality, such as the workers movement of nineteenth century Europe. Contemporary calls for degrowth from high profile environmental campaigners are also aligned to such tactics.<sup>22</sup>

The art market itself can be transformed initially by making primary market sales and donations, collector bequests and distributions, investments and returns, etc., transparent. Transparency is not enough however, despite its presumed effect on price (in that it may or may not have the effect of either further hierarchizing or producing equality of price). Divestment will flow at the point of transparency. The ability of public institutions, where they exist, to survive in their current financial shape when investors move on, upon not wanting their investments and donations to be named, is a question. The funding strictures of biennials, in which gross inequalities between payments to artists and workers exist and where the privilege of the sponsor is marked both in branding and elite access, may crumble – many biennials would not survive. Art fairs will become clear trading posts, but much of the allure of the fair, and all of the performative hierarchy of buying and selling will be removed. Many will leave the art world, displeased by its removal of the gratifications once entrenched in its mythologies and practices. What would be left and would it be worth preserving, investing in, practicing?<sup>23</sup>

As Butler and Athanasiou note, dispossession is a risk. For example, whilst the feminist movement is founded on resistance to patriarchal forms of valuation, it has also historically demanded that women are valued equally to men, certainly not devalued. In this sense, how might a call to devaluation be accountable globally not simply in economic terms but also in terms of subjective emancipation? If art is not property, and those that produce it do not rely on its property-relation, how is it to be understood ontologically? What is the relation between the art-property object and the subject formation of those repressed and without access? Butler and Athanasiou's 'double valence' suspends these questions somewhat. But in a response to Butler's suggestion that core to her argument is the difference between morality (which "issues maxims and prescriptions") and the "ethical relation" (which is "a way of rethinking and remaking sociality itself"), Athanasiou says:

*Yes, "responsibilization" is certainly a case in point if we consider that the social therapeutics currently deployed by neoliberal governmentality is very much premised upon a morality of self-government, possessive individualism and entrepreneurial guilt. It is critical then that we distinguish the calculus of corporate and self-interested "responsibilization," so common to the processes of neoliberal restructuring, from responsibility as responsive disposition that can make possible a politics of social transformation, in ways that cannot be reduced to a mere calculus of interests.<sup>24</sup>*

Butler and Athanasiou suggest that we recognize the difference between devaluation as a radical form of refusal and devaluation as the violent form of neoliberalism in order to change the "ethical relation". How can this be applied to art workers? The issue is systemic and, whilst the practical imaginary is immediately engaged with visions of empty galleries being repurposed for cooperative learning initiatives and alternative economic modes of exchange replacing the buying and selling of art, it is to the form of property that art is that we need to return to begin to both dismantle regimes of value and at the same time connect the small world of the art market

22. See for example: Naomi Klein. *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate*. 2014; and recent work by the New Economics Foundation. URL: <http://www.neweconomics.org/>. (Accessed 2015-09-06).

23. There are long histories of community arts practice where such an 'art world' has and does exist; there are also other forms of symbolic and aesthetic skill sharing that exist in different cultural contexts; these are perhaps the future. The asymmetry between this practice and the art market has been naturalized, only becoming more closely intertwined with the sales successes of some artists whose work is labeled as 'socially engaged'. The community arts movement, however, exists in a very different ideological and social vacuum, the ideas and methodologies of which are intrinsic guides to altering the capitalization of art.

24. Butler & Athanasiou, op. cit., p. 103

to larger (and arguably more important) social struggles that exist within the same ambivalent value structure.

Devaluation, in this light, as a process of making and maintaining worlds of equality, cannot be applied simply to the art market and the world it creates, but needs to work in the understanding of the embeddedness of transactional and valuation rituals as they exist systemically within contemporary capitalism. But rather than continue to contribute to these, why don't we try something different?

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# Masquerade



*Vermeir & Heiremans, Masquerade (2015). All photography: Michael De Lausnay.*

## **VERMEIR & HEIREMANS**

Vermeir & Heiremans is an artist duo living and working in Brussels. They have presented their work at 10th Istanbul Biennial (2007); Arnolfini, Bristol (2009); *Kassel Documentary Film Festival* (2009); Nam June Paik Art Center, Gyeonggi-do (2010); Loop, Barcelona (2010); Videoex, Zurich (2011); Salt, Istanbul (2011); *Viennale*, Vienna (2011); Argos, Brussels (2012); Extra City, Antwerp

(2012); 7th *Sbenzhen Sculpture Biennial* (2012); *Manifesta 9*, Genk (2012); CA2M, Madrid (2013); 13th *Istanbul Biennial* (2013); Rotwand Gallery, Zurich (2014); Stroom Den Haag (2014), *Triennale Brugge* (2015), 4th *Dejima River Biennale*, Osaka (2015).

1. URL: <http://ahi.in-residence.be/chart.php> (Accessed 2015-04-30).

2. Frank Goodman is an impersonation of a number of professional bankers that we spoke with during our research. The name refers to the eponymous character of Melville's last novel *The Confidence Man: His Masquerade* (1857). The subtitle of the novel inspired the name of our video.

3. Andrea Phillips in "Publics as Cultural Capital", a lecture delivered at the Graduate School of Design, Harvard University, 2013-10-01.

4. Inspired by Sandra Sherman. *Finance and fictionality in the early eighteenth century: Accounting for Defoe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1996. p. 5

5. Nick Summers. Short Jackson Pollock! Go long on Damien Hirst! In *Bloomberg Businessweek*. 2012-08-14. URL: <http://www.liquidityexchange.com/component/content/article/85-bloomberg-businessweek>. (Accessed 2015-03-16).

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8. Noah Horowitz. *Art of the Deal: Contemporary Art in a Global Financial Market*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press. 2011. p. 208



**OUR PRACTICE** as the artist duo Vermeir & Heiremans focuses on the dynamics between art, architecture and economy. In this practice we define our own home, a loft apartment in a post-industrial building in Brussels, as an artwork. Whilst keeping the home private, we create "mediated extensions" of the artwork that generate a kind of public hyper-visibility for our domestic space through translating it into installations, videos, performances, publications...

*Art House Index* (AHI-) is a new "extension" that proposes the transformation of "the home as an artwork" into a financial instrument. A financial index, like the Dow Jones or the S&P500, is a measuring tool that quantifies a well-defined part of the economy. The potential value of the new index would be in its ability to render an opaque static product that is difficult to trade, like a house or art, into a transparent, virtual and liquid investment opportunity that is highly accessible for many investors. One does not invest directly in an index, but a market can be created around it: financial bets as it were on how the index will evolve in the future.

We visualized the underlying value of AHI- in a publicity video with the art house unfolding as many virtual houses, each with a global skyline view of cities where we have showed our work. The video promotes art house as a global investment opportunity, and offers a projection of the desires associated with this living format and its ever-changing amenities. We developed a real-time algorithm that non-stop calculates the value of AHI-.<sup>1</sup> Designed as a page on our website the algorithm references tools for measurement of confidence and belief.

The Initial Public Offering (IPO) of AHI- was inaugurated with a lecture-performance: a putative Skype conversation with Frank Goodman,<sup>2</sup> held in a corporate-style conference room at the Marmara Taksim Hotel during *Public Alchemy*, the public programme of the 13th Istanbul Biennial. At the time our performance was interrupted by activists protesting the biennial over its sponsorship by Koç Holding, bringing up issues very much tied to the same anxieties over ruthless city development that sparked the Gezi Park movement. The script of our performance and the agit prop protest of that evening inspired us for the production of a new video, titled *Masquerade*.

The ephemeral worlds of "high finance" and the "global art markets" offer a unique context for the narrative of *Masquerade*. It is set in an environment that gradually evolves from a gallery white cube to an auction house, commodity exchange, trading pit, even a courtroom... all places where values are negotiated and exchanged.

*Masquerade* presents itself as a TV-reportage in which a reporter is telling the story of AHI-'s protested IPO. While she is addressing the camera, what appears to be a reconstruction of the event is taking place in the background. And then it all starts going wrong again! Is the audience witnessing a turmoil in an auction house, a crash in the market or is it a hearing in a courtroom, one that tries to unveil the intricate dynamics of a confidence game? The whole situation gradually transforms into an abstracted visual landscape of differing opinions and values.

*Masquerade* is presented as a video installation. The actual performance of AHI- triggers a switch between two video timelines, one of which shows the “finished” version of *Masquerade* while the other demystifies the finished version in the way that this timeline captures the video’s production process, rehearsals and failures, in the act commenting on the concealing operative ideology of the filmmaker as a double agent, the complicity of the audience, and the conditions of artistic production reflecting a wider economy, in which belief and confidence are crucial for its functioning. After all, art, like finance, is a system of belief and their markets are where this belief is put to work.

## Credits

*Masquerade* is a video installation by Vermeir & Heiremans in collaboration with Andrea Phillips, Werner Van Steen, Justin Bennett, Amir Borenstein, Michael Schmid, Salome Schmuki, and with Mon Bernaerts, Philip Brackx, Hans Bryssinck, Ludo Engels, Ciel Grommen, Elien Hanselaer, Nav Haq, Mieja Hollevoet, Liliane Keersmaeker, Heike Langsdorf, Dieter Leyssen, Karlijn Sileghem, Peter Sileghem, Fatos Ustek, Sun-Mee Vanpanteghem, Mi You and many others. Photography: Michael De Lausnay.

## Production

LIMITED EDITIONS vzw

Executive production: JUBILEE vzw (Katrien Reist, Reintje Daens, Marjolein Van der Boon, Kia Von Schoubie)

Co-production: Bernaerts Auctioneers (Antwerp), 4th Dojima River Biennale (Osaka), Goldsmiths, University of London, 13th Istanbul Biennial, Stroom Den Haag, Triennale Brugge 2015, V2\_Institute for the Unstable Media (Rotterdam). Supported by Flemish Audiovisual Fund (VAF) and the Flemish Community.

## Masquerade: A photo reportage

Below a number of Michael De Lausnay's set photographs of Masquerade, accompanied by fragments of our script.



*Reporter: What is Art House Index? It concerned the proposition – with distributed prospectus – in which the artists modelled a derivative for potential investment, an “art house” based on their own penthouse apartment in Brussels but able to be virtually rendered in any shape and form at creative global reach in the manner befitting an index.<sup>3</sup>*



*Investor 3: The information that we are talking about would actually correspond to certain expectations that other investors will have in the real world. With their futures and options these investors create narratives about the future performance of Art House Index. Until the moment of payoff, these narratives are potentially fiction while the investors have to suspend their disbelief and wait. If they become reality, then fiction becomes fact, and profits or losses are made depending on the positions taken. Now this match will give a boost of confidence to the index.*  
*Lawyer: Are you telling us that fiction creates finance?<sup>4</sup>*



*Reporter: The more liquidity you bring to a market, the more confidence you bring to it, and the more money flows in.<sup>5</sup> This creation of confidence, I sometimes think, is the cultural artefact of the last half of the twentieth century, far more striking than any given painting or sculpture.<sup>6</sup>*



*Reporter: The net effect of this phenomenon is nothing less than a revolution in artistic values...*

*Lawyer: ...an assault that finally jettisons traditional humanistic and postmodern aesthetics to nakedly embrace the idea of art as an asset (now without the aid of passé irony); that univocally accepts the market as the ultimate arbiter of worth (both economic and symbolic); and that, finally, banks on the auction houses as a stock exchange to be readily manipulated by powerfully opaque interests, with virtually no oversight.<sup>7</sup>*



*Reporter: After months of contentious behind-the-scenes battles, the public may finally get its chance to own a piece. The artists are moving ahead with the IPO after battling a group of dissident investors and rejecting a set of unsolicited offers for the Art House.*

*Investor 1: This kind of practice would be controversial for many artists, as well as for much of the art world. But you can see it as democratic. It is an equalizing practice that opens up the benefits of participation in an elite art market to a wider number of people than ever before.*



*Investor 2: The crowds? Well they don't realize that, in the end, it is us who need them. The very freedom of its users continually generates the data allowing Art House Index to progressively fine-tune itself. Trust is of the highest order in the art economy. Like finance, art is a system of belief and its market is where this belief is put to work... What remains crucial is that the debate on value never reaches a conclusion. And these negotiations are based on confidence...<sup>8</sup>*

## Notice of Issue #3

### Repetitions and Reneges: Interpretation, iteration, and re-performance across the arts.

Editors: Darla Crispin, Anders Hultqvist and Cecilia Lagerström

The possibility of repetition in general, and more specifically repetition or reiteration of artistic work raises questions that emerge, and are negotiated differently, across the various art fields. This is because these various art fields are connected to divergent practices and conceptions of tradition, authorship, interpretation, ownership, originality, performativity and artistry.

The issues that might be addressed under the heading of "repetitions and reneges" range from the relation to repetition and reiteration in theatre and dance practices to non-repeating strategies in performance art; from the legitimate interpretation of canonical works within various music traditions to the re-performance of improvisational practices; from the vogue for re-enactments in contemporary art to the construction of poetic texts exclusively from explicit or implicit citations of other works; from the normalisation of appropriation in some visual arts and literary practices to the scandal of subsequent performances that deviate from interpretive standards in some areas of the performing arts; from the reinterpreted acts of appropriation within design and architecture to the iterative momentum inherent in craft; from the politics of preservation and reclamation in some cultural heritage practices to the rhetorics of post-memory and the intrinsically contested nature of any re-construction of the past; from the tensions incurred through the proliferation of documentation simultaneous with the "weakening" ontology of the individual work of art to the complex aesthetic and epistemic quandaries thrown up by the attempt to construct "living" archives of ephemeral and evanescent practices.

These questions of repetition touch upon both the philosophical themes of intention, tradition, identity, individuation, type and event and the performative themes of ownership, style, oeuvre and artistic agency. Within, for instance, theatre and (classical) musical interpretation there are often strong tendencies to police the legitimate interpretational possibilities of canonical works. These works are for some critically proscribed from

realisation outside a predefined set of performance strategies. The third issue of PARSE comprises research submissions that operate within this complex space of repetition or reiteration of works of art and of artistic practices.

## Calls for Future Issues

### Speculation

Editors: Catharina Dyrssen, Anders Hultqvist, Valerie Pihet

This issue of PARSE addresses arts practice as a mode of critical action in probing alternative futures and possible worlds. The term "speculation" is connected to "*specular*" (look out), "*specula*" (watchtower) and "*specio*" (look at). In French the term can also suggest the act of looking for signs of presence not already there. The usefulness of the term speculation is contested. Speculation can be understood as merely *spectating*, reduced to an act of "seeing," which has in many quarters been dismissed as it tends to de-emphasize practice. Could "speculation" in artistic practices on the contrary be regarded as resuscitating, revitalising, and redefining what observation / seeing can mean, what seeing's agency can be? Could the future-oriented projections of speculation also serve as modes of criticality, as a testing of ways to resist the probable, and to reveal, re-think, re-create and re-compose all the possibilities contained within each situation?

The term "speculation" has also been suspect for its strong correlation with the logic of financial markets, the valorisation of unbridled risk, and the dynamics of capital within which arts and design practices are deeply embedded. The future-oriented projections of speculation may be exercises in profit-seeking; they may be idealistically alluring escapisms or refusals of limitation.

Speculation and speculative reasoning have been largely disqualified in the history of philosophy. They have been understood as modes of pure theory and abstraction disconnected from any kind of relation to the real. However, Isabelle Stengers, Didier Debaise, Elisabeth Grosz, and Donna Haraway, drawing upon the work of amongst others William James and Alfred North Whitehead, have re-activated the word "speculative" and notions such as "speculative gesture,"

“speculative narration,” and “speculative fabulation”. Speculation to them is related to the creation of possibilities, rather than to the abstract logic of probabilities. Speculation, they argue, can transform the comprehension of the present and simultaneously open up pathways to otherwise unthinkable futures. For example, Harraway engages us in thinking the power of narrations or “speculative fabulation” as acts of fabrication, which are able to have productive effects on the real. Speculative narration makes the bet that the real can be transformed depending on how we tell it, taking into account the situation of its own production and diffusion, resisting dualisms of true/false, real/fiction or subjectivity/objectivity.

For this issue of PARSE Journal, we welcome contributions from all disciplines on the theme of speculation. This issue also invites us to think around the notion of distributed cognition, through which we can see, among other things, that the arts, sciences and diverse other disciplines complement each other in more profound ways than we generally acknowledge. The speculative issue proposes that all the physical and conceptual tools, and artefacts that we have access to, can be seen as parts of the same consciousness, of our shared cognitive toolbox, by which we need to be able to navigate the futures. Among the questions that contributors may wish to consider are:

- How can the objects of art unfold and generate their own experimental ontologies when speculating about and probing emerging futures?
- What is the performative relationship between concepts and objects /materiality?
- What is the democratic potential or danger of speculative aesthetic objects in the forming of publics?
- How does speculative experimentation engage with time, with the relationship between the now and the future, between real politics and utopianism?
- How is the speculative experiment situated and how is it blind to its own position and narrative tropes, metaphors, metonyms, and diegesis?
- How is speculation entangled in emancipation as well as subjugation?
- How are conceptual pairs like emergence/linearity, immanence/transcendence, reflexivity/objectivism and distributed cognition/autonomous will, enacted in speculative narrations?

The deadline for abstracts is Dec11, 2015 and for full articles; March 3, 2016. Proposals should be sent to editor Anders Hultqvist: anders.hultqvist@hsm.gu.se

## Management

Editors: Henric Benesch, Andrea Phillips, Erling Björgvinsson

Management is usually treated as a separate domain to the field of contemporary creative practice. How does such a political and social separation of the tasks of “making” and “managing” inhere to an isolationist mechanism, in which the production of art, design, literature, theatre, craft, music, dance etc., is separated from its processes of its administrative “doing”? Histories of modernism suggest that the artist/performer/ crafter/ designer/ actor/ composer/ musician/ writer is managed and at the same time resists – or refuses to take responsibility for – her own management. Is this refusal and/or resistance a survival mechanism, and a performative critique of the governmentalisation and privatisation of the cultural industries, or is it a naïve calling upon art’s possessive autonomy – a resistance in fact to the responsibility of care of the self within an administered world? Within the field of curating, the term “curatorial” has emerged as an ambivalent idiom seeming to separate itself aesthetically from the pragmatics of making exhibitions in the practical sense. Conceptualising management as troublesome and uncreative allows us to externalise the rhythms and protocols of macropolitics against our own (mythologised, personalised) micropolitics. But in fact many of us spend most of our time managing our administrative as well as aesthetic relations to the world. A performance, a process, a production, an exhibition, an action, a concert, a talk, a reading, a workshop are situations that not only require a management of the self but also depend upon cooperation, coproduction, delegation and various collective efforts. In the often cited words of Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, it is in the administration of our own affairs, situated in communities, co-operations, organisations and institutions and saturated by practice, teaching, researching in the ‘planning’ rather than the policy-making – where forms of aesthetic solidarity between organisers may lie.

The issues that might be addressed under the heading of “management” range from:

- the conflict between established practices and protocols

and transformations in perspective of participation, inclusion, co-production;

- artist-organised initiatives and their structures;
- critical management and new thoughts on the politics of management;
- the aesthetics of administration;
- issues of knowledge production and the managerial cooption of cultural process through processes of financialisation;
- knowledge management and knowledge assessment within academia in relation to artistic practice, production and research;
- the management of artistic processes and outcomes through dispositifs such as scores, scripts, documented gestures, manuscripts, drawings, schemes and diagrams;
- dealing with quantitative data;
- the impact of current languages of cultural management, governance and public co-design on everyday practices to the maintenance and negotiation of roles, identities and borders in perspective of cultural diversity and inclusion;
- how policy produces manageable cultural experiences and shapes audiences.

This issue of PARSE invites research submissions that operate within this complex space of management addressed through and beyond the lens of art and artistic practice. We are especially interested in contributions based on current research that may in some way help to inform and foster a transdisciplinary debate on the different potentials, proprieties and politics of management across artistic practices including, but not restricted to, questions of organizing, production, processing, co-production, inclusion, infrastructuring, scripting, composing, sequencing, attuning, publishing, archiving ...

The deadline for abstracts is Feb 19, 2016 and for full articles; May 6, 2016. Proposals should be sent to editor Erling Björgvinsson: erling.bjorgvinsson@gu.se

## Utterance

Editors: Magnus Bårtås, Kristina Hagström Ståhl, Johan Öberg

Utterance, the production of voice, the bodily uttering of sound, is an integral task across a range of artistic practices. Etymologically the term draws upon Germanic as well as Latin roots, referring to outer limits, passing beyond, and carrying to

excess. From (theatrical) performance to poetry, from opera to contemporary visual arts and film, utterance is a site of intense critical aesthetic labour.

The critical, theoretical and metaphorical frameworks within which questions of utterance may be thematised range widely: from linguistics and literary studies to performance studies; from film studies and musicology to oratory; from feminist theory and political science to neurophysiology: from ethnography and psychoanalysis to rhetoric. These frameworks are contested and divergent. On the one hand, long established oppositions between orality and textuality continue to dominate thinking in spite of their problematisation within these disciplines, on the other hand, discursive developments – such as the performative turn in the arts, humanities, and social sciences – have given rise to a range of understandings including verbal as well as corporeal, extra-linguistic and non-vocal notions of utterance.

Given the development of a wide range of enquiries, by artists and performers of all kinds, this issue of PARSE invites researchers to make contributions that consider a diversity of possible questions and problematics. These may include, but are not limited to the following:

What are the current means by which utterance is actualised, understood and re-configured in contemporary artistic research? In what ways can conceptions of vocal utterance be expanded, elaborated upon and challenged? How do approaches that conceptualise utterance exist in concert or in tension with practices that operate at the level of “discourse” or at the level of “the” work? How do questions of dialogicity, corporeality and materiality come into play? How do questions of utterance play in into the material, performative and affective resonances of voice, voicing, song, speech, and the much vaunted ideal of coming-to-voice? What does attention to the question of utterance do to the hierarchies of interpretation and origination, and moreover, to notions of subjectivity and positionality as they are interrogated or inscribed in artistic practice? How does current inquiry problematize intentionality and its connection to what Derrida calls the “scene and system of utterance”? How are these politics operative with respect to contemporary artistic practice? What is the status and valency of stammering, stuttering, and other modes of hesitant, transient and liminal utterance within contemporary art practice? What

is the relevance of utterance within mediatized art forms and inquiries? How do questions of performativity inform the production of voice and gesture in various modes and practices in performance? How does the question of utterance interact with documentary practice, testimony, activism and listening as these appear in contemporary artistic production? To what degree, for example, is there a transfer or exchange of critical practices with regard to utterance between the sounding of poetry and contemporary vocal music or performance art or experimental typography? What are the political stakes of utterance in an era of publicity and sound-bites? In what sense is utterance augmented, re-defined, re-constituted, denigrated, displaced or newly constituted in contemporary techniques of reproduction and enhancement, within various digital networks and other technologies of action-at-a-distance? How have these developments been apprehended, enacted or instantiated within and across different artistic practices?

The deadline for abstracts is Feb 19, 2016 and for full articles; May 6, 2016. Proposals should be sent to editor Kristina Hagström Ståhl: [kristina.hagstrom-stahl@hsm.gu.se](mailto:kristina.hagstrom-stahl@hsm.gu.se)

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The peer review process is based on an open review process (it is not double blind as normally employed in many of the natural sciences for example). The full list of reviewers will be identified via the *PARSE* website annually. In all cases reviewers and the authors will be asked to disclose any possible conflict of interest. After approval for publication has been established through the peer review process, a finalized version of the contribution will be provided by the author(s) in correspondence with the article editor.

We regret, that it is not possible for the editorial team to enter into dialogue or provide feedback for all submissions. Typically this is reserved for those submissions that have been identified as suitable for potential publication in the particular volume number.

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