

*Cahier on Art and
the Public Domain*

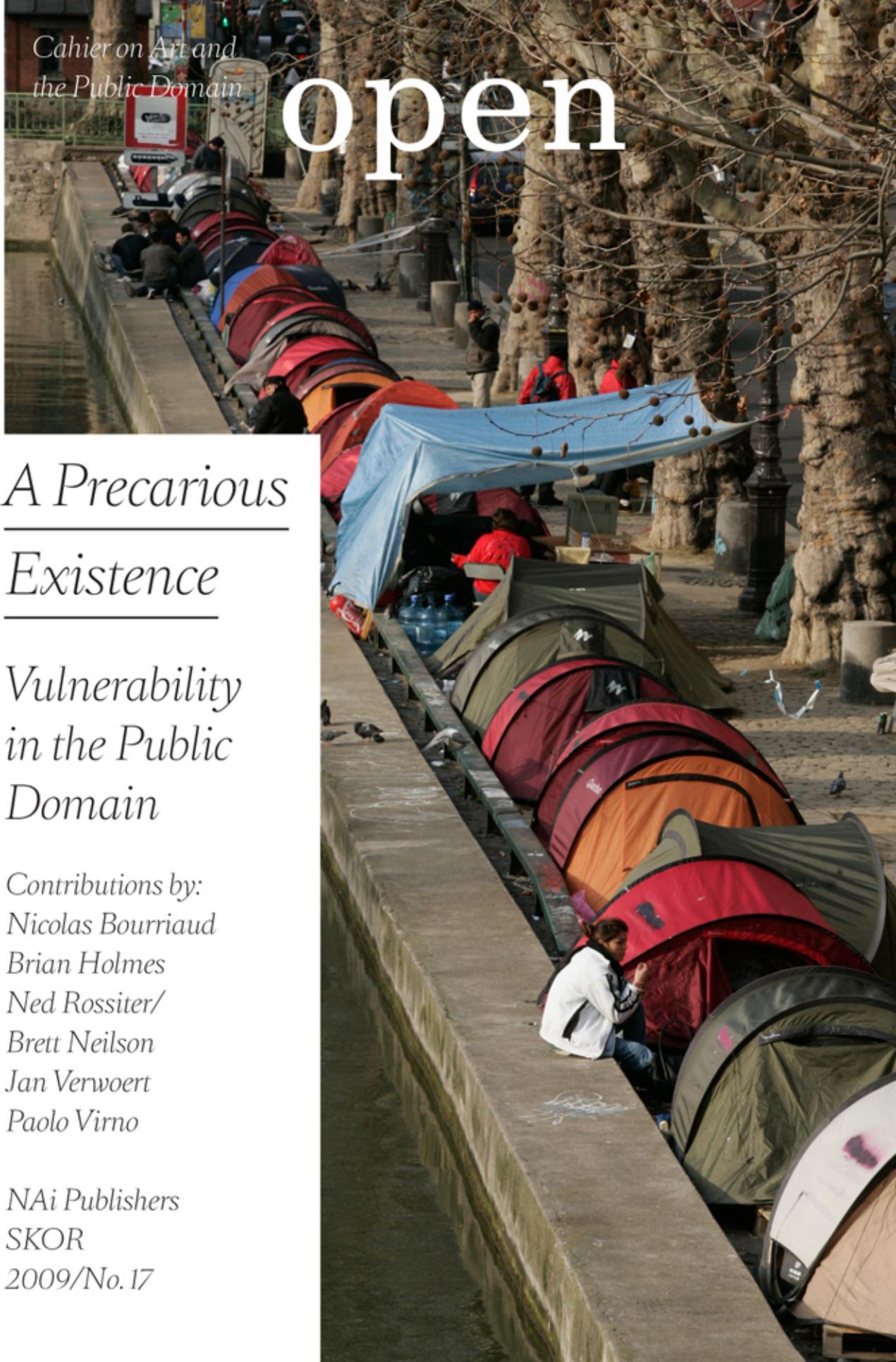
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A Precarious Existence

Vulnerability in the Public Domain

*Contributions by:
Nicolas Bourriaud
Brian Holmes
Ned Rossiter/
Brett Neilson
Jan Verwoert
Paolo Virno*

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editorial

JORINDE SEIJDEL

A PRECARIOUS EXISTENCE

Vulnerability in the Public Domain

With the international credit crisis there is more and more talk of the crumbling of the neoliberal hegemony. Whatever this may mean exactly, in relation to the theory and practice of art and public space this very crumbling also seems to be revealing implications and effects of neoliberalism that were previously suppressed, at least in mainstream discourse. Assuming that neoliberalism, consciously or unconsciously, is more or less internalized in the policy and programmes of art and public space, a crisis of market thinking is also affecting the core of these domains. In other words, if neoliberalism fails economically, socially and politically, what are the symptoms of this within art and public space? And how should we be dealing with this?

Two concepts resonate in this issue of *Open* – ‘post-Fordism’ and ‘precarity’ – the first being something that can be called a manifestation of neoliberalism and the second an effect. The premise is that post-Fordist society has supplanted the Fordist order: the hierarchical and bureaucratic pro-

duction system as worked out by Henry Ford and Frederick Taylor is no longer dominant. This system was characterized by the mass production of homogeneous, standardized goods for a mass market. Since the 1970s, however, there has been a shift of emphasis within the organization of labour to the immaterial production of information and services and to continuous flexibility. Both systems reflect different social and economic value systems – the mainstays of post-Fordism are physical and mental mobility, creativity, labour as potential, communication, virtuosity and opportunism – and have their own forms of control

The political philosopher Paolo Virno sees a direct connection between post-Fordism and precarity, which refers to the relationship between temporary and flexible labour arrangements and a ‘precarious’ existence – an everyday life without predictability and security – which is determining the living conditions of ever larger groups in society (part-timers, flex workers, migrant workers, contract workers, black-economy workers, etcetera). This structural discontinuity and permanent fragility also occurs in the ‘creative class’: art, cultural and communication businesses in which there is talk of flexible production and outsourcing of work. Through the agency of European social movements

and activists, and philosophers such as Virno, precarity has been a political issue for some years already in countries like Spain, France and Italy.

Brian Holmes writes in this issue about the video series *Entre Sueños*, in which artist Marcelo Expósito reports on this 'new social issue'. Merijn Oudenampsen deals very concretely with the response of Dutch cleaners to their precarious situation. Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter contend that the rise of precarity as an object of academic analysis coincides with its decline as a political concept capable of inciting social action. They sound out the power of precarity to bring about new forms of connection, subjectivity and political organization. Gerald Raunig poses the question as to whether the post-industrial addiction to acceleration can create strategies that give new meaning to communication and connectivity.

What can notions like post-Fordism and precarity bring to light when they are related to the current conditions of, and thinking about, urban space and about art and the art world? In the context of the city, the 'creative city' thrusts itself forward as a post-Fordist urban model par excellence, whereby creativity and culture are seen as the motor for economic development. The creative city is also an entrepreneurial city in which city marketing and processes of gentrification go hand in hand, and in

which social issues are subordinated to the demands of the labour market and the production of value. Matteo Pasquinelli, in particular, directly addresses the role played by the creative scene in making (im)material infrastructures financially profitable and susceptible to speculation. The architect and activist Santiago Cirugeda has made a poster with a selection of urban interventions created in recent years by his office Recetas Urbanas, which are aimed at regaining public space for citizens within the precarity of the urban environment.

Nicolas Bourriaud argues that the essential content of contemporary art's political programme is not an indictment of the 'political' circumstances inherent to current affairs, but should consist in 'maintaining the world in a precarious situation'. Sonja Lavaert and Pascal Gielen interviewed Paolo Virno in Rome about such matters as aesthetics and social struggle, the disproportion of art and the need to invent institutions for a new public sphere. Gielen describes in another article how the international art scene embodies and indulges the post-Fordist value system, and asks to what extent its informality and ethics of freedom can be exploited and managed biopolitically. From the heart of the art scene Jan Verwoert resists the imperative to perform creatively and socially, and calls for a different ethics, one that all of us should be able to take to heart.

Pascal Gielen

The Art Scene

*An Ideal
Production Unit
for Economic
Exploitation?*

In sociology, the ‘scene’ is barely taken seriously as a form of social organization, but sociologist Pascal Gielen sees the scene as a highly functional part of our contemporary networking

society and thus worthy of serious research. Were the current success of the creative industry to result in the exploitation of the creative scene, however, the level of freedom enjoyed could quickly become a lack of freedom.

When a *Kunsthalle*, an experimental theatre, an international dance school, an alternative cinema, a couple of fusion restaurants and lounge bars – not to mention a sufficient number of gays – are concentrated in a place marked by high social density and mobility, the result is an art scene. ‘What’s there? Who’s there? And what’s going on?’ are what American social geographer Richard Florida calls the three ‘W questions’ (Florida is a fan of management jargon). These questions have to be answered if we want to know if ours is a ‘place to be’.¹ A creative scene like the one described is good for the

1. Richard Florida, *Cities and the Creative Class* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

economy, the image of a city and intercultural tolerance, it would seem.

Although the art scene has become an important economic variable and a popular subject of study, the term is not exactly thriving in the sociological context. The classic sociologist does know how to cope with concepts like ‘the group’, ‘the category’, ‘the network’ and ‘the subculture’, but ‘the social scene’ is relatively unexplored as an area of research. Obviously, there are exceptions, such as work done by Alan Blum.²

Yet the lack of scholarly interest is surprising, since the scene is perhaps the format best suited to social intercourse. Within the prevailing post-Fordist economy – with its fluid working hours; high levels of mobility, hyper-communication

2. See, for example, Alan Blum, ‘Scenes’, in: Janine Marchessault and Will Straw (eds.), ‘Scenes and the City’, *Public* (2001), nos. 22/23.

and flexibility; and special interest in creativity and performance – the scene is a highly functional social-organizational form. Moreover, it is a popular temporary haven for hordes of enthusiastic globetrotters. Why is the scene such a good social binding agent nowadays? To find a satisfactory answer, we should start by taking a good look at the curious mode of production known as ‘post-Fordism’.

Paolo Virno-Style Post-Fordism

The transition from a Fordist to a post-Fordist (that is, Toyota-ist) manufacturing process is marked primarily by the transition from material to immaterial labour and production, and from material to immaterial goods. In the case of the latter, the symbolic value is greater than the practical value. Design and aesthetics – in other words, external signs and symbols – are major driving forces in today’s economy, because they constantly heighten consumer interest. We are all too familiar with this point of view, which has been propagated by countless postmodern psychologists, sociologists and philosophers since the 1970s.

But how does an industry based on signs and symbols affect the workplace and the manufacturing process? What characterizes immaterial labour? According to Italian philosopher Paolo Virno, current focal points are mobility, flexible working hours, communication and language (knowledge-sharing), interplay,

detachment (the ability to disengage and to delegate) and adaptability.³

Consequently, the person performing immaterial labour can be ‘plugged in’ at all times and in all places.

3. Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude. For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004).

Yet Virno’s conception of immaterial labour is surprisingly refreshing when he links it to such notions as power, subjectivity (including informality and affection), curiosity, virtuosity, the personification of the product, opportunism, cynicism and endless chatter. Admittedly, his conception initially appears to relate to a string of seemingly heterogeneous characteristics applicable to immaterial labour. Presumably, the idea is to select with care a few key aspects from the list. Virno starts with the better-known aspects of the social phenomenon before adding his personal adaptation.

Physical and Mental Mobility

A brief summary – as found in the paragraph above – makes us forget what immaterial labour actually requires from people and, accordingly, what drastic consequences the new form of production has for contemporary society. For instance, mobility is often defined as increasing physical mobility, the negative aspects of which we encounter frequently: traffic jams, overcrowded trains and pollution caused by, among other things, a vast number of planes in the skies. The employee no longer lives his entire life near the

factory or office where he works but moves regularly – as a result of promotion or relocation – not only from one workplace to another but also from one house to another.

Apart from the growth of physical mobility, mental mobility is becoming an increasingly essential part of our present-day working conditions. After all, the immaterial worker works primarily with her head, a head that can – and must – accompany her everywhere. Immaterial labour does not cease when the employee shuts the office door behind her. It is easy for the worker who performs immaterial labour to take work-related problems home, to bed and, in the worst-case scenario, on holiday. The worker can always be reached, by mobile phone or email, and summoned back to the workplace within the moment or two it takes to log on. Mental mobility makes working hours not only flexible but fluid, blurring the boundary between private and working domains. The burden of responsibility for drawing the boundary rests almost entirely on the shoulders of the employee.

The foregoing outline makes rather a depressing impression, but many a person who does immaterial work experiences it as such, as evidenced by the increase in work-related stress and depressions. One cause of depression is an ongoing sense of having too much on one’s mind and of being constantly reminded of this fact by the working environment. Perhaps a creative idea is still nestling somewhere in the

brain: a conclusion based more on a socially conditioned criterion than on anything psychological. The knowledge that you can go on looking, that you may be failing to utilize a possibility still lodged in your brain, can lead to psychosis. Burnout is not necessarily the result of a person feeling that his ideas have not been fully exploited. On the contrary, it is rooted in the frustration that an unused, passive zone exists within the cranium that can still be activated. The worker who can no longer stop the introspective quest for inventiveness may find himself falling into an abyss or looking for escape routes, such as intoxication, to momentarily halt the thinking process. He deliberately switches off his creative potential.

However, contrasting with this very one-sided and sombre picture of the effects of immaterial labour, it must be said that it can also liberate a form of mental labour. After all, no-one can look inside the head of the designer, artist, engineer, ICT programmer or manager to check whether he is actually thinking productively – that is, in the interests of the business. It's difficult to measure the development of ideas. A good idea or an attractive design may escape from the brilliant mind of the immaterial worker in a matter of seconds, or it might take months. What's more, the same employee may be saving his best ideas until he's accumulated sufficient capital to set up his own business. Anyone possessing immaterial capital can participate

unseen, and in this case invisibility can be taken literally.

Power and Biopolitics

Clearly, the employer of immaterial labour no longer invests in effective labour but more in working power, in potential or promise, because the person who performs immaterial work comes with a supply of as-yet-untapped and unforeseen capabilities. Perhaps the brilliant designer, engineer, manager or programmer, who had been acquired for a great deal of money, is burnt out. Or perhaps he's in love and focused on something other than work. Maybe his latest brilliant idea was the last, or it will take another ten years before another follows. Who can say?

The paradoxical characteristics of that working power – that potential which is bought and sold as if it were a material commodity – presuppose 'biopolitical' practices, according to Virno. The employer, preferably aided by the government, has to develop ingenious mechanisms for optimizing, or at least guaranteeing, immaterial labour. Since physical and intellectual powers are inseparable, these mechanisms should focus on the life of the immaterial worker: hence the term 'biopolitics'. 'When something is sold that exists merely as a *possibility*, it cannot be separated from the *living person* of the seller. The worker's living body is the substrate of the working power, which in isolation has no independent existence. "Life", pure and simple "*bios*", acquires special

importance since it is the tabernacle of *dynamis*, of the more-or-less possible. Capitalists are only interested for an indirect reason in the worker's life: that life, that body, contains the talent, the possibility, the *dynamis*. The living body becomes an object to be managed. . . . Life is situated at the centre of politics as the prize to be won and is the immaterial (and not present in itself) working force.'⁴

4. Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, op. cit (note 1), 83.

Communication, Linguistic Virtuosity and Informality

Virno comments, somewhat ironically, that on the good old Fordist shop floor there would often be a sign saying: 'Silence, people at work'. He believes it could be replaced today with: 'People at work. Speak!' In the post-Fordist setting, communication has become all important. This conclusion would seem fairly obvious, as immaterial labour relies heavily on sharing know-how and ideas. Communication is productive within the contemporary working environment, whereas it was once considered counterproductive for the 'traditional' worker. The latter is a 'doer', working manually, even if his job is only a matter of pressing a button at regular intervals. Chatter, therefore, is a form of distraction or entertainment.

When communication is the key focus in the workplace, the bottom line is negotiation and persuasion. Thus rhetorical powers play a special role in the workplace. Someone

with virtuoso linguistic skills invariably gets more done. Virtuosity has shifted from making – as evident in the work of the artisan – to speaking. Linguistic virtuosity, says Virno, has two characteristics: it finds satisfaction in itself, without attaining any objectified goal; and it presupposes the presence of others, of an audience. In other words, the immaterial worker is a good performer. If he is to convince colleagues that he has a good idea, he must take a verbal, or at least a linguistically logical, course. Even if no idea exists, the immaterial worker counts on his linguistic skills to keep on implying that he's thinking hard or ruminating in a positive way. Others either confirm or contradict him during the process.

Communication, in Virno's opinion, assumes something in addition to virtuosity. Or rather, communication has a specific effect on relationships among immaterial workers. If nothing else, it requires relational skills that have little to do with production. Workers must get on with one another in a workplace in which the human aspect plays an increasingly greater role. Virno refers to 'the inclusion of anthropogenesis in the existing mode of production'. When the human aspect enters the office or factory, it carries with it an air of informality. The ability to get on well with others – and daring to try out ideas on colleagues – involves a degree of trust.

Although that idea goes beyond Virno, it's one worth analysing. After all, one can question whether infor-

mality plays a productive role in the immaterial workplace, which extends further than achieving good communication and a useful exchange of information. Informal association with others also means knowing more about one another. About family life, children and, in some cases, 'extra-curricular' relationships. Private information can be a good way of checking whether an employee is still 'on the ball' and, consequently, whether he's working productively and in the interests of the business. In fact, and more speculatively, isn't a more informal working environment the ultimate tool of biopolitics? An informal conversation is a way of evaluating an employee's brainpower without her being aware of it. 'A good work climate' – which can mean, for example, that it's possible to have a pleasant conversation in the corridor or to go out for lunch or have a beer after work with a colleague – has a dual purpose. It can increase productivity, because employees enjoy being at work (even if the work is not necessarily interesting, good colleagues are a compensation); but it can also be a highly ingenious means of control: the control of life itself. Informalization can mean, therefore, that the immaterial worker in all his subjectivity is biopolitically 'nabbed' or 'caught out' in his situational inability to develop productive ideas. This is genuine biopower: not power set down in formalized rules but power present in a vetting process that can steal round corners, any time and any

place, to encroach upon the body in a subjective fashion. The following section substantiates the argument that biopower can develop within the scene extremely well as a form of social organization.

Scene to Be Seen

In everyday usage, the word 'scene' invariably prevails in alternative discursive settings. For example, 'scene' is rarely used to indicate socially appropriate professions or groups. We do not refer to 'the scene' in relation to civil servants, bankers, the police or heterosexuals; but we do refer to the art scene, the theatre scene, the gay scene and, not to be forgotten, the drug or criminal scene. Creativity and criminality seem to occur to a notable extent in the same semantic circles. They have at least one characteristic in common within society: both creative and criminal networks stand for innovation. Regardless of whether it's a network involving innovative cultural practices, alternative lifestyles or illegal financial transactions, it serves as an alternative to what is socially acceptable or commonsensical. Until now, the word 'scene' has always been available to accommodate heterodox forms in the discursive sense. Yet recent decades have seen a remarkable advance of the discursive fringe towards the centre, making the 'alternative scene' a quality label at the heart of society. Today, labels like 'alternative', 'independent' and 'avant-garde' rank as welcome brands

in the economic epicentre. Hence the word 'scene' cannot lag behind, as Richard Florida clearly understands.

The scene as a form of social organization meets a number of criteria that fit relatively recent social developments. In a world in which individuality and authenticity are highly prized, in leisure activities as well as in the workplace, the scene constitutes a comfortable setting. The scene is a form of social organization that generates the freedom of temporary and flexible relations unavailable in a group (with relatively closed membership), for instance. The scene produces social cohesion and a shared identity unknown in a social category like an age-related or professional group. Relations within the scene are relatively free of obligations, but not without rules. Someone wishing to enter the art scene, for example, must comply with certain rules or social codes, but these are far less specific than the admission codes of a football club, youth movement or lodge. What's more, one scene can easily be exchanged for another. This is where it differs from a subculture, which requires a specific, almost rigid identity.

These are the very characteristics that make the scene an ideal form of social organization in the present network society. Local scenes are proving to be familiar focal points within a worldwide network. They generate just enough, but not too much, intimacy for global nomads. Whether you enter the art scene in Shanghai, Tokyo, New York,

London, Berlin or Brussels, you find a familiar frame of reference despite what may be a totally different cultural context. If, six months ago, you had mentioned the name Damien Hirst in any of these art scenes, you would have instantly created a common ground for socializing, whether participating in an intellectual debate or chatting in a pub. The scene provides a safe, familiar, yet admittedly temporary home in a globalized world. Or, as Alan Blum puts it: it offers a kind of urban intimacy that enables a person to survive in a chilly urban environment and anonymous global time. The reason, to some extent, is that professional and public activities within a scene affect the domestic domain. Professional and private activities, work and personal relationships, often merge seamlessly. Although it may sound facetious, the hotel lounge, vernissage and fusion restaurant are settings for both informal chatter and professional deals. But professional deals may well depend on gossip, and informal chatter may prompt professional deals. Thus the scene is the place where formality and informality effortlessly intersect. And, proceeding in that vein, the scene is the ultimate place for biopolitical control.

The foregoing inventory of public and semi-public spaces that fit comfortably into the scene uncovers another aspect of this form of social organization. It creates a Foucaultian panoptical décor for the visual control of seeing and being seen. If anything: whoever is not seen 'on the

scene' does not belong to the scene, and the scene which is not seen is a non-scene. And so the notion remains very close to its original etymological meaning. The Greek *skènè* was actually a tent: the hut or wooden structure from which actors emerged. Theatricality plays an important constituent part in 'the scene'. In other words, the scene always implies a *mise en scène*. And, by extension, it ties in seamlessly with the demands made of the present-day post-Fordist worker. As we have seen, he depends largely on the performance of his creative ideas. In so doing, he has much to gain from these ideas being communicated to the widest (and most international) audience possible. Foreign is chic on the scene. But he gains only if the audience is reliable. After all, an idea can be easily ridiculed but easily stolen, too. The public – international yet intimate – environment is the perfect place for promoting the social conditions that enable the relatively safe exchange of ideas. Anyone stealing ideas within the scene receives at least a verbal sanction. A claim that an original thought has been copied elsewhere is an option only if witnesses exist and the thought has been aired in public. The originality or authenticity of an idea can be measured recursively, therefore, if that idea was ever 'put on the stage'.

Freiheit macht Arbeit: Freedom Creates Work

Events like biennials and buildings like a *Kunsthalle* or museum are ideal semi-public venues for the art scene and for the circulation of creative ideas. You could say they form the concrete infrastructure of the scene or make the scene more visible: the non-seen scene becomes the seen scene. This applies primarily to artists whose work is displayed by the organizations in question or is on display in the buildings. The concrete infrastructure literally scenarizes the art scene, thus making it a more or less permanent creative scene. This displaying of the scene, incidentally, takes place in complete accordance with the rules of post-Fordist art. As a result, a person works under a temporary contract or, in the art world itself, often without a contract in what is always a vitalist, project-based setting; the work – flexible and invariably at night – is done with irrepressible creative enthusiasm. In short, it involves a work ethic in which work is always enjoyable, or should be; in which dynamism is boosted unconditionally by young talent; and in which commitment outstrips money. These factors determine the spirit of the art scene. If you try to rationalize this great, spontaneous desire and freedom to work (by means of rigid contracts or labour agreements, for instance) or to bureaucratize or routinize it, you are in danger of letting the metaphorical creative genie out of the bottle. However, we

should not forget that creative work as described here is always a form of cheap, unstable work, which makes the art scene of great interest to outsiders like company managers and politicians. Not only does it boost the local economy and introduce the city to the world market; it also, and especially, reveals a biopolitical ethic that benefits today's economy. Rather than believing that *Arbeit macht frei*, as announced on gates to Nazi concentration camps, protagonists of the creative scene seem to think that *Freiheit macht Arbeit* (freedom creates work). The type of accepted flexible work that marks artistic projects would make gratifying advertising for a temp agency. Considering the rhetorical reversal, it is better to offer no opinion as to whether or not the concentration camp has become the central social structure of all society, as Giorgio Agamben claims.⁵

If the crossover involving professional, public and domestic activi-

5. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

ties – and particularly the interplay between formality and informality, on the one hand, and seeing and being seen, on the other – is exploited on a rationally economic basis, the cultivated freedom of the art scene edges uncomfortably close to the inhuman lack of freedom of the camp. Making a link between scene and camp is undoubtedly going a step too far. The point, however, is that the freedom of the art scene within the capitalist *mise en scène* can be no more than a false freedom, because it inevitably stems

from a well-defined (or un-free) finality, primarily the pursuit of profit.

The fact that Richard Florida and his ilk are perfectly happy with this scene, as viewed from their neoliberal perspective, is suspect, to say the least. Of course, an interest in the art scene from politicians and managers need not lead to paranoia. Their focus does demonstrate to some extent, after all, that artistic phenomena have considerable social support. If and when this focus causes the exploitation of the creative scene, owing to its informality and ethic of freedom – a shift that would restructure biopolitics, bringing about a real lack of freedom – the art scene will have good reason for concern.

**FREI
HEIT
MACHT
ARBEIT**

Nicolas Bourriaud

Precarious
Constructions

Answer to Jacques
Rancière on Art
and Politics

In the following essay, Nicolas Bourriaud reacts to Jacques Rancière's claim that his 'esthétique relationnelle' is little more than a moral revival in the arts. According to Bourriaud, the significance of

the political programme of contemporary art is its recognition of the precarious condition of the world. He elaborates this theme in his recently published book *The Radicant*.¹

1. Nicolas Bourriaud, *The Radicant* (New York/Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2009).

In a recent book, Jacques Rancière questioned 'the pedagogical model for the effectiveness of art', seeing in today's most socially engaged works of art the validation of a model for relations between art and the political that has been outdated for 200 years. We agree with him that the political effectiveness of art 'does not reside in transmitting messages', but 'in the first place consists of dispositions of bodies, the partitioning of singular spaces and times that define ways of being together or apart, in front or at the centre of, within or without, nearby or far away'.² However, it is in fact the approach to this formal problem that is shared by

2. Jacques Rancière, *Le spectateur émancipé* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2008), 61.

the artists who are discussed in my essay 'Relational Aesthetics', which Rancière misunderstands, seeing it 'as arrangements of art [that] immediately present themselves as social relations'.³ We are apparently confronted here with an optical deformation that is quite common among contemporary philosophers, who do not recognize the concepts that art reveals through its visual reality because they make the wrong connection between the library from which they observe the world and the artists' studios. So let's put things straight: these repartitionings of time-space not only constitute the link between for example Pierre Huyghe and Rirkrit Tiravanija, which is after all clearly explained in the book, but in fact also delineate the actual locus where the relations between art and politics are redistributed. On the condition,

3. *Ibid.*, 77.

however, in accordance with Rancière, that their areas of application are not confused with each other. At no time are the artistic positions analysed in 'Relational Aesthetics' described as social relations that are not mediated by forms, nor do any of them answer to this description, although social relations can constitute the living material for some of the practices in question.

It seems that the debates that have been raised by the 'relational' in art since the publication of the book essentially revolve around the respective positions of ethics, the political and aesthetics in the artistic practices that are described. These practices have been suspected of putting morals above form, generating a purely 'social' or even 'Christian' or 'compassionate' art; they have been accused of proposing an angelic ethical model, masking the existing conflicts in society. This misunderstanding was all the more perplexing because the book discusses the emergence of a new state of the form (or new 'formations', if we insist on the dynamic character of the elements in question, which actually include precisely 'the disposition of bodies' within their field of definition) and hardly ventures into the domain of ethics, which is considered as a kaleidoscopic backdrop reserved for the interpersonal dimension that connects the viewer to the work he encounters. In short, it isn't the ethical dimension of the work of Rirkrit Tiravanija or Liam Gillick that is put forward in 'Relational Aesthetics', but their capacity to invent innovative ways of exhibiting on an interpersonal level. Besides, the works

of the artists who are discussed in my essay display very heterogenic relations with the spheres of politics and ethics and do not lead to a global theory.

Which ethics do Vanessa Beecroft and Christine Hill have in common? What is their shared relation to politics?

The problem primarily resides in the web of relations between words and images. Rancière's description of the work of Tiravanija overlooks its formal dimension from the start: its arrangement, he writes, 'presents the visitors of an exhibition with a camping-gas stove, a water cooker and packets of dried soup, intended to involve them in action, dialogue and collective discussion ...'⁴ This does not really take into account the

4. Ibid., 78.

concrete reality of the work: what about the colours, the disposition of elements in space, the dialogue with the exhibition space, the formal structure of the installation, the protocol for its use? In fact, Tiravanija's exhibitions have never limited themselves to such a summary arrangement as that which is 'described' by Rancière, who here seems to sketch a general, vague outline of a work rather than giving an exact idea of what it is actually like. You might just as well say that Vermeer is a painter who depicts domestic interiors in which women perform trivial activities, or reduce Joseph Beuys to a shamanic figure who speaks with animals. Here the stalemate finds its origin in formal models that underlie artistic arrangements, in the importance of architectural structures, in philosophical references, and mostly in the issue of the use of forms

which lies at the heart of Tiravanija's practice. Yet, by inducing the idea that those structures are meant for 'action, dialogue, or collective discussion', Rancière implicitly gives the work of the artist a political dimension. Tiravanija does not construct meeting rooms, and for him the function of usability represents a backdrop that is more formalized and abstract than Rancière might think.

Thus, the question is asked today in its full amplitude: Can we derive an ethics from contemporary art? Considering the heterogeneous character of artistic production and the large variety of theoretical sources on which the artists can draw, this demand may seem totally absurd. Furthermore, you would be right to ask what would be the 'holder' of that ethical philosophy in art today: The work of art itself? The modalities of its reception? The materials it uses? Its production process? However, certain dominant traits in the contemporary formal landscape, certain invariables in the exploitation and management of signs by artists enable us to outline an answer to this complex question. A fragmentary answer, of course, and just as precarious as the objects to which it is attached: moreover, precariousness constitutes the dominant trait and the 'reality' of these ethics. By placing this word between quotation marks, I am referring to the Lacanian real, that focal point around which all the elements of the visible are organized, that hollow form that can only be apprehended through its anamorphoses or its shadows. On that basis: first, every

ethical reflection on contemporary art is inextricably bound with its definition of reality. Second, let us postulate that the real of contemporary art is situated in *precariousness*, whose different figures interconnect the works of Maurizio Cattelan and Thomas Hirschhorn, Rirkrit Tiravanija and Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Kelley Walker, Wolfgang Tillmans and Thomas Ruff.

A Precarious World

Zygmunt Bauman defines our period as one of 'liquid modernity', a society of generalized disposability, driven 'by the horror of expiry', where nothing is more decried than 'the steadfastness, stickiness, viscosity of things inanimate and animate alike'.⁵ The constellation of the precarious, notably from the point of view of the *renewable*, is the invisible motor of consumer ideology. Placing himself on the level of the collective psyche, Michel Maffesoli describes individual identity as eclectic and diffuse: 'A fragile identity, an identity which is no longer, as was the case during modernity, the only solid foundation of individual and social life.'⁶ Here, the observations of the sociologist appear to be in keeping with certain philosophical intuitions about precariousness. In order to produce the philosophy that Marx never had the time to write, Louis Althusser places himself in the 'line of Democritus', who said that the world is made up of a rain of atoms whose deviations produces

5. Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Life* (Oxford/Cambridge: Polity, 2005), 3.

6. Michel Maffesoli, *Du Nomadisme* (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1997), 109.

encounters that are the principle of all reality: in short, capitalism was just a chance encounter between agents that otherwise may have never found themselves in the same space. As for Foucault, he defined the enunciations that make human thought function as events that appear and insert themselves in a given historical field before disappearing just as rapidly as they have arrived, filtered out by a new configuration of knowledge.

Endurance, whether it concerns objects or relations, has become a rare thing. When we look at artistic production today, we see that in the heart of the global economic machine that favours unbridled consumerism and undermines everything that is durable, a culture is developing from the bankruptcy of endurance that is based on that which threatens it most, namely precariousness. My hypothesis is that art not only seems to have found the means to resist this new, instable environment, but has also derived specific means from it. A precarious regime of aesthetics is developing, based on speed, intermittence, blurring and fragility. Today, we need to reconsider culture (and ethics) on the basis of a positive idea of the *transitory*, instead of holding on to the opposition between the ephemeral and the durable and seeing the latter as the touchstone of true art and the former as a sign of barbarism. Hannah Arendt: 'An object is cultural to the extent that it can endure; its durability is the very opposite of functionality, which is the quality which makes it disappear again from the phenomenal

Kelley Walker, *Black Star Press*, triptych, 2006. Silkscreen print using brown and white chocolate, digital print on linen. Courtesy Saatchi Gallery, London. © Kelley Walker, 2006

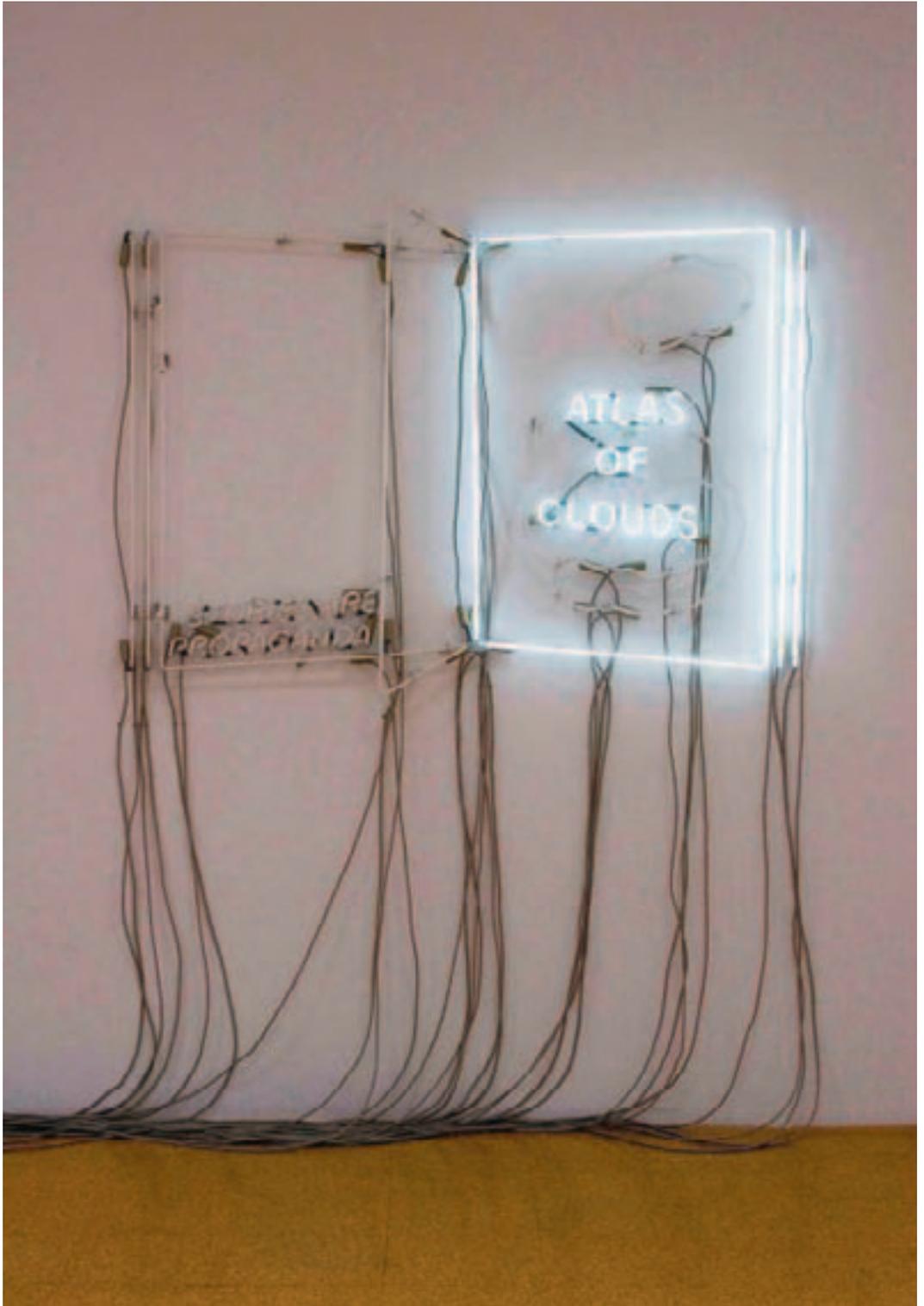




Cerith Wyn Evans, chandelier in the A.A.Hijmans van den Bergh Building in Utrecht, commissioned by the University of Utrecht in collaboration with SKOR. Photo Jannes Linders



Philippe Parreno, *Atlas of Clouds*, 2005. © Philippe Parreno and Pilar Corrias Gallery



Thomas Ruff, *jpeg bb01 (Bagdad Bombing)*, 2004. (c/o Pictoright, Amsterdam 2009)









world by being used and used up.⁷ In this new configuration, the physical duration of the artwork is dissociated from its duration as information and its conceptual and/or material precariousness is associated with new ethical and aesthetic values that establish a new approach to culture and art.

⁷ Hannah Arendt, 'The Crisis in Culture: Its Social and Its Political Significance', in: Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin, 1993), 209.

This precarious state, on which in my view truly innovative relational practices are based, is largely confused with the immaterial or ephemeral character of the artwork. However, the former is a philosophical notion, while the latter are merely formal or even demonstrative properties that only refer to their outward appearance. The precarious represents a fundamental instability, not a longer or shorter material duration: it inscribes itself into the structure of the work itself and reflects a general state of aesthetics.

Precarious Art

Etymologically, the term *precarious* means: 'that which only exists thanks to a reversible authorization.' The *precaria* was the field cultivated for a set period of time, independently of the laws that govern property. An object is said to be precarious if it has no definitive status and an uncertain future or final destiny: it is held in abeyance, waiting, surrounded by irresolution. It occupies a transitory territory. Generally speaking, we could say that contemporary artworks have

no absolute rights as to their conceptual status. In the end, the question amounts to an interrogation: what gives you the right to set foot on artistic soil? Do you have the correct papers, the deeds that give you the right to occupy the land? From the perspective of a precarious aesthetic, the question runs differently: what matters is to know whether the object generates activity, communication, thought, what its degree of *productivity* is within the aesthetic sphere. Here agrarian thought (the durable bond with the land) is replaced by concepts of trade (the cross-border encounter between an object and its users). The contemporary artwork does not *rightfully* occupy a position in a field, but presents itself as an object of negotiation, caught up in a cross-border trade which confronts different disciplines, traditions or concepts. It is this ontological precariousness that is the foundation of contemporary aesthetics.

Thus, contemporary art assumes this double status of crossing borders and precariousness, by the undifferentiated use of different 'mediums' – something that Rosalind Krauss, from a very critical perspective, calls the 'postmedia condition' of contemporary art, following in the footsteps of Marcel Broodthaers's fictional museum. We can only acknowledge that the great works of art today present themselves in the form of trajectories or synopses: the works of Pierre Huyghe, for example, each constitute a 'building site' with at its centre tools for production and diffusion that spread their effects in subsequent

projects through collaboration with various interlocutors. The functional model for these projects is precarious: like in the film by Jacques Tati, *Jour de fête* (1949), a tent is put in place, disposes its effects, and then withdraws.

Thus, precariousness cannot be reduced to the use of fragile materials or short durations, because it impregnates the whole of artistic production, constituting a substratum of reflection and playing the role of an ideological support for passing forms. In short, precariousness now impregnates the whole of contemporary aesthetics, in its negative as well as its positive versions. This includes managing the duration of the exhibition; the huge installations of Thomas Hirschhorn dedicated to Deleuze and Bataille only last the limited time of an exhibition, and sometimes only 24 hours, as was the case with his homage to Michel Foucault. The work of Tris Vonna-Mitchell is emblematic for this new type of relation with the precarious: based on oral performances of the artist talking about his travels with the support of a complex slideshow, his exhibitions accumulate disparate materials, referring to other, simultaneous or past exhibitions, none of which constitute a real conclusion. The slide and video projectors, photographs and rare objects that constitute them only weave an endlessly flickering circuit of signs in space.

Besides the mode of production itself, we can distinguish three main patterns in precarious aesthetics, namely transcoding, flickering and blurring:

a. Permanent Transcoding: Formal Nomadism

In the works of Kelley Walker, Wade Guyton and Seth Price, forms are displayed in the shape of copies, forever in a transitory state; the images are instable, waiting between two translations, perpetually transcoded. The practice of these three artists dissuades us from giving their works a precise place in the production and processing chain of the image, because the same patterns are repeated with greater or lesser variants in distinct works.

Kelley Walker operates by linking visual objects: he depicts an uprooted reality in works that are only 'freeze frames' of an enunciation in a continuous state of development, constantly incorporating earlier stages of his work. As for Wade Guyton, he leaves it to mechanical reproduction techniques to generate form variables that he introduces in his work.

Taken from magazines, television or Google search, they seem ready to return there, instable, spectral. Every original form is negated, or rather, abolished. Navigating through a network made up of photocopies, prints, screens or photographic reproductions, forms surface as just so many transitory incarnations. The visible appears here as a nomad by definition, a collection of iconographic ghosts; the work of art presents itself in the form of a USB-stick that can be plugged into every support.

b. Flickering: Intermittences

The phosphorescent drawings of Philippe Parreno fade every minute

and only become clearly visible again once they have been reloaded by a spotlight; the candelabras of Cerith Wyn Evans deliver messages in Morse code; Maurizio Cattelan develops a strategy of the 'flash', his works are governed by the surprise effect. These are all modes of *flickering*, the specific regime of the visible that is marked by intermittence, the programmed fading of what is presented to our eyes or to our perception. Something manifests itself and then disappears from sight: here the precarious is suggested, inscribed in time as the condition of the work. A work by Philippe Parreno, *Fraught Times: For Eleven Months of the Year It's an Artwork and in December It's Christmas (October)* (2008), consisting of a decorated aluminium Christmas tree that has the status of an artwork for eleven months of the year, but changes into a real Christmas tree at the beginning of December, is thus structured by the concept of intermittence. In Carsten Höller's case, the flickering light that is present in a large number of his works makes us question our perception of reality: it functions as a major signal in the grammar of doubt

This art of flickering (as a functioning mode of the artwork) is associated with a vision of a reality that also flickers: the present lags behind itself, as is pointed out by Marcel Duchamp (the *Bride Stripped Bare* described as a 'delay in glass') and later by Jacques Derrida (*Difference* as the gap between being and meaning). As it is delayed, we only perceive its shards, like those supernovas of which our eyes only record the explosion that has taken

place millions of years ago – and that is exactly how art functions, as a 'delay' through which we can see the world.

This new distribution between the direct, the deferred and the archive is a seedbed for certain contemporary practices that insist on the unique, singular character of the artwork, on its status as a non-reproducible event. Tino Sehgal's minimalist scenarios, which he has staged with actors, or Trish Donnelly's performances do not generate any visible traces a posteriori. This insistence on the 'here-and-now' quality of the artistic event and the refusal to record it other than as an indirect archival work, represent both a challenge to the art world (whose institutional nature from now is confused with a mighty archival apparatus) and the affirmation of a positive precariousness that consists of an unburdening – in keeping with the famous statement made by Douglas Huebler that the world is already full of objects and that he doesn't wish to add any more.

c. Blurring: The Indiscernible

In a number of photo series, notably in the *jpegs*, Thomas Ruff outlines a typology of blurring: *jpeg bb01 (Bagdad Bombing)* (2004) shows an aerial view of an arid zone dotted with buildings connected by roads. The title indicates that we are dealing with the war in Iraq, and that the irregularities in the terrain are bomb craters. The dimensions of the photo (188 x 311 cm) reveal the pixels that make up the image taken from the Internet, as the title suggests: everything is enunciated, but everything is blurred. In the *Substrat* series,

Ruff blows up the original document to the point of abstraction, while on the other hand, in a collection of photos of pornographic scenes, the original image is only slightly veiled. The aesthetic of the permanent zoom: reality is mediated by the Internet, then mediated again by the blow-up. Like with Kelley Walker, the image is presented in an instable, precarious state: it is no longer a matter of framing, but a question of the distance that is taken with regard to the object. The work of Wolfgang Tillmans is also influenced by the issue of focus: *Freischwimmer #82* (2005) is an abstract photo (we will call it that for convenience's sake, because of our doubt about its 'identity'), which at his exhibitions hangs side by side with life-size pictures or close-ups of still lives. What is striking about these few examples is not the nature of the images, but the total equivalence that these artists establish between the different modalities of 'making visible'. The world that they depict is indiscernible and already pixellated from the outset.

In the works of Mike Kelley, blurring is an indication of a displacement of signs: the *mise-en-scène* of the formless is blurred in works such as *Framed and Frame ...* (1999): the colours are applied on the sculpture (with paint from a spray can) so that they do not coincide with the form that they cover. There is an underlying project: as Kelley explains: 'The meaning is confused spatiality, framed.' The meaning is blurred because it results from a displacement.

Ethics of Non-Finitude: The Precarious Politics of Art

The social body as it appears in contemporary art production does not constitute an organic whole that needs to be changed from the bottom up, as was the case with the framework of modernist dramaturgy, but a disparate collection of structures, institutions and social practices that can be detached from one another and that differ from one society to the next. For late twentieth-century artists, the social body is divided into lobbies, quotas or communities: it is a catalogue of narrative frameworks surmounted by tools for home production (home technology) or professional production. In short, what we traditionally call reality is in fact a simple montage. On the basis of that conclusion, the aesthetic challenge of contemporary art resides in recomposing that montage: art is an editing computer that enables us to realize alternative, temporary versions of reality with the same material (everyday life). Thus, contemporary art presents itself as an editing console that manipulates social forms, reorganizes them and incorporates them in original scenarios, deconstructing the script on which their illusory legitimacy was grounded. The artist de-programmes in order to re-programme, suggesting that there are other possible usages for techniques, tools and spaces at our disposition. The cultural or social structures in which we live are nothing more for art than items of clothing that we should slip into, objects that must be examined and put to the test. It is a

question of *postproducing* social reality or, in other words, of confirming, in a negative form, its ontologically precarious nature.⁸

8. See Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction* (New York: Sternberg Press, 2002).

That, to my mind, is the essential content (beyond the anecdotal) of the political programme of contemporary art: *maintaining the world in a precarious state* or, in other words, permanently affirming the transitory, circumstantial nature of the institutions that partition the state and of the rules that govern individual or collective behaviour. The main function of the instruments of communication of capitalism is to repeat a message: we live in a finite, immovable and definitive political framework, only the decor must change at high speed. The relational scale models of Pierre Huyghe or Liam Gillick, the videos of Doug Aitken and the sign linkages of Kelley Walker each in their own way present the reverse postulate: the world in which we live is a pure construct, a *mise-en-scène*, a montage, a composition, a story and it is the function of art to analyse and re-narrate it, and adapt it in images or by any other means. Rancière arrives at a similar conclusion when he writes that ‘the relation between art and politics [is not] a passage from fiction to reality, but a relation between two ways of making fiction.’⁹

9. Rancière, *Le spectateur émancipé*, op. cit. (note 2), 84.

Thus, the political substratum of contemporary art is not a denunciation of the ‘political’ circumstances that are immanent to actuality, but the persistence of a gesture: spread the precarious almost everywhere, keep the idea of

artifice alive and productive, undermine all the material and immaterial edifices that constitute our decor. It is because our social reality has proven to be artificial that we can envisage to change it; and contemporary art, as a producer of representations and counter models that subvert this reality by exposing its intrinsic fragility, also encompasses a political programme that is much more effective (in the sense that it generates real effects) and ambitious (insofar as it refers to every aspect of political reality) than all the messages and slogans it uses to comment on daily events.

Opening those channels of speech that are ‘blocked’ by the media, inventing alternative modes of sociability, creating or recreating connections between distant signs, representing the abstractions of global capitalism through concrete singularities: just as many precarious constructions with incendiary effects that today open avenues to a truly political art.

Kelley Walker, *Schema; Aquafresh plus Crest with Whitening Expressions (Trina)*, 2006. © The Saatchi Gallery



Jan Verwoert

I Can, I Can't,
Who Cares?

From a personally felt necessity, Jan Verwoert calls on artists to search for a new form of ethics in this pamphlet-like text. An ethics that makes it possible to adopt a different position concerning the current demand to perform that characterizes

today's culture. Acknowledging that you care about something makes it easier to make conscious decisions about whether or not you want to participate.

How can we address the current changes in our societies and lives? Some have said that we have come to inhabit the post-industrial condition. But what could that mean? One thing seems to be sure: after the disappearance of factory work from the lives of most people in the Western world, we have entered into a culture where we no longer just work, we perform. We need to perform because to do so is what is asked of us. If we choose to make our living on the basis of doing what we want to do, we need to get our act together, we need to get things done, everywhere and at any time. Are you ready? I ask you and I am sure that you will be as ready as you will ever be to perform, do things and go places.

Who are we? This group is ever expanding. It is us, the creative types who have created jobs for ourselves by exploring and exploiting our talents to perform small artistic and intellectual miracles. It is us, the socially engaged who create communal spaces for others and ourselves by performing the roles of interlocutors in and facilitators or instigators of processes of social exchange. When we perform we create concepts and ideas as well as social bonds and forms of communication and communality. Thereby we create the values that our society is supposed to be based on today. The Deutsche Bank currently sums up its company philosophy in a simple slogan (formulated in a symptomatically a-grammatical international English): *A Passion to Perform* (you have a passion *for* something but never *to* realize an end through actions, the

wisdom of grammar). So which side of the barricades are we on then? Where do the barricades stand today, anyway? We are the avant-garde, but we are also the job slaves. We serve the customers who consume the communication and sociability that we produce. We work in the kitchens and call centres of the newly opened restaurants and companies of the prospectively burgeoning new urban centres of the service society. To offer our services we are willing to travel. Being mobile is part of our performance. So we travel, we go west to work, we go north to work, we are all around, we fix the minds, houses and cars of those who stay in their offices. What do we feel about ourselves and our lives? Are we happy? Are we in charge? What pain and what pleasure are we experiencing in the lives we have created for ourselves?

I Can't

What would it mean to put up resistance against a social order in which performativity has become a growing demand, if not the norm? What would it mean to resist the need to perform? Is 'resistance' even a concept that would be useful to evoke in this context? After all, the forms of resistance we know are in fact usually dramatic performances themselves. Or maybe we should consider other, more subtle forms of not performing, of staging, as the Slovakian conceptual artist Julius Koller called them, 'anti-happenings'. What silent but effective forms of unwillingness, non-compliance, uncooperativeness, reluctance or non-alignment do we find in

contemporary culture when it comes to inventing ways to not perform how and when you are asked to perform?

Can we ever embrace these forms of non-performance in art and thinking as forms of art and thinking? Or will we always find ourselves on the other side of the barricade, with the performers and those who want to get things done and get enraged by people who stand in their way by being slow, sluggish and uncooperative? After all, is not uncooperativeness the revenge uncreative people take on the society of the creative by stubbornly stopping it in its tracks? Have you ever found yourself screaming (or wanting to scream) at an uncooperative clerk behind a counter: 'I haven't got time for this' – only to realize that, yes, he has time for this, an entire lifetime dedicated to the project of stopping other people from getting things done? These people work hard to protect society from change by inventing ever new subtle ways to stop those in their tracks who want to revolutionize it. Are they the enemy? Or are they today maybe the strongest allies you can find if you want to put up defences against a culture of compulsive performativity?

But does it have to take other people to make you stop performing? When and how do you give up on the demand and need to perform? What could make you utter the magic words 'I can't'? Does it take a breakdown to stop you? Do the words 'I can't' already imply the acknowledgment of a breakdown, a failure to perform, a failure that would not be justifiable if your body didn't authenticate your

inability by physically stopping you? How could we restore dignity to the 'I can't'? What ways of living and acting out the 'I can't' do we find in art and music? Was that not what Punk, for instance, was all about? To transgress your (musical) capacities by rigorously embracing your incapacities? To rise above demands by frustrating all expectations? When the Sex Pistols were on one of their last gigs, when it was practically all over already and the band simply could no longer get their act together, Johnny Rotten turned to the audience and asked: 'Do you ever feel you have been cheated?' Would that be a question to rephrase today? If so, how? There are ways of confronting people with the 'I can't' that put it right in their face. But maybe there are also other means of making the 'I can't' part of a work, of putting it to work, means that art and poetry have always used, namely by creating moments where meaning remains latent. To embrace latency goes against the grain of the logic of compulsive performativity because it is all about leaving things unsaid, unshown, unrevealed, it is about refraining from actualizing and thereby exhausting all your potentials in the moment of your performance. We have to re-think and learn to re-experience the beauty of latency.

What Is the Time?

Performance is all about the right timing. A comedian with a bad sense of timing is not funny, a musician useless. Career opportunities, we are told, are all about being in the right place at the

right time. Finding a lover to love may also be. Is there a right time for love? Stressed out, overworked couples are advised these days to reserve 'quality time' for each other to prevent their relationship from losing its substance. What is quality time? 'Is it a good time for you to talk?' people ask when they reach you on your mobile. When is a good time to talk? We live and work in economies based on the concept of 'just in-time-production' and 'just in time' usually means things have to be ready in no time at all, urgency is the norm. 'I haven't got time for this!' the just-in-time producer will shout at you when you are not on time and make him wait.

To be in synch with the timing of just-in-time production you have to be ready to perform all the time. This is the question you must be prepared to answer positively: Are you ready? Always. Ready when you are. As ready as I will ever be. Always up for it. Stay on the scene. Porn is pure performance. Impotence is out of the question. 'Get on the fucking block and fuck!' is the formula for getting things done. Frances Stark recently quoted it to me when we talked about the culture of performance. She got the sentence from Henry Miller and included it in one of her collages.

What happens when there is a lapse of time, when time is out of joint? Are we not living in times now when time is always radically disjointed as the 'developed' countries of the first world push ahead into a science-fiction economy of dematerialized labour and virtual capital? While at the same

time pushing the 'developing' countries centuries back in time by outsourcing work to them and thereby also imposing working conditions on them that basically date back to the days of early industrialization? Sometimes the time gap doesn't even have to span centuries, it might be just years, as in some of the countries of the former Eastern Bloc (like Poland for instance) are rapidly catching up to the speed of advanced capitalism, but still not fast enough. Migrant workers bridge this gap in time. They travel ahead in time to work in the fast cities of the West and North. Yet they face the risk of any time traveller as they lose touch with the time that passes while they are away. Will they ever find their way back into their time or learn to inhabit the new time of the other country? How many time zones can you inhabit? Who is to set the clock and make the pace according to which all others are measuring their progress? 'Que hora son en Washington?' sings Manu Chao and it may very well be the crucial political question of this moment.

I Can

But would to embrace the 'I can't' mean to vilify the 'I can'? Why would we ever want to do that? After all, the joy of art, writing and performing freely lies in the realization that you can, a sense of empowerment through creativity that in ecstatic moments of creative performance can flood your body with the force of an adrenaline rush. And then living out the 'I can' is not just a cheap thrill. To face up to your own potential

might be one of the most challenging tasks of your life if not even your responsibility. Giorgio Agamben speaks about the pleasure and terror of the 'I can' in this way. He refers to an account by the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova who describes how it came about that she became a writer. Standing outside a Leningrad prison in 1930 where her son was a political prisoner, another woman whose son was also imprisoned, asked her: Can you write about this? She found that she had to respond that yes, indeed she could and in this moment found herself both empowered and indebted.

Today it seems most crucial to really understand this link between the empowerment and the debt at the heart of the experience of creative performance. In what way are we always already indebted to others when we perform? In what way is it precisely this indebtedness to others that enables us to perform in the first place? Could an ethics of a different type of performance – one that acknowledges the debt to the other instead of overruling it hectically to improve the efficacy of performance – be developed on the basis of this understanding? How could we perform differently? Freely? In his film *Teorema* Pasolini draws up a scenario of unleashed performativity. A factory owner hands over the factory to the workers. His obligations to work have thereby come to an end. A young man arrives at the villa of the factory owner, he has no personality or features except for the fact that he is a charming lover. He sleeps with all of the members of the family and leaves

again. Disconnected from work and freed by love, all of the family members start to perform: The son acknowledges he is gay and becomes a painter. The daughter decides to never move nor speak again. The mother cruises the streets and sleeps with strangers. The housemaid decides to not commit suicide, instead she becomes a saint, starts to levitate and cure sick children. The factory owner himself decides to take his clothes off in the main train station and walk off into a nearby volcano. None of these actions are commented upon and they are presented as all having the same value as they are equally possible and the possibility of each of these performances does not equalize or relativize the possibility of any other. Pasolini thus describes a situation where the end of work and the arrival of love create the possibility for a radical coexistence and co-presence of liberated performances that are not forced under the yoke of any single dominant imperative to perform in a particular way. How could we create and inhabit such a condition of undisciplined performativity?

Who Cares?

To recognize the indebtedness to the other as that which empowers performance also means to acknowledge the importance of care. You perform because you care. When you care for someone or something this care enables you to act because you feel that you must act, not least because when you really care to not act is out of the question. In conversation Annika

Eriksson recently summed this point up by saying that, as a mother, when your child is in need of you 'there is no no'. You have to be able to act and react and you will find that 'you can' even if you thought you couldn't. Paradoxically though, the 'I care' can generate the 'I can', but it can also radically delimit it. Because when you care for yourself and others, this obligation might in fact force you to turn down offers to work and perform for others, in other places, on other occasions. When the need to take care of your friends, family, children or lover comes between you and the demand to perform, to profess the 'I can't' (work now, come to the event . . .) may then be the only justified way to show that you care. Likewise, the recognition that you are exhausting yourself and need to take care of yourself can constitute a reason to turn down an offer to perform and utter the 'I can't'. So both the 'I can' and the 'I can't' may originate from the 'I care'. The 'I care' is the question of welfare. In the historical moment of the dismantling of the welfare state this is a pressing question. In a talk Jimmy Durham cited two people he had met in Italy as saying: 'We are liberated. What we need now is a better life.' Maybe this is indeed the question: How do we want to deal with the potential of living life caring for yourself and others by negotiating the freedom and demands of the 'I can' and 'I can't' in a way that would make another form, another ethics, another attitude to creative and social performance possible?

Brett Neilson
and Ned Rossiter

Precarity as a
Political Concept

*New Forms of
Connection,
Subjectivation
and Organization*

The emergence
of precarity as
an object of
academic analysis
corresponds with
its decline as a
political concept
motivating social
movement activ-

ity, according to
Brett Neilson and
Ned Rossiter.

But precarity as
an experience has
not disappeared.

By interrelating
its various regis-
ters and bounda-
ries, precarity can
be seen as an
aspect of a
common space.

In 2003, the concept of precarity emerged as the central organizing platform for a series of social struggles that would spread across the space of Europe. Four years later, almost as suddenly as the precarity movement appeared, so it would enter into crisis. To understand precarity as a political concept it is necessary to go beyond economic approaches that see social conditions determined by the mode of production. Such a move requires us to see Fordism as exception and precarity as the norm. The political concept and practice of translation enables us to frame the precarity of creative labour in a broader historical and geographical perspective, shedding light on its contestation and relation to the concept of the common. Our interest is in the potential for novel forms of connection, subjectivization and political organization. Such processes of translation are themselves inherently precarious, transborder undertakings.

What Was Precarity?

There is by now a considerable body of research, in both academic and activist idioms, that confronts the prevalence of contingent, flexible or precarious employment in contemporary societies. Encompassing at once sociological and ethnographic studies as well as incorporating some of the most innovative theoretical work being produced in Italy and France, there is little doubt that research on this topic has gathered pace. Yet it is also the case that the critique surrounding precarity, to use the English language neologism, has already enjoyed quite

rigorous intellectual debate, particularly in online, open-access publications that carry nothing like the intellectual property arrangements or impact factors of most prestigious scholarly journals. We have in mind the materials published in venues such as *Mute*, *Fibreculture Journal* and *ephemera: theory & politics in organization*, not to mention the prodigious writing on the topic in non-English language journals such as *Multitudes* and *Posse*.

The debate that unfolded in these contexts was often fractious but, in retrospect, we can identify some common elements. At base was an attempt to identify or imagine precarious, contingent or flexible workers as a new kind of political subject, replete with their own forms of collective organization and modes of expression. In some cases, for instance among groups such as Chainworkers or Molleindustria working out of Milan, this involved an effort to mobilize youth with little political experience through striking works of graphic and web design as well as publicity stunts at fashion parades, in supermarkets and the like. But the question of precarity remained a serious issue that, in its theoretical and political conception, would extend well beyond young people employed in the creative or new media sectors. In its most ambitious formulation it would encompass not only the condition of precarious workers but a more general existential state, understood at once as a source of 'political subjection, of economic exploitation and of opportunities to be grasped'.¹ Not only the disappear-

1. Maurizio Lazzarato, 'The Political Form of Coordination', *transversal* (2004), <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0707/lazzarato/en>.

ance of stable jobs but also the questions of housing, debt, welfare provision and the availability of time for building affective personal relations would become aspects of precarity. Life itself was declared a resource put to work and there emerged demands for a *social wage* or *citizen's income* that would compensate subjects for the contribution made by their communicative capacities, adaptive abilities and affective relations to the general social wealth. This led to a further series of debates regarding the status of non-citizen migrants as precarious workers.² Related to this was the question of the gendered nature of precarious work. Groups such as the Madrid based *Precarias a la deriva* began to focus their research and politics on the affective labour of female migrant care workers.³ Others began to approach precarity as an experience of 'embodied capitalism'.⁴ Others again drifted towards investigating the transformations to the university and related issues of 'cognitive capitalism'.⁵

Doubtless this is an idiosyncratic and selective memory of the debates sparked by the European precarity movement. We find it important to remember these antecedents not simply because they

predate the growing scholarly interest in precarious labour. Nor is our own involvement with some of these initiatives the sole determining factor for this account. It is well known that academic work suffers from a time-lag and it would be disingenuous to claim that this disqualifies its validity or political effect. In the case of the debates concerning precarity, however, the period of this lag coincides with the demise of this concept as a platform for radical political activity, at least in the European context. To register this tendency it is sufficient to recall the fate of the EuroMayDay protests. This annual day of action against precarity, which began in Milan in 2001 and spread to 18 European cities by 2005, had entered a crisis by 2006. Similarly, militant research groups linked to the EuroMayDay process, such as the European Ring for Collaborative Research on Precariousness, Creation of Subjectivity and New Conflicts, had reached conceptual impasses and begun to fragment across this same period.

Whether we are witnessing the untimely exhaustion of a political process or its timely absorption into official policy circles, the point we want to make remains the same. The emergence of precarity as an object of academic analysis corresponds with its decline as a political concept motivating social movement activity. For us, however, this observation has to be qualified, not least because our own global trajectories (in and out of Europe through Australia and China) alert us to wider applications of the concept, or, perhaps more accurately, wider instances of its dif-

2. Agir ensemble contre le chômage, 'Precarity and Migration' (2004), <http://www.ac.eu.org/spip.php?article734>.

3. Precarias a la deriva, 'Bodies, Lies and Video Tape: Between the Logic of Security and the Logic of Care' (2005), <http://www.sindominio.net/karakola/precarias/cuidados/bodies-liesandvideo.htm>.

4. Vassilis Tsianos and Dimitris Papadopoulos, 'Who's Afraid of Immaterial Workers? Embodied Capitalism, Precarity, Imperceptibility' (2006), <http://www.preclab.net/text/06-TsianosPapado-Precarity.pdf>.

5. See edu-factory collective (eds), *L'università globale* (Roma: Manifestolibri, 2008), <http://edu-factory.org> and Carlo Vercellone (ed.), *Capitalismo cognitivo: Conoscenza e finanza nell'epoca postfordista* (Roma: Manifestolibri, 2006).

faculty in gaining traction as means of organizing radical political activity.

In Australia, the 2005 conservative government labour reforms known as Work Choices brought job security to the forefront of official political debate, contributing to the electoral defeat of this same government in late 2007. But the concept of precarity did not feature in the many debates and campaigns, which frequently highlighted economic and existential experiences of risk and uncertainty. If one compares Italy, where, in 2006, the Democratici di Sinistra (DS) campaigned against Berlusconi under the slogan 'Oggi precarietà, domani lavoro' (Today precarity, tomorrow work), the difference is marked. Likewise, in China, where we have both been involved in critical research concerning, among other issues, labour conditions in the creative industries, the concept of precarity has not figured largely.⁶

While it might accurately describe the work conditions of internal Chinese migrants who fuel the growth in this sector, and has been used by Hong Kong based academics and labour organizers to describe the working lives of female migrants in the Shenzhen special economic zone, it was decidedly absent from the discourses surrounding creative labour

6. A project in Beijing that we participated in during the summer of 2007 began to investigate conditions and practices overlooked in studies and policy on the creative industries. As a counter-mapping of creative industries, this transdisciplinary project foregrounded practices of collaborative constitution that registered the 'constitutive outside' of creative industries (<http://orgnets.net>). Material from this project was published in a bi-lingual issue of *Urban China* (2008) magazine.

7. It may seem unusual to connect migrant workers with the creative industries; however, in the case of China (if not elsewhere), migrant labour supplies the creative industries with its primary economy: real-estate speculation predicated on the rapid construction of buildings

in the city where we conducted our research, Beijing.⁷

and infrastructure made possible by cheap migrant labour.

At stake here is something more than differences in language, expression or the limited uptake of travelling theories. The brief emergence of precarity as a platform for political movements in Western Europe has to do with the relative longevity, in this context, of social state models in the face of neoliberal labour reforms. Precarity appears as an irregular phenomenon only when set against a Fordist or Keynesian norm. To this we can add other factors, such as the overproduction of university graduates in Europe or the rise of China and India as economic 'superpowers' in which skilled work can be performed at lower cost. But the point remains. If we look at capitalism in a wider historical and geographical scope, it is precarity that is the norm and not Fordist economic organization. Thus in regulatory contexts where the social state has maintained less grip, and here neoliberal Britain is a case in point, precarity has not seemed an exceptional condition that can spark social antagonism. To understand precarity as a political concept we must revisit the whole Fordist episode, its modes of labour organization, welfare support, technological innovation and political contestation. Far from the talk of 'neoliberalism as exception',⁸ a deep political consideration of the concept of precarity requires us to see Fordism as exception.

8. See Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Sovereignty and Citizenship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

**OGGI
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Networks, Migrant Labour and the Invention of New Institutions

In an earlier article, we worried that the European precarity movement, in some of its manifestations, tended to address the state as an institution that might resolve the problems of security at work.⁹ This was implicit in many demands for the social wage or measures of *flexibility*. Who, we asked, might finance such initiatives if not the state or some federation of states? It could be taken as a given that such welfare assistance was not assumed of the private sector. At the time, our concern was that such appeals might play into the securitization of state discourses and political language that was one of the hallmarks of the first half of the present decade. We were interested in the effects of a possible convergence between precarity at work and the ontological precariousness that Judith Butler associates with the vulnerability and susceptibility to injury of the human animal.¹⁰ Now we want to extend this argument further by rethinking the vexed relation between capital and the state. This is not simply because the redirection of public investment to the security industries following the dot.com crash of April 2000 is a tendency by now fully played out. Nor is it because the global economy is currently absorbing the effects of a credit crisis based on subprime lending to those with precarious

9. Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter, 'From Precarity to Precariousness and Back Again: Labour, Life and Unstable Networks', *Fibre-culture Journal* 5 (2005), http://journal.fibre-culture.org/issue/5/neilson_rossiter.html.

10. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004).

housing circumstances, just as the corporate absorption of new digital social networking technologies promises a second web boom. Our focus is on deeper shifts to the relation between the figures of the citizen and the worker.

Both the figures of the citizen and the worker have been invested by diffuse practices of multiplication and division.¹¹

Within the creative industries, regimes of intellectual property operate as an architecture of division: predominantly copyright in the cultural industries, but also patents that arise through technological innovation in the IT sector and trademarks in the advertising industry and its production of brands. McKenzie Wark considers the extension of intellectual property regimes with the advent of commercialized computer networks – what is generally understood as the Internet – to have produced a new class relation special to the information age.¹² The antagonism between 'hackers' and 'vectoralists' moves around a

11. See Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, 'Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor', *transversal* (2008), <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0608/mezzadranilson/en>.

12. McKenzie Wark, *A Hacker Manifesto* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

property relation. Hackers are producers of intellectual property. Such activity is predicated on the self-organization of labour and a value system of sharing that arises through social cooperation and an informational commons. Vectoralists, on the other hand, are understood by Wark as the ruling class of the 'vectoral society'. Their power is built around ownership and control of both the media of transmission and the information of expression. Intellectual property regimes will always divide the

experience of precarity between vectoralists and hackers. Precarity, while an ontological condition or experience that cuts across class and other divisions, can never (or, better, not alone) offer a new political subject or ‘common cause’, as Andrew Ross argued at the London School of Economics seminar from which this text derives.

Intellectual property, however, is not the only dividing factor. With division comes the possibility of multiplication. The informatization of social relations constitutes, as many commentators note, an intensification in processes of abstraction. The transnational nature of much work within information and knowledge economies is now well documented.¹³ That

labour in many instances should become unhinged from worker’s rights

13. See Biao Xiang, *Global ‘Body Shopping’: An Indian Labor System in the Information Technology Industry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

accorded to the citizen-subject is symptomatic of informatization (and hardly exclusive to it). Despite the increasing power of governance by supranational institutions, the nation-state and its legal organs retain a monopoly on the adjudication of rights, especially in the domains of labour and migration. While informational labour is typically carried out in the space of the nation (it also comprises modes of work in maritime and aviation industries), the conditions of employment and materiality of production frequently sever the citizen-worker relation. Short-term work visas granted to Indian programmers in the IT sector, for example, allow temporary migration to countries in need of high-skilled labour such as the

USA and Germany.¹⁴ Such governance of transnational labour and citizenship is

14. A. Aneesh, *Virtual Migration: The Programming of Globalization* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 32-40.

complemented by the materiality or technics of production which, in the case of informational labour, allows for the high-speed transmission of digital data. The structure of IT labour is flexible and typical of much post-Fordist work, in other words. The circumstances of labour in architecture offices located in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou would be other cases to consider among many.

The example of creative labour is one we find useful in elaborating the constitutive potential the practice of translation holds for political organization. As mentioned at the start of this essay and discussed below, the varied work of migrant labour – from the imported foreign expertise of programmers and architects to the multi-skilled capacities of the peasant farmer who becomes a construction worker and later a taxi driver – points to the highly diverse composition of precarity gathered around the sign of creative labour. How connection is built across these seeming social and class incommensurabilities is contingent upon translation. Again, we are not proposing a new political subject or common cause here. Rather, our emphasis is on translation as a social practice that brings differences into relation. To reduce labour within the creative industries to a separation between vectoralists and hackers is to attribute a determining role to the property relation at the expense of complex forces and conditions that vary across and within geocultural and affective spaces. The supposed

security afforded by intellectual property rights can thus be seen to contain its own element of uncertainty, beyond whether or not a potential commodity value is ever realized on the market. While dominant as a regulatory system of exchange within information economies, intellectual property regimes do not, in other words, offer much analytical insight into practices of translation within the creative industries. Nor do they tell us how the common is actively constructed through, and in spite of, social and political technologies of division and multiplication.

The recombinant nature of skills in the creative sectors, the necessary dependency on collaborative practice, both produces and is enabled by a common through which other registers of connection and relation are possible. Yet the common in itself offers no guarantees for collaboration. Non-collaboration may just as easily eventuate. Intellectual property regimes simultaneously constitute a technology of division and connection between hackers and vectoralists. But such regimes are just one among many barriers to collaboration and do not easily engender invention. Our argument is that unexpected forms of invention – primarily the instituting of networks – may arise from such constraints as a strategy of refusal. In the case of the hacker, such refusal takes the form of constructing an informational commons through peer-to-peer practices of collaborative constitution and self-organized labour. The transnational element of such practices makes it highly difficult, however, for the creative worker to claim any legal affinity with

the citizen-worker whose protection is sedimented in the state form of sovereign power. It's at this point that both connections and distinctions can be made between networks of hacker and migrant labour.

The potential for commonalities across labouring bodies is undoubtedly a complex and often fraught subjective and institutional process or formation. The fractured nature of working times, places and practices makes political organization highly difficult. Where this does happen, there are often ethnic affinities coalesced around specific sectors – here, we are thinking of examples such as the 'Justice for Janitors' movement in the USA, a largely Latino immigrant experience of self-organization.¹⁵

On the other hand, as Xiang Biao emphasizes in his study of Indian IT

15. See Florian Schneider, *Organizing the Unorganizable* (2002), http://wastun.org/v2v/Organizing_the_Unorganizable.

'body shop' workers in Sydney, Australia, the ethnicization of workforces is not necessarily based on pre-existing closely-knit networks based on cultural affinities, but increasingly predicated on processes of transnationalization and individualization that insert workers into the market as 'free atoms' in the neoclassical sense. The coexistence of seeming contradictions – cultural networks conjoined with processes of individualization – is indicative of the complex of forces that constitute the body of labour as a subject of struggle. In Hong Kong, domestic workers of diverse ethnic and national provenance gather on Sundays within non-spaces such as road flyovers, under pedestrian bridges and in public parks. The domes-

tics are female workers for the most part, initially from the Philippines with a new wave of workers in recent years from Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. And as cultural critic Helen Grace notes: 'There are also mainland migrant workers with limited rights, working in all sorts of low-paid jobs, moving backwards and forwards and living with great precarity.'¹⁶

16. Helen Grace, e-mail correspondence, 15 January 2008.

The domestic workers transform the status of social-ethnic borders by occupying spaces from which they are usually excluded due to the spatial and temporal constraints of labour. Sunday is the day off for domestic workers, and they don't want to stay at home, nor do their employers wish to have them about the house. The Norman Foster designed headquarters for HSBC bank located in the city's Central district nicely encapsulates the relation between domestic workers and capital and the disconnection between state and citizen. This bank is just one of many instances found globally where the corporate sector makes available public spaces in the constitution of so-called 'creative cities'. Yet the actions of undocumented workers mark a distinction from the entrepreneurial city and its inter-scalar strategies of capital accumulation in the form of property development and business, financial, IT and tourist services. With a first floor of public space, workers engage in praying and study groups reading the Koran, singing songs, labour organization, cutting hair and dancing while finance capital is transferred in floors above the floating ceiling of the HSBC bank. Used in innovative ways that conflict with or

at least depart from how these spaces usually function, there is a correspondence here with what Grace calls a 'horizontal monumentality', 'making highly visible – and public – a particular aspect of otherwise privatized labour and domestic space'.¹⁷

17. Helen Grace, 'Monuments and the Face of Time: Distortions of Scale and Asynchrony in Postcolonial Hong Kong', *Postcolonial Studies* 10.4 (2007), 469.

Not described in tourist guides and absent from policy and corporate narratives of entrepreneurial innovation and development, the domestic worker is a public without a discourse. For many Hong Kong residents their visibility is undesirable, yet these workers make a significant contribution to the city's imaginary: their visibility on Sundays signals that the lustre of entrepreneurialism is underpinned by highly insecure and low-paid forms of work performed by non-citizens. The domestic worker also instantiates less glamorous but nonetheless innovative forms of entrepreneurialism. An obvious example here consists of the small business initiatives such as restaurants, delis and small-scale repairs and manufacturing that some migrant workers go on to develop, making way for new intakes of domestic workers in the process and redefining the ethnic composition of the city. Such industriousness provides an important service to local residents and contributes in key ways to the sociocultural fabric of the city.

The competition for urban space – particularly the use of urban space – by the domestic worker also comprises an especially innovative act: the invention of a new institutional form, one that we call the 'organized network'.¹⁸ The tran-

snational dimension of the domestic workers is both external and internal. External, in their return home every year or two for a week or so – a passage determined by the time of labour and festivity (there is little need for domestics during the Chinese New Year). Internal, with respect to the composition of the group itself. In this case, there exists ‘a multiplicity of overlapping sites that are themselves internally heterogeneous’.¹⁹ Here, we are thinking of the borders of sociality that compose the gathering of domestics in one urban setting or another – as mentioned above, some choose to sing, engage in labour organization, hold study groups, etcetera. Ethnic and linguistic differences also underscore the internal borders of the group.

Can the example of domestic workers in Hong Kong be understood in terms of a transnational organized network? The domestics only meet at particular times and in specific spaces (Sunday in urban non-spaces). Such a form of localization obviously does not lend itself to transnational connection. Perhaps NGOs and social movements that rally around the conditions of domestic workers communicate within a transnational network of organizations engaged in similar advocacy work. But if this is the case, then we are speaking of a different register of subjectivity and labour – one defined by the option of expanded choice and self-determination. In this sense, we can identify a hierarchy of networks whose incommensurabilities are of a scalar

18. See Ned Rossiter, *Organized Networks: Media Theory, Creative Labour, New Institutions* (Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2006).

19. Mezzadra and Neilson, ‘Border as Method’, op. cit. (note 11).

nature: local as distinct from transnational. For domestic workers, much of this has to do with external conditions over which they have little control: Sunday is the day off work, exile from their country of origin is shaped by lack of economic options and the forces of global capital, their status as undocumented or temporary workers prevents equivalent freedom of movement and political rights afforded to Hong Kong citizens, and so on. But within these constraints, invention is possible.

Precarity, Translation and the Multiplicity of the Common

Precarity, situated in this transversal manner, is not exclusive to the human or human nature as such, but rather becomes an experience from which differential capacities and regimes of value emerge. If, as Boltanski and Chiapello argue, the demand for flexibility on the part of workers in the 1970s precedes the emergence of labour flexibility as an important form of post-Fordist control, this does not mean that precarity can be bound down to any single set of experiences, social situations, geographical sites or temporal rhythms.²⁰

One witnesses, in other words, a contest over the semiotic and insti-

20. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by G. Elliott (London: Verso, 2005).

tutional territory of precarity: the creative worker or activist in Europe, the migrant’s experience of labour and life, the CEO undergoing an existential crisis over repayments on a third holiday home, the policymaker’s or academic’s affiliation with a discursive meme, the

finance market whose fluctuations are shaped by undulating forces, etcetera. Played out over diverse and at times overlapping institutional fields, the sign and experience of precarity is multiplied across competing regimes of value: surplus value of precarious labour, scarcity value of intellectual property rights, cultural and social values of individual and group identities, legal and governmental values of border control, and so forth. The translation of precarity across these variables registers the movement of relations.

Let us be clear that we do not see precarity as furnishing a pre-given cause for contemporary labour struggles. In identifying this experience as the norm of capitalist production and reproduction, we do not propose that it can simply merge or sew together experiences of contingency, vulnerability and risk across different historical periods and geographical spaces. Nor do we see translation, even when posited as an interminable process, as a means of collapsing the variations of precarity into some stable, undivided subject position (the working class, the multitude, the precariat, etcetera). Translation can be a mode of articulation, but it is also something more than this. Clearly, translation has its scopes and limits. Nobody would deny that some forms of precarity cannot translate into others. But the deeper question concerns how this untranslatability is constituted. As Naoki Sakai notes, untranslatability ‘does not exist before translation: translation is the a priori of the untranslatable’.²¹

21. Naoki Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity: On 'Japan' and Cultural Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 6.

Only after translation has occurred can we sense what has been translated or transferred. So to identify the untranslatable we must continue to translate.

To think about translation as organization is to come to terms with this predicament. Only by continuing to translate can we discern the limits of translation, and only by operating within these limits can we distinguish the instituting of one network of relations from another. It is within these contours that we can discern the emergence of the common. What we term the organized network, or the instituting of sociotechnical forms, is predicated on transversal relations that remain contingent and precarious. The common is not given as a fragile heritage to be protected against the ravages of new forms of primitive accumulation and enclosure. Rather, it is something that must be actively constructed, and this construction involves the creation of ‘subjects in transit’.²²

22. See Ibid., and Sandro Mezzadra, ‘Living in Transition: Toward a Heterolingual Theory of the Multitude’, *transversal* (2007), <http://eipcp.net/transversal/1107/mezzadra/en>.

Let us take the example of taxi drivers, many of whom are from the Indian state of the Punjab, in the Australian city of Melbourne. In late April 2008, after one of these drivers had been near fatally stabbed in an apparently racist attack, approximately one thousand of these workers assembled to block one of the city’s major intersections for a period of 22 hours. They chanted, removed their shirts in the cold night weather, issued a set of demands to improve their safety and working conditions, refused the directions of police and the ministrations of government, attracted the media spot-

light, and caused massive traffic jams and public discontent. There are two things that interest us about this event.

First is how the difficulty experienced by police and government in dealing with the blockade surfaced in the claim that the drivers were not organized. 'They are not an organised group,' declared the relevant public transport minister Lynne Kosky, 'which is actually very difficult.' Presumably this meant that the group, which had gathered partly as the result of the circulation of SMS messages, was not organized as a trade union with recognizable spokespeople and negotiators. Inspector Steve Beith of the Victoria Police explained: 'There doesn't appear to be any structure or organizers. Every time we try to speak to anybody the shouting and the chants start. It's very difficult to hear what they're trying to say. There appears to be different groups with different organizers of those groups. It's very hard to work out who's who' (quoted in *Times of India*, 2008). It is precisely because the drivers did not organize along hierarchical or representative lines that their protest proved so baffling and threatening to the authorities. Clearly, the event was something other than a spontaneous uprising. It was not without 'structure or organizers'. Rather, the potency of the strike rested on its multiplicity and internal divisions, which remained illegible to the state but instituted a network of relations that, while precarious, brought the city to a halt.

The second thing that interests us about this taxi blockade is the fact that many of the drivers are also international university students. Because most of

these students are present in the country on visas that allow them to work only 20 hours a week, they are forced to survive by accepting illegal, dangerous and highly exploitative working conditions. The question thus arises as to whether the blockade should be read as taxi driver politics, migrant politics or student politics. We would suggest that one reason for the effectiveness of the strike (the government, which had only recently refused to negotiate with unions of teachers and health workers, ceded to the drivers' demands) is the fact that it is all three of these at the same time.

To analyse this event one really needs to consider the transversal relations between these different subject positions. From here proliferates a whole series of questions surrounding issues such as visa and residency regulations, border control, race relations, the structural dependence of the Australian higher education sector on international student fees, the increased precarity of academic labour in this same sector, the role of recruitment agencies in countries like India and China, their links to English language testing services, and so on. The organization of the event itself translates between these different issues and brings them into novel relation. It is not a matter of building lasting alliances between, say, taxi drivers, university students and migrants. Indeed, the very translation at play in the strike reveals untranslatable elements here. That participants in the blockade were simultaneously workers, students and migrants does not mean that these three groups, when constituted separately, share interests, social outlooks or experiences of precarity. Within

the moment of protest, however, political possibilities emerge. The organization and political creativity of these ‘subjects in transit’ institute new experiences of the common, which suddenly flash up in political space and then seemingly withdraw into a space of quiet suffering, remaining all the more threatening because they can only be known in, through and for their unpredictability.

The common, in this sense, refuses any straightforward transposition into state politics and cannot be confined within a single channel of political communication. This is not to say that the common, in all its possible manifestations, exists outside the ambit of the state. Nick Dyer-Witheford identifies differing moments in the circulation of the common.²³ These include: ‘*Terrestrial commons* (the customary sharing of natural resources in traditional societies); *planner commons* (for example, command socialism and the liberal democratic welfare state); and *networked commons* (the free associations [of] open source software, peer-to-peer networks, grid computing and the numerous other socializations of technoscience).’ The question is about how these multiple forms of the common come into relation. ‘A twenty-first century communism,’ Dyer-Witheford suggests, will involve their ‘complex unity’, but ‘the strategic and enabling point in this ensemble is the networked commons’, which depend on and even exist in ‘potential contradiction’ with ‘the other commons sectors’. When we talk about organized networks and the transversal but also often con-

23. Nick Dyer-Witheford, ‘The Circulation of the Common’ (2006), <http://www.geocities.com/immateriallabour/withefordpaper2006.html>.

flictual relations that compose them we have a similar vision in mind.

To return to our original remarks: we do not see such processes of composition and transposition as possible without struggle. In the current conjuncture there are struggles not just about the ownership but also about the most basic design and architecture of networks. Only in the context of these struggles do we believe it is possible to claim the organization of networks as the ‘strategic and enabling point’ in the construction of the common. To insert the moment of precarity into these struggles is not to claim that it alone is the concept or experience that translates across different struggles and enables political invention. Indeed, the overburdening of precarity, the expectation that it might bear the load of a common cause, is one reason for its rapid expiry within social movements. Any concept that so quickly monopolizes the political field is bound just as quickly to disappear, or, at least, to acquire merely academic connotations. The remedy to this situation is not necessarily an abandonment of the concept. Precarity as an experience is unlikely to go away. Rather, we have suggested a broadening of the debate and analytical perspective. By working through and across the differential registers and limits of precarity we can recognize that it is the norm – or an aspect of what we have been calling the common – and not the exception.

A longer version of this text is published in: Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter, ‘Precarity as a Political Concept, or, Fordism as Exception’ in: *Theory, Culture & Society* (2008), vol. 25, no. 7-8, 51-72.

Matteo
Pasquinelli

The Art of Ruins

*The Factory of
Culture through
the Crisis*

Now that the financial world seems to be collapsing, writer and researcher Matteo Pasquinelli thinks the time is ripe to think about how the creative city and its gentrification processes

will develop in the coming years. It's important that this debate goes beyond the position of the art scene and the cultural industry and that it includes the ruins that the immaterial accumulation of value has left behind.

The Underground of the Crisis

Political and artistic avant-gardes have always had an intimate relation with the *Zeitgeist* of the *crisis* and with the spaces and technologies that incarnate each paradigm shift. The most recent of the epochal turns has been the passage from industrialism to informationalism, that is the reorganization of the Fordist factory by digital networks. As Rebecca Solnit points out, the punk movement was precisely that form of life colonizing the suburban ruins that Fordism left behind in the Western world. ‘Coming of age in the heyday of punk, it was clear we were living at the end of something – of modernism, of the American dream, of the industrial economy, of a certain kind of urbanism. The evidence was all around us in the ruins of the cities . . . Urban ruins were the emblematic places for this era, the places that gave punk part of its aesthetic, and like most aesthetics this one contained an ethic, a worldview with a mandate on how to act, how to live . . . A city is built to resemble a conscious mind, a network that can calculate, administrate, manufacture. Ruins become the unconscious of a city, its memory, unknown, darkness, lost lands, and in this truly bring it to life . . . An urban ruin is a place that has fallen outside the economic life of the city, and it is in some way an ideal home for the art that also falls outside the ordinary production and consumption of the city.’¹

Coincidentally, in *A Grammar of the Multitude*, Paolo Virno as well marks the rise of post-Fordism (the new mode

of production centred on language) and the uprising of the new political subject of the multitude in the same year of the punk explosion: ‘Post-Fordism (and with it the multitude) appeared, in Italy, with the social unrest which is generally remembered as the “movement of 1977”.’²

Later on more subcultures and art movements continued to experiment and grow along the new infrastructures of production, along the invisible matrix of microchips and telecommunication networks, bringing the *information guerrilla* over the *information highways* and hijacking the language of the society of the spectacle itself. Today the financial and energy crisis changes the coordinates once again, revealing both the *energetic unconscious* beneath the Western economy and the abyss of *value speculation* beyond stock markets.

Where is the underground today? This ingenuous question is useful to condense a spatial disorientation specific to recent decades. If traditional avant-gardes have been growing along the ruptures and interstices opened by epochal transformations, which kind of ruins are the digital age and financial crisis going to leave behind? Which relics will be colonized in the near future? Instead of indulging in the rhetoric of the crisis or in a self-victimizing theory of ‘precarity’, it might be better to figure out from now on how to colonize those spaces afflicted by the crisis.

Contrary to what Solnit suggests, a ruin never falls ‘outside the economic life of the city’. Relics of a former economic

2. Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude. For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004).

1. Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (New York: Viking, 2005).

power, colonies of new forms of life, ruins are never a virgin territory.

The notion of the underground obviously belongs to the age of industrialism, when society had a clear class division and was not yet atomized into a multitude of precarious workers and free-lancers.³ The self-assuring spatial dimension of the underground seems somewhat nonsensical in an age of collaborative networks and among the well-educated ‘creative’ commons and Free Culture. What does it mean to be *underground*, when there is no longer an *outside*? However, despite the much celebrated *horizontal* cooperation, the autonomous production of culture feeds a *vertical* accumulation of value that emerges more clearly in the economy of contemporary cities. Apart from the culture industry, the art world and urban subcultures have been integrated in a more general *social factory* that provides, for instance, symbolic capital for processes of gentrification and real estate business. Between *creative industry* and *creative commons*, the chimera of the *creative cities* and their gentrification processes can represent case studies of new modes of production and zones of conflict yet to be explored.

From the ‘Artistic Mode of Production’ to the ‘Art of Rent’

The integration of the art world into the economy of global cities and specifically into gentrification processes is an old and widely covered phenomenon. Already in 1982, Sharon Zukin recog-

nized a specific *artistic mode of production* at work in New York: through the seductive power of the art scene, industrial buildings became attractive for newcomers and construction companies turned them into fashionable lofts. Zukin was quite clear about this passage from productive economy to financial speculation: ‘By an adroit manipulation of urban forms, the Artistic Mode of Production transfers urban space from the “old” world of industry to the “new” world of finance, or from the realm of productive economy to that of nonproductive economic activity.’⁴

In 1984, Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Ryan explained similar techniques of urban regeneration in their article ‘The Fine Art of Gentrification’, that furthermore pointed out how they were affecting the aesthetic canon itself.⁵

The renovation of the Lower East Side of Manhattan came together with a neo-expressionist wave and they recognized the exhibition ‘Minimalism to Expressionism’ at the Whitney Museum in 1983 as a key signal. According to Deutsche and Ryan the art scene of minimalism was more engaged and aware of the social context, while neo-expressionism was paving the way for yuppie individualism. After decades yuppies have turned into *bobos* and these localized tactics became a global strategy under the notorious label of ‘creative cities’. In East Berlin, for example, the gigantic project Media Spree is going to transform an area of 4 km along the

3. Rosalind Williams, *Notes on the Underground: An Essay on Technology, Society, and Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990).

4. Sharon Zukin, *Lofi Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).

5. Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara G. Ryan, ‘The Fine Art of Gentrification’, *October*, vol. 31, (Winter, 1984).

Spree River, renowned for its music and art underground, into a new district for global media corporations. Contrary to the basic understanding of ‘creative economy’ promoted by Richard Florida, the debate on gentrification shows at least how cultural production partakes in processes of financialization and speculation of material infrastructures.⁶

A new *art of rent* has overtaken the old *artistic mode of production*.

6. Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

To understand the new business models based on the exploitation of the immaterial commons it is useful to contextualize the role of the art scene within the history of gentrification theory. Neil Smith was the first to introduce gentrification as the new fault line between social classes in his seminal book *The New Urban Frontier*.⁷ However, he describes the gentrification of New York principally through the notion of *rent gap*: the circulation of a differential of ground value across the city triggers speculation when such a value gap is profitable enough in a specific area. David Harvey expanded the theory of rent to include the collective production of culture as a terrain the market needs to get new marks of distinctions for its commodities. In his influential essay ‘The Art of Rent’, Harvey introduces the notion of *collective symbolic capital* to explain the gentrification of Barcelona. Here the fortune of the real estate business is rooted in the cultural capital which the city has been gradually sedimenting thanks to its

7. Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier. Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (New York/London: Routledge, 1996).

sociality, tolerance, artistic movements, gastronomic traditions, natural heritage, etcetera.⁸ Harvey’s notion of collective symbolic capital underlines for the first time a political *asymmetry* around the acclaimed cultural commons: the intangible assets of culture are linked to profit accumulation along the parasitic relation of *rent* and not through the regime of intellectual property.

8. David Harvey, ‘The Art of Rent: Globalization and the Commodification of Culture’, in: *Spaces of Capital* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

Commons Incorporated, or the ‘Communism of the Capital’

The notion of collective symbolic capital shows the asymmetric vectors through which a very material economy exploits cultural production. While a mainstream debate is hypnotized by the issue of *intellectual property* and the opposition copyright/copyleft, cultural commons themselves are peacefully integrated in flows of *material production* and *value accumulation*. What gentrification simply reveals are the new rent techniques over the commons on a city scale. Besides the corporate offensive on copyright, there are also business models that exploit cultural capital with no need for dramatic enclosures – a sort of *capitalism without intellectual property* that many activists of Free Culture refuse to recognize. Someone calls it: *wikinomics*.⁹ I prefer: *Commons Incorporated*.

9. Don Tapscott and Anthony D. Williams, *Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything* (New York, Portfolio, 2006).

Long before the bailouts that *de facto* nationalized Western banks to rescue them from the 2008 credit bubble, Virno

introduced the idea of an emerging *communism of capital*. Post-Fordism ‘incorporated, and rewrote in its own way, some aspects of the socialist experience’ and in particular the collective dimension of cultural production. He writes: ‘The metamorphosis of social systems in the West, during the 1980s and 1990s, can be synthesized in a more pertinent manner with the expression: communism of capital . . . Post-Fordism, hinging as it does upon the general intellect and the multitude, puts forth, *in its own way*, typical demands of communism (abolition of work, dissolution of the State, etc.)’¹⁰

Gentrification is only one of the many cases of a value chain generated by the *general intellect* of the art world, urban subcultures and digital networks. Free Software, for instance, helps IBM and other corporations to sell more proprietary hardware. File-sharing networks sabotaged the music industry and its copyright regime, but at the same time gave life to a new generation of fashionable devices, like iPods, and to the MP3 market, too. Contrary to the cheap interpretation of Free Culture inspired by Lawrence Lessig and Yochai Benkler (‘information is nonrival’),¹¹

the commons of culture are never an independent domain of pure cooperation and autonomy, they instead constantly fall subject to the force field of capitalism. The ‘communism of capital’ is then not merely exploiting the creative

10. Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, op. cit. (note 2).

11. Lawrence Lessig, *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity* (New York: Penguin, 2004); Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

talents of the multitudes, but has established a whole fictional commonality that hides the material and conflictual roots of value. In European ‘creative cities’ artists and activists complain about gentrification driven by cultural capital, but no exit strategy can be envisaged until the debate is hypnotized by the issue of *intellectual property* rather than *value production*.

The Ruins of the Unsustainable as the New Frontier

Art underground and urban subcultures made fertile again the massive spaces and urban areas that Fordism left behind. After cultivating a workforce of precarious and freelance workers, what kind of ruins is post-Fordism preparing for the post-financial age? Google data centres storing petabytes of 404-not-found pages? Carcasses of computers and LCD screens, dumping grounds of iPods and mobile phones? Shards of dismembered social networks? Behind any digital and culture commons the barbaric shadow of value crisis is looming. Referring specifically to a new wave of urbanism as a response to the crisis, Bruce Sterling has predicted for 2009 ‘the ruins of the unsustainable as the new frontier’.¹² The gentrification of the ‘creative cities’ is likely to come to a halt and slide back into the spectre of *degentrification*. In the scenario of financial crisis, is it possible to imagine a role for aesthetic and cultural production outside the net of the corporate parasites as well as outside the cages of

12. Bruce Sterling, ‘State of the World 2009’, *Beyond the Beyond*, 2 January 2009, <http://blog.wired.com/sterling/2009/01/bruce-sterlings.html>.

the museum and its ‘art activism’?

The factory of culture is described today mainly by the horizontal (apparently flat and immaculate) plateau of the cultural commons. Nevertheless this dimension is always crossed by the vertical axis of value. The positive vertical of the surplus-value extracts and accumulates profit from the horizontal plane through intellectual property, monopoly rent and gentrification techniques. On the other side, the negative vertical is the incarnation of the *negative surplus*, that is, the multitude of precarious workers and artists that compose the culture industry and produce value. Here finally we find the underground – underneath the ‘commons’!

The coordinates of artistic and political practice in the age of cognitive and financial capitalism must be found along these intangible vectors of value, reclaiming autonomous and productive spaces against the material ruins of the Creative City rather than contemplating the reassuring identity of the precarious workers. As the punk underground grew out of the ruins of the suburban factories and cyberpunk along the first precarious Internet connections, it is time to imagine the factory of culture entering the ruins of the surplus-value that the fall of financial Babel are about to leave behind.

Sonja Lavaert and Pascal Gielen

The Dismasure of Art

An interview with Paolo Virno

In his home town Rome, Italian philosopher Paolo Virno talks with philosopher Sonja Lavaert and sociologist Pascal Gielen about the relation between creativity and today's economics, and about exploitation and possible forms of resistance. Virno is known for his analysis of post-Fordism; his view that the disproportion of artistic standards runs parallel to communism, however, is new to the philosophy of art. He believes aesthetics and social resistance meet in a quest for new forms. Political art or not, the contents hardly matter.

The art world has displayed an avid interest in your work over the past few years; we ourselves are here to interview you for an art magazine. Yet you've hardly written anything explicitly about art. Where do you think this interest in your work comes from?

It's true. I sometimes get invited to talk about art at conferences or seminars organized by art academies and that always embarrasses me a little, as if there has been some mistake, because my knowledge of modern art is actually very limited. I think that people involved in art being interested in my work has something to do with a concept I use, namely 'virtuosity'. In my opinion, this concept is the common ground between my political and philosophical reflection and the field of art. Virtuosity happens to the artist or performer who, after performing, does not leave a work of art behind. I have used the experience of the performing, virtuoso artist not so much to make statements about art, but rather to indicate what is typical of political action in general. Political action does not produce objects. It is an activity that does not result in an autonomous object. What strikes me is that today work, and not just work for a publishing company, for television or for a newspaper, but all present-day work, including the work done in the Volkswagen factory, or at Fiat or Renault, tends to be an activity that does not result in an autonomous 'work', in a produced object. Of course the Volkswagen factory cranks out cars, but this is entirely subject to a system of automatic mechanized labour, while the duties of the individual Volkswagen factory workers consist of communication that leaves no objects behind: of this type of virtuoso activity. I see virtuosity as a model for post-Fordist work in general. And there is more: what strikes me is that the earliest type of virtuosity, the one that precedes all others, precedes the dance, the concert, the actor's performance and so on, is typically the activity of our human kind, namely the use of language. Using human language is an activity that does not result in any autonomous and remaining 'work'; it does not end in a material result, and this is the lesson De Saussure, Chomsky and Wittgenstein taught. Post-Fordist work is virtuoso and it became virtuoso when it became linguistic and communicative.

What do I think about art? The only art of which I have a more than superficial knowledge is modern and contemporary poetry. I think that the experience of avant-garde art including poetry in the 20th century is one of disproportion and of 'excess', of lack of moderation. Great 20th-century avant-garde art – and poetry in particular – from Celan to Brecht and Montale, has demonstrated

the crisis of experiential units of measure. It is as if the platinum metre bar kept in Paris to define the standard length of a metre suddenly measured 90 or 110 centimetres. This emphasis on immoderation, disproportion and the crisis in units of measure is to be credited greatly to avant-garde art and this is also where it edges up to communism. With regard to the crisis of measure, art is a lot like communism.

Only poetry, or other art as well?

Art in general, I expect, but I know poetry best. It is about disproportion. In addition to explaining the crisis, poetry wants to find new standards of measure and proportion. Along the same lines the major Italian poet and critic Franco Fortini has said that there is an objective common ground between avant-garde art and poetry and the communist movement – and I do not use the term ‘communist’ in the sense of actual socialism. What’s more, I consider actual socialism as interpreted within the communist party and the Soviet Union as communism’s worst enemy.

This emphasis on the disproportion or crisis of units of measure is present in the communist movement and they are looking for new criteria, too. The experience of the artist-performer can provide us with a general post-Fordist model.

What do you mean by ‘crisis of the unit of measure’?

It is as if the metre, the standard set to measure cognitive and affective experience, no longer works. We see the same crisis in the fields of politics and history: social prosperity is no longer produced by labour time, but by knowledge, by a general knowing, by ‘general intellect’, and as a result social prosperity and labour time are no longer directly connected. The new standard to measure prosperity is within the domain of intelligence, language and collaboration. The problem is that social prosperity is still measured by the old standard of labour time, while realities have changed and it is actually determined by ‘general intellect’. We can see the same thing happening in 20th-century art. It demonstrates the inadequacy of the old standards and suggests, in the formal sphere and through the formal work of poetry, new standards for the appraisal of our cognitive and affective experience. This is a point that brought the artistic avant-garde close to the radical social movement and in this sense there is a kind of brotherhood between the two: they would like to explain that the old standards are no longer valid and to look for what might be new standards. Another way to put the problem is: how can you locate a

new public sphere, which has nothing to do with the state? Avant-garde art proved the impotence, the inadequacy, the disproportion of the old standards through a formal investigation. The common ground of art and social movements is never about content. Art that relates to social resistance is beside the point, or rather art expressing views on social resistance is not relevant. The radical movement and avant-garde poetry touch on the formal investigation that yields an index of new forms denoting new ways of living and feeling, which results in new standards. All this is far removed from a substantive relation.

So you see only a formal parallel? Do you think there is a historic evolution in this formal parallelism and can there be any interaction between form and content?

No. When it comes to content, there is no common ground. There is only contact with regard to form and the quest for forms. To me, it is purely a matter of a formal investigation. The form of the poem is like the form of a new public sphere, like the structure of a new idea. Looking for forms in the arts is like looking for new standards of what we may regard as society, power, and so on.

As new rules?

Yes, exactly, it's about new rules. This collapse of the old rules and anticipating new rules, even if only formal, is where aesthetics and social resistance meet: this is the common ground where a new society is anticipated that is based on 'general intellect' and not on the sovereignty of the state anymore.

Do you mean: rules to organize the standard?

It is a matter of defining concepts: the concept of power, of work, of activity and so on. In connection with art I would like to add, and this perhaps goes without saying, that after Benjamin we cannot but wonder what the fate of technical ability to reproduce is going to be. In our present context we need, aesthetically and politically, a concept of 'unicity without the aura'. You both know Benjamin's concept of the unicity of a work of art involving the 'aura', a kind of religious cult surrounding the artwork as is for instance evident in the case of the *Mona Lisa*. Benjamin points out that the aura is destroyed by reproduction techniques: think about film and photography.

The problem we face today is the problem of the singularity of experience, which has nothing to do with aura or cult. To grasp the

particularity of the experience we need a concept of unicity without aura, for that particularity or unicity no longer has the character of an aura. Nowadays it is all about finding the relation between the highest possible degree of communality or generality and the highest possible degree of singularity. In art forms, too, what matters is finding the relation between the most general and the most particular. Art is a quest for unicity without any aura.

Art and philosophy face the same problem?

Absolutely. Philosophy is supposed to formulate a critique against the universal on behalf of the general.¹ The concepts of 'universal' and 'general' are constantly being mixed up, while they are in fact opposites. The 'comune' or 'general' is not that which we encounter in you, in him, in me but that which occurs, passes, between us. My brain is general yet simultaneously particular because it is not like yours or his: only the universal aspects are. Aspects that are equally present in us all are universal. 'General' refers to what exists or occurs in the borderland, between you and me, in the relation between you, him and me, and in that sense there is a constant movement between the particular and the general. Marx's concept of 'general intellect' is general, just as the English language is general and not universal. Language serves as a model for the general that only exists within a community and that cannot exist apart from the community. Our mother tongue, the language we speak, does not exist apart from the relation with a community each of us has individually, whereas our bifocal eye sight does exist in each of us individually, apart from the community. There are things that only exist inside relationships. When Marx speaks of 'general intellect', he refers to collaboration and so to something like that, which only exists in the in between. This concept of Marx's refers to the general good. Now I think that in modernity, the general in both art and philosophy is involved in a complex emancipatory struggle to get away from the universal. This is also how I interpret 'other globalization' or 'new global' movements: they represent the dimension of the general that criticizes the universal. Sovereignty, on the other hand, is a form of the universal. So the question we now face is: What aesthetic and political experiences can we develop to transfer from the universal to the general without consequently destroying the particular?

1. We have in most cases translated the Italian 'comune' by 'general' because of Virno's moves in the field of logic, his wordplay on a principal level, his translational referrals to Marx's notion of 'general intellect'. However, the Italian 'comune' also means 'common', 'communal', 'collective'. So please keep in mind that in each case, the logical 'general' also echoes the English 'common'.

Or take what philosophers call the ‘individuation principle’, meaning the valuation of everything that is unique and unrepeatable in our lives. Speaking of individuation implies that you consider the individual a result, not a starting point. The individual is a result of a movement that is rooted in the ‘communal’ and yet is, or is becoming, particular. It is Marx who, for ‘general intellect’, uses the term ‘social individual’. We can postulate that the general is something pre-individual, a kind of general consciousness that exists before individuals form, and from which they form. This general pre-individual is a ‘we’ that exists before the different I’s develop, so is *not* the sum of all I’s. This is also in perfect agreement with the view on human development of the Russian psychologist and linguist Vygotsky, who was actually heavily influenced by Marx: prior to anything else there exists a collective social context and only beyond and from that context does the child develop into a separate individual subject. Or remember the formidable discovery of the ‘mirror neurons’ by the neurosciences, which tells us there is a kind of general sensing, an empathy that precedes the constitution of the separate subject. The Italian scientist Gallese, who contributed to this discovery, speaks of a space in which the ‘we’ is central. I think all these expressions by Vygotsky, Marx and Gallese are different ways to grasp the concept of the general as opposed to the concept of the universal. I would like to highlight this contrast, which is a hard nut that both political movements and artistic research will have to crack. The alliance between the general and the singular opposes the state and its machinery. Today, movements that side with the multitudes carefully anticipate this alliance: the multitudes are individuals who nevertheless maintain strong ties with the general. On the other hand, the state and post-Fordist society transform the general into the universal; they transform the general intellect into a source of financial gain and social collaboration, and virtuosity into patterns and structures of post-Fordist production.

Returning to the connection between art and politics: how do you feel about engaged art, for instance about what Brian Holmes does or Michelangelo Pistoletto and his Cittadelarte – Fondazione Pistoletto? How do you feel about art that takes up a substantive political standpoint as well? Is it relevant?

In this context I would like to talk about the Situationists and Debord, for they provide an example of an artistic movement, Debord and *Situationiste Internationale*, turning into a political avant-garde. To me, engaged art is an integral part of political move-

ments, one of its components. Political movements use a lot of tools, including means of communication like the Internet, and politically engaged art is one of those tools. It is a component of movements' political capital.

Yet I would once again like to underline that the most important effect of art is set in the formal sphere. In that sense, even art that is remote from political engagement touches upon the social and political reality. The two are not conflicting matters. They operate on different levels. The formal investigation produces criteria, units of measure, whereas the directly political engagement of the artist is a specific form of political mobilization.

Do you mean to say that even politically engaged art is still part of a formal investigation? Engagement is closely connected to a successful formal investigation?

Yes, what I mean is that even artists who are remote from the political movement may, through their search for new forms and expressions and in spite of themselves, get in touch with the needs of such a political movement, and may be used by it. Brecht as well as poets much more remote from social realities, like Montale, realized a similar relation. The Situationists were very important when they became a political movement, but from that moment on they were no longer avant-garde art: it's about two modes of existence. They clearly illustrate this double take. Before 1960 they were an artistic movement rooted in Dadaism and Surrealism, afterwards they participated in social resistance, making the same mistakes or gaining the same merits as other political activists. Another problem is that when language becomes the main principle according to which social reality is organized, social reality as a whole becomes aesthetic.

So where would you situate art within society from a sociological perspective? Or put the other way around: What would happen if art was cut away from society? What social role do you ascribe to fiction in society?

Well, I think that Enzensberger's quip is appropriate here. He said poetry is no longer found in volumes of poetry but scattered over society like an effervescent tablet dissolved in a glass of water. You will find art everywhere, even in commercials. There is no longer a monopolistic location for the production of art; the artistic experience is molecularly disseminated. We also live in a time, the post-Fordist era, in which human nature has become an economic stake.

Every aspect of human nature (that we are linguistic beings, the effect of environment on the human species) constitutes raw material for production. The debate about human nature that took place between Foucault and Chomsky in Eindhoven in 1971 was very important to me. This debate was at the heart of the social movements' deliberations from the moment its translation was published in Italy. You could say both parties were wrong. Foucault denied there was any such thing as innate human nature, whereas Chomsky's concept of this innate human nature was so rigid and deterministic that he thought he could deduce a political programme from it. I believe this discussion ought to become the subject of renewed study and that we need to have it again, to find new answers to contemporary questions about the relation between human nature and politics. You see, today aspects of human nature have become sociological categories. One example is flexibility. Anthropologists like Gehlen teach that the hallmark of human nature is the absence of specialized instincts: we are the species without a specific milieu. Anthropology uses notions such as 'natural, unchanging truth' but, particularly in our day and age, such natural truths have become *sociological* truths and the phenomenon of flexibility and sub-phenomena, like migration, along with them. Another example: we human beings always remain children, we hold on to certain child-like aspects our entire lives, we are chronically childlike. This, too, has always been true but only now has lifelong learning become an issue. Yet another example: the metahistorical aspect that we are highly potential creatures. In the present context, this potential has become labour power. From this perspective we can speak of biopolitics, because biological features have become a sociological category – that is to say, a sociological category of capitalism. In no way do I mean to say that flexibility and capitalism are sociological laws of nature. Nothing stipulates that society has got to be organized in this way, on the contrary. There is an aesthetic base component in human nature which, in the present context, has become an aspect of economic production. That is why matters have to be dealt with on a fundamental level. The concept of labour power also includes an aesthetic component, beside a communicative and a linguistic aspect. The problem of and for art, both intrinsically and formally, is to show this aesthetic component of the production process. Does contemporary art indeed represent this widespread aesthetic dimension of present-day production? I cannot answer this question, but I do think it needs to be asked. Human nature, aesthetic component, post-Fordism, labour power: the discussion about art needs to be

held in this conceptual constellation. What is left of aesthetics in present-day production in the collaboration and in the communication that have become production power? Something transformed the extraordinary position of the aesthetic experience within society, for it is no longer extraordinary, singular and separate but has, conversely, become an integral part of production.

Let's go back a little, to Enzensberger's quip and the place where art is produced, does something like artistic autonomy exist anymore? Do artistically autonomous places exist?

I think so, but not as many as there used to be.

So is it still possible for art to remain disengaged? Can art be resistance and exodus?

I think it can. Linking the terms I used before to this question: the land of the pharaoh, from which the exodus takes place, is the universal. The exodus is away from the universal towards the general, however this occurs among the phenomena of the present context. The exodus involves the transformation of those very present phenomena. Nothing is external, there is no outside. The exodus occurs within post-Fordist production where linguistic production and collaboration, as labour and production power, create a public dimension that is not identical to the dimension of the state. It is an exodus away from the state and its machinery and towards a new public space that makes use of general intellect and general knowledge. During the exodus the general intellect no longer has the power to produce profit and surplus values but becomes a political institution. What comes to mind is the space in which a central 'we' is a realistic basis for a new political institution. I think the pre-individual dimension and the features of human nature that post-Fordism put to work and converted to cash (flexibility, chronically childlike, no instinctive orientation or specific milieu) also give us the opportunity to create new forms, but in a manner opposite to what happens in today's institutions – an exodus that provides what we can see happening in post-Fordism with a new form. Flexibility therefore, but interpreted as freedom. The chronically childlike understood as prosperity, on condition that it stops transforming into the necessity to learn lifelong as described by Richard Sennett. An exodus within the present landscape.

It is generally understood that post-Fordism's breakthrough as a global production principle took place in the 1960s and 1970s

together with the student revolts and the Fiat strikes. Do you think that prior to that time there were areas that ranked as kinds of social laboratories for this production process? You could say that immaterial labour commenced when Duchamp entered his urinal in the New York exhibition. Would you support the hypothesis that the laboratories of the present post-Fordism are to be found in artistic production itself, particularly in early modern readymade art? Max Weber showed that the spirit of capitalism is deeply rooted in Protestantism. Can you indicate locations (of an artistic, religious or subcultural nature) in society, in this Weberian or historical sense, where preparations are being made for post-Fordism as a mental structure?

You mean a genealogy of post-Fordism? I would be very interested in a genealogical perspective dating back further than the 1960s and 1970s. I think we could regard the culture industry of the 1930s and 1940s and onwards as the laboratory for post-Fordist production that anticipated that which was embodied in industry in general in the 1980s.

What would you consider examples of the 1930s culture industry?

Radio, film . . . to me, they anticipate post-Fordism for technical reasons: at that time, the unexpected becomes an indispensable element in the culture industry. The unexpected, which later becomes the pivot of post-Fordist production in the form of the *just-in-time* inventory strategy. There is no culture industry without an outside-of-the-programme factor. And that reminds me of what the two great philosopher-sociologists Horkheimer and Adorno wrote in their chapter on culture industry of their *Dialektik der Aufklärung*: culture, too, became an industrial sector and a capitalist assembly line but one with a handicap, for it was not fully rational yet. It is this handicap, not being able to foresee and organize everything, which turns the culture industry into a post-Fordist laboratory. The culture industry is the antechamber of present-day production techniques. For what escapes programmes is, indeed, that element of flexibility. And of course I also see that anticipation because the culture industry's base materials are language and imagination.

Today, we see artistic expressions and activities simply being situated at the centre of post-Fordist economy. Think about, for instance, artistic expressions in commercials or advertising but also about the incredible growth of the cultural and creative industries. Art, or at least creativity, has not been socially

marginal, which was how Michel de Certeau saw them for a long time. Yet even Wittgenstein and you yourself place creative space in the margin or as you call it, on a sidetrack. Might the discrepancy between margin and centre not be obsolete?

I see creativity as diffuse, without a privileged centre. As a no-matter-what creativity, under weak leadership if you can call it that, having no specific location, connected to the fact that we humans are linguistic beings: art is anybody's.

Does creativity transform when it is at the centre of the post-Fordist production system? Or, more concrete: is there a difference between a creative thinker or artist and a web designer or a publicity expert at the centre of the economic process? Are these two kinds of creativity, or is it about the same kind of creativity?

This is a complex dialectic. First, it is important to post-Fordist capitalism that creativity develops autonomously, so it can subsequently catch it and appropriate it. Capitalism cannot organize reflection and creativity, for then it would no longer be creativity. The form applied here is that of the ghetto: 'You go on and make new music, and then we will go and commercialize that new music.' It is important for creativity to have autonomy, because it forms in the collaboration that is general and consequently the opposite of universal. Creativity feeds off the general. I would like to elucidate this through the distinction Marx made between formal and real subsumption or subjection. In the case of formal subsumption, the capitalist appropriates a production cycle that already exists. In the case of real subsumption, the capitalist organizes the production cycle moment by moment. Now it seems to me that the existent post-Fordism in many cases implies that we have returned to formal subsumption. It is important for social collaboration to produce its intelligence and create its forms. Afterwards, that intelligence and those forms are captured and incorporated by the capitalist, who has no choice but to do so if he wants to acquire that which can only grow outside of him or outside his organization. So the capitalists want to seize autonomously and freely produced intelligence and forms: to realize a surplus value of course, not to realize greater freedom for the people.

A certain degree of autonomy or freedom is necessary and therefore permissible. Social collaboration has to be something with a certain degree of self-organization in order to be productive in a capitalist manner. If the work was organized directly by the capitalist, it would be unprofitable. To yield a profit and be useful from

the perspective of the capitalist, the work needs to some extent to be established through self-organization. It is difficult to grasp this complex dialectic by using theoretical categories. That which is really productive from an economic point of view is not the sum of the individual labourers' output, but the context of collaboration and interaction – provided that it follows its own logic of growth, investigation and invention to some extent. In other words, the process is subject to our own initiative. It is a condition for my exploitation that I produce intelligence and collaboration, and I can only do so when I am, to some degree, free. So I need to be granted a certain degree of autonomy in order to be exploited.

Can the myth of the autonomous artist be seen as a capitalist construction?

First and foremost I think about the autonomy that is functional in creating surplus value, the autonomy that is essential to innovation and to the optimization and development of collaboration. This is a patented and therefore a regulated autonomy, which is absolutely vital when labour has become linguistic and communicative. At that time, speaker-workers must be permitted autonomy. In Wittgensteinian terms it is a matter of 'language games' being used as a source of production. Language games do not just exist, they need to be developed and that is impossible within a rigid structure with all sentences and dialogues pre-recorded and scripted. Language games presume some degree of freedom or autonomy. However, I do not share the view that the present context includes more freedom and prosperity. A grinding poverty reigns in post-Fordism. The worst poverty you can imagine, for it is communication skills themselves that are claimed, exploited, and as capital, too.

Now that we are talking about exploitation perhaps we might address the question of how to fight it. Today in Rome we saw posters displayed by the opposition featuring the slogan 'Il lavoro nobilita. Il precariato no'. Whether or not there is nobility in labour remains to be seen, but we all agree that the precariat is a condition to avoid, a grinding exploitation. We urgently need forms of resistance, developed by and for 'precarious workers' or precari. What is your take on such forms of resistance? Are they, in keeping with what you said earlier, forms of life? Can they be artistic expressions as well? Can you concretize this?

Let's take the example of someone who works for Italian television and radio: thousands of people with an unclear and insecure

status . . . are being exploited. They form a so-called *precariat*. They have to work a lot, work hard, be inventive and focused all the time. They do not make a lot of money, are employed for three months and then unemployed for six more. How can these people organize? Not in the workplace: now you see them there, now you don't. As a rule, TV and radio's *precari* are well-educated creative people with a lot of cultural baggage, a rich cultural and social life: typical post-Fordist workers. However, what applies to them also applies to any example of a *precariat*, including Alitalia's. Developing forms of resistance from, for and by the *precari* means doing so within the very broad context in which they live their lives. It means involving every aspect of their lives, their place of residence, the places they spend their leisure, their communication networks. You cannot organize television people without involving the districts they live in. You cannot abstract from the theatres they visit. In short, the whole problem concerns so many aspects and vital dimensions that developing a form of resistance means inventing new institutions.

How should I concretize this? How do we invent new institutions? What can the forms of resistance of the *precari* look like? This is of course the big X on the European political scene. Politics in Europe means finding the *precariat* forms of resistance. There is a precedent, an example perhaps for this problem, in the IWW, Industrial Workers of the World. At the beginning of the 20th century no-one knew how to organize the mobile migrant labourers in the USA, either. They were highly scattered, very mobile and their resistance did not look as if it could be organized. Yet for about ten years the IWW managed to put up their seemingly impossible struggle with some success. Their importance therefore should not be underrated, even if they did lose in the end and get massacred. Perhaps today, we ought to look in the same direction, to a new kind of union that will find a new form of resistance. The strike no longer works. We need new forms that are much more linguistic and creative, much more collaborative. The *precari* are the extreme product of the big city experience and of post-Fordist capitalism. That is why they are a foothold for the onset of reflection. Organizing them means organizing lives and there is no model for that. It cannot be done without investigating the districts they move around in, their circuits of cultural consumption, their collective habits. The *precari* are actually the social individual, therefore they are always more than one, they are the counterpart of the 'general intellect'. But organizing the social individual is very hard for, as I said, they are more than one, scattered, a brittle faction. We need research. Philosophy, including

the philosophy of language, has to concern itself with the issue of what resistance forms may be developed starting from the *precari*. This is not a technical problem, on the contrary, it is an ethical matter and also an artistic matter. It is an institutional problem. Organizing the *precari* will mean finding new institutions in the broad sense of the word and the opposite of state sovereignty. The measure of resistance today depends precisely on dedication to this major objective.

This is an abridged version of
the interview with Paolo Virno.
The complete text is available at
www.opencahier.nl

column

GERALD RAUNIG

SPEED!

‘The concept of post-Fordism is invented for that which dawns as the future – a linguistic hereafter that seems to stand obtusely at the exit from the past, knocking timidly at the door of the future because its old home no longer exists.’ Thus Hans-Christian Dany, describing the threshold from Fordism to post-Fordism in his cultural history of amphetamines published by Nautilus-Verlag Hamburg in 2008. And just as the ‘linguistic hereafter’ has been peering round the corner into the future now for a pretty long time, obtusely if not without curiosity, so the linguistic labels for the social transformations taking place since the late 1960s have gone on multiplying: post-industrial society, service society, information society, network society, cognitive capitalism, knowledge economy, and so forth. No matter what the perspective, however, it is the acceleration, pace and speed of the currents flowing through it that define the quality of the ‘future’ whose door we have long since passed through.

It is not by chance that Dany’s book is titled *Speed*. Social transformations are also central to the changes of function and use of the

cheap drugs known in their users’ slang by that name. ‘Speed’, in its narrower, drug-related sense in post-Fordist capitalism, no longer implies, as in the preceding century, an *ambivalent* acceleration, conditioner for the pressures of professional life and resistant medium of new subcultures. In an astounding process of disambiguation it is increasingly found only on the affirmative side, although now more strongly as an element of caring for self. Controlled intoxication is more and more part of a well-ordered relation to self, where getting high and consciousness-raising are deliberate means of self-effectivization. In the cocktail of neoliberal-governmental modes of subjectivization the ‘speed’ family of drugs has become one of a host of components in a generalized style of self-government.

‘Speed’, however, by no means refers any longer exclusively to drug use, but increasingly to all areas of production and reproduction. And in the sphere of production it not only concerns the acceleration of material work processes but also, and above all, the immaterial terrain of the cognitive, the communicative and the affective. Dany describes this in detail with reference to a proto-post-Fordist avant-garde that was already moving into the new era 40 years ago: Andy

Warhol's *Factory*. In this factory – much as in the completely different political contexts of the *fabbrica diffusa* conceptually formulated by Italy's operaist theoreticians and put to the test in the struggles of the *Autonomia* at the start of the 1970s – the time and space of its subjects are diffuse. As 'pioneers of the new work' they have no permanent collective workplace and know nothing of orderly Fordist time. And they no longer produce things but atmospheres: 'The majority of those present are involved in activities that aren't immediately recognizable as work and mostly look like the opposite, so that some think it's a party.' This new form of employment is no longer based on the separation of work and free time, achievement and leisure, factory and home, sobriety and drug consumption, but on the blurring of the formerly clear-cut boundaries between these areas.

Speed shakes off its more or less intentional marginality and becomes central to post-Fordist production, extending far beyond peripheral drug use as dependence on all forms of acceleration, especially dependence on being attached to accelerated communication and information technologies. And in this dependent attachment the components of the apparatuses traditionally referred to as machines and our own machinic subjectivizations intermingle. Just as we adopt the modes of functioning of the technical apparatuses that we operate and that operate

us, so the apparatuses adopt our skills, technology and knowledge. It is as if we had simply gone a step further in the incessant process of becoming machines, from a Fordist-industrial osmosis with the production line to a post-Fordist-informational osmosis with computers. And just as the nineteenth-century view of machines as something like the extension of our arms was reductive, so too now there is the simplistic view of the computer as prosthetic brain. Involved here is not just a one-sided extension of the human body or the upgrading of the human being by a machine, but as ever a flow of machinic currents that permeate things, people and socialities alike.

Once the acceleration of these currents tends to infinity, however, and that moreover on the basis of a machinic desire driving us, grave consequences ensue for living and working conditions. Some of the worst excesses are the outsourcing of material dirty work to the global peripheries, recent interrelated forms of sexist and racist exploitation, and the development of new pathologies specific to the full-speed subjects in the era of precarization. But machinic desire, as a producer of wishes, also has a revolutionary side. In combating the new subjectivizations, the new atomizing forms of individualization, it is no use simply turning one's back on machines, or wrecking them, or throwing clogs in the works. Nor are the current patterns of dealing

with sociality any help, the yearning for a state that parcels social space and for a closed community are losing all meaning. What we must rather ask is: What are these machines in which accelerated-accelerating singularities can link up together instead of returning to the identitary vessels of community and rasterization by the state apparatuses? What is the nature of this new irrepressible link among these singularities that cannot be understood in terms of homogenizing cohesion? How and where do offensive accelerative strategies emerge, as traffic and concatenation, *linked by the absence of any link?*

RECETAS URBANAS

Recetas Urbanas (Urban Prescriptions), an architecture firm based in Sevilla, was founded in 2001 by Spanish architect Santiago Cirugeda. The firm is devoted to making interventions in the precarious nature of the urban environment. Their aim is to win back public space for the city's inhabitants by creating 'urban interventions and situations', as they call them. Subversive occupations of public space are proposed in the form of portable architecture. These interventions are often on the borders of what is legal and what is not legal. The editors of *Open* asked the firm to make a contribution that gives

an idea of its practice. On the poster inserted as a separate supplement, *Recetas Urbanas* presents a selection of the urban interventions they have developed, which are intended to improve the social conditions of the city's inhabitants in the hope that they can regain control of their environment.

All Urban Prescriptions are at the disposal of the public on their website www.recetasurbanas.net.

(Olga Cordón Gironés)

...muestra incluye el edificio Olivetti de Barcelona, el único proyecto que firmaron en España.

Las mejores obras a partir de 1945 del equipo de arquitectos italianos BBPR se exponen en Sevilla

MARCO MULLINA, Sevilla. Los arquitectos italianos Gian Luigi Banfi, Lodovico Belgiojoso, Enrico Peressutti y Ernesto Rogers, o lo que es lo mismo BBPR, contribuyeron a crear tras la 2ª Guerra Mundial el nuevo con-

cepto de ciudad en Europa. Tras abandonar el racionalismo, el grupo fue adquiriendo un estilo propio que partía de la reinterpretación del espacio en un sentido histórico junto a la introducción de nuevos elementos. Los planos y dibujos

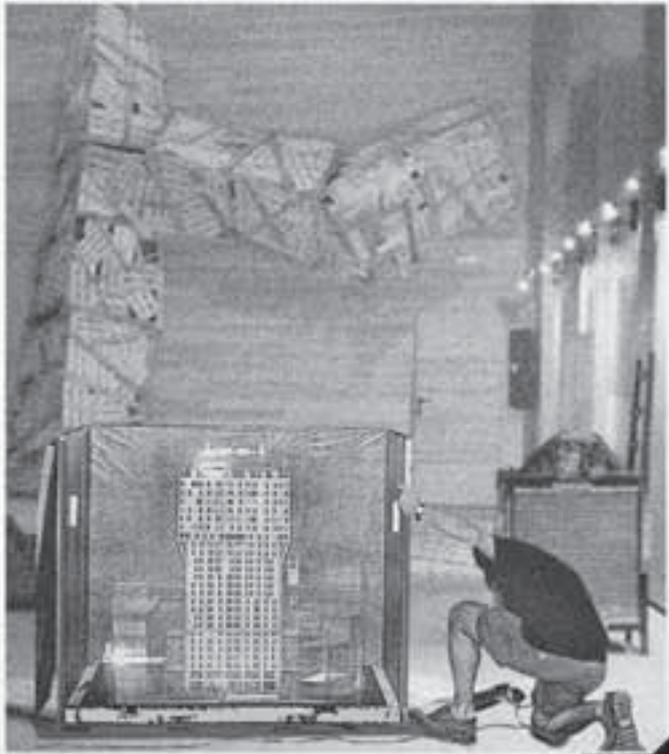
originales de las principales obras de BBPR, que influyeron en los arquitectos de la escuela sevillana, forman parte de una exposición que se inaugura hoy en Sevilla, en el Pabellón de Finlandia de La Cartuja.

"Desde una cucharilla hasta una ciudad", dijo ayer la arquitecta italiana y comisaria de la muestra Silvia Maffioletti para explicar de forma gráfica el trabajo de BBPR. Lo abarcó todo desde el diseño del mobiliario hasta el urbanismo.

"Banfi, Belgiojoso, Peressutti y Rogers se asociaron cuando todavía estaban haciendo la carrera y su trabajo ha sido siempre de equipo, nadie se ocupaba de un tema en concreto", dice Maffioletti. El estudio, ubicado en Milán, consistía fundamentalmente aunque tan sólo vive uno de sus miembros, Belgiojoso. El arquitecto, con 87 años, ha delegado en su hijo Alberico que dirige actualmente la empresa y que esta tarde pronunciará un discurso en la Escuela

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Desmontaje de la maqueta de la Torre Velasca de BBPR, en el Pabellón de Finlandia de Sevilla.

castillo de Sforza (Milán) ya los cascos en los campos de galería Guggenheim
que en sus últimas etapas se concentraron de Alemania. En este la sala de ex-

Brian Holmes

Marcelo Expósito's
Entre Sueños

Towards the New Body

In the past few years, Spanish artist Marcelo Expósito realized a series of videos entitled *Entre Sueños* – his testimony of a new social conflict. Art and culture critic Brian Holmes analyses these videos and shows that, besides carrying an activist message, they illustrate the history of its artistic expression.

Upon opening my laptop to write this article I found an email text with the latest news from Greece, where night after night demonstrators had been facing off with the police, expressing their rage at the murder of the young Alexandros Grigoropoulos. Immense social issues, as pervasive as they are everywhere invisible, were thrust into the burning actuality of the streets by the bullet that pierced the boy's heart. The text says this: 'The youth is revolting because they want to live. With every last one of the meanings of the word "life". They want to live freely, they want space to create, to emancipate themselves, to play. They don't want to spend their adolescence in 12-hour days of school and extra courses, their first adult years in the pointless chase of a university degree, the passport to a glorious 800-euro/48-hours-a-week job in a boring office. . . . We crave to construct our own, autonomous future . . . When you really want to live, a spark is enough to make you instinctively attack anything that you think stands in your way.'¹

1. Anonymous, 'The Revenge of Life', 14 December 2008, at <http://indy.gr/analysis/the-revenge-of-life>.

The corrupt politics and stagnant economy of Greece are unique, say the security officials. But in Europe and across the developed world, the neoliberal revolution has brought precarious working and living conditions to an entire generation. Meanwhile, city centres became glittering spectacles and skyrocketing levels of inequality were seen only from the viewpoint of the elites. The failure of the transnational financial system now guarantees that the 'unique' conditions of Greece will be duplicated in country after country. Like life itself, like art at its best, the spark from the south of Europe is something you can feel in your own body.

As the tension mounts and the demonstrations break out, how many museums and educational programmes will have the courage to explore the work of activist-artists who have dealt directly with the affects, the aspirations and the self-organization of this precarious generation? Those willing to erase the divide between politics and art will find great interest in the production of the Spanish video maker Marcelo Expósito, who over the last five years has been carrying out a multi-part evocation of the new social struggles under the name *Entre Sueños* (Between Waking and Dreams). Unlike conventional documentaries establishing the historical facts, this videography records the nascent movements of history in the gestures and the stories, or indeed the imaginations, of those who attempt to make their own history in the streets.

The series opens with *First of May (The City-Factory)*, 2004, a far-reaching video essay on the transformation of labouring and

organizing conditions in northern Italy, culminating with the appearance of the Chainworkers collective and the EuroMayday parade in Milano. Following this rather complex overture is *Radical Imagination (Carnivals of Resistance)*, also 2004, as well as a third piece, co-authored with Nuria Vila (the editor of all three works) and entitled *Tactical Frivolity + Rhythms of Resistance*, 2007.² In the videos, a shift in the philosophical conception of the capital/labour relation is articulated with the emergent forms of militant organization and with historical practices of audiovisual editing. But as these discursive and formal agendas are pursued, something unutterable is going on beneath the surface: the search for an unknown kind of life that can work a mind-numbing shift, dance in the face of the cops, click through computerized labyrinths and care for a child in one continuous rhythm. The search for a new body.

2. For screening and exhibition of the videos see <http://www.hama-caonline.net/autor.php?id=69>; for free download see <http://www.archive.org/details/tacticalfrivolity>.

City-Factory

The ambition of these videos is to be activist in their message, while actualizing the intricate histories of artistic expression. Thus *First of May* is all about organizing chain-store employees and freelance workers; but it begins with lines from the literary writer W.G. Sebald, a sequence from the silent-film classic *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* and a black-and-white clip of Glenn Gould at the piano, also strangely mute. Only a few moments later do we hear Gould's elegantly phrased performance, which seems to orchestrate the movements of a temp worker watching over kids in an Italian mall. The central question is posed in these first few seconds. If the cinematic montage of the 1920s sought to develop a harmonious musical score for the clashing social relations of the industrial city, then what kind of link could we hope for today between the virtuoso performances of artists and the highly scripted routines of workers caught in the production systems of the post-industrial metropolis?

The video shows documentary clips of the Fiat automobile plant of Lingotto, in Turin, with its spectacular racetrack on the roof where buyers could test drive a car rolling directly off the assembly line. Next come scenes of that same building transformed into a conference centre and leisure complex, a symbol of the transition to communicative labour. The collective discipline of the factory has been vaporized into the omnipresent warp and weft of hyper-individualized economic relations. It is here that the temp girl rushes to

keep up with the activities of the corporate playground, chasing toddlers on plastic cars imported from China. Consumerism appears as a debilitating game where even the guardians don't know the rules. Yet a dream is gathering amid the toys and balloons: the old leftist dream that artistic expression could become directly active in the struggle for emancipation.

The philosopher Paolo Virno gives fresh voice to that dream in excerpts from a lecture where he describes the resemblance between virtuoso performance and communicational labour. Neither of them produces a finished object or work; both depend on improvisational sequences carried out before a public. Yet the same is true of politics. For Virno, the linguistic and performative turn of the economy tends to dissolve the boundaries between labour, inner contemplation and political action. The situation is confusing, but it brings new powers into everyone's reach. He speaks enigmatically of an invisible notation, a hidden score: the sharable potential of a 'general intellect' that informs or even orchestrates the multifarious activity of today's economy.

Is that sheer mysticism? Waking life in the metropolis appears to be guided not by political virtuosity but by fine-grained processes of control: combinations of motivational research, on-the-job surveillance, individualized seduction and credit assessment by the bankers. Managers and advertisers pull the strings. Activists have to occupy and undermine that terrain. Fascinating sequences of the film show the founders of the Chainworkers group in Milano mounting an unheard-of campaign: a mobilization of the shit-job workers who staff your supermarket, sort your mail, deliver your pizza – and play your music, host your party, cuddle your kids, probably write your advertising too.

Chiara Birattari clicks through a corporate image-bank, looking to pirate the perfect photo of a tattooed rocker from the squatted social centres. She finds one sorting boxes at a depot in the exurban sprawl. 'Autonomous, or precarious?' asks the flier she's designing. Alex Foti recounts the desire to organize people who never dreamed of a union: the kids in the uniforms, the chain-store workers, who grew up on comics and fast food and American culture. The interview breaks up into scenes from a surprise action he coordinated in a giant mall – an environment strictly without freedom of speech or association, the archetype of what Virno calls 'infinite publicity without a public sphere'.

Banners suddenly unfold on an upper floor; leaflets sail through the kingdom of the commodity. A portable sound system cuts

Marcelo Expósito, stills from the video *Radical Imagination* (*Carnivals of Resistance*), 60 min., 2004.



the mask expresses the joy of sequence,
of reincarnation, of light-hearted relativity
and the negation of identity
and the single meaning



new forms of language develop which
negate any distance between the subjects,
who are freed from standard
rules of behaviour

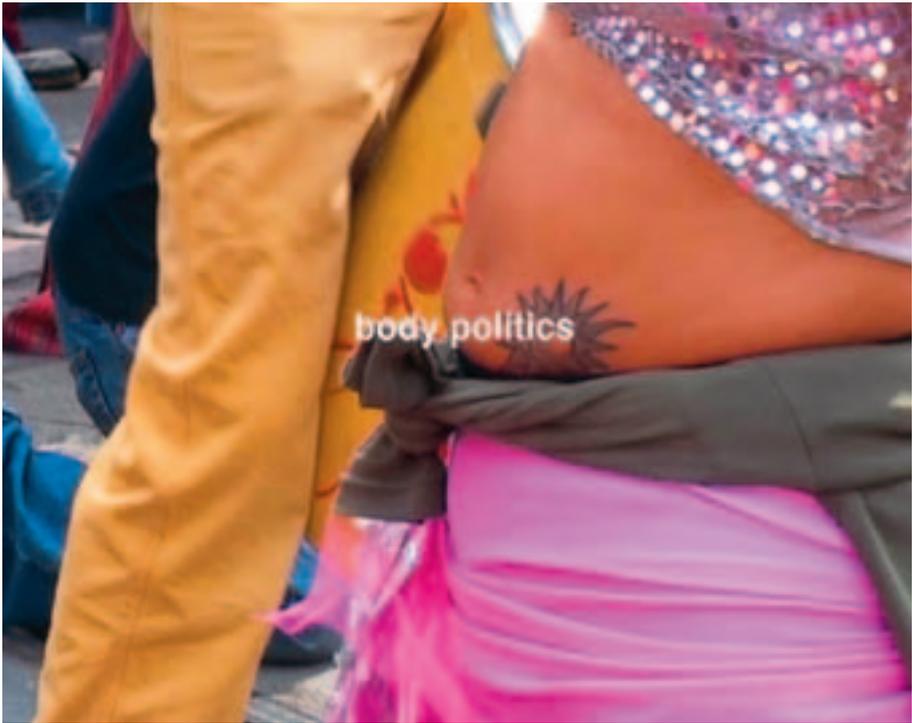


Marcelo Expósito, stills from the video *First of May*
(*The City Factory*), 2 min., 2004.









through the muzak with strong rock and political talk, while activists hold off the burly security guards to open up a window of possibility. Amazingly, the action lasts an hour. The video ends on the city streets, with the wild antics of the precarious Mayday demonstration in Milano, gathering casual workers to protest for better conditions. 'Rights or riots' is the slogan on a demonstrator's bright pink shirt. He smiles self-consciously under the camera's eye, then looks frankly at us, tapping the words on his chest.

With the launching of the EuroMayday parades in 2003 and 2004, the new social movements began raising the issues of life and labour on the urban territory. In a bewildering neoliberal environment where workers are dispatched through the urban sprawl by computerized orders, activists use communication skills to change the score, to disrupt the orchestration of daily life and make a positive move in the perpetually losing game that the corporations have imposed on the populace. This is the challenge of emancipation in our time: popular autonomy and 'riots for rights' depend on the communicational capacities of precarious expression within the fractured tissue of the metropolis.

Swirling Rhythms

What the next two videos show is that emancipation really is a waking dream, relayed across the generations. 'Changes happen first in the imagination,' reads the opening caption of *Tactical Frivolity*. A faraway chant resounds in the air, then an extravagant creature appears on the screen, dressed in silver and pink with enormous wings, a feather duster in her upraised hand and a gas mask dangling at her side, twirling in front of the police. Cut to black-and-white scenes of suffragette marches, with early feminists speaking to the crowd; then another cut to the eyepiece of a turn-of-the-century kinoscope, through which we see the flickering image of a woman performing a modernist butterfly dance on stage. Her flowing white dress swirls in the air, tracing arabesques in three dimensions, while a samba drummer cuts into your rapt attention. One . . . two . . . three: the thunderous beat prepares the break into the present, into the streets.

Using simpler discursive structures than *First of May*, the next two works of *Entre Sueños* plunge into specific events: the 'Carnival against Capital' of 18 June 1999, and the invention of the 'pink bloc' protest aesthetic during the demonstration against the IMF/World Bank in Prague on 26 September 2000. *Tactical Frivolity* +

Rhythms of Resistance, on which I'll briefly focus, combines video footage of the Prague events and retrospective interviews with the participants. What they reveal is how much consciously articulated desire goes into the collective gestures that can succeed in transmitting a political message to today's polarized societies.

Evolving under particularly repressive conditions, British social movements invented the most effective forms of resistance against neoliberal control. Yet as activist Kate Evans explains, they did not depend on violence but on feminine provocation. At the Mayday demonstration held by London Reclaim the Streets in 2000, widely expected to mark the first application of the new Terrorism Act, 'Rosie was there, and she was wearing this ridiculous costume, with this tiny pink bikini and this headdress and these big pink tails, and she had a feather duster and she was tickling the police'. As Rosie herself continues: 'I thought, well, if I'm gonna be legislated into being a terrorist, then I might as well be the most ridiculous kind of terrorist there is.'

Kate recounts the journey to Prague in two travellers' vehicles, filled with 11 women, two men and vast quantities of silver and pink materials. Scenes at the convergence centre give a taste of the preparations with a larger group (mostly from the Peoples' Global Action) who formed the 'pink line', one of three distinct approaches used to shut down the World Bank/IMF meetings. Samba echoes in your ears, and at this point another series of interviews begins, recounting the origins of the subversive music from black Brazilian carnival bands in the 1970s. 'The rhythms that we play originate from *candomblé*, so they're actually used to call down deities of nature,' explains Nicky. 'The moment a break happens, the crowd goes mad. So I think there is really something powerful about those moments, and about those changes in rhythm.' The Prague demonstrations as a whole formed such a break; and members of the pink bloc used the disarming force of surprise to enter the conference centre, closing the meetings and launching a new cycle of popular protest in Europe.

Kate Evans, breast-feeding her baby during the interview, is quite lucid about the potential ambiguities of her tactics: 'I have a bit of a problem with the idea that girls wear very small costumes and dance and men don't,' she explains, 'because I don't know exactly how liberating that is for people who don't realize it's meant to be ironic.' This feminist look at the precarious protest aesthetic combines a grounded, direct-action approach with a rich exploration of the ways that popular mobilization sparks changes in lived experience.

Marcelo Expósito and Nuria Vila, stills from the video *Tactical Frivolity + Rhythms of Resistance*, 39 min., 2007.





The videos are directly inspiring for people who want to put their bodies on the line, producing a new orchestration of urban gesture without falling into the traps laid by the authorities and the media. At the same time, they trace perspectives across a century. Those who are curious about vanguard art might remember Peter Wollen's question in *Raiding the Icebox*: 'What form of bodily movement would correspond to a process of production that displayed a different, transformed rationality – and, of course, a transformed gender division and sexuality?'³ Marcelo Expósito and Nuria Vila have given one answer. It is as though marginal artistic and activist experiments of the past had reawakened in the present, but with a much broader and deeper embodiment, among people aware of the staggering opposition that any emancipatory movement faces. Now the relay will be passed to a younger generation. The film ends with samba rhythms and an eyepiece-view of costumed protesters, cutting to another antiquated butterfly-dance on stage. This time the swirling veils are tinted in electric pink.

3. Peter Wollen, *Raiding the Icebox: Reflections on Twentieth-Century Culture* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1953), 56.

Marcelo Expósito and Nuria Vila, opening still from the video
Tactical Frivolity + Rhythms of Resistance, 39 min., 2007.

**changes happen first
in the imagination**

Merijn Oudenampsen

Precariousness in the
Cleaning Business

*Cleaners as the Vanguard of
a New Trade Union Revival*

Working conditions in virtually all sectors of the labour market are under pressure at the current time. Focusing on the developments in the cleaning industry, sociologist Merijn Oudenampsen shows how, following the American example, cleaners have successfully started to mobilize in the Netherlands and have thus given a new impulse to the revival of trade unionism.

On 6 November 2007, around 50 people resolutely exit the metro at the Amsterdam Amstelveenseweg station. The group is garbed in bright orange trade union shirts and clown outfits, and carries banners, flutes and drums. A little later they are standing in front of the closed doors of the huge glass palace that serves as the headquarters of the Dutch ING bank. Never mind. A back door is still open. The last hurdle is a dividing door, kept shut by a few panicky guards, but after a bit of pushing and shoving they have to admit defeat. The noise of 50 frenzied demonstrators fills the chic foyer of one of the world's biggest banks. The absolute top and bottom of the Dutch labour market meet each other. For just a little while, roles are reversed. Cleaners express themselves and managers listen.

What happened at the ING bank would soon be repeated in the nearby ABN AMRO headquarters, in the Schiphol airport terminal, at ministries in The Hague, at the Dutch Railways in Utrecht and at a long list of other companies. It was part of a campaign in the cleaning industry, one of the sectors in which the position of employees has drastically deteriorated due to outsourcing and flexibilization. A new campaign strategy is engaged to attempt to offer an answer to the weakened position of the trade union in the service sector which is characterized by fragmentation and temporariness. It is one of the most promising initiatives aimed at finding an answer to what has become known to some as the new social question.

The social question dealt with in this essay is that of 'precarity'. Precarity is a neologism, a translation of the French *precarité*. It is derived from the Latin *precare*, to beg. According to Webster's dictionary one of the meanings of precarious is 'depending on the will or pleasure of another', in other words to possess something that is liable to be withdrawn at any moment.

Precarity is a problem that has announced itself in Europe under many different guises. At first sight, it presents itself in the media as a conflict of generations. In Germany they talk about the *Generation Praktikum*, abbreviated as *Generation P*, a young generation that lives from one internship to the next but fails to gain structural entry to the German labour market. In France, there is a similar sentiment among the *Génération Précaire*, which led in 2005 to a general youth revolt against the further flexibilization of the French labour market, the CPE (*Contract de Premier Embauche*). In Italy, Spain and Greece it is referred to by the average monthly incomes that are earned: the 1,000, 800, or 700 euro generation. In all cases it concerns a generation whose future prospects look grimmer than those of their parents. It is not surprising that the recent riots in Greece were rapidly assigned a

comparable meaning, with American social commentator Mike Davis noting a connection between the rage on the streets and a growing worldwide realization among young people that the credit crunch has surely robbed their future of any promise. According to these types of analysis, the feeling of a precarious life is pre-eminently that of a generation unfamiliar with the certainties of the 1960s and '70s – a job for life, a fixed contract – or even those during the years of crisis in the 1980s, when an unemployment benefit was one of the few remaining certainties for young people. A new generation has grown up in Europe, which, in contrast to their parents, lives on the basis of temporary arrangements as regards to work, housing, education and social security. It is principally this version of precarity that has been seized upon by social movements in Europe, the most important example being the annual Euromayday protests that have taken place in dozens of European cities in recent years.

Yet it is misleading to limit the issue to one generation. The impact of the restructuring of the labour market and welfare state retrenchment is simply too great and too generalized. A much more extended reality of urban precarity lurks behind the newspaper headlines about integration, the working poor and the new underclass, behind the tendentious articles on the uprising of the *banlieues* and the situation in American inner cities. We can read about it in the work of the sociologist Loïc Wacquant who has conducted research both in the USA and in France into what he calls 'urban marginality': an accumulation of deprivations that expresses itself via the convergence of class, ethnicity and living conditions. But the backgrounds of this social problem – which are often connected with education and the labour market – are outstripped and disguised by an all-pervasive problem of security and by the theme of ethnic/cultural segregation. In his book *Punishing the Poor*, Wacquant calls the current security policy in the USA a 'new policy of social insecurity'. He explains: 'The battle against street criminality becomes the screen behind which the new social question is concealed: the generalization of uncertain, precarious wage labour and the impact thereof on the living conditions and survival strategies of the urban proletariat.'

He is not alone in this. Other American sociologists, such as Philippe Bourgois and William Julius Wilson, see casualization as the underlying cause of the urban crisis in the USA, that is, the restructuring of the labour market. Prior to the crisis of the 1970s, the bottom of the labour market was filled with low-paid factory work, where the relative ease with which trade unions were able to organize led to the accumulation of a minimal number of rights and securities. In the 1980s the

service sector became the new motor of the economy, while industrial employment shrank drastically due to mechanization and outsourcing to low-wage countries. Previous certainties changed into uncertainties: low wages, inadequate contracts or none at all, flexible working hours and unclear social rights. Migrants, almost by definition, had to endure the most severe conditions, as has often been the case historically. But since then a place at the bottom of the social ladder has started to mean something quite different. In his book *The Corrosion of Character*, Richard Sennet points out that the social ladder has lost its rungs. The American dream of unlimited social mobility changed in the 1980s into a reality of dead-end jobs.

Instead of facing this problem, American public opinion has chosen to culturalize and moralize the issue. In brief, the core, according to the now dominant conservative discourse, is that the root cause of the problems of the urban poor is their sociocultural background, rather than structural social problems such as the labour market. An emphasis on the inadequate norms and values of marginalized populations reduces the issue to one of personal responsibility: the deserving poor enter the scene. Although the situation in Europe and in the Netherlands differs in many ways from that in the USA, the USA has had, as in many areas, a considerable influence on European policies. It is not strange, then, that Wacquant observes that European poverty is becoming Americanized. Not so much with regard to reality but certainly in perception. The plight of first and second generation migrants in Europe is implicitly and explicitly compared to that of Afro-Americans and Latinos in the USA. Wacquant sees the entrance of the American concept of an 'underclass' in the European debate on urban poverty as a clear indication of this. Accompanying this concept are the culturalist and moralist biases that have also crossed the ocean. If we read Paul Scheffer, a prominent Dutch intellectual who has achieved considerable fame with his plea for a renewed 'offensive' to 'civilize' the ethnic underclass, or UK-based Theodor Dalrymple, who points to the 'culture of poverty' in the English working class, then we can see what a dramatic impact the USA has had on the European perception of poverty, and what a central position the 'culturalist' vision has acquired in public opinion. Not for nothing, the credo of personal responsibility became one of the recurrent slogans of the Balkenende governments.

Laboratory

Fortunately, the USA does not only export the policies that are responsible for its most problematical social discrepancies. It also functions as

a laboratory of revolt from below, the results of which find their way to other parts of the world as an antidote to dominant policy and business practices. One of the most important developments in this area is the organization of migrants in trade union campaigns that are totally different from existing union practices.

Until recently, American trade unions saw migrants and the flexible, atypical sort of jobs they are predominantly dependent upon for earning a living as unorganizable. Working in hotels, fast-food chains, grocery markets, cleaning companies and supermarkets, in domestic help and the many small convenience stores, dry cleaners and delis is an army of migrants whose working conditions seemed not to be an issue. Campaigns in the 1980s would drastically change this view. The Justice for Janitors (JfJ) campaign in Los Angeles was the most important example and has acquired an almost legendary reputation. The campaign was the subject of Ken Loach's film *Bread & Roses*, and Mike Davis described the miraculous transition from 'pariah proletariat' to 'peaceful guerrilla army' in his book *Magical Realism*.

The context for the new campaign was a sharp decline in the labour conditions of cleaners throughout the USA. Whereas cleaning had previously been organized internally, in the sense that cleaners were simply on the payroll of the company concerned, or of the manager of the building in which they worked, in the 1980s cleaning was farmed out to specialized firms. The wages and working conditions of cleaners became the main victim in the subsequent competition for cleaning contracts. It was necessary to invent a new trade union strategy, now that the cleaners were no longer to be found in just one building, but were spread out, flexibly, across the whole city. The answer of the Justice for Janitors campaign was closely linked to the specific social networks present in the Latino community of the cleaners. Visits were paid to churches and neighbourhood organizations, house calls were made and NGOs and political activists were involved in the campaign. An extended social network was mobilized. The background of the predominantly Latino cleaners played an important role. Many were veterans of social movements in Latin America, from El Salvador to Guatemala, and they were now implementing these experiences in the context of Los Angeles. The practice that emerged would later be called 'social movement unionism', in contrast to the dominant service model of 'business unionism', where the members have a passive role and the activity range of the trade union is largely confined to its own office. The targets of the new campaign were not the cleaning firms but the clients, the contractors of cleaning services. Confrontational demonstrations and the practice of 'Naming & Shaming' replaced the sym-

bolic pickets that had previously been the usual repertoire of the trade union. The directors of the companies concerned were visited by cleaners at high-profile fundraising events and luxurious networking dinners. The parties were gate-crashed by hordes of cleaners brandishing their mops and vacuum cleaners and demanding a living wage. The invisibility that had previously characterized the cleaners was replaced by their taking a role in the spotlight, particularly when in 1990 a cleaner protest was brutally crushed by the police, which was given full coverage in the media. It was not until 1995, five years after that event, that the JfJ campaign was able to announce a resounding victory. With 90 per cent of cleaners part of the organization, a new model was born, and for the Service Employees International Union, the most important trade union in the service sector, this would be the overture to its growth into the biggest trade union in the USA.

Precarity in the Polder

In its earliest national iconography, used on coins, medals, pamphlets, building facades and seals, the Netherlands was symbolized by a garden of plenty, defended against foreign aggression by a roaring lion. Sometimes the garden alternated with a fat cow, but the message of prosperity was unchanging. That same period, the early seventeenth century, also contains the mythical origin of the Dutch political culture of consensus and division of power – the so-called polder model – arising from the collective battle against the continuous threat of inundation. It is these two elements, economic abundance and consensus culture, that have most likely resulted in the phenomenon of precarity being milder and more marginal in appearance in the Netherlands than elsewhere.

This does not mean, however, that no comparable trends have taken place. Most of the general forms of precarity have indeed passed the Netherlands by, to a large degree thanks to the restraining influence of trade unions on the implementation of neoliberal reforms. The pie is divided somewhat more evenly, and in the Netherlands there was simply more pie to be divided up than elsewhere. And yet in recent years there have been signs of a reversal. One of the defining moments was in the autumn of 2004, when the first Balkenende cabinet became embroiled in a fierce conflict with the trade unions on pension reform and labour market flexibilization. The then minister of social affairs, De Geus, proposed undoing the strongest instrument of the trade unions, making collective bargaining no longer nationally binding, thereby threatening to blow up the entire Dutch corporatist model. The degree

On 6 December 2007, the ING headquarters on the Zuidas is occupied for a short time. The demonstrators want ING to issue a statement in support of better working conditions for cleaners. Like the vast majority of Dutch businesses, ING outsources its cleaning. Photo Nico Jankowski





After the hall has been occupied for a while, a representative comes down who accepted a petition and made a noncommittal promise of improvement. Photo Nico Jankowski



On 13 December 2007, the 'Drol D'Or' is presented to NS director Blokland. The 'Golden Turd' trophy is awarded to the NS (Dutch Railway) by FNV Bondgenoten (Dutch Trade Union) because their subsidiary Nedtrain is the largest and worst-paying employer in the cleaning business. Photo Nico Jankowski



On 16 December 2007, a 'guerilla' concert is held at Schiphol Airport Plaza. About a hundred people occupy the plaza, bands play music, cleaners hold speeches, flyers are handed out and the security guards clench their teeth. Photo Nico Jankowski



of representativeness and hence the legitimacy of the trade unions was publicly attacked by the government, with dwindling membership and an aging rank and file as the main arguments reiterated. Newspaper headlines like 'Trade unions a thing of the past ten years from now', 'FNV [Federation Dutch Labour Movement] in danger of ending up as a museum piece' and 'What use are trade unions for employees?' had already been typifying public opinion for some years. A big demonstration on the Museumplein in Amsterdam in the autumn of 2004 saved the face of the trade union, as well as its negotiating position, after which the union restricted itself again to its customary role of bureaucratic negotiator.

Five years on, and the episode is almost forgotten. But the crisis was only temporarily averted. With the so-called 'hot autumn' of 2004, tensions came to light that continue to play a role today. The trade unions were being increasingly perceived as protecting the interests of the older, aging generation of babyboomers, that is, the insiders on the labour market. Shortly after the protests on the Museumplein, a new trade union was launched, AVV [an Alternative Labour Union], which to a significant degree would articulate this criticism. The AVV talked about a conflict of generations whereby younger workers have to pay for the rights of the already established older generation, certainties they themselves lacked. In theory, then, the AVV was standing up for the rights of outsiders, freelancers, flex workers, temps and others, whose interests were being sidelined by the trade unions in favour of the insiders on the labour market, the union membership. In this sense, the AVV was the Dutch instance of similar political movements of precarity elsewhere in Europe. The French *Génération Précaire*, for example, also declared that they were no longer willing to be burdened with the pension costs of the already established babyboomers.

But while in France and other countries the further flexibilization of the labour market was contested by the 'precarious generation', the Dutch AVV turned out to be an avid supporter of the labour market deregulation. For Mei Li Vos of the AVV, the magical balancing trick that would bring the rights of insiders and outsiders up to par was to simply deregulate everything and everyone. The position of the AVV, not as an alternative to a trade union but as an anti-trade union, became even more clear through the explicit support it gained from employers and (neo)liberals. Since the AVV consisted of a group of media savvy, highly educated career makers, who projected their personal situation onto that of their entire generation, they systematically sided with the winners of flexibilization, the highly educated job-hoppers who have little to fear from the wondrous world of the deregulated Dutch labour

market. This perhaps explains their blindness to the interests of poorly educated outsiders who have little or nothing to gain from a further deregulation of the labour market.

The stance of the AVV is a clear illustration of why precarity in the Netherlands has never really been placed on the agenda. The labour shortage in the Netherlands, especially for the highly educated, has resulted in a totally different attitude with regard to flexibility among the younger generation – jobs aplenty. At the bottom of the labour market, however, we see a different story. The cleaning sector example illustrates how flexibility and precarity in the Netherlands are connected with both the problem of integration and that of the future of the trade union.

Brave New World in the Cleaning Sector

As an ABN AMRO report recently announced, the cleaning industry has the doubtful honour of being one of the first sectors to ‘profit’ from outsourcing. Since the 1980s, Dutch companies that previously employed their own cleaners under fixed contracts have increasingly been outsourcing the work to specialized cleaning firms in order to save costs. This had led to extremely tough competition between the various cleaning firms in offering the lowest possible price – the reason cleaning is also called a penny market or a fighting market. And, just like in the USA, it is ultimately the 200,000 cleaners themselves who appear to be the biggest losers in this fight, seeing as the first item of expenses cleaning firms economize on are the terms of employment.

That has happened in different ways. On the one hand, simply by paying lower wages; gross wages are now between 9 and 10 euros per hour and are among the lowest in the country. On the other hand, by increasing the work pressure – fewer cleaners per square metre – and by cutting the work up into short shifts. Many cleaners now travel several times a day from building to building. They work two hours here, three hours there, and they are not paid for the time in between. Absence through illness is restricted as much as possible since the cleaners have to pay the first two days of sick leave out of their own pockets. Cleaners also largely work part-time, and at abnormal times. The result is invisibility: they work in the late evening and in the early morning and don’t see the rest of the (office) personnel. The cleaners do not get to see much of each other either, which means that they build up few social relationships that could be helpful in demanding improvements. The legal status of cleaners is so uncertain that many do not dare to express themselves critically when at work. All this was

partly made possible because of the almost total absence of the trade union, which, with membership at 7 per cent, fulfilled little more than a symbolic role. As a result, many cleaners are part of a new and growing stratum of the Dutch working poor. Most cleaners are women and in the urban conglomeration the majority are first or second generation migrants and very poorly educated: many have had no more than a basic education and often speak little or no Dutch.

The cleaning sector has long been a sort of free haven in the Netherlands, a laboratory for implementing American business practices like flexibilization and outsourcing. But the answer to this development also comes from the USA. A campaign by the Dutch Labour Federation is now copying – with success, it seems – the method of the Justice for Janitors campaign. Known as Organizing, this method breaks through the commonly held view that the trade union is a product that simply needs to improve its marketing techniques – the union as a bureaucratic service provider. Organizing combines a return to the time-honoured trade union practice of organizing workers on the shop floor, with modern registration and management techniques derived from American election campaigns.

In 2007, the Dutch Labour Federation started a national campaign for a new collective labour agreement. To start with, a number of strategic companies and locations were identified where a large number of cleaners were working. Then in various places – The Hague, Schiphol, Utrecht and Maastricht – trade union organizers were mobilized to actively contact and bring together dissatisfied cleaners. Buildings were visited, cleaners contacted, and meetings organized. In short, the campaign built up a social network of cleaners, and made efforts to involve local churches, neighbourhood organizations and activists.

One of the problems of outsourcing is that the market conditions are such that cleaning firms are forced to keep wages low since they would otherwise lose contracts. Their clients have the power to change things, to increase the budget, but they almost always deny that they have any responsibility. Just as with Justice for Janitors, it is not the cleaning companies themselves that are the target of the actions in the cleaners' campaign, but their clients. These actions make use of an escalation tactic whereby companies first receive a letter requesting them to publicly support the cleaners' wage demands. Rarely is a response given. The next step is a visit by a delegation of cleaners demanding a discussion with the management, who usually deny having any responsibility. Cleaners then start distributing flyers outside the premises, followed not much later by small- and larger-scale actions: pickets, sit-ins and noise demonstrations. Examples include the aforementioned occupa-

tion of the ING headquarters, or the award of the 'Golden Turd' to the Dutch Railways as the worst employer in the cleaning business.

Most of the companies that the campaign confronts are not aware that they bear some responsibility for the activities that they outsource. Even though they are doing it for such a low price that it is impossible for people to earn enough to live on. Some revelations are shocking. The Ministry of Social Affairs, for example, discovered that it had outsourced its cleaning to a company that was violating basic human rights by refusing to grant cleaners the right to organize themselves. But the fundamental idea that the wages paid at the bottom of the labour market are impossible to sustain a reasonable standard of living was a new one for many people who were confronted with the campaign. After an escalation of actions taken in December 2007, an initial and unexpected victory came in January 2008, in the form of a much improved collective labour agreement. That one of the aims achieved was the free provision of Dutch language lessons makes it clear that the symbolic meaning of the cleaners' campaign goes further than just that of income. Like the American campaigns, the cleaners' campaign in the Netherlands is thus also an attempt to shift the discussion around citizenship and integration from the cultural domain to that of the labour market.

Cleaners have become a forerunner in the renewal of trade union activism, making it relevant for labour relations in the twenty-first century. The campaigns have become a sort of social glue that binds together the most diverse ethnicities in circumstances of extreme fragmentation. The motto of the anti-globalist movement 'let our resistance be as transnational as capital', has, for the cleaners' campaigns, turned into an everyday practice.

book reviews

Benda Hofmeyr (ed.), with contributions from BAVO, Hito Steyerl, Benda Hofmeyr, Erik Swyngedouw, Daniël van der Velden, *The Wal-Mart Phenomenon: Resisting Neo-Liberal Power through Art, Design and Theory*

Willem van Weelden

The Wal-Mart Phenomenon: Resisting Neo-Liberal Power through Art, Design and Theory was published in connection with the colloquium of the same name that was held at the Jan van Eyck Academy in Maastricht on 3 November 2006. Set against the background of a viewing and discussion of the documentary film *Wal-Mart: The High Costs of Low Price* (Robert Greenwald, 2005), a persuasive appeal was made to formulate a form of resistance against the proliferation of neoliberalism.¹

The convener of the colloquium, Benda Hofmeyr, holds the global economic and social plague of neoliberalism responsible for the condition of precarity. In general, what is meant by this is the increasing disappearance of the autonomous world of local economies, cultural production, cinema, publishers, and so on, as a result of the 'neoliberal disruption of the economy'. For the arts this then implies an impoverishment and losing out of small-scale initiatives, often involving local art production,

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to competition. In every way, it's a situation that needs to be actively resisted!

On closer inspection, however, the book's approach does not seem to be entirely successful. Perhaps the ambitions were too high for the amount of suffering that can effectively be shouldered. Despite all the care the editor has taken, one of the book's rather irritating problems is that it is unable to make clear to the reader what is understood by the notion of neoliberalism. Besides this, it is particularly annoying that it lacks any practical analysis of how neoliberalism represents a death-blow to the arts and public space. Is there not something paradoxical in the fact that the arts, architecture and design have apparently been able to exist with no noticeable problems for almost 30 years under totalitarian neoliberal conditions, and that only now, of all times, is there a need for a discourse about a renewed commitment to the re-politicization of intellectual and creative work? Necessity knows no laws, it seems.

Of course the practice of

neoliberalism, and the concomitant sociocultural and economic transformations, are so broad, complex and comprehensive that it is difficult to formulate a satisfying definition. But the editor has made this crisis of definition even more difficult by trusting in the interdisciplinary path – apparently in the blind belief that a crossover approach could provide solace – without, however, having felt the need to explain what the conditions are for such a grand tour to operate effectively. Editorially, then, this collection of essays leaves a lot to be desired since nowhere is it explained how the various perspectives (philosophy, social geography, film theory, art and design) ultimately relate to one other. Readers are, it seems, expected to negotiate and synthesize this multiplicity of perspectives themselves.

It becomes even more problematic when this same many-headed monster, partly through the link with Greenwald's documentary, is awkwardly brought into line with the diabolical methods of

the multinational Wal-Mart. The weighty question that keeps resounding throughout the entire book and is nowhere made clear is: What, then, is this 'Wal-Mart phenomenon'? That is a pity, since despite the courageous attempt of the authors to chart the destructive influence of neoliberalism on design, public space and the arts, and how, on the basis of a creative engagement, a riposte to it could be offered, an important part of that critical potential is negated in advance, precisely because of this shortcoming. This is even more regrettable considering that, now the *après nous le déluge* morality of neoliberalism is imposing itself massively by means of a global financial crisis, all parties would benefit from a book that could serve as a theoretical and practical compass for suggesting a new direction.

This crisis of orientation could perhaps have been avoided if the pretensions had been somewhat less and if the choice had been made to follow a theoretical path more in line with Greenwald's film, in the tradition of tactical media and media activism. The closest we get to this is the essay by Hito Steyerl, which in fact sees conventional documentary films, like Greenwald's, precisely as a

neoliberal, unproblematic representation of reality, and talks about a 'wal-martization of the documentary form'.

Yet the perspective in this actually too short essay continues to adhere too much to the conventional practice of art theory, where an overkill of theoretical references and views prevents it from really getting down to initiating an alternative practice of tactical media. The practice in question not only feeds on a theory about subjectivization, but also actually eludes, as regards both publication and tactical effect as well as distribution, everything that Steyerl claims to be resisting. For despite all appeals for creative engagement and opposition to the spectre of neoliberalism, there is an air of despondency and a lack of imagination in many of the essays. The book is left reeking of a restless theoretical roaming in an indescribable world of text, rather than being a vital and creative appeal for action and providing an idea of a tactical practice whereby all imaginable means can be deployed, and not just text. It seems as though the writers no longer actually believe that the arts and design can really provide an adequate answer, whether conventional or activist.

This hardly encouraging attitude is particularly evident in the final piece in the book, in which careful thought is given to 'Public Art as Interruption or Anamorphosis on the Possibility of a Creative Engagement with Present-Day "Public Space"'. The title alone is enough to put the reader off and to completely extinguish any possible glimmer of hope. This is the terrain that goes beyond all 'precarity'. The essay, based on Benda Hofmeyr's interview with design researcher Daniël van der Velden, is subtitled 'an interview and (in) conclusive remarks'. After the theoretical bombast of the preceding essays, the hesitant and not particularly determined tone that throbs in these introductory qualifications makes it clear immediately that an apologetic and patent disorientation lies at the bottom of the discussion. This is a cause for concern, especially when one considers that the last chapter should actually be granting us a visionary and inspiring look at a reestablishment and re-politicization of a practice that, whichever way you look at it, finds itself in a precarious position.

1. Background information can be found at: <http://www.walmart-movie.com/>.

Daniel Birnbaum, Isabelle Graw (eds.)
Canvases and Careers Today: Criticism and Its Markets

Ilse van Rijn

Seldom has an introduction to a book of art theory contained so many exclamation marks. Isabelle Graw, who with Daniel Birnbaum co-edited *Canvases and Careers Today: Criticism and Its Markets*, begins with an exalted, 'Es lebe die Kunstkritik!' and concludes her introduction by enthusiastically encouraging us into activity: 'Let's get going!' The publication contains the results of a symposium of the same title, organized in Frankfurt am Main in December 2007 by the Institut für Kunstkritik, which was founded by Birnbaum and Graw in 2003. The aim of the symposium was to discuss the art critic's changed relationship with art and the market. *Canvases and Careers Today* consists of five presentations aired at the symposium and each is followed by a critical response.

The title of the book and symposium is drawn from a 1965 sociological study called *Canvases and Careers: Institutional Change in the French Painting World*, which served as the source of inspiration for the initiators of the symposium and as the starting point for the speakers. The authors of the original study, Harrison and Cynthia White, describe the changed world of art in nineteenth-century France. They concentrate on Impressionism and argue that the commodities traded

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were not so much paintings as careers. According to Graw, whose presentation at the symposium is included as an essay in the series, the Whites remind us that the careers of individual artists are embedded in institutionalized systems of organizations, rules and customs. Structural changes, such as a new market economy for example, entail new divisions of tasks. Graw questions the role of the critic in an age in which artists themselves assume responsibility for supplying the meaning of their works. What, asks Graw, should the form, place and value of texts be in a period in which information and communication have been declared the 'queens of productive forces'? From a Marxist viewpoint, value is always relative and has to be continually negotiated and determined anew, says Graw.

George Baker, editor of the influential journal *October* and the first contributor, casts doubt on the Whites' (and therefore Graw's) sweeping sociological, (neo-)Marxist positioning of the artist. There is no foundation in the suggestion, he says, that a 'dealer-critic system' has replaced the time-honoured French academies and salons. Therefore, he continues, the structure, in which, according to the Whites, art dealers, in close collaboration with critics, are supposed to have had a direct impact on

the production of the value of a work of art, is in no need of dismantling today. Baker prefers to discuss the autonomy of art criticism. Leaning on the late writings of Theodor Adorno and Edward Saïd, he argues in favour of what he calls 'late criticism'. It is only through the notion of 'late criticism', comparable with the 'late style' of an artist which is characterized by anachronisms and anomalies, that the discipline's own historicity and internal fragmentation, and criticism's lack of self-regulation, can be considered. Only when art criticism is no longer just preoccupied with its own time does it stand up as truly autonomous.

Responding to Baker is André Rottmann, the editor of the German magazine *Texte zur Kunst*. Rottmann wonders whether this (self-)reflexive form of art criticism can only be employed in the 'late phase' of work, in the margin, when death is in sight and one's own discipline is declared to be 'old' or 'obsolescent'? How, Rottmann asks, do practices like those of Andrea Fraser, who takes (self-)criticism as her point of departure, relate to this idea? Is there not, he says, despite – or thanks to – the current 'new spirit of capitalism' precise evidence of a revitalization, and hence a Pyrrhic victory, of art criticism? After all, art criticism is ubiq-

uitous, from panels at art fairs to articles in magazines and monographs. There is no sign that the traditionally mediating and judgmental role of the critic is in any way deficient.

Baker's presentation and Rottmann's response to it are an ideal illustration of the remarkable phenomenon identified somewhat hastily in the foreword to *Canvases and Careers Today*, namely that American critics tend to adhere to a more pessimistic view of the future than their European, that is to say German, counterparts. No explanation is given for this observation, but perhaps it lies in the fact that the tone of the discussion around this theme was already set several years ago in the USA. On the occasion of the hundredth issue of the journal *October* in the spring of 2002, a round table discussion was organized to discuss the state of art criticism which, it was suspected, was characterized by the fact that it had, to a large extent, become outdated and was no longer current. *Canvases and Careers Today* repeatedly refers to the text version of this discussion in which Baker also participated.

In his contribution, John Kelsey, a teacher, gallery owner and member of the artists' collective Bernadette Corporation, believes that the artist has long ceased to exist; by implication, the critic has thus chosen to question his own specificity rather late in the day. But perhaps the 'real fun' of art criticism only begins when it disappears, he says scornfully. Kelsey himself operates from a lack of distance, in contrast to the objectivity that

is demanded of the critic. He advertises as a gallery owner in *Artforum* and also writes articles for the magazine. Kelsey calls himself 'the hack'. He describes the hack as someone who moves, plays, operates and writes while in the middle of a business transaction. The hack has nothing special to say, says Kelsey, is no genius nor does he claim to have intellectual property. The hack, he says, is empty, an instrument, a post-Fordist virtuoso. The hack appears to conform to the contemporary art system, but was already seen in artists like Stéphane Mallarmé, Marcel Broodthaers and Pier Paolo Pasolini, says Kelsey. What he finds appealing in all these examples is the degree to which they are 'instances of critical language becoming performative in relation to the movement of capital'. Such a way of thinking and working creates possibilities for an immanent critique, a critique from within that deliberately alienates itself (through becoming performative or fictitious) from the culture of which it is a part, without cherishing the illusion that it can ever effectively change the system.

Reacting with scepticism to Kelsey's reading is artist Merlin Carpenter. Carpenter is also sceptical of the incestuous conspiracy of critics, which is how he sees *Canvases and Careers Today*. They question their own position, yet transparency is a farce, he contends. Every redefinition contains a hidden agenda. Perhaps, suggests Carpenter, citing Lacan, we should 'shatter discourse in order to bring forth speech'.

In reaction to Branden W.

Joseph's contribution, art historian and scholar Tom Holert endorses Carpenter's commentary to a certain extent. At the same time, Holert manages to skilfully avoid Carpenter's tendency for destructive and defeatist discourse by beginning his critical response to Branden W. Joseph with a careful analysis of the 'performativity' of the criticism he directs at Joseph. Transcending a nostalgic desire for the supposedly lost practice of art criticism, Holert looks beyond the dichotomy of its earlier status and the current situation of society. What's more, he sets aside the occasionally rather rigid framework set-up by the symposium. The 'past criticism' that he refers to is averse to prescribed codes of behaviour, ways of reading and rationality. 'Past criticism' is provisionally structured around 'performance spaces', a temporary convergence of moments of 'criticality'. In his reading of the position of art criticism, Holert does not opt for a compulsory, visionary interpretation of the practice, something that many a conference participant tended towards. Instead, Holert concretizes what Andrea Fraser once called 'site specific criticism'. Just like an artist, he says, a critic has the responsibility of taking stock of the surrounding contexts. These contexts consist not only of the sociological structure in which, besides Graw, Birnbaum and the Whites, the critic is also situated, but appear, judging by the contributions to *Canvases and Careers Today*, to be much more complex and diverse.

Markus Miessen (ed.)
East Coast Europe

Dieter Lesage

East Coast Europe, edited by Markus Miessen, is the product of the *East Coast Europe* project initiated by the Slovenian Consulate General in New York in connection with Slovenia's Presidency of the Council of the European Union during the first half of 2008, the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. The initiative was funded in part by the New York chapter of EUNIC, the network of European Union National Institutes for Culture founded in 2006.¹ Alenka Suhadolnik, Slovenia's Consulate General in New York, asked Katharine Carl and Srdjan Jovanović Weiss of the School of Missing Studies, which presents itself as a 'network for experimental study of cities marked by or currently undergoing abrupt transition',² to organize the project. They, in turn, then brought on board the promising young German architect Markus Miessen, editor of the book *The Violence of Participation*.³

During one of the brainstorming sessions that inevitably accompany such transnational, transatlantic and public-private networking, someone must have come up with the cool expression 'East Coast Europe'. While Europe is the book's main subject of research, 'East Coast' refers to the two borders of this Europe: on the one hand the geographical East Coast of the USA, on the other hand the political 'East Coast' of the European

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€ 12,--

Union. *East Coast Europe* has become an enquiry among political and cultural actors who view Europe from this or that 'border'. A museum director in Philadelphia; an artist in Bucharest; a curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art; and a gallery owner in Pristina; each of them has to deal with Europe from the outside, albeit from two different sides. The tiresome thing about this method though, which is the logical result of what is ultimately a banal play on words, is that it brings together two completely heterogeneous groups of actors under one and the same denominator. The enquiry mainly takes the form of conversations that Markus Miessen had with various people about Europe's borders; about the most important characteristics of the European Union; and about the perceptions of Europe.

Miessen's interviews are not all the same standard. Some of them, like the conversation with Jordan Wolfson and Nedko Solakov, have an unbearable lightness, while others, like the one with Eda Cufer and the Slovenian artists' collective IRWIN, provide a lot of interesting information, but look suspiciously like carefully written essays. Some of those interviewed meanwhile, like the British politician Paddy Ashdown and the Russian curator Viktor Misiano, are well aware of what they are talking about. For other interviewees, however, the point under dis-



cussion only seems to dawn on them during the course of the interview, but by then it's too late.

A highly debatable assumption carried by this collection of interviews seems to be that all the artists, curators and architects who happen to be in your address book should by definition have something interesting to say about Europe, as long as they were born or are working in East Europe or live or work on the American East Coast. Greater selectivity, a bit more preliminary research to find voices that, like Ashdown's and Misiano's, can speak expertly and knowledgeably, would not have been amiss. Furthermore, it is a pity that many of the interviews evince a complete absence of any reference to the existing, many-voiced discourse about Europe, whether it's a question of an opinion of philosophers such as Derrida, Habermas or Sloterdijk, or of the position of prominent politicians like Delors, Prodi or Verhofstadt. Such a marked omission suggests the book's editor must have had a premise that West European opinions should not be included, not even in the most indirect sense, if only to permit 'the other' to have a say.

The Slovenian philosopher and cultural theorist Mladen Dolar supplies an excellent introduction to the book with his essay 'Kafka's Europe'; while the academic and writer Genevieve Maitland Hudson, and the Ankara-based ar-

chitect, artist, designer and scholar Can Altay provide contributions of their own. Contained in one of the book's appendices is a conversation between Katharine Carl and Srdjan Jovanović Weiss with the Bosnian-American artist Nebojša Šerić Shoba. The book also includes a reprint of an interview that the curator Hans Ulrich Obrist once conducted with the French historian Jacques Le Goff in connection with another project in January 2005.⁴ If the intention of this reprint as appendix was to rectify the lack of West European voices in the main texts, then I would have to register a protest against what is in fact the quasi-monopoly on West European opinions that this visceral anti-Turkish historian is momentarily allotted here. That dated interview looked at then-current

political events, and the lack of any editorial commentary on the reprint of the interview leads to serious confusion. In 2005 Le Goff was rejoicing in the 'recent decision of the European Commission' not to allow Croatia to join the European Union, while in the course of 2008 the European Commission – through both the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, and the member of the European Commission responsible for enlargement, Olli Rehn – had repeatedly offered Croatia the prospect of membership in 2011 (p. 298). The technical negotiations, it was even said, could be completed in 2009. Seeing as *East Coast Europe* is an initiative of the Slovenian presidency, one cannot help but wonder whether the reprint of this old interview

without any commentary is an innocent editorial slip or a sly dig at Slovenia's Balkan neighbour. If only to preventively quell a political furor, I suspect that ultimately it is nothing more than a question of a little 'gesture' by Markus Miessen towards his fellow interview specialist – and boss – Hans Ulrich Obrist.

1 See www.eunic-europe.eu.
2 See www.schoolofmissingstudies.net.

3 Markus Miessen (ed.), *The Violence of Participation* (Berlin/New York: Sternberg Press, 2007).

4 'Ever Le Goff. Hans Ulrich Obrist in conversation with Jacques Le Goff' (289-306) is a reprint of 'Europe's Past, Present and *Longue Durée*', in Barbara Vanderlinden, Elena Filipovic (eds.), *The Manifesta Decade. Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

Michiel Dehaene, Lieven De Cauter (eds.)
Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society

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Gijs van Oenen

Spatial concepts and ways of expression made their entry in philosophy some time ago, partly inspired by, or in connection with, architectural ideas. On the one hand, they arrived via deconstructionism, emerging from the notion of *Abbau* – literally demolition – in thoughts voiced by Heidegger. On the other hand, via Deleuze's 'nomadic' or 'rhizomatic' philosophy, in which the notion of spatiality is expressed in architecturally appealing terms such as

'fold', spaces that are 'grooved' or 'smooth', and '(de)territorialization'. In contrast to Foucault, Deleuze described his own work as spatially-oriented: it had to do with the outside, the unthought, the superficial, the fold, all that, in fact, remains strange or outside.

The collection of essays *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society*, edited by the Flemish philosophical urbanists Lieven De Cauter and Michiel Dehaene, is now

aimed at presenting Michel Foucault himself as a spatial thinker. Or rather, 're-present', since the textual basis for this is already 40 years old. In the late 1960s, Foucault gave a lecture to a group of architects about 'other spaces', *des espaces autres*, which, despite – or perhaps precisely because of – their fragmentary and exploratory nature, began to form a source of inspiration for spatial thinking. The notion of heterotopia was central to this. Although only very tentatively

indicated by Foucault, in the form of abstract principles that did not hang together clearly, the notion was meant to suggest something like ‘inversion, contestation or representation of actual places’; ‘external places’ that, although localizable, are ‘outside all places’ (page 17).

It seems to me that, with the notion of heterotopia, Foucault’s intention was to translate his earlier analysis of the structuring effect of ‘discourses’ in terms of the structuring principles of places or living spaces, that is, ‘architecture’. Whereas discourses, in their mutual confrontation, worked in an ordering, exclusionary and regulatory way, it is now a question of a comparable ‘contest’ in spatial terms. The heterotopia is the real place that shows that reality is an illusion, or indeed the perfect place that is better ordered and more rational than normal space. In both cases we can speak, with Christine Boyer (pages 54 and 58), of a contestation with other spaces with the normal spatial order. Boyer’s skilful analysis shows how this can be applied, for example, to Foucault’s famous discussion of Velázquez’s *Las Meninas*.

As Heidi Sohn instructively reveals in her contribution to the book, Foucault derived the notion of heterotopia from medicine, where it refers to ‘normal tissue in an abnormal place in the body’. In spatial thought and philosophy, therefore, the heterotopia is itself heterotopian! And the concept clearly behaves in such a way in this book as well. Following a short introduction

by the editors, there is a (new, good) translation of Foucault’s original text, with two short accounts of the biographical and historical context of its creation; this is followed by 20 authors who each shine their light on a range of possible elaborations and interpretations of heterotopia, whereby it indeed becomes evident that both the concept itself and the practice it refers to are by their very nature nowhere really ‘settled’.

Marco Cenzatti supplements Foucault’s quasi-historical distinction between ‘crisis heterotopias’ and ‘heterotopias of deviation’ – the first referring to special places in so-called primitive societies where temporarily disordered individuals can stay, the second to institutions where deviant individuals are placed – with a new period in which deviance itself has once again become a controversial concept. Such new heterotopias, which frequently form part of everyday life and are no longer necessarily and literally distinguishable spatially from it, acquire a normative charge, in the sense of ‘empowerment’ of minorities and resistance to dominant practices. The price paid for this is that the notion of heterotopia loses even more spatial definition.

Other essays further fragment – ‘heterotype’ – the notion of heterotopia by continually undertaking other, new ‘tissue transplants’. De Caeter and Dehaene associate heterotopia with the ‘inter’ between public and private space, with play and the suspension of everyday economic life, and with ‘safe havens’ – ‘open’ spaces that still offer or enjoy

protection in a post-sacral way. They even see heterotopia as a potential counterforce or strategy against the proliferation of ‘camp-like situations’, that is, extra-legal spaces. On the other hand, Setha Low’s otherwise critical and very readable essay also typifies the ‘gated community’ as a heterotopia. Both Low and Hugo Bartling emphasize the exploitation of gated communities as capitalist profit-machines, in which citizenship is contracted out to the project developer for an exorbitant service fee.

Bartling’s essay deals with the Baudrillard-like project *The Villages in Orlando, Florida*, where one encounters official fake signboards with invented stories about non-existent (at least not existing there) cultural heritage, purely so as to create a nostalgic colonial atmosphere amid the raked over front gardens with streets through which the predominantly aged population prefer to travel in golf carts. Further kaleidoscopic offerings include David Adjaye’s *Whitechapel Idea Store* in Spitalfields Market in London, masculinity on Tel Aviv’s coast (Yael Allwell and Rachel Kallus), the embodiment of mobility in the *Yokohama Port Terminal* and, sure enough, the central station in Arnhem (Lee Stickells). Also discussed is heterotopia as a sort of negative projection of everything that project developers and municipalities nowadays want to build on wasteland, or so-called ‘dead zones’ (Gil Doron).

In a well considered afterword, Hilde Heynen takes stock of the various contributions. Given the very diverse

nature of the subjects and approaches, she can do little more than draw a few informative dividing lines and illuminate interesting contrasts. She does the same, in fact, as Foucault does in his seminal but porous text at the beginning of the book.

Surprisingly enough, what is missing from this wide range of contributions is any consideration of heterotopia as virtual space – a topical notion par excellence that almost perfectly

fits Foucault's cryptic indications. Such an approach would also enable some of the quasi-paradoxes of spatial presence and absence to be better formulated. Moreover, it is strange that references are made in the essays to various previous publications of Foucault's text rather than to the new translation at the front of the book.

I could also imagine that the same editors could have used the same material to put

together a fiery, anarchistic pamphlet on the political and social implications of heterotopia. The book at hand is indeed a 'heterotopic reversal' of this: imaginative, but above all learned, handsomely bound and richly illustrated. But this also means that the book is exceptionally expensive – more than 100 euros. It would be a pity if its distribution remained limited to traditional outlets because of this.