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**THE
AUTONOMY
PROJECT**

└ ONOMATOPEE 43.1

┌
NEWSPAPER #2

└ POSSIBILITIES
└ PERSPECTIVES
└ PROJECTS



**FRAME
WORKS**

┌ <http://theautonomyproject.ning.com>

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EDITORIAL INTRO AUTONOMY |
NEWSPAPER #2 |

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Art's autonomy has always mirrored other forms of autonomy: the autonomy of the subject, the objective autonomy of knowledge, the autonomy of judgment, the autonomous flow of (art) history. In this, art's autonomy appears as an icon of the compartmentalisation of the modern world into discrete, specialised nodes housed in distinct institutional shells. But the transportation and communication technologies that first made possible this endless diversification have now accelerated to such speed that they have ruptured the hygienic, organising tissue of modern society. It is in this fragmented light that the Autonomy Project continues to analyse and experiment with that modernist remainder: art's autonomy.

FRAMEWORKS, the second Autonomy Project Newspaper, picks up where the project's Summer School left off – with a discussion of the question :

“Where Do We Go From Here?”

At the heart of the Autonomy Project is the collective desire of all the partners to open up a critical dialogue on the subject between established thinkers, theorists, artists and activists as well as a new generation of colleagues. The Project seeks to build bridges between different practices which are necessary to produce and mediate art today – and to stimulate a consciousness that neither research on art, or the making of art, can occur in isolation.

During the early part of 2010 a series of Seminars on Autonomy were held in various cities in the UK, Germany and the Netherlands. These seminars were aimed at developing a dialogue and exchange on the subject of autonomy amongst a growing community of undergraduate and postgraduate students as well as early career artists (regardless of their age). The initial results of our discussions, which provided the basis for the first Autonomy Project Summer School, can be viewed at <http://theautonomyproject.ning.com>

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The Autonomy Project Summer School provided a platform for Seminar participants, established artists, academics and radicals to use the Van Abbemuseum as a hub – to meet, exchange, question and discover their similarities and differences through the continued discussion of autonomy. Both the results of these discussions and reflections upon them are contained here. In the spirit of the Autonomy Project FRAMEWORKS has brought together these writings in three sections – Possibilities, Perspectives and Projects. The work of new writers and artists rubs shoulders with commissioned as well as existing texts by more familiar names. Each voice and project contributes equally to the development of an architecture of understanding (attempting to accommodate a set of complex propositions and difficulties). All point towards new ways of thinking and the urgency of our questions.

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To the writers:
For the contribution of these valued possibilities, perspectives and projects we, as the newspaper's editorial team, are extremely grateful – your generosity of experience, wisdom and knowledge is the foundation without which any framework wouldn't stand a chance.

Thank you to the publishing support of Onomatopée. This newspaper would not have been realised without the involvement of the Autonomy Project editorial board and partners.

┌ Newspaper #2: Frameworks:
└ POSSIBILITIES:
└ An Introduction:
└ J.Byrne

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POSSIB

AN INTRO- DUCTION

JOHN BYRNE

We are living in remarkable times. Our globalised neo-liberal economy has nearly bankrupted itself and we are all now footing the bill. Europe is re-fragmenting, America's power is waning, Asia's power is waxing and the 'War on Terror' has turned into a pandemic of ideological attrition. It seems highly unlikely that anybody looking back at this moment from some time in the future will even begin to remember the art. That is, of course, unless we do something about it.

One of the interesting things about the term Autonomy is its links to earlier uses and senses of the word. Not all of these links to the past are bad. Not all of autonomy's earlier senses are derived from an isolationist stance on art's alleged transcendental aesthetic quality. The past, as well as the future, can offer us the possibility of an autonomy that is connected and meaningful. The negotiation of a space for artistic autonomy is the struggle for a place where we can imagine a different way of living – or, at the very least, be able to re-imagine a time when difference from the status quo still seemed a distinct and achievable possibility. The essays in this section are all engaged in such a search for new pasts and radical futures.

For Emilio Moreno, the historical lessons of alternative economies point toward the possibility for the production and distribution of real social change. For Paul Sullivan, autonomy becomes the tool to re-negotiate a more meaningful role for the artist within new economies of cultural production (where economy no longer means the crude commodification of the artistic object). For Sarah Pierce, autonomy is, paradoxically, conditioned by dependency. For Charles Esche, it is the role of the Museum to protect a fragile space where dissent can still be meaningfully nurtured, "an opportunity to look back in order to look forward" as we continue to negotiate the difficult transition from Modernity to a new and less certain futures of our own making.

All of these essays hinge on the knowledge that the search for autonomy is located firmly within the present conditions of our dysfunctional social production. All look to reshape autonomous futures through a renegotiated relationship with our past – towards a time when art no longer re-creates the act of shock as tragedy (or farce), a time when the avant-garde is no longer just a voice amongst the babble of sanitised dissent.

BILL

ART AND ARTISTS

CHARLES
ESCHE

_The field of art remains a tolerated enclosure within global capital in which non-productive, dysfunctional and pointless experimentation can still take place. Even though much has been commodified, there is no other field so free of the economic logic that defines our contemporary world. Try doing what art does in business or in democratic politics to understand the difference. We understand this status under the term "autonomy".

_Being autonomous carries the constant danger that art becomes marginalised in the social, political and economic discourses in which it takes part. It is also limited and constrained by institutional and governmental systems. Yet art is not entirely instrumentalised for other purposes, nor entirely excluded from influential commentary on the world outside itself. It sits on the edge of things without being detached, constantly negotiating with historical change and also able to pass comment on itself and its condition. At least it has this potential.

「_The field of art can be seen (potentially) to occupy an ambivalent space and status apart: potentially autonomous and potentially engaged, potentially commodified and potentially critical, a double position that is increasingly rare in a world where so much is purified in order to sustain the core system of capital exchange. Indeed, it is this multiple, paradoxical potentiality that could be its unique characteristic.

To actualise its potential, art needs artists who can realise its possibilities in works of art that engage a public.

_To actualise its potential, art needs artists who can realise its possibilities in works of art that engage a public. The artist is therefore the key figure who has to play out the paradoxes and bridge the gap across conflicting demands.

_Yet the role of the artist has been overwhelmed by new models of economy flowing from the development of the media, entertainment and “creative” industries. The skills of an artist (flexibility, creative spontaneity, innovation, provocation) are the core values of this creative economy. In this way, it has become true that ‘everyone is an artist’ in the (Beuys) sense of a self-determining, creative individual. But this artist is also one who is prone to financial ‘self-exploitation’ for indeterminate future benefits and who derives his/her core personal identity from work that is temporary and changeable. Such an individual might be of great value to the creative economy, but it is difficult to see how this will be sustainable over the long term, especially if state subsidies are withdrawn.

_The paradox between everyone being an artist, and the artist as the key figure in realising the potential to help us all think differently, is a problem that needs to be addressed by us. It makes our relationship to the figure of the “artist” as understood by society complex and makes our choices for certain artists all the more crucial. It also means the opportunities we offer artists have

」 to be specific and particular. Simply offering a platform to present visual artwork to people, made by those whom the market already recognises as being artists, is no longer sufficient or even justifiable in terms of the public interest.

_ Instead we have to commission work and to ask for commentary on art’s relationship to the world outside itself. We need criteria for assessing our projects that judge

its contribution to critical thinking and ‘imagining the world otherwise’. We must avoid presenting works that simply confirm the creative economy, its flexibility, and that celebrate the success of certain adaptable individuals within the existing systems and forces of global capital production.

THE MODERN AND ITS PARADOXES

_The ambivalent nature of the role of the artist is part of the complex of ideas making the shift from modernity to the contemporary. Modernity had a plan (secularism, liberty, democracy) and a style (modernism). It offered answers to the big questions of existence and foresaw a future where problems would be solved and difficulties lessened. It originated in Europe and spread its influence through imperialism and communism throughout the world. It claimed access to universal truths and delivered mass technology, culture, media and production and consumption to the world of 2010.

_Yet from the perspective of 2010, most of these elements appear to be in long-term decline. Even those that are not, such as technology or consumption, appear to offer little more than “more of the same”. It is true that there is no new paradigm in which the truths of modernity are exposed as absurd or antique (such as for instance the shift from feudalism to industrialism or paganism to Christianity) but nor is there any real conviction in the potency of modern principles for the future.

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Art and Artists:
C. Esche

_The real moderns today are Wilders, Fortuyn and their ilk all over Europe. They are the ones that cause us to pause and to understand that we cannot continue in the old avant-gardist ways, however appealing they are.

_The void at the heart of politics, its domination by a consensus that destroys the possibility to imagine the world differently, is our driving force. Why? Because without contested politics related to different visions of the world, the future cannot be created and the idea of "leading the way" (as in avant-garde) becomes a minority amongst other minorities shuffling in various directions and victim to the overriding

pragmatic logic of global capital. Such a society requires only a repetitive art and culture that delivers the same but different in ever repetitive loops.

_We are in a time of transition that currently has no obvious end. Thus the ghost of modernity remains hovering around as the only available compass to orientate ourselves in much of our contemporary world, however much we instinctively understand

that it no longer points in any meaningful direction. It is precisely this modern compass that we need to lay to rest (slowly) over the next years, as we also invite artists to try to point out new possible directions ahead - in a perhaps problematic return to an avant-garde tradition.

_At that point, the task of the inheritors of the avant-garde (and that is what we are, if we are anything) is not to celebrate the mainstreaming of modernist art as a simple style without revolutionary content, but to turn away and look elsewhere. That elsewhere has to be built on existing ground.

THE MUSEUM, AMONGST ALL THIS

_Ideally speaking, our task in the museum is to help shape and give body and voice to

The task of the inheritors of the avant-garde is not to celebrate the mainstreaming of modernist art as a simple style without revolutionary content, but to turn away and look elsewhere.

feelings that could become that new paradigm that we know that we need. This is the essence of our search for a museum of the 21st century. It allows us to commission and show works that depict the state of things today and indicate from where the potential thinking for this new paradigm may come.

_At the same time, we are also the inheritors and carers for a rich, imaginative archive of works both from the high days of modernism/modernity when it more or less matched subjective reality and even more so from the slow, long-term decline in its accuracy and effectiveness to describe the world of today.

_This gives us an opportunity to look back in order to look forward, and describe what has happened to get us here through physical encounters with exhibitions and artworks. It also should allow us to commission artists and perhaps people from other disciplines to use knowledge produced under the old paradigm to seek out new possibilities.

_Artists have to play a bigger role in helping and steering our thinking. They have to be part of how we shape things, not only the providers of display products. They do this not only through the tools of talking and meeting, but making and showing – and we have to permit that/encourage it. But we shouldn't focus exclusively on artworks – indeed showing artworks in connection with other types of things might highlight their uniqueness and categorical difference better.

_It is its potential to act as a free connector of knowledge and experience from fields outside itself that keeps the museum linked to the world, and therefore a valid site for asking and answering the kinds of questions we try to outline here. We have to develop this capacity.

_At the same time, we need to open ourselves to other notions of quality and Modernity and Modernism and how to make this accessible.

We have to speak to people's emotions
We have to offer them a unique experience
We have to create the conditions for thinking.

if we want to have an effect on a wide audience and not compromise ourselves with easily marketed blockbusters that would destroy our critical position (over time).

UNFORMED NOTES

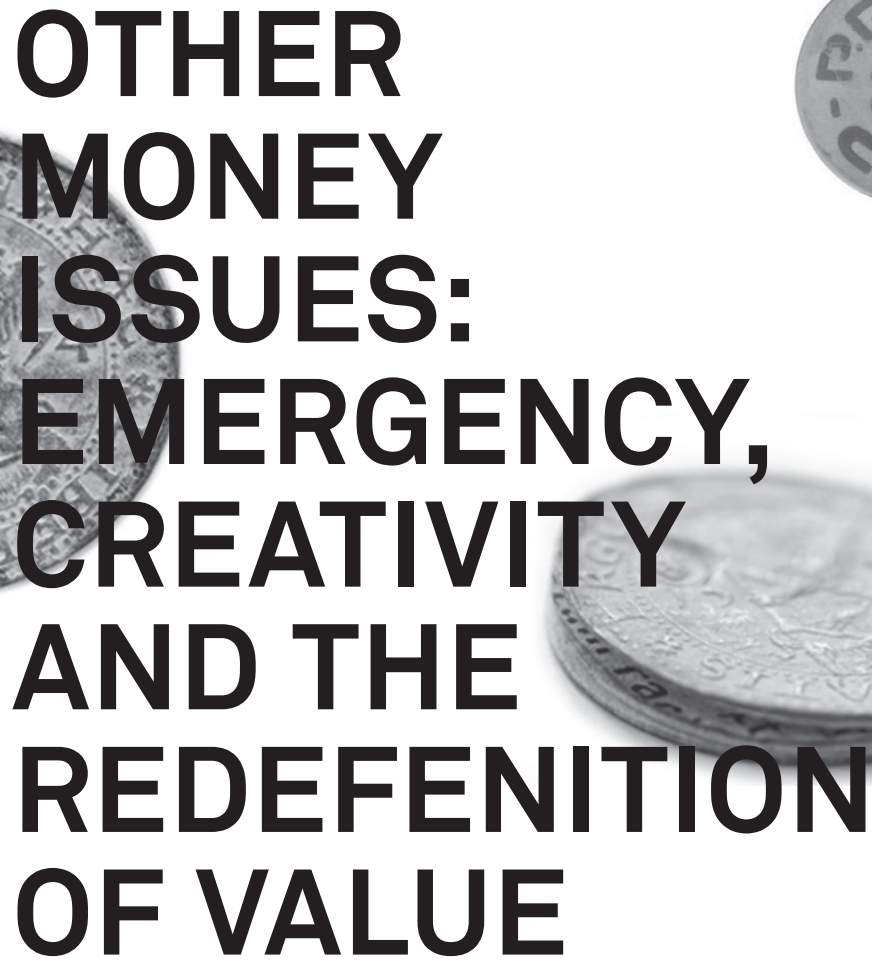
Why do we make things so difficult for ourselves?

_Because we are trying to change the paradigm of how art is consumed and the effects it produces on people and in society.

Why do we want to do that?

_Although people might understand intuitively that Modernity and Modernism are over, there is no effective new narrative to define the end and start a new season.

Newspaper #2: Frameworks:
Other Money Issues:
Emergency, Creativity and the
Redefinition of Value:
E. Moreno



OTHER MONEY ISSUES: EMERGENCY, CREATIVITY AND THE REDEFINITION OF VALUE

EMILIO
MORENO

—The History of money has been continuously affected by moments of scarcity that have forced communities to push their creativity to the extremes in order to redefine the idea of value. We find several historical cases of currency issues that exemplify the adaptability of money as an abstract concept in which value merely depends on trust.

—A first example is the Eighty Years War, when the Spanish army besieged the city of Leiden (in the Netherlands) between 1573 and 1574. Given the extraordinary nature of the



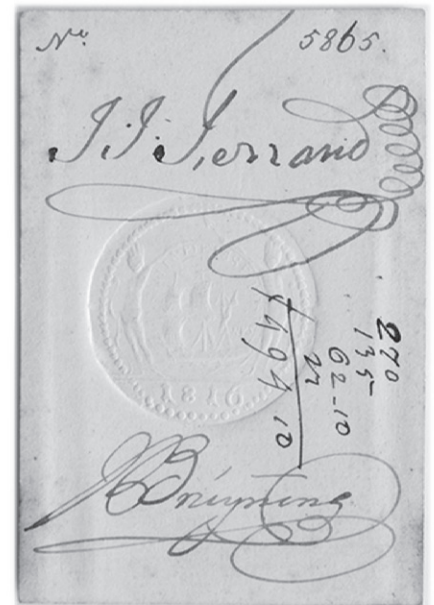
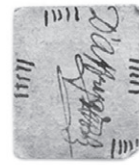
situation, the city exhibited usual social behaviour when in times of instability. The government hoarded coins and precious metals to ensure the power to support its sovereignty, while using less noble metals for the production of arms and war material. Simultaneously, citizens stockpiled metals with an intrinsic value, coins and other resources in an attempt to prepare for the period of scarcity ahead. As a result, the only form of money known in Europe at the time - precious metal coins - disappeared from daily life in Leiden. With the need to pay their soldiers to defend the city and after exhausting all existing metals - including ornaments and objects from Catholic churches - the city was the first in Europe to finally decide to issue paper as a promise of payment in silver at the end of the war. Forced by necessity and in clear political opposition of the Catholic enemy, the government issued 43000 paper coins using the pages of Catholic books on church

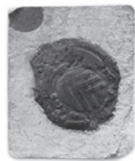
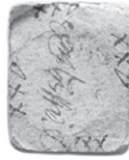
related subjects and the life and works of churchfathers. For every coin they used 18 to 22 pages stuck together with a glue made out of bones. By separating the pages, we can still read the words of the incunabulae.

_We find another example of an extraordinary currency issued two centuries after the Leiden siege by crossing the ocean towards Surinam. The need for money during the first years of the new Dutch settlement had been modest and was mainly sufficed by minting special colonial coins. By the 1750s however, the need to increase the supply of small change had become rather pressing as these copper and silver coins vanished abroad or were buried for safekeeping. After some hesitation, the colony governors opted for the use of authenticated playing cards as money. The initial issues were shaped like coins and were embossed with the seal of Surinam, as well as numbered and signed by members of the Court. As more and more

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card money was issued, the work involved in shaping the cards like coins became prohibitive and the use of regular playing cards was adopted, where lower values were indicated by cutting the cards into smaller sizes and half cards. Surinam used playing cards as money for 80 years, between 1760 and 1827.





Inmuntend papiera
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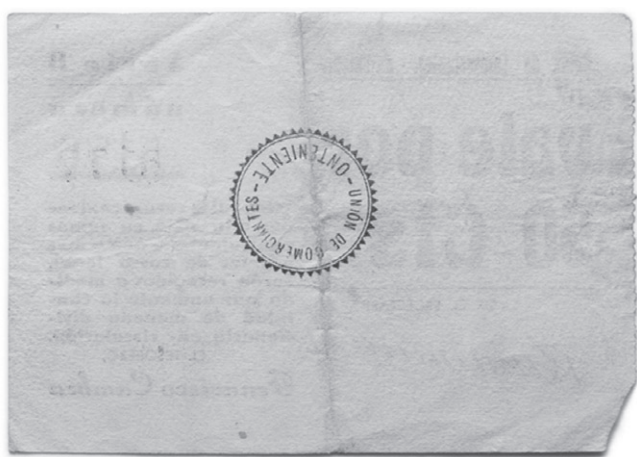
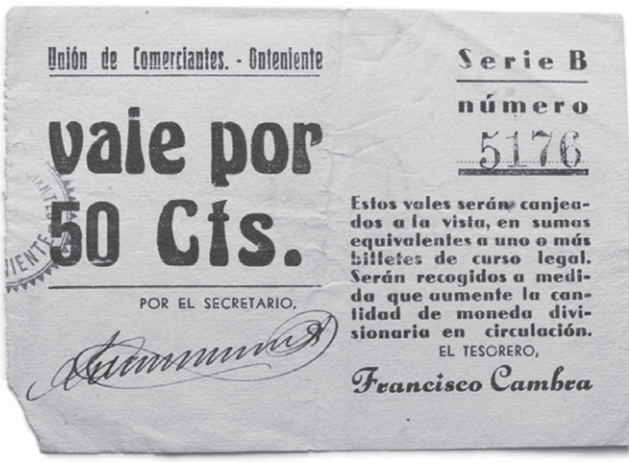


Researching world history we find a considerable number of similar cases in which necessity obliges people to redefine the concept of value and trust, mainly at a local level. In the inflationist post WWI Germany leather, linen, aluminium foil, photographs, business cards, wrapping paper, plywood, underground tickets, celluloid or wax were validated as money in villages and by small groups. During the same period, in the territories of Khorezm (today's Uzbekistan) silk banknotes were regular currency for a time, At the beginning of the 1930s, the Soviet-founded Szechuan-Shensi Provinces (China), issued cloth banknotes.





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During the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) up to 7000 different forms of money were issued by cities, smaller city councils, villages, factories, companies, cooperatives, trade unions, hairdressers, cafes and even individuals. WWII brought an endless number of similar cases throughout Europe. Small regions in Russia, in Philippines, India, in the Middle East, groups of people in Tanzania, Nigeria, Congo, (and in many other parts of the African continent)... all of them experienced the conceptual and formal flexibility of the concept of value. Each of these cases underline the use of creative capacities of communities to establish new parameters of agreement regarding different forms of trust.

Economic theoretician Silvio Gesell changed the perception of the established economic system in his *The Natural Economic Order* (1911). According to Gesell, freeing money from interest payments

is a prerequisite in the movement towards "free money" (FREIWIRTSCHAFT), which would be the basis for social justice and welfare. During the Great Depression of the 1930s

some experiments based on Gesell theories were conducted in Europe and the U.S. leading to very interesting results. One of the most striking cases was that of the Austrian town of Wörgl which, being bankrupt and with an unemployment rate of 75%, issued its own money based on principles such as the penalization of hoarding and speculation, as well as the acceleration of circulation. In one year, the town emerged from bankruptcy and went back to a minimum unemployment rate. Income from local taxes rose 35% and investment in public works 220%. Experts throughout Europe recognised the success of the idea: six neighbouring villages copied the system successfully and even the French Prime Minister, Eduoard Dalladier, made a special visit to see the "miracle of Wörgl". By that time, two hundred Austrian townships were interested in adopting that system. But the Austrian Central Bank panicked over the possibility of losing its profitable monopoly over an interest-based economy and brought the case to Supreme Court. It then became

It was only two hundred years ago when banks as we know them today were born in central Europe.

a criminal offence to issue "emergency currency". This return to a speculative, interest-based economy controlled by a central bank focused on creating money as debt, quickly brought Wörgl to a 30% unemployment rate.

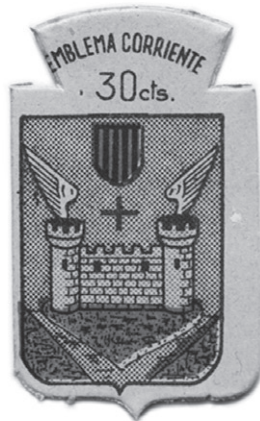
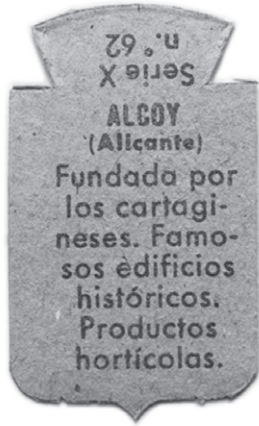
Nowadays it is taken for granted that borrowed money must carry interest. It is generally believed that such an economy can grow forever regardless of the warning signs: such as decreasing natural resources or the generalised moral rejection of the notion of usury. Usury, according to Aristotle, not only aims at an unnatural goal, but it also uses money itself erroneously since money was created as a means of exchange, and not as a medium to be increased for its own sake. The Roman Empire punished usury as a crime. In Christian tradition, the Bible as well as St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, defend the immorality of obtaining something out

of nothing, as this would lead to a violation of a natural law and to produce imbalance and disintegration of fraternal bonds. Even today, modern Islamic banking is guided by these

same parameters. The repudiation of usury dates back to the legal and ethical roots of the European civilization.

So, what happened? Why did Europe change its mind? It was only two hundred years ago when banks as we know them today were born in central Europe, and with them the condemnation of usury began to diminish - leading to today's situation in which we erroneously take for granted an economic system based on interests. With these changes in moral and ethical standards brought on by the ideas around the Protestant Reformation, the first bankers realised that trading with money could be more profitable than with any other thing. They focused on the three transactions that could imply more benefits out of nothing: exchange of foreign currency, the negotiation of loans and bank deposits. Regarding the deposits, they issued paper receipts that the costumers used in daily transactions instead of carrying heavy pieces of metal.

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sellschaft in Celle
Mark
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ZAHLE AN ÜBERBRINGER DER PLATZANWEISUNG AUS GUTHABEN
STADTSPARKASSE BIELEFELD
100M
BIELEFELD, 15.7.1921
DER MAGISTRAT.

Weiss-Cakes
MARKE LORELEY
10 Pf. à Rolle
RY TRÖLLER, CELLE
-Cakes-Waffel-u. Biscuit-Fabriken.

100M

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E. Moreno



Soon bankers realised that their customers never happened to ask to change those papers for the goods stored in the bank all at the same time, and that nobody really knew exactly how much goods the bank had stored. So bankers began to issue much more money in the form of receipts than the existing goods, mainly loaning those receipts and applying interest to them. This is the way money is still created today. One has a debt with interests so the bank knows that the individual will pay back far more than what the bank loaned. This way, the bank can loan more money to another person because of the promise of the first person's payment with interest. The debt of this second person will ensure the possibility for the bank to make a third loan to a different person, and so on so forth. Believe it or not, this practice came to be supported by law and today we live in a system in which:

- 1) Money is created by banks out of thin air.
- 2) For one person to have money it is completely necessary that another one is in debt.
- 3) When a bank provides a mortgage, it only creates the amount of money that one asks for, but the bank does not create the amount of money it asks as interest for that loan. In other words, A quantity of the money people are asked to pay back to the bank simply does not exist because the bank does not create it. It is inherent to the system that there are a number of people unable to pay back their loans. The only solution the system finds is to create more money out of debt, to manage a continuous necessity of exponential growth and inflation.

The first question to pose to this system would be:

Why do governments - sovereigns in a democratic system - choose to borrow money with interest from independent institutions as banks are, when governments themselves could create all the interest-free money they need?

_To answer this, we need to reflect on the very notion of “sovereignty”. For Agamben, the sovereign is ‘he who decides on the state of exception’ i.e. a realm in which there is a suspension of law . The state of exception is legitimised by a necessity based on the right of a system to self-defense. In times of extreme necessity a system has to choose between following the rules and collapsing or breaking the rules and preserving the system. Living with the consequences of today’s financial crisis, we can easily understand the exceptional, urgent measures taken by governments forced to invest public money in order to rescue banks – ultimately revealing them as the real sovereigns of our current system.

_The forementioned historical issues of emergency currency serve to illustrate the fact that money is nothing more than an idea waiting to be redesigned according to particular circumstances; and could therefore provide the formal precedents for creative ways of thinking in other fields. If these examples represent the most formalist approach, experiments such as Wörgl, expose the ideological roots of what we know today as alternative economic systems based on sustainability and social integration. They remind us that opportunities to negotiate and redefine concepts such as trust and value, are always present.



* All images are part of Emilio Moreno’s current research around historical examples of currencies issued during emergency times.

* State of Exception, Giorgio Agamben. University of Chicago Press, 2005.



PAUL SULLIVAN

┌
**WHO CONTROLS
THE AUTONOMY
ZONE?** ┌

At the start of the Autonomy Project,
one of the questions continuously
raised was: can art be autonomous?

_Personally, I was interested in the idea that art production could be autonomous - within the context that autonomy equates to self-control or self-determination or, simply, the possibility that the artist can act autonomously without external control. From my perspective, this is also really about the notion of translation and the possibility that the artist as author can somehow move something from one place to another without changing the meaning or form of the concept. In other words, the ability that the artist has to move a metaphysical concept across into physical or digital terrain without distortion.

However, the act of adequate or accurate translation, like Utopia, is the arena of fantasy. Nevertheless, it still serves a useful purpose in that it acts as an unattainable horizon that not just artist's dream of reaching.

Just as private fantasies are inevitably derived from an external set of ideas or images, it is also true that the idea that the artist can make some form of pure data into an artwork, via translation, would itself deny that what is being translated is, in fact, an already disparate set of ideas and images – albeit ideas and images that are primed for representation after a lifetime of image and sound absorption.

What we are really talking about, therefore, is a sampling and representation of life's other (and our other) and not simply an act of translation.

If this is the case, then surely it is a question of how the artist seeks to be in control of the work? Perhaps not just in the sense of the artist deciding what the work is, but also in the sense of the artist deciding whether or not to engage in a debate about what happens to the work once it has been (if at all) moved into the world beyond her or his control. And, I would argue, that world beyond the artist's control is the market place (here I use the term market place to denote the entire structure of the art world which, in turn, is a world that does not differentiate between public and private).

I would also argue that the market is a-political and a-economic in the sense that it will appropriate all available political and financial structures and resources in order to continue to fund, and to buy, the production and distribution of artworks. Like it or not, the market controls not just the flow and dissemination of artworks, it also controls the critical structures (including

education) and dominant media outlets that are essential to the procurement and development of the majority of artists who enter the global market.

The act of adequate or accurate translation, like Utopia, is the arena of fantasy.

For any debate to really happen around the idea of control, and for the conclusions drawn to

be enacted and made real, art production (not necessarily artworks) and art dissemination via the existing dominant market place would have to be challenged. As John Byrne has pointed out in the last issue of The Autonomy Newspaper, rather than the work losing its autonomy (or self-control) when released into the wider market, there remains the possibility that this is, in fact, where the work becomes ultra-autonomous – in that it can now be re-presented, re-owned and re-contextualised ad-indefinitum. In this scenario, we may say that, due to the fact that the market now controls the movement and reading of the work, a kind of slippage of control has occurred from the artist to the market and we may, therefore, describe the market as the autonomous agency.

If this is the case then the artwork now sits somewhere in between the author and the public – in the market – and, although the market may not own the intellectual copyright to the work in the majority of cases, it owns the dominant means of distributing and positioning artworks. It could also be argued that this happens irrespective of any discussion with artists and, to a greater or lesser extent, the market owns the ability to trade on the name of the artist (dead or alive) each time it is either shown or published.

For artists to even enter this market they need to firstly attain visibility in order to be seen by the market. Visibility, self-promotion and self-propaganda are required and are tactics promoted in art schools.

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Who Controls the Autonomy Zone:
P. Sullivan

In this structure there is still a two-way-street of sorts. The artists need the market and the market needs the artists. However, although this may be the state of the market today, what if artists began to oppose the form and the mechanics of this sort of commodity and brand exchange? How would they renegotiate their position within the market by establishing new market places? Would they try to do this and, if so, what would be the alternative? If this were to happen, would this be some form of explicit autonomy as Byrne suggests? A form of explicit autonomy which does not necessitate the traditionally flawed assumption that one has to somehow step 'outside' of the market/art industry to launch the most effective critique?

_To understand why artists should want to address these questions would need a political perspective that would oppose the view that the market is an open arena for which aspiring artists may enter and navigate in order to succeed, and to begin to see it as a regulatory body that in effect is only interested in promoting the types of brands that successfully sell within the market place. Therefore the question is whether the market needs to be reshaped from within or whether an entirely new structure can develop and exist outside of the current conventions.

_If we take an analogous perspective from the world of architecture we may be able to shed some light on our discussion of art's autonomy. We may also see similarities in the development of the type of architectural thought and representation that may still be considered as an art form. That is to say, whilst an architectural project is at a concept stage it may still offer some notion of translation and relative autonomy within its own construct, its own delusional purity and proximity to its author.

_However, as with art, architectures fleeting glimpse with translation is at the origin of the work - as opposed to the final business

end of the process - and this short burst is quickly extinguished as the concept travels through the necessary sequences that turn it into something called a building.

_However, although we may still argue that architecture, like art, becomes ultra-autonomous after it enters the world of the other (or the world of us, the public or compulsory realm) the architectural form is also continually reshaped and re-contextualised by successive generations who redesign and rebuild buildings for an infinite set of representations. If this is true, then there would seem to be one major difference between the autonomy of art and the autonomy of architecture and that would be control.

_Although we may continue to argue that the art market controls art, there is the simultaneous argument that the market must also counterbalance control with the "out of control" - that is the shifting territories of the controversial and continued examination from inside and outside of what exactly is art, where does it reside and what is its relevance - to allow it to continually be reshaped and repackaged as a commodity that has relevance not just to the world it resides in and represents, but also to the world it sells in. However architecture on the contrary is still taught or is presented to us as though it is somehow art or art like. To accept this is to acknowledge that, by definition, it must be an art form that is subservient to the dominant forms of state control that regulate the subject.

_Rather than the body of control being an evolving self-generator of new form - aesthetics, politics and commerce that is self-serving and essentially a mutually beneficial construction that we may argue constitutes the art market - the state control of architecture (via planning departments, building controllers, insurance executives, politicians, wannabe politicians, health and safety executives, commissioners,

conservatives, ecologists, environmentalists, tree huggers, conservationists, lobbyists, quango's, public consultation bodies and higher educationists) is on the one hand the death of autonomy for a relevant architecture (as opposed to a state controlled monopoly on construction) and yet on the other hand it is this architectural straightjacket that in fact gives rise to the possibility of an alternative architectural proposition which is driven by the political notion of self determination or autonomy by the resistance and eventual removal of the dominant or colonial form.

It is this notion that architecture may actually be colonised - by the state or a state of mediocrity - that separates it from art from a purely structural perspective. Even the most vociferous anti-art market thinkers (who attack what they perceive as a monetary imbalance in the art star-system) would have to concede that the art market is instrumental in the continued development of its own form or the brand of art in a global market place. The architecture market and its regulators on the other hand cannot be seen to be part of an evolving framework that allows form and experimentation to develop within its own respective market or to offer a significant counterbalance to allow for the crucial level of debate and criticality that will ensure its evolution or radicalisation. It is this control against the form of architecture by its governing bodies as opposed to the support of architecture by its governing bodies which essentially allows us to seriously consider the other possibilities of architectural production outside of the current system - that is a new form of production carried out in a new autonomous zone.

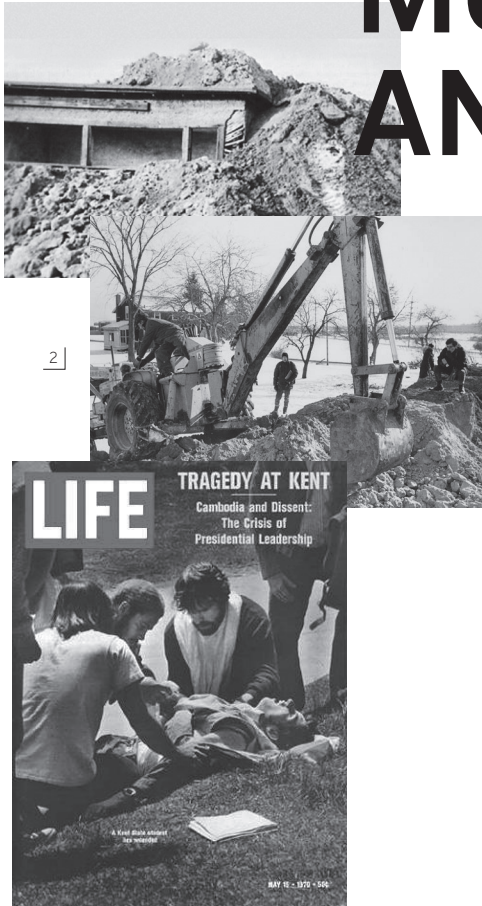
An evolving framework that allows form and experimentation to develop within its own respective market or to offer a significant counterbalance to allow for the crucial level of debate and criticality that will ensure its evolution or radicalisation.

* The following text by Sarah Pierce is a modified transcription of a presentation she made in 2007 at the 'Be(com)ing Dutch Caucus' in the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven. Her ideas were framed by a panel discussion entitled 'The autonomy of art versus its use (critically, economically and socially broaching the questions - is it even possible to speak of art as "autonomous" in any of these contexts? Is this not simply an outmoded term? It became clear during the Caucus that we need a sense of density, dialogue and locatedness when addressing established narratives within art history (the legacies of Enlightenment thought and trajectory into Modernism) in order to substantiate any productive counternarrative. Here, Sarah Pierce suggests that the possibility of counternarrative lies in the momentary murmuring of the crowd: multi-perspectival and circulating, collective and non-authored. Within a context like the Netherlands where the romance of autonomy has become systemic, this idea of constant reiteration is imperative. The question is how? We need more voices.

MURMURS AND LEGACIES

SARAH PIERCE

_When I was presented with the invitation to consider today's topic: the autonomy of art versus its critical use, or its critical uses, I found myself thinking about dependencies. Specifically, one's dependency when drawing upon a notion or notions of autonomy, and a legacy of past practices, which, in relation to something that Charles Esche said about the "here and now", are implicated in the present. I'm not thinking about dependency as a breakdown or symptom of autonomy's failure. Rather, I want to describe autonomy as a position in the present that is conditioned by a past, which, to connect autonomy to its critical uses, attends to the difficulties that accompany this position in the present. The idea of autonomy brings us quickly to the idea of dependency; paradoxically, dependency is a condition of autonomy.



1 | Smithson's 'Partially Buried Woodshed' years on, image courtesy of www.vitruvius.com.br

2 | Robert Smithson prepares to install his work, 'Partially Buried Woodshed' at Kent State University, 1970.

(Photo by Doug Moore. From the Kent State University Library Special Collections and Archives)

3 | Life Magazine, 1970 covers the tragic shootings at Kent State University

There is a reason for this duality, or complexity, and it has to do with the terms of being an artist, how we are educated, how our work comes to be, the conditions we inherit, and the slippages between individual and collective outputs – between one’s artistic persona and the kind of incorporated identity that allows one to describe oneself as an artist or as “being” an artist. To explain what I mean, I’d like to project back to the late ‘80s and early ‘90s, and my situation then, as a young artist living in Los Angeles. I have a book with me today that I first read as a student in 1989, called, POLLOCK AND AFTER: THE CRITICAL DEBATE.

It contains a well-known correspondence between T. J. Clark, Michael Fried, and Clement Greenberg centred on the possibility or impossibility of an autonomous art object. I have always considered T. J. Clark the clear winner; as a result, autonomy as a position, for me, has no credibility. Partly because it expands a kind of ideology that privileges the artist and partly because I could never accept the idea of art’s autonomy from other internalised agendas, such as art for art’s sake. But of course, my position overlooks autonomy’s other meaning: as the degree of freedom an artist has to act under his or her own influence, and to resist any demands other than self-contained ones, and this would include the ability of the work of art to resist instrumentalisation, being put to “uses” other than “being” art. Tricky. Is any artist, by refusing or continually resisting external demands, also able to resist the reproduction and the rationalisation of their work and their ideas by culture and a cultural industry that continually seeks to possess the usable bits of those works, or the usable ideas, whether or not those ideas emerge through resistance or self-reflexivity or through some kind of inwardness? Put more simply, if a work of art is ever autonomous, then the artist too must forego his or her control over its destiny.

This is when the limits of autonomy are most at stake. Autonomy, like all political

gestures, points to one thing by obscuring another, something that is present, but not always visible, or apparent. So, hovering over me here is an image of PARTIALLY BURIED WOODSHED, which is an artwork by the American artist Robert Smithson, produced on the campus of Kent State University. He made the work in the winter of 1970, by pouring several tons of dirt onto a derelict building. Flash-forward four months, in the same year, four students were shot dead on the Kent State campus by the US National Guard, following protests on the specifically to do with the US invasion of Cambodia. Sometime after this incident took place,

If a work of art is ever autonomous, then the artist too must forego his or her control over its destiny.

someone wrote on the side of the woodshed the words: “May 4, Kent 70”. In the ‘80s, the university, in an attempt to protect

the campus from what had become an eyesore, as well as a sore reminder of the past, planted a grove of trees around the woodshed. This gesture also protected an agreement with the artist to allow the woodshed to decay, undisturbed. Partially Buried, partially buried, again, and as a result, the university obscures the work, and its own history. And this is where the potential for autonomy lies: when demands are in conflict, when multiple voices enter into the discourse, when contradictory histories are at work, autonomy is what remains uncontained. The whispers, the rumours, the anonymous gestures, the friendships and ‘multiple interpretations’, or ‘murmurs’, that resound in spaces that can’t be claimed. Spaces intimated by images and works of art that, for me, connect back to Kent State. Three days before the shootings a group of students and faculty gathered at Victory Bell. It is a university campus, it is the space of peaceful protest. And if you look closely in the background, you can see, the National Guard has already arrived.

* The following text was first published in 'Unleashing the Collective Phantoms: Essays in Reverse Imagineering' (Autonomedia: 2008).
It has been reprinted here with the kind permission of the author.

INTRODUCTORY REMARK

Brian Holmes

Following is the text I read in one of those rather disagreeable places to which art circles sometimes lead you. This time, the Tate Modern.

The conference, held this Saturday October 25 [2003], was called Diffusion: Collaborative Practice in Contemporary Art. Also present were Bureau d'Etudes, Francois Deck, Eve Chiapello, Jochen Gerz, Stephen Wright, John Roberts, Charles Green, and others.

Important to the understanding of the gesture involved in reading such a text in a place like Tate Modern is the visual material, beginning with the photo of Jack Lang and Fidel, moving through the screen captures on the Tate's corporate patronage, with the British Petroleum adverts and so forth, and leading to the press clippings of the mounting British troop commitments in Iraq, and the photos of "the society of leaders": Blush and Blair, Bush and Chirac, Bush and Schroeder, Bush and Berlusconi, Bush and Aznar, Bush and Bush... Then you would have further material on the marginal realms of protest and "exit," and finally, on the NSK project discussed in conclusion.

The aim of these kinds of interventions is to break the long-discredited, but still practically imposed taboo on public discussion of the social relations that lie behind "our" cultural institutions, which, in the case of museums like the Tate Modern, have clearly almost nothing to do with former conceptions of the public sphere, and in no way support "free cooperation." To the extent that these institutions ultimately depend on a far wider circle of participants than the ones they objectively serve, maybe there's still some interest in this kind of straight talking. And beyond the aspect of denunciation, there is the question: in addition to the diffuse creativity of protest, what is a strong ambition for concentrated art today?



ARTISTIC
AUTONOMY
AND THE
COMMUNI-
CATION
SOCIETY

BRIAN HOLMES





... THE PRICE TO PAY FOR FREEDOM IS THE DESTRUCTION OF THE ECONOMIC AS THE CENTRAL VALUE, INDEED AS THE SOLE VALUE.

C. CASTORIADIS ¹

The period in which we are living has seen a sweeping change in the organization and fundamental mission of the aesthetic institutions (museums, schools, publishing houses, forms of patronage, etc.), a change driven ahead by the transformation of society on the business model. One characteristic of this accelerated change has been to make artistic and cultural production both into a major field for capital valorization, and into an important means of controlling and channeling the aspirations of populations, partially replacing the disciplinary frameworks of the mass-production society. In this context, there is need for a broad and intense debate about the means, results and ends of artistic practice, independent from the categories established by the market and the state. This was one of the motivations for an initial, collaborative publication in French, coordinated by Bureau d'Etudes and myself, under the title *Autonomie artistique—et société de communication*. Here I will pursue some specific aspects of that same debate.

Why talk about autonomy when the major thrust of experimental art in the 1960s and 70s was to undermine the autonomous work? This is the question that always arises when you speak with those for whom the academic discourses of the 1950s still seem to matter. Indeed, the university careers to be made by refuting Greenburg, by deconstructing the harmonious totality of the white male Kantian subject, by critiquing the closure of the artistic frame, are seemingly infinite. And the same holds for the description of the paradoxes that invariably arise when mechanically reproduced works or recorded slices of everyday life are presented in the auratic, singularizing spaces of the museum. But one sometimes wonders if the members of the art establishment, while seemingly obsessed with these transgressions of a very old status quo, are in fact not afraid to draw the most basic conclusions from their own ideas. For if you truly abandon the notion that an object, by its distinction from all others, can serve as a mirror for an equally unique and independent subject, then the issue of autonomy becomes a deep existential problem. Because for those without a substitute identity, for those without a passionate belief in their blackness, their whiteness, their Jewishness, their Muslimness, their Communistness, their Britishness or whatever, the condition of existence in the communication society—that is, the awareness that one's own mental processes are intimately traversed or even determined by a ceaseless flux of mediated images and signs—is at first

¹ Cornelius Castoriadis, "Fait et à Faire," in *Fait et à Faire: Les carrefours du labyrinthe V* (Paris: Seuil, 1997), p.76.

deeply anguishing, then ultimately anesthetizing, as basic structures of the ego dissolve and the postmodern “waning of affect” sets in.² We always work beneath the pall of this postmodern anesthetic.

No doubt there are thousands of very exciting ways to make artworks where the question of autonomy is not at issue. But there is some doubt as to whether any of these ways of art-making could be called political. Does politics, in the democratic sense at least, not presuppose that one is somehow able to make a free decision? That one is not blindly driven by a determining, heteronomous force? What does it mean to make an artistic decision? And what happens when that decision is collective? How can the sensible world—that is, the world composed by the senses, the intellect and the expressive imagination—be reshaped according to what the artist François Deck would call a “strategy of freedom”?

The stakes of autonomy are revealed by the etymology of the word, as pointed out by the psychoanalyst and political philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis. *Autos* means self, and *nomos* means law. Autonomy means giving yourself your own law.³ But men and women are social beings; we only exist as “ourselves” through the language of the other, through the sensations of the other; and what is more, this shared language, these transiting sensations, are bound up in the uncertainty of memory and forgetting, the incompleteness of perception, the willfulness of imagination, the specific materiality of expression. Thus, the attempt to give oneself one’s own law becomes a collective adventure, as well as a cultural and artistic one.⁴ For it is the very essence of clear consciousness to recognize that we human beings are full of obscurity, of unresolved personal and historical passions, of half-understood images and enticing forms that we constantly exchange with one another, generating the majority of our motivations and behaviors in the process, so that the act of giving ourselves our own laws becomes



² Cf. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1991), esp. this passage: “The end of the bourgeois ego, or monad, no doubt brings with it the end of the psychopathologies of that ego—what I have been calling the waning of affect. But it means the end of much more.... the liberation, in contemporary society, from the older anomie of the centered subject may also mean not merely a liberation from anxiety but a liberation from every other kind of feeling as well, since there is no longer a self present to do the feeling.” But Jameson’s limit has been to never ask about the possible invention of other kinds of feeling, or of a process of individuation detached from the “bourgeois ego.”

³ C. Castoriadis, “Pouvoir, politique, autonomie,” in *Le monde morcelé : Les carrefours du labyrinthe III* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), pp. 160-171; similar formulations can be found in, for example, “Phusis and Autonomy,” in *World in Fragments: Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis, and the Imagination*, tr. D. A. Curtis (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 331-41.

⁴ Cf. C. Castoriadis, *L’institution imaginaire de la société* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), esp. pp. 138-157. English translation: *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, tr. Kathleen Blarney (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1998), pp. 101-114.



something quite complex, something experimental and experiential, which can never be resolved once and for all, but only cared for and coaxed along in manifold ways, among which we find the arts—those supreme expressions of sensation, intellect and imagination. Indeed, it is exactly with respect to art and its reception, or better, its uses, that freedom appears fundamentally as a open strategy among the multitudes, because the dynamic of expression and use can never be directed by the one—that is, by any sovereign instance of decision. And in this way, collective autonomy becomes a question both of individual or small-group artistic production, and of the large-scale cultural policy that conditions its reception and uses.

My belief is that you can only have a real democracy when a societal concern with the production of the sensible is maintained at the level of a forever unresolved but constantly open and intensely debated question. This is why I like to work with François Deck, because he has developed a method, a kind of artistic trick—the “banques de questions” and associated procedures—that allows him to explicitly bring the sensible world into collective questioning. What we really need is to spend a lot more time asking each other whether our cultural fictions—our architecture and images, our hierarchies and ambitions and ideas and narratives—are any good for us, whether they can be used in an interesting way, what kind of subjectivity they produce, what kind of society they elicit. But to do that effectively, we also need to invent new fictions, to shake up the instituted imaginary with what Castoriadis calls the “radical” or “instituting” imaginary.⁵ Only by actively imagining different possible realities can we engage in the operations of desymbolization and resymbolization, or in what Bureau d’Etudes calls “the deconstruction and reconstruction of complex machines”—taking the notion of machines in the strong sense, whereby it denotes the symbolic, technological and human assemblages that configure ourselves and our societies, and make them work in the specific ways they do.⁶

Art can offer a chance for society to collectively reflect on the imaginary figures it depends upon for its very consistency, its self-understanding. But this is exactly where our societies are failing, and failing miserably, as a result of the way artistic invention and display has been instituted as a central economic function over the last twenty years. We are looking at an extreme limitation on the varieties and qualities of self-reflection. To indicate the

⁵ Castoriadis describes how social invention arises from psychic origins: “It is only insofar as the radical imagination of the psyche succeeds in transpiring through the successive strata of the social armor that is the individual, which covers it up and penetrates it all the way to an unfathomable limit-point, that the singular human being exerts an action in return upon society.” “Pouvoir, politique, autonomie,” op. cit., p. 140.

⁶ Bureau d’Etudes, “Autonomous Knowledge and Power in a Society without Affects,” at: <http://utangente.free.fr/newpages/holmes.html>.

extent of this disaster, and the degree to which it calls for a reinvention of artistic autonomy, I will take two examples. One is a programmatic sentence from the former French culture minister, Jack Lang. And the other is the concrete reality of a major British museum. These examples will give a fairly precise idea of what I mean by the communication society, and why it's necessary to conceive artistic autonomy against the background of the really existing machines of communication.



Jack Lang is one of the great socialist managers of people's minds, one of the major architects of artistic creation. Imagine him as he appears in a photo which can be found on the Internet, standing in front of the Mona Lisa with one of his few living peers, Fidel Castro. ⁷ In 1983, the year French socialism abandoned its collectivist utopia—that is to say, its real political program, the one it was democratically elected for—in the face of the so-called economic crisis, Lang came out with this slogan: “Culture is the poets, plus electricity.” *La culture, c'est les poètes, plus l'électricité.* Extraordinary man, to say such a thing! “This kind of mesmerism is a constant in his conception of art,” remarks a French observer. For Lang, “culture is an economic weapon because it can change mentalities, and because the crisis is not just economic, but also a crisis of the mind. The power of creativity is to elicit agitation, movement, to transform energy into labor.” ⁸

A lot of interesting ideas have been developed in the wake of the Italian *Autonomia* movement about the liberating potential of creative work, or what is called immaterial labor. But Jack Lang, like Chris Smith in Britain, is the state's great visionary of immaterial labor. ⁹ And the state seeks only one thing: to functionalize creative work, to manage it, to give it a productive discipline. In the mid-1980s, Lang's culture ministry created an elaborate series of state-run institutions which aimed to modernize the artistic genres, to make them a flourishing, productive and prestigious part of a mixed economy with a “cultural exception.” For Chris Smith, who came a decade later, the idea was literally to map out our sensations from above, to establish a “Creative Industries Mapping Document” that would productively channel people's aspirations into a thousand variations on

⁷ See for yourself at: www.indiana.edu/~unionet/people2.htm.

⁸ Philippe Urfalino, *L'invention de la politique culturelle française* (Paris: La documentation française, 1996).

⁹ Some primary sources on immaterial labor: A. Corsani, M. Lazzarato, A. Negri, *Le Bassin du travail immatériel* (BTI) dans le métropole parisien (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996); M. Lazzarato, *Lavoro Immateriale: Forme di vita e produzione della soggettività* (Verona: Ombre Corte Edizioni, 1997); C. Marazzi, *Il posto dei calzini* (Torino: Bollati-Boringhieri, 1999); and in English, the articles by M. Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor,” in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), and M. Hardt, “Affective Labor,” *boundary* 26:2 (January, 1999). Also see the discussion of immaterial labor in A. Negri and M. Hardt, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).



the advertising industry. ¹⁰ The cultural exception becomes the productive rule. Thus New Labour in Great Britain, more than any other European government, made a concerted attempt in the late 1990s to codify and professionalize the myriad of new behaviors that had emerged from the meeting of alienated urban youth and the new technologies for the creation and transmission of signs, sounds and images. The irony is that this kind of socialist central planning of the spirit reaches back to another would-be architect of humanity: Lenin, at the Congress of Soviets in 1920, who said: “Communism is soviet power, plus the electrification of the entire country.” But which proved stronger: the workers’ councils (soviets) or the programs of forced industrialization? And which do you think will prove stronger today: poetry or electricity?

The Tate Modern is a living allegory of these histories. It is a former electric power plant, a pure product of the meeting between the bureaucratic state and capitalist industry. This was a place for discipline, for the total control of a labor force. If you consider it architectonically, from the viewpoint of the volumes and the monumental order of the spaces, it looks like nothing so much as a mausoleum, a worker’s tomb, which the party cadres of New Labour have turned into a tourist attraction, a crystal palace of globalization. It can be illuminated, decorated with blue neon light, electrified in its turn: so the tomb of the working class is made into a glittering artwork. Poetry meets electricity. And the Tate Modern also has a constructivist, Tatlinesque bridge that connects it directly to the heart of the City, as a public service for the bankers and traders of the financial district. It’s important to admit what this kind of neoliberal institution is built on. The corporate sponsors of the Tate museums (both modern and classical) are at the heart, not just of British, but of Imperial capital: among them are Barclay’s plc, Europe’s largest institutional investor; Lloyds, the world’s largest insurance company; British Telecom, one of the backbones of the communication society, a top advertiser and now the great British art patron; and BP, British Petroleum, rebranded “Beyond Petroleum,” using art along with all the other forms of advertising to plant the sunflower seeds of an arcadian future in your oil-guzzling imagination. For corporations like these, creating belief, manipulating desire, and maintaining the political anesthesia of public life is the most important production. ¹¹ And these companies now actively use the world of art, they make museums into private universities, like Bloomberg’s holding seminars for its executives on Level 7, as a way to stimulate their energy, their experimental faculties, their virtuosity in the manipulation of abstract

¹⁰ British Government, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, available at: <www.culture.gov.uk/global/publications/archive_1998/Creative_Industries_Mapping_Document_1998.htm>.

¹¹ Cf. Maurizio Lazzarato, “Créer des mondes,” *Multitudes* 15 (Winter 2003); available at: <http://multitudes.samizdat.net/article.php?id_article=1285>.

figures. ¹² Of course this is all part of what is now the very well-known story of the privatization of culture from the Reagan and Thatcher era onward ¹³—but it is equally coherent with the Third-Way strategies of workfare, which include the use of education and culture for the total mobilization of all the valuable, productive elements of the population. ¹⁴ And in this sense, far more so than in the days of the situationists, art is the ultimate commodity, the one that sells all the rest. Because it mobilizes you, it plugs you into a transnational communications loop, it gets you to adhere, to commit, to do your part, to play your role, to burn the midnight oil, it makes you part of a dynamic society. A society whose imaginary of consumption/accumulation leads directly to the current wars in the Middle East.

What kind of attitude to take, when you know how tightly an institution like the Tate is integrated to what Bureau d'Etudes has identified as the financial core of transnational state capitalism? ¹⁵ One thing is sure: the old strategy of forming a collective as a way to get into the museum has become absurd. That much has been proved by the submissive posturing of a group like Etoy, which endlessly reiterates the forms of corporate organization, from head-hunting rituals all the way down to the display of self-infantilization. ¹⁶ The collaborative art of Etoy only restates the painfully obvious: that the values of transnational state capitalism have permeated the art world, not only through the commodity form, but also, and even primarily, through the artists' adoption of managerial techniques and branded subjectivities. The current explosion of cleverly conceived "artists' collectives" thrusting themselves onto the institutional market is sorry testimony to this profound and unquestioning mimesis of the values projected from the consulting firms and human-resources departments. It is in this sense that contemporary capitalism has successfully absorbed the artistic critique of the 1960s, transforming it into the networked discipline of what Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello call "neo-management"—or into the subjective opportunism of what I call "the flexible personality." ¹⁷

¹² See <www.tate.org.uk/supporters/corpmembership.htm>.

¹³ Cf. Chin-tao Wu, *Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention since the 1980s* (London: Verso, 2002).

¹⁴ For the definition of the "Schumpeterian Workfare Postnational Regime"—seeking to optimize the cognitive performance of the most capable citizens on the transnational knowledge markets—see Bob Jessop, *The Future of the Capitalist State* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002).

¹⁵ For the "financial core" see Bureau d'Etudes, "The World Government: Post-national states, influence networks, biocracy," brochure, 2004 (Internet publication forthcoming).

¹⁶ See, for example, <<http://etoy.com/daycare/torino/index1.html>>.

¹⁷ Luc Boltanski, Eve Chiapello, *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), forthcoming in English as *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Norton, 2005); Brian Holmes, "The Flexible Personality: For a New Cultural Critique," in *Hieroglyphs of the Future* (Zagreb: Whw/Arkzin, 2002), at: <www.geocities.com/CognitiveCapitalism/holmes1.html>.





One response to all of this is—exit. Over the last ten years it has been increasingly possible to shift artistic work away from saleable objects, and outside the normative framework, into marginal realms of opposition whose consistency and sustainability over time becomes the key issue. A clear example can be found in the role of artists in sparking the counter-globalization protests, such as the “Carnival Against Capital” held in the City of London on June 18, 1999, and all the “Global Days of Action” that preceded and followed. Such experimental practices have benefited enormously from access to a cheap and relatively uncontrolled communication and distribution system, the Internet. Which is still a matter of poetry and electricity, but at the same time, quite another cup of tea. A deepening consciousness of personal stakes in the contemporary economy has more recently led young and not-so-young artists and theorists to participate in the self-organization of flexible workers, giving rise to a new kind of urban event, the Mayday parades, organized first in Milan, then in Barcelona.¹⁸ In France, direct attacks from the right-wing government and the employers’ organization have resulted in the struggle of the part-time theater and audiovisual workers to defend a special unemployment regime that helped shield them from the conditions of flexible labor, and so allowed them to practice their art outside the conditions dictated by the market. This struggle has directly identified the role of the dominant communications media in imposing a majority culture. On Saturday October 18, 2003, a group of part-time performers broke into a prime-time broadcast called “Star Academy.” They seized the microphone to announce the demands of the movement and unfurled a banner reading: “Shut off your TVs.” It was not an isolated event: innumerable broadcasts, ministerial speeches and film sets have been interrupted. Just a week before the Star Academy action, a networked movement had arisen to deface the advertisements that pollute the public space of the metro. Thousands of ads were destroyed over a period of a several months. These insurgencies constitute a live reflection on our collective fictions, on the instituted imaginary of the current neoliberal system.¹⁹ And such symbolic violence, practiced collectively in the open air and raised to a level of engaged reflection on what we want our society to become, is a more interesting collaboration than anything I see in the museums. If we want to regain any chance at living in a democracy, we must make the production of the collective imaginary into an issue, by derailing or deconstructing certain communications machines, while building others and adapting the existing ones to meet new needs.

¹⁸ For the logic of these events, see the Italian site <www.chainworkers.org>.

¹⁹ For further information, see *Multitudes* 17 (Summer 2004), special issue on “Interruption dans tous ses états,” as well as the article on “Stoppub” in *Multitudes* 16 (Spring 2004), both at: <<http://multitudes.samizdat.net>>.

Shall we then abandon the museums? My position is that they can be occupied like any other distribution mechanism within the communication society—and should be occupied, to generate decisive conflict over the kind of society they help produce. But there is another, more challenging question: shall we abandon the historical practice of experimental art, as it emerged from its last metamorphosis in the period around 1968? Is the post-studio art of attitude and behavior fatally involved with the motivational strategies of neo-management, completely permeated with the opportunism and individualism of the flexible personality? One could draw such conclusions by observing the uses made of the “artistic critique” of the 1960s and 70s, as Boltanski and Chiapello do in *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. The imaginary of rebellion and liberation, the quest for individual authenticity, the ideal of self-management, the anti-hierarchical social form of the network/rhizome, all have been appropriated as rhetorical and organizational devices that respond to broad aspirations of emancipation, but deliberately channel those aspirations so as to reinstate exploitation and alienation under another guise. We can see the formula at work in communication machines like the Tate Modern, where the aesthetic populism of spectacular drifting on the ground floor combines with high-powered elite initiation on “Level 7,” in a manner reminiscent of the double *vulgo/culto* reading offered in the Baroque spectacles as described by José Antonio Maravall.²⁰ Like the Baroque, the “guided culture” of twenty-first century hypermedia develops lavish and highly coordinated architectural environments and urban decors as manipulative devices offering various levels of participation, in the attempt to bind society into the appearance of a coherent and pleasurable whole, while at the same time reasserting the prerogatives of a ruling elite whose positions are threatened by the tremendous mobility and dynamism of the preceding period. The social institution of the imaginary operates simultaneously as a seductive capture device for popular desire, and as a productive discipline for the mid-ranking “symbolic analysts” (or “creative class”) whose job it is to stimulate our interest, attention, passions—that is, to exercise the contemporary function of control, through the modulation of subjective energies.²¹ Little wonder that museums like the Tate have attracted such attention from the highest managerial strata of what Félix Guattari used to call “integrated world capitalism.”



²⁰ J.A. Maravall, *Culture of the Baroque* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1993); also see “From the Renaissance to the Baroque: The Diphasic Schema of a Social Crisis,” in *Literature Among the Discourses: the Spanish Golden Age* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1986), eds. W. Godzich and N. Spadaccini.

²¹ For “symbolic analysts,” see Robert Reich, *The Work of Nations: Preparing Ourselves for 21st Century Capitalism* (New York: Vintage, 1992); for the “creative class,” Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (New York: Basic Books, 2002). The most precise developments of Deleuze’s notion of “control societies” are by M. Lazzarato, *op. cit.*, and Philippe Zarifian, *A quoi sert le travail?* (Paris: La Dispute, 2003), esp. pp. 13-28, and “Contrôle des engagements et productivité sociale,” in *Multitudes* 17.



Castoriadis sees a central role for the imaginary in the political project of autonomy, whereby a society attempts to give itself its own laws, and ultimately something like its own habitus, its own way of inhabiting the institutional structures. Conversely, he sees alienation as the result of an imaginary that cannot be reflected or reelaborated by those whose attitudes and behavior it conditions: “The essence of heteronomy at the individual level—or of alienation, in the general sense of the term—is domination by an imaginary which has become autonomous and has taken over the function of defining, for the subject, both reality and personal desire.”²² Here we rediscover the deeper meaning of the critique of the autonomous artwork developed in the sixties and the seventies. But today that critique must be turned to the full range of aesthetic institutions operating within spectacular society. How to destroy or surpass the central value placed on the economic within the imaginary institutions of the globalizing societies? To suggest the power of radical artistic practice to dissolve certain institutional forms, and to encourage the creation of others, I’d like to close with a reference to a group of artists from another epoch, close to the present and yet fundamentally different, who were not necessarily seeking to exit the museum, nor even the communication society, but who created a theatrical and conceptual fiction in a bid to reflexively transform the authoritarian state—which in their view had appropriated and distorted the avant-garde artistic tradition. I refer to the Slovene art group NSK, or Neue Slowenische Kunst, and particularly to their project, *The State in Time*. Its premises are described like this:

IN THE YEAR 1991 NSK HAS BEEN RE-DEFINED FROM AN ORGANISATION TO A STATE. A STATE IN TIME, A STATE WITHOUT TERRITORY AND NATIONAL BORDERS, A SORT OF “SPIRITUAL, VIRTUAL STATE.” IT HAS ISSUED AN ORIGINAL NSK PASSPORT AND EVERYBODY CAN BECOME ITS HOLDER AND THEREFORE A CITIZEN OF THE NSK STATE. THE PASSPORT CAN BE USED CREATIVELY, ALSO AS AN OFFICIAL TRAVEL DOCUMENT, NATURALLY WITH A CERTAIN HAZARD TO ITS OWNER.... THE NSK STATE DENIES... THE CATEGORIES OF FIXED TERRITORY, THE PRINCIPLE OF NATIONAL BORDERS, AND ADVOCATES THE LAW OF TRANSNATIONALITY. BESIDES NSK MEMBERS THE BENEFICIARIES OF THE RIGHT TO CITIZENSHIP ARE THOUSANDS ALL OVER THE WORLD, PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT RELIGIONS, RACES, NATIONALITIES, SEXES AND BELIEFS. THE RIGHT TO CITIZENSHIP IS ACQUIRED THROUGH OWNERSHIP OF THE PASSPORT. ²³


²² C. Castoriadis, *L’institution imaginaire de la société*, op. cit., p. 141.

Texts available at: <<http://www.nskstate.com/athens/state/state.asp>>.

²³ Texts available at: <<http://www.nskstate.com/athens/state/state.asp>>.

Why did NSK create this strange conceptual machine, The State in Time? One reason was to assert the subjective consistency and sustainability of a group of people who effectively choose their own laws, who shape themselves and their society. This attempt to imagine the forms of autonomy was decisively important for NSK, as the Yugoslav federal state collapsed, and a new, but also unsatisfying—and potentially fascist—national state was born. But there is another level to this reflexive act, to this artistic transformation of the political imaginary. Because it is not so easy to create one's own laws. One only does so in the shadow of far larger organizations, really existing institutions, which can alienate your ideas and sensations, which can prey parasitically upon your deepest aspirations. And so the social forms of alienation must be exorcized, made to give back what they have captured, to release what they have appropriated and distorted. In the case of NSK, this alienating force was nothing less than the bureaucratic, disciplinary state, which in Yugoslavia bore the double heritage of Nazism and Stalinism. Both of these, in their view, had enduring consequences for artistic autonomy. As they write:

MODERN ART HAS NOT YET OVERCOME THE CONFLICT BROUGHT ABOUT BY THE RAPID AND EFFICIENT ASSIMILATION OF HISTORICAL AVANT-GARDE MOVEMENTS IN THE SYSTEMS OF TOTALITARIAN STATES... [NSK] REVIVES THE TRAUMA OF AVANT-GARDE MOVEMENTS BY IDENTIFYING WITH IT...THE MOST IMPORTANT AND AT THE SAME TIME TRAUMATIC DIMENSION OF AVANT-GARDE MOVEMENTS IS THAT THEY OPERATE AND CREATE WITHIN A COLLECTIVE... THE QUESTION OF COLLECTIVISM, I.E. THE QUESTION OF HOW TO ORGANIZE COMMUNICATION AND ENABLE THE COEXISTENCE OF VARIOUS AUTONOMOUS INDIVIDUALS IN A COMMUNITY, CAN BE SOLVED IN TWO DIFFERENT WAYS. MODERN STATES CONTINUE TO BE PREOCCUPIED WITH THE QUESTION OF HOW TO COLLECTIVIZE AND SOCIALIZE THE INDIVIDUAL, WHEREAS AVANT-GARDE MOVEMENTS TRIED TO SOLVE THE QUESTION OF HOW TO INDIVIDUALIZE THE COLLECTIVE. AVANT-GARDE MOVEMENTS TRIED TO DEVELOP AUTONOMOUS SOCIAL ORGANISMS IN WHICH THE CHARACTERISTICS, NEEDS AND VALUES OF INDIVIDUALISM, WHICH CANNOT BE COMPRISED IN THE SYSTEMS OF A FORMAL STATE, COULD BE FREELY DEVELOPED AND DEFINED. THE COLLECTIVISM OF AVANT-GARDE MOVEMENTS HAD AN EXPERIMENTAL VALUE. WITH THE COLLAPSE OF THE AVANT-GARDE MOVEMENTS, SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVE VIEWS IN ART FELL INTO DISGRACE, WHICH CAUSED THE SOCIAL ESCAPISM OF ORTHODOX MODERNISM AND CONSEQUENTLY LED TO A CRISIS IN BASIC VALUES IN THE PERIOD OF POSTMODERNISM.



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NSK defines experimental, vanguard art as attempt to individualize the collective, to develop the characteristics, needs and values of individuals within the framework of autonomous social organizations—what they call constructive organizations, or what I might call the experimental expressive machines of the multitudes. From the viewpoint of exploding Yugoslavia in 1991, at a time when it was politically necessary to reflect on the form that such social organizations could take, NSK attempted to exorcize the totalitarian state, and to replay the traumatic history of vanguards, so as to recover their potential autonomy. This led to the theatrical and symbological mimesis of Stalinism and above all Nazism, in the performances for which the group is primarily famous. It would be unfortunate, however, to stop at this pseudo-ritual stage of “casting out the demons,” and yet worse, to fetishize its specific historical contents. NSK’s identification with vanguards at the moment of their absorption by the totalitarian state only takes on its full meaning when coupled with the forward-looking proposal of a society-building process of individuation, emerging precisely from a collective context. Questioning the very consistency of the state—its spatial and temporal modes of being—was, for NSK, a strategy of freedom.

At present, I believe that an ambition for sophisticated and concentrated art is to exorcize the institutional forms of transnational state capitalism, which has appropriated and distorted the experimentalism of the period around 1968. This theatrical, stylistic and psychic exorcism (the word is not too strong) supposes a corresponding material reality: the construction of expressive machines that can project, exchange and elaborate the imaginaries of a society where collective infrastructure actually favors individuation, rather than reducing it to the servile caricatures of postmodern individualism (and indeed, “collectivity”) demanded for integration to the current managerial structures. In fact, this kind of work has already appeared, if one considers the Bureau of Inverse Technology in the United States, Yo Mango in Spain (and the “Mapas” group ²⁴), 0100101110101101.org in Italy, Bureau d’Etudes in France, and a host of others, of which @™ark and the Yes Men are no doubt the most exemplary—particularly because they show no dependence on the control structures of the really existing aesthetic institutions. The symbolic violence exercised by these groups dissolves, at best, into a contagious humor and an imaginary of active, critical emancipation, conveyed by sophisticated strategies and techniques of distribution which prefigure the formation of a “non-state public sphere,” as called for by Paolo Virno. ²⁵ An experimental public sphere whose multiple

²⁴ For one of the most complex and effective projects in recent activism, see <www.sindominio.net/mapas>.

²⁵ “The general intellect asserts itself as an autonomous public sphere only if the juncture that ties it to the production of goods and wage labor is severed.” Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), p. 68.

and situated participants may be able to imagine, and ultimately even institute, alternatives to the dangerous reduction of any concern for our collective destinies in the world—a reduction now being imposed by the spectacular communication machines of contemporary capitalism.

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BRIAN HOLMES

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INTRO

STEVEN TEN THIJE

When stating: "this is my perspective", one is offering something that is based explicitly on a life lived a certain way. In this, a perspective, more than a theory, has the tendency to incorporate and make visible the one who has the perspective. It is a double-edged sword that not only proposes an understanding, but also makes clear that one has to be at a particular point to share that understanding. There is therefore a kind of generous self-awareness practiced in sharing a perspective which connects well with the ambition of the Autonomy Project and the Summer School: to allow artists and art theorists to think through their position in relation to each other and society.

It may seem superfluous in today's networked, globalised society to designate a particular space to position oneself. We are continuously stating ourselves, showing our perspective (preferably as loaded and biased as possible). It's doubtful whether this constant, aggressive sharing of ideas and perspectives has not somehow collapsed the possibility to exchange views. It seems that today the true potential of sharing a view - the possibility of change due to confrontation - is subtly silenced in the buzz of endless opinions. The autonomy of the individual here appears to echo the clichéd autonomy of the artwork: a perpetually distanced point, only available to one or few.

In this section we have therefore grouped together several articles and a letter, which try to offer more than just an affirmative or negative opinion. Instead, the perspectives here are observations and suggestions that position those involved in the Autonomy Project opposite each other as differing but related. The writers share their views on what has taken place or will happen in future. In this process they instate themselves as theorists or artists, connected perhaps, but on the basis of their own specificity, dare I say autonomy.

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- summary -
Autonomy Project Summer School

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DATE	DD	MM	YY	DAY OF WEEK	REPORT NUMBER
	28	06	10		
City:	EINDHOVEN				By:
Region:	Brabant				S.TEN THIJE
Location:	v. Abbe museum.				

Gathering of 40 students and
young practioners to debate
the contested autonomy of art.

* In just one week, artists and
theorists from institutes based
in the UK, the Netherlands and
Germany reflected and debated
what, in today's relational, non-object-
based, interdisciplinary, institutional
art world the old notion of autonomy
could signify.



AUTONOMY PROJECT SUMMER SCHOOL

During the week of 28 June to 2 July, 2010 the Van Abbemuseum, Onomatopée and the city of Eindhoven in general became the backdrop for a gathering of close to 40 students and young practitioners to debate the contested autonomy of the art. In just one week artists and theorists from institutes based in the U.K, the Netherlands and Germany reflected and debated what, in today's relational, non-object-based, interdisciplinary, institutional art world the old notion of autonomy could signify. Is autonomy finally dead, as has been claimed so often, or does it resurface in unforeseen places? Is autonomy a quality of a person or object, or is it a description of a certain moment of reflection and experience? Is autonomy a way to separate oneself from society, or can it be the unlikely tool to engage with it in a profound way? These and many other questions fuelled our conversation that ignited the engine of thinking rather than bringing final conclusions.



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DAY 1

_The week started in the Studio of the Van Abbemuseum, which has indeed passed the test of facilitating something as dynamic as a Summer School in something as static as a museum. The first guest was Erik Hagoort who gave a stimulating account of his research into the 'art of the encounter'. He elaborated on the different ways in which the moment of encounter in relational art can manifest itself, drawing on the work of Nicolas Bourriaud, Viktor Misiano and Grant Kester. According to Hagoort, Misiano favoured a confrontational notion of encounter, based on the trust of friendship and confidentiality, whereas Bourriaud promotes a more fluid, rhizomatic and transitory encounter, Kester, finally, works towards a transformative moment of encounter, is directed at changing things 'Is autonomy a freedom to confront? a poetic infinite? a fluid movement? or is it a proclamation to independently change yourself?' These questions became the opening perspective of our week.

_In the evening we gathered for our first session at Onomatopée publishing platform and project space. Two groups - Liverpool School of Art and Design and the University of Hildesheim - gave a brief presentation on the ways in which they had tackled the issues at hand. Here, a more traditional line of separation became clear - where as the art school had focussed more on practice, using concrete examples to stimulate thinking, the theorists had worked their way through a variety of art philosophy and theory, looking into thinkers like Kant, Adorno and Rancière. Later Paul Sullivan and John Byrne of Static Gallery in Liverpool presented the ongoing Noodle bar project: this project, which featured in Liverpool Biennial 2006, involved starting a Noodle Bar as intervention in public space. What made the project especially productive for the week's discussion was that its complicated oscillation between the art world and the public domain: this web of aesthetic, pragmatic and political choices made clear that autonomy does not exist in one place, but has a different meaning in each context.

_On Tuesday morning designer and researcher, Chris Lee led a workshop/lecture which looked at alternative currency (for a more expanded description of his project see the first Play Van Abbe magazine published by the Van Abbemuseum titled, THE COPYIST). Chris first gave us some insight into the workings of financial systems which, he claimed, have begun to derail

DAY 2



and are now preventing trade, exchange and the distribution of wealth. However, Chris pointed out that our existing economic systems can be challenged and occasionally, be imaginatively re-appropriated by independent communities as they introduce alternative currencies. To experience the workings of money and trade in a more practical way Chris had conceived a game for the Summer School participants, which turned into a perhaps slightly chaotic feast of wheeling and dealing.

_In the afternoon, art historian Sven Lütticken gave a remarkable performative lecture - loosely entitled, "The Subject and the Market" - in which he read out segments of text before reflecting upon them and critically re-connecting them. Starting with "Composing for Film" written by Adorno and Eisler, Sven introduced the Adornian struggle with the culture industry and sketched a Hegelian perspective on history, the subject and art, arguing that for Hegel the moment of subjectivity was found in negativity. Sven proposed that, when one rejects a certain situation and says "I can do nothing other than differ" (like Melville's Bartelbian statement, 'I prefer not to') that the subject becomes capable of creating a break in the fixed status quo - and subsequently

instigates a historic, dialectical movement. In this age of immaterial labour, difference is now an immanent part of industry and opposing it cannot occur by producing more, or "real" difference, but only by resisting the current demand to differ: saying, I prefer not to.

_We ended the afternoon with artist, Ahmet Ögüt who used some examples such as the public disturbance caused by Orson Wells' radio-play, War of the Worlds. Ahmet focused on the productive possibility of fiction in reality and explained how he strategically situates his work on the border between fiction and reality. In Ahmet's experience authorities are often strong but slow, therefore autonomy is not so much found on a permanent basis, but exists in the gaps left by the slow pace of force.

_In the evening, the idea to think things differently moved again to the centre of our discussion in the presentation/discussion with Charles Esche, who presented his understanding of art as "imagining the world otherwise". Reflecting on the history and present of the Van Abbemuseum, Charles further explored how autonomy relates to institutional practice. Charles arrived at this point by arguing that the old notion of

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avant-garde has lost its critical potential due to the different understanding of history in the post-1989 world. This, in turn, has had consequences for the curatorial policies of many modern art museums which are dedicated to collecting and displaying the avant-garde. In the post-1989 world the avant-garde occupies an impossible position which lies somewhere between its positioning outside of history and, simultaneously, at the frontier of historical progress. Where the early avant-garde had situated itself in a utopian future, far beyond any mundane institutional, bureaucratic life, today's artists and curators seek space for change via disrupting, creating or substituting institutional structures. If this is so, then art is no longer autonomous as a free object made by someone excused from the obligation of conforming to art's current, institutional present. Instead, the practice of autonomy becomes one of reforming, disrupting or (re) creating the institution of today.

DAY 3

_Continuing the pattern of theory - practice - theory - practice, the first guests on the third day were Dimtry Vilensky and Olga Egorova who are members of Chto Delat/What is to be done? Dimtry and Olga who showed us their latest work, a Brechtian musical-film, that deals with the building of a large corporate tower by Gazprom. In the film's straight-forward division between "good guys" and "bad guys", the technique of over-identification produced a distinct form of Brechtian alienation. For Chto Delat this was deemed necessary to articulate the historical situation of today. Dimtry posed that one of the biggest problems of this time is the "fake" autonomy present in the ahistorical production of "interesting", but unnecessary works. In his mind the autonomy of the artist lies within ones possibility to recognise the historical situation and act upon it to change it.



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_We then had the chance to hear Alistair Hudson's presentation of Grizedale Arts, an art centre on the former John Ruskin estate in the north of the UK. Alistair spoke of another working method that, similar to Chto Delat, values clarity over dense, opaque critical language or aesthetic artworks. In a distinct and more pragmatic working format Grizedale seeks to take the proverbial bull by the horns and ask bluntly "how can art be useful?" In a playful manner the institute moves freely between making concrete social, cultural interventions and producing still recognisable artworks that create a remarkable relational tissue forming the Grizedale network. Also, by way of giving a historical backdrop to this, Alistair pointed out that John Ruskin himself already marked the understanding of the art practiced by

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Grizedale - and that this meant that Ruskin was present at the historical juncture where more pragmatic approaches to art became symbolically overruled by the now more familiar notions of ephemeral, asocial and autonomous art.

_At the art and technology centre (which is on the site of the former Philips Electrical complex in Eindhoven) BALTAN LABORATORIES invited us to join a set of presentations led by Wendy Van Wynsberghe and Peter Westenberg from Constant in Brussels. Julien Ottavi, from APO33 in Nantes, also joined us to reflect on the workshop in relation to his electromagnetic spectrum research, as well as participating in a discussion around "copyleft" practices with Wendy and Peter. ¹

¹ More information can be found on the Baltan Laboratories website: www.baltanlaboratories.org

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DAY 4

The artist duo, Bik van der Pol structured a discussion around their project Loompanics. This project consist of making collating and presenting the complete collection of the alternative publisher Loompanics, which produced titles like 'How to Disappear', 'How to Hide Things in Public Spaces' and 'How to Make a Fake-ID'. The books are often straightforward manuals of how to do things that are either slightly or completely illegal. In the discussion that followed it became clear that here, autonomy existed in the freedom of information that allows or even forces people to take their own stance - a space we can create where any thought is possible and where the subject can move through a complex field of decisions. In an interesting way this perspective appears to resonate with the Kantian notion of understanding enlightenment as a "liberation of self-imposed immaturity". Bik van der Pol suggest that the more we allow state bureaucracy to define what we can and cannot think the more we submit ourselves to a form of self-imposed immaturity that is in essence antithetical to a democratic society. (See also Thomas Lange's essay in the first Autonomy Newspaper, for more on Kant's text and its relation to autonomy.)

In the afternoon three guests joined from the curatorial and theoretical side: Annie Fletcher, Galit Eilat and Jeroen Boomgaard. In a lively debate our three guests responded to our questions formalised during the



week on how one can curate autonomy. The focus here was how such a practice could take shape, since predefined forms are contradicting to the notion of autonomy. This discussion circled around the issue of production and the degree to which one could resist producing work in the conventional way. In this it became clear that refusal or resistance may be a valuable position, but that this depends significantly on how and where one resist or refuses. In the end this reflected even back on the work itself, that in its resistance to becoming completely transparent or understandable, there is a productive form of negativity.

On Thursday night critical design practitioner Kim de Groot made an intervention at Onomatopee. Connected with her ongoing projects investigating the idea of metadata, Kim used Twitter as a vehicle for critique of the mediation of the oil calamity in the Gulf of Mexico. She invited us to make our own "tweets" which reflected on the representation of the oil spill rather than the thing itself, and attach these to balloons. At the end of the evening Kim released a host of black "tweet" balloons into the night sky over Eindhoven. ²

² read more on <http://www.onomatopee.net/pages/oilspill/oilspill.html>



-DAY 5.

_On Friday morning the last guest presented himself: the humble technical assistant to the Museum of American Art. Showing us the way through the current presentation entitled Sites of Modernity from the Museum of American Art in the Van Abbemuseum, the technical assistant told us a story of the first museum of “modern” art – the Vatican Museum as initiated by Pope Julius II – and the last museum of modern art – MoMA in New York. With this we ended with a return to the classic modern art from post-impressionism up to abstract expressionism (the art we tend to first think about when we hear that contested term “autonomous art”). The technical assistant was kind enough to share with us his many insights on how stories are built through contexts – and that one object can obtain a completely different meaning when presented within a new context. It was clear that we are beyond the notion of copy and original, that the story of art was about to change again into perhaps a story beyond art, and with that beyond autonomy, even if the form and direction remain unclear.

_In the afternoon in our “where to go from here?” session, we had presentations by the three Summer School groups who had

worked together in the sessions between the week’s presentations and discussions. One group had broken its collaborative thinking down into an interactive mind-map, which confronted established ideas on autonomy with more contested ones: creating a network of categories between modernistic and contemporary forms of artistic practice and theory that could be cross-referenced and therefore made more complex. Another group presented a game-like interface comprised out of strings of “yes/no” questions that would eventually form a type of 0900-hotline to answer questions on autonomy. With this playful format the group tried to create a database or archive of the week, which would both be informative and provoke debate and reflection. The final group had opted for a different format and summarized the week in a film. In this the members metaphorically depicted their journey through a world of ideas, moving slowly through the Van Abbemuseum stating key-words or questions from their discussions. In the end, the presentations marked more of a departure point than a moment of arrival – the trajectories of which we hope to track and link in the weeks/months/years to come.

MARIJKE GOETING

A FIELD OF DISSONANCE

Autonomy is a slippery word. Although its definition in the dictionary is clear – ‘the right or condition of self-government, freedom from external control or influence, independence’¹ – the context in which the word is and has been used defines its more specific meaning. Paradoxically the word autonomy is not autonomous at all: as part of the system of language its meaning depends on context and on difference, on what it is not. Perhaps because over the past decades artists, critics and curators have become increasingly aware of the diverse systems of control and influence that shape society and the art world, the desire to create forms and places of autonomy has grown.

This is reflected by the Autonomy Project and its Summer School, in which both artists and art historians were asked to develop new definitions, new forms and new models of autonomous practice, which demanded in particular a departure from “the” modernist notion of autonomy. For the artists involved the aim to create new definitions of autonomous practice felt natural, since their education and practice had made it impossible to return to former (modernist) models of autonomous practice. For the art historian, however, the objective to develop

¹ Oxford Dictionary of English.

new definitions, was read rather differently and inspired them to examine older definitions and contexts of autonomy, with modernism as one of its primary research topics, since it functioned both as ground of resistance and point of departure. In addition, it is important to note the subtle difference between the aim to create new definitions of autonomy, and the aim to create new definitions of autonomous practice. In the end it was this subtle difference—which is essentially the difference between theory and practice—which made it impossible for artists and art historians to attune their thinking during the Summer School.

During the week both theoreticians and practitioners failed to acknowledge and respect their methodological differences. Instead, in the attempt to reach mutual agreement, or at least to engage in a productive discussion, the opposite occurred: disciplinary methods were abandoned for the sake of collaboration and the experience of the week was one of being “lost in translation”. By giving up certain parts of their respective domains – and arguably part of their own autonomy – the participating theoreticians and practitioners established a space of interference. Art historians felt, for example, unable to exercise historical reflection alongside practitioners that were attempting to move away from just those historical conditions.

This feeling was further reinforced by the programme of the Summer School, which had a strong focus on contemporary art practices. Guests like Chris Lee, Paul Sullivan, Ahmet Ögüt, the Russian collective CHTO DELAT? all had a relation towards autonomy based on negativity or impossibility. For them artworks function less as isolated, self-contained and self-referential objects in today’s commodified, globalised and networked society, but are foremost projects and interventions that critically reflect on and interact with the complex and interconnected

worlds of politics, culture, economy and technology that make up society. As a result, the distinction between art and, for instance, politics becomes increasingly blurred, or is even considered non-existent, according to guest curator of the Van Abbemuseum Galit Eilat. ² When there is no fundamental distinction between art and politics (or for that matter between art and society, art and economy, or art and technology) the notion of autonomy becomes problematic.

From this position within contemporary art there comes a need, or an urge, to redefine autonomy;

to claim a space for art that is unique to art, where art can still take up a critical position without being

Paradoxically the word autonomy is not autonomous at all: as part of the system of language its meaning depends on context and on difference.

annexed by the politics of industry. This urgency is also expressed in the introduction of the last Autonomy Newspaper: ‘In today’s networked, high-tech society the forms that artistic practice takes, as well as the way in which these are mediated or taught, have put additional pressure on art’s always problematic, always paradoxical autonomy. This urgent situation within the infrastructure of art and modern society incites us to redress autonomy in new ways [...]’ ³ The two extreme positions – the modernist possibility of autonomy and the postmodern impossibility of autonomy – are, according to the text on the Autonomy Project’s website, not mutually exclusive. ⁴ The aim of the Autonomy Project is to thus find some middle ground between opposing poles; to discover ways in which, in today’s interconnected milieu, artists can still

² In the panel discussion with Annie Fletcher (curator Van Abbemuseum) and Jeroen Boomgaard (lectoraat Art in Public Space), held at the Van Abbemuseum on July 1, 2010, as part of the Autonomy Summer School.

³ Editorial introduction, The Autonomy Newspaper # 1: Positioning, p. 3.

⁴ <http://theautonomyproject.ning.com/page/the-autonomy-project>

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lay claim to forms of autonomy, but without the naïveté and romanticism associated with modernist autonomy.

_In the end the aim of the Autonomy Project, to redefine autonomy, is therefore also, or even mostly political: by trying to create new definitions, new models and new forms of autonomous practice, the Autonomy Project is wresting the notion from the context of modernism and recontextualising it in contemporary society. In so doing, the participating art institutions reinforce their position as critical institutions that stimulate discursive, socio-politically engaged contemporary art – setting themselves apart from art institutions that keep the modernist ideal of art and “autonomy” intact, such as museum De Pont – an opposition that Charles Esche, director of the Van Abbemuseum, explicitly mentioned in his presentation at the Summer School. ^{5]} The aim of the Autonomy Project is no neutral ambition to investigate and compare historical and contemporary conditions of autonomy, but rather stems from a desire to free autonomy from the clutches of modernism and to claim it for contemporary art.

_This desire corresponds to the practical aims of contemporary artists, but seemed incompatible with the art historians’ approach of taking a more distanced and neutral position from which to engage with the subject of autonomy. An objective position, which is important for an art historian (although one can question the essential possibility of it), is difficult to attain in a situation where others are taking and defending positions with such velocity. In that sense, the shared objective to create new forms of autonomous practice is – or should – not be a shared objective at all: it belongs to the practice and methodology of the artist, not of the art historian. The art historian’s method is to examine and compare historical and/or contemporary expressions of autonomy, not to create new ones.

_To state it clearly: neither the one nor the other disciplinary method is superior, they are simply different. This is not a problem, or something to overcome, but something to acknowledge and to be aware of. The lack of this awareness during the Summer School probably resulted out of a wish to collaborate. By wishing to engage in a productive dialogue, the participants of the Summer School were giving up part of the space that defines their discipline and which enables them to work effectively. This, far from leading to the desired attunement, resulted in dissonance – as artists and art historians attempted to share an objective that in reality belongs more to the domain of practice than theory. It is in fact not necessary to achieve a common goal; it would probably be more effective to have separate and specific objectives for both disciplines. From there, the outcomes can stimulate both within and across the disciplines.

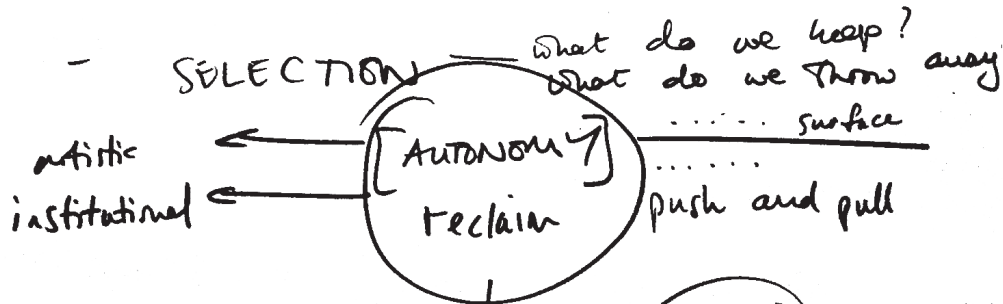
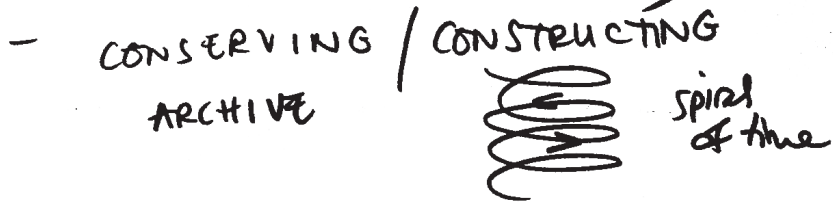
_In the difficult but potentially fruitful endeavour of bringing together theoreticians and practitioners to think about autonomy, it is important to distinguish not only between disciplinary methods, but also between different proprietors of autonomy: the artist, the artwork, the art historian, the art critic, the exhibition space, the viewer, the curator and the museum. Explicating these modalities, and accordingly addressing them with articulate vocabulary, is especially important when people with different – theory and practice based – backgrounds are involved. If these different modalities of autonomy are not explicated, theoreticians and practitioners will get lost in vague discussions and misunderstandings, and autonomy will remain a slippery concept to deal with. Only when the different contexts and modalities of autonomy are articulated, and only when the differences between theory and practice are acknowledged and put to use, can the field of dissonance turn into a productive unity.

^{5]} On June 29, 2010 at Onomatopée in Eindhoven, as part of the Autonomy Project Summer School

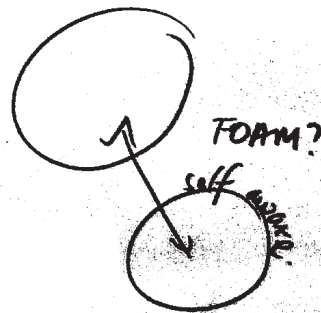
The art historian's method is to examine and compare historical and/or contemporary expressions of autonomy, not to create new ones.

STRATEGIES

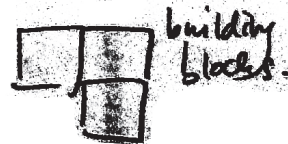
- addition / subtr
- time / speed / speed up!
- INVISIBILITY / VISIBILITY
(documentation consumption)



Where is society?



- CONTROL



Newspaper #2: Frameworks:
Autonomy:
H. Pierce

AUTONOMY

_ Know that this is not a decision I have rushed into. This is a profoundly difficult situation, made more so by knowing that I'm not the first person you have put in this situation and nor will I be the last.

_ I don't remember the first time we met, more that I was always aware of your presence - and even after all these years I'm not sure I really know you at all. I think sometimes that I'm getting close to the truth. But then someone mentions something from your past that completely undermines all my certainties about you.

_ I was only a child when I first knew you, and I clung to fanciful romantic notions that we we're to be forever intertwined, undisturbed by societies demands and constraints. But the autonomy I knew then is a joke now, a tired old cliché, and I am no longer naïve. I don't hold you responsible. In my mind the blame lies with those who surrounded you,

"I need to carve my own path out, and you need to realise what it is you want."

_ encouraging you to maintain your outdated reputation, their reputation. But their mistake is that reputation does not reflect integrity, rather conformity, and who would be the haystack over the needle?

_ At this point I think it would be best for us both if we spend some time apart. You've always been so illusive and I've spent a long time trying to fulfil your indescribable criteria. I need to carve my own path out, and you need to realise what it is you want. I hope when our paths do cross in the future (this has always been a journey for us, rather than a departure and arrival) it will be without agenda and you can fulfil all the promises you first made to me. After all, your promises have always been of a possibility in the future rather than something that can obtained in the present, and I can be patient.

Yours always,

HANNAH
PIERCE

Public/
Private
space

business,
Commercialism,
Consumerism
opportunity
to
X subvert.

Collective
collaboration
Participation

conflicting?
Perception
+ understanding
shared?

← ENGAGEMENT →

Control

Art school/
college
- Control
+ autonomy?

Institution

agenda
€
Funding
€
rejection

Autonomy

undermining
certainties?
?

Organisation
- structure
POWER
Influence →

..... history

Politics
relationship
with art...

ethics / X
morality

↑
reciprocity
↓

education
X

loss of ?
ownership
authorship.

Subject

Usefull
how is
usefulness
measured.

VALUES

quality
or?
loss

Shared
LANGUAGE?

BEING RADICAL. GENTLY.

ON GRIZEDALE ARTS

JENNIFER
SMAILES

Part of the Autonomy Project Summer School was a presentation of the radical curatorial project Grizedale Arts by its deputy director, Alistair Hudson. Grizedale Arts was originally founded in 1977 in the British Lake District as a residency programme promoting the “polite British version” of Land Art while it became ‘a leading light in developing a role for public art in Britain throughout the 1980s.’¹ Afterwards Grizedale took on an increasingly active position towards the marketing approach of the Lake District, its role in the broader British contemporary art scene became subsequently less prominent. In 1999, though, a drastic change took place in its programming when Adam Sutherland was appointed new director and, in a loud, rude and humorous manner,² the Grizedale Arts programme was forced back into the attention of the international art scene as well as that of its surrounding community.

¹ Griffin, Jonathan (Ed.), Grizedale Arts. Adding Complexity to Confusion, Coniston 2009, p. 6 (To be purchased via the project’s website: www.grizedale.org)

² This claim is exclusively based on Grizedale Art’s self-presentation in the above mentioned catalogue.

³ Brownrigg, Jenny, Forest Flashpoints. The Nature of Grizedale Arts. In: Griffin, Jonathan (ed.), Grizedale Arts. Adding complexity to confusion, 2009 (p.120 - 122), p.120

⁴ <https://www.tate.org.uk/britain/eventseducation/lateatatebritain/lateatatebritainjune2010.htm>

“I would argue that Grizedale’s radicality lies in its conception of the public and, with that, the subject it presupposes.”

_ Since then, the practice of Grizedale Arts has been called ‘renegade’, ³ ‘radical’, ⁴ ‘effervescent’, ⁵ and ‘dubious’ ⁶ and they have become the object of criticism from both art professionals and rural neighbours alike. ⁷ At the same time, voices could be heard praising Grizedale Arts as ‘one of the most significant arts organisations in Europe.’ ⁸ So what causes such strong reactions? What is it that makes Grizedale such a “radical” project?

_ I would argue that Grizedale’s radicality lies in its conception of the public and, with that, the subject it presupposes. With such a claim it is important to note that the realm of the public cannot simply be reduced to a question of location: while Grizedale is playing with ideas of insularity, of the countryside and of an “outside” of institutions (both metaphorically and literally), it cannot simply be their location within an off that guarantees it radicalness per se - as this argument would simply recreate the classic dichotomy between centre and periphery. Furthermore, does the ‘moving away’ from city and institution

_ not have a long tradition within public art movements, land art or artist-run spaces? Has it not already found its perverted form in a multitude of biennales all over the world, sprouting in the middle of (discursive) nowheres, intended to be “put on the map?” If anything, this has proven that a widening of the defining borders of art, coupled with a move away from its centres, has a tendency to reaffirm what was set out to be questioned in the first place.

_ If it is not the local aspect of the public, one could argue that Grizedale’s radicalness lies within its approach towards an audience. Since 1999, such diverse artistic positions as Jeremy Deller, Juneau Projects or Jonathan Meese have been gently forced to produce more or less participatory art, involving them in different projects - like exhibitions as country fairs or car boot sales, the building of radio stations and other advances into the realm of “the useful” - which indicate the plenitude of changing positions that arts institutions takes towards their audiences. These approaches could be called ‘relational’, ⁹ ‘dialogical’, ¹⁰ ‘context-’ or

⁵ http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/liverpool_biennial

⁶ http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/coniston_water_festival

⁷ Again, this is based on the information found in the catalogue.

⁸ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2005/oct/01/comment.news>

⁹ Bourriaud, Nicolas, *Relational Aesthetics*, Dijon 2002

¹⁰ Kestner, Grant, *Conversational Pieces. The Role of Dialogue in Socially-Engaged Art*, in: Kocur, Zoya, Leung, Simon (ed.), *Theory in Contemporary Art since 1985*, Hoboken 2004

Newspaper #2: Frameworks:
Being Radical. Gently.:
J. Smailes]

‘audience-specific’, ¹¹] depending on, who you ask, and find their context within a strong British tradition of community art as well as within the discourses of the 1990s and 2000s around participation and engagement.

_One very clear voice within these discourses is Claire Bishop’s: her critique of the concept of ‘Relational Aesthetics’, ¹²] for example, reveals its lack of precision regarding its institutional contexts, its audiences and thus the subjects it constitutes, while her analysis of engaged art practice takes a stand for the aesthetic aspects of social art. ¹³] Furthermore, she is one of the few theorists, who responded directly to Grizedale’s curatorial concept, the gist of this being her question of ‘What differentiates contemporary from community art?’ ¹⁴] She answers this question herself by insisting on an aesthetic product, on art’s awareness for its own history, its context and its fixation within “an elaborated culture of reception”. ¹⁵]

_This “elaborated culture of reception” is the key notion both of Bishop’s claims, and of a critical reading of these, because this is the pivotal point where public and autonomy meet. Bishop’s critique of engaged art practice focuses on the problematic disentanglement of art’s autonomy and the blurring of art and life. For Bishop, this takes place when art is judged by ethical criteria instead of aesthetic ones, mourning the loss of disruptive material, which might ‘confront darker, more painfully complicated

considerations of our predicament.’ ¹⁶] In the end, she asks for an art that ‘address[es] this contradictory pull between autonomy and social intervention.’ ¹⁷] As valid, as this argument is, its blind spot is that it poses the contemplation of art – with all its potential of emancipation and insight – above other possibly emancipating forms of cultural experience, ignoring that this kind of reception is relevant (and relevant it is) only to a narrow and defined group of people. She thus makes the same mistake of underestimating her own position within the institution of art.

_Grizedale’s radicalness lies in its sensibility concerning its ambiguous position towards different audiences – its postmodern acknowledgement of the possibility to be at the same time part of a culture of critical perception, which presupposes its spectator as the classical subject to autonomous art: they “elaborate” through education, practice and taste, while at the same time strongly promoting the “usability” of artworks to advance change. ¹⁸] Grizedale render these artworks readable in various contexts, thus “degrading” the critical perception of art only to one method beneath others, which is based on a certain invisible set of conditions. The main claim put forward by Grizedale Arts, and the foundation for their impact on the art world as well as on its rural surrounding is, as simple as it sounds, ‘to consider contemporary art as a minor component in a richer, more complicated and interesting picture.’ ¹⁹]

¹¹] See Kwon, Miwon, *One place after another. Site specific art and locational identity*, Massachusetts/London 2004, p. 2

¹²] Bishop, Claire, *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics*, In: *October* (Fall 2004, No. 110), pp. 51-79

¹³] Bishop, Claire, *The social turn: Collaboration and its discontent*, In: *Artforum* (February 2006), pp. 178-183

¹⁴] Bishop, Claire at the webcast discussion ‘A New Public Art’, originally webcast live from Egremont Market Hall on Friday June 16th 2006, 12-5pm, (Session 2 / 2-3pm, The Greasy Pole), featuring Alistair Hudson, Alan Kane, Jeremy Deller, Claire Bishop and Will Bradley. http://www.creative-egremont.org/index.php/egremont_zerosix/more/view_the_webcast_archive

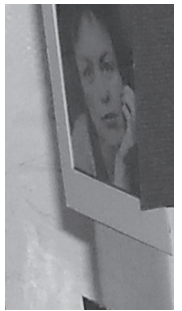
¹⁵] ¹⁷] *Ibid.*

¹⁶] Bishop (2006), p. 183.

¹⁸] That these audiences by no way mean different social groups, but could theoretically consist of the same diverse and fractured subjects, with corresponding antagonistic needs and identities must, due to the lack of space here, be taken for granted.

¹⁹] Sutherland, Adam, in: Griffin (ed.), p. 41

JOANNE McCLELLAN



Newspaper #2: Frameworks:

The Urge to take a stand:

D. Broekers

L. Cluitmans

M. Goeting

M. Schyder

THE URGE TO TAKE A STAND

Within the practice of New Institutionalism, the museum visitor is given a lot of freedom. New Institutionalism has developed since the start of the 21st century mainly on a social democratic axis in northern-central Europe (the Nordic countries, the Netherlands and Germany). It is described by curator and critic, Jonas Ekeberg as an attempt to redefine the contemporary art institution and the willingness to let go, not only of the limited understanding of the artwork as a mere object, but also of the entire institutional framework that accompanied it. ¹ Art institutions adopting this approach have internalised the institutional critique that was formulated by artists in the 1970s and '90s, translating it into a reconsideration of their structures and functions, questioning the ideology of the white cube with its implied disembodied viewer, and suggesting instead a dialogical and participatory model. New Institutionalism is motivated by, but also dependent on, a certain range of artistic practices that are essentially participatory, socially reflective, context specific and project based. Object- and image-based art is, however, more difficult to fit within this approach. What happens when the strategies of relational art and New Institutionalism are adopted by museums that host mainly object-based collections, such as the Van Abbemuseum?

The exhibition series, PLUG-IN (2006-2009), consisted of 53 interventions, and was the Van Abbemuseum's initial answer to the prior question. There, a broad scope of art professionals with different backgrounds (artists, curators, art-collectives, art historians), and even museum visitors in the case of HET KIJKDEPOT, engaged with the structure of the Van Abbemuseum. The 'curators' presented their plug-ins side by side offering the visitor the possibility 'to 'plug in' according to a self-chosen order and to activate their imagination.' ² Consequently, one could create a multitude of cross-connections, both within and between the exhibitions. This model afforded the visitor freedom on a number of different levels. Firstly, the canonical linear narrative of art history was abandoned in favour of multiple subjective views. Secondly, these multiple subjective views were not imposed upon an audience. In the case of PLUG-IN, any informative mediation on specific interventions was made available but discretely, leaving the reading of the cross-connections and relations between the "plug-ins" solely to the visitor's discernment.

In exhibition models such as PLUG-IN the passive viewer was required to be an active participant; the visitor was no longer a subject to be educated, but instead an

¹ Ekeberg, J. (Ed.), *New Institutionalism*, Oslo, 2003, p. 9.

² [http://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/browse-all/?tx_vabdisplay_pi1\[ptype\]=18&tx_vabdisplay_pi1\[project\]=542](http://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/browse-all/?tx_vabdisplay_pi1[ptype]=18&tx_vabdisplay_pi1[project]=542)

equal to be engaged in a discussion. The visitor was thereby offered more autonomy, in other words, room for self-determination. This willingness to engage with visitors can only be applauded. The question is, however, if it is possible to OFFER someone self-determination and emancipation. Does emancipation function when it is not actively pursued but passively received? According to psychologist and philosopher Frantz Fanon freedom that is given and has not been fought for is not real freedom. ³ “Freedom is something you alone must take,” as Jose Dolores says in the movie THE BATTLE OF ALGIERS.

_Along this line of argument one can question the extent to which the visitor of PLUG-IN actually made use of his or her appointed right to self-determination. The permissive character of PLUG-IN, it can be argued, did not provoke one to take a position, nor to engage in (let alone start) a relevant discussion.

_Just as freedom, autonomy cannot be given but has to be claimed – for one can only be autonomous in relation to. In other words, the museum must take a stand that provokes the visitor to claim his or her right to self-determination. In an exhibition model like PLUG-IN, such a stand was not taken since the exhibition model was organized as a horizontal network, in which multiple perspectives co-existed without confronting one another. By suggesting that all narratives have equal value, the museum created a space of ultra-relativism: where anything goes and nothing is at stake. As a consequence of this extreme democratisation, friction and the possibility of antagonism were eradicated.

_By assuming that the museum is part of, and thereby has to adapt to today’s network society – which is in constant flux and defined

by the immateriality of relations and exchange – the historical ambition of the collection and the museum as such become problematic. In this horizontal structure past, present and future are levelled. In turn, the institution runs the risk of becoming transitory and ephemeral; a space where multiple perspectives are interchangeable and thereby lose their relevance. In a situation where everything has equal value, nothing remains particular.

_The answer that we propose is that it is necessary, indeed imperative, that the museum takes a stand. This is important for two reasons. First, it is required in order to maintain a relevant art historical dialogue and to avoid becoming ephemeral. Only when the museum asserts a position does it provoke discussion and ground a debate. The museum as such claims its right to self-determination, by choosing instead of becoming all-inclusive. Second, by taking a stand the museum indicates a direction, thereby avoiding the disorientation of the audience. Only then is the visitor provoked to take his or her autonomous position, from which he or she can engage in a genuine and meaningful discussion. Only then would the museum truly become what Chantal Mouffe has called an ‘agonistic public sphere’: which attempts not to ‘establish a rational consensus in the public sphere but to defuse the potential of hostility that exists in human societies by providing the possibility for antagonism to be transformed into ‘agonism.’ ⁴

_Debbie Broekers
 _Laurie Cluitmans
 _Marijke Goeting
 _Maria Schnyder

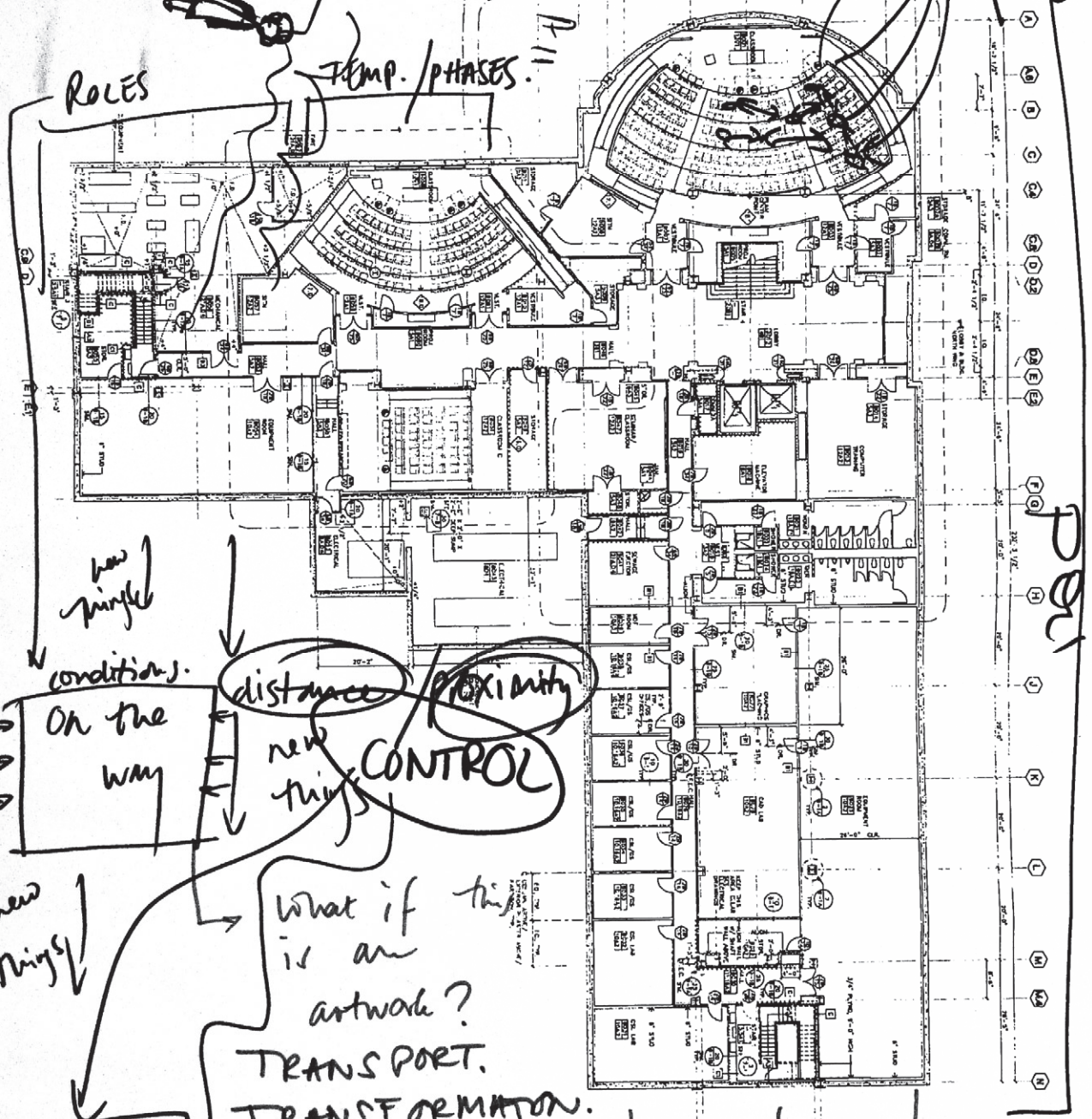
³ Fanon, F. Black Skin, White Masks, transl. Markman, C.L. New York: Grove Press, 1967, p. 221

⁴ Mouffe, Ch., “For an Agonistic Public Sphere” in Enwezor, O. et al (eds.) Democracy Unrealized, Osterfeldern-Ruit, 2002, p. 90.

New paper #2: Frameworks:
The Grounds of Autonomy:
J. Ozorio de Almeida Meroz

autonomies
thesis
antithesis
synthesis.
Hegel
Kropotkin

TRYING TO BE...
ACHIEVING BY FAILING...



ROLES

TEMP. / PHASES.

new things
conditions.
On the way

distance
proximity
CONTROL

new things

What if this
is an
artwork?
TRANSPORT.
TRANSFORMATION.

CORRUPTION

CHOICE

Contextualise.
INSTITUTE CHANGES?
WITH MOVEMENT.

BUNNERS HP

Part

JOANA OZORIO DE
ALMEIDA MEROZ

THE GROUNDS OF AUTONOMY

15 OCTOBER 2010

I.

_The stakes of the Autonomy Project Summer School held at the Van Abbemuseum in June 2010 were high: the hoped-for outcome was no less than a blueprint for future research into autonomy. This proved an unreachable goal due to an intuitive suspicion that producing a blueprint on autonomy meant not only a certain curtailing of our own autonomy, but also our possible implication in inhibiting the autonomy of those that would “use” our blueprint. What set of beliefs form the foundation of the presupposition that autonomy must be the stuff of spontaneous combustion and is antithetical to any sort of external influence? My purpose here, then, is to examine the principles, in other words, the grounds on which our present “intuitive suspicion” about autonomy is established, so as to ultimately consider whether there are other, more fertile grounds for supporting autonomy today.

_The probing of the historical formations of our notions about autonomy lay also at the core of art historian and critic Sven Lütticken’s lecture, around the title THE SUBJECT AND THE MARKET, delivered in the context of the Summer School, and which I will use as a means to structure the investigation into the question above. Although the way I am putting this is probably more formulaic than intended, Lütticken contended that the meaning of autonomy at any point in history

One had to resist the market in order to retain autonomous subjectivity.

is variable, and that this variable is a product of the dialectical relation between two factors: subjectivity and the market. The reason this framework is constructive in that it allows us to consider how wider socio-economic networks (partially) ground our notions of autonomy, and how changing our notions of autonomy therefore necessarily means engaging with the foundations on which they are based.

II. THE CIRCULARITY OF ABSTRACT AUTONOMY

At the heart of Lütticken's subject/market dialectics is the age-old debate in political philosophy regarding "substantive" versus "abstract" freedom (where each stands for a type of subjectivity) and the implications that the choice of one conception over the other has in determining the dominant social and economic system (what Lütticken calls 'the market'). As I will argue, our present notion of autonomy stems from a critique of and yet continues embedded in a society that subscribes to abstract freedom.

According to Hegel, abstract freedom stands primarily for an absence of external obstacles: I am free when I can do what I want and am not hindered by anyone. Although this is the most common notion of freedom in our neoliberalist times – and clearly echoes our concerns regarding impinging on and having our autonomy impinged upon during the Summer School – Hegel's point was that not sensing external obstacles does not mean they are not there, gently influencing our innermost desires: 'What the English call 'comfortable' is something endless and inexhaustible. Every condition of comfort reveals in turn its discomfort, and these discoveries go on forever. Hence the new want is not so much a want of those who have it directly, but is created by those who hope to make profit from it.' ¹ In believing that our desires, needs and opinions – including the opinions regarding the nature of autonomy – are ours rather than seeing them for what

they are, as manipulated by the market, we mistake society's views for our very own "autonomous identity".

Marx and the critical theorists – among whom Theodor W. Adorno – argued that because of this, abstract freedom became the free-market's most powerful ally. Philosopher Todd May summarises the argument thus: 'we should first recognise that [abstract freedom] is a defense of free-market capitalism. In the name of autonomy [...] [it] seeks to justify an arrangement in which people are entitled to whatever they have not stolen [and] can do with it what they like (so long as those doings do not coerce others).' ² Adorno maintained that ultimately, the result of goods manufactured in accordance with capitalist production is the manipulation of the subjectivity of the consumer him – or herself. Thus, one had to resist the market in order to retain autonomous subjectivity. Consequently, any "art" produced by the culture industry was fundamentally a tool of social control because, since it was produced under capitalism, it actually also reproduced its logic. Diametrically opposed to this was autonomous art, whose most significant social function was precisely to not have one. Adornian dialectics results not only in the notion that autonomy is antithetical to the market, but most essentially, that autonomy cannot be instrumentalized for any purpose whatsoever or else it is no longer autonomous.

Now, depending on the inclination and agenda of the reader, it is possible to arrive at different conclusions regarding Adorno's analysis. A first option is to focus on the core contradiction of his argument: in a bizarre twist, Adorno's criticism of abstract freedom comes full circle and ends up suspiciously resembling a signatory to it – "I am autonomous when I can do what I want and society does not interfere with

¹ Georg H W Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. S.W. Dyde (Cosimo, Inc., 2008), 102. Addition to paragraph 191 by the editors based on notes taken by students during Hegel's lectures.

² Todd May, *The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière: Creating Equality* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), 17.

my choices” – the very thing he set out to denounce in the first place. So one can accuse Adorno for instrumentalizing autonomy for the sake of autonomy. However, thus “relegating Adorno to the dustbin of history,” as Lütticken is fond of saying, “is also to miss his best parts.” In analogy to democracy, the critical project can be said to have been the worst option besides all others. And yet, in spite of itself, it arguably left us locked within an ultimately unfruitful circular notion of autonomy today, the cause of much frustration during the Summer School.

III. SUBSTANTIVE AUTONOMY WITHOUT SUBSTANCE

_Philosopher Jacques Rancière devoted a substantial portion of his oeuvre to the very question of how one could be thoughtful concerning the problems of the social without reproducing its logic and thereby locking our critique into a vicious circle as we saw above. The vigour of Rancière’s thinking about autonomy lies not so much in its novelty, but in its unconditional removal of the discussion about autonomy from the territory of abstract freedom altogether, and into the realm of substantive freedom.

_For Hegel, ‘substantive freedom’ stands for a subjectivity in which the individual acts according to Kant’s ‘categorical imperative’ (which can be roughly understood as internal duty) rather than as a reaction to external coercion. Substantive freedom calls for action, as it implies that the individual will try to alter those worldly aspects necessary to enable him to act according to his internal duty. Insofar as the subject reshapes the world so as to live in accordance with the categorical imperative, there is no contradiction between subjectivity and society. From this perspective, autonomy is the subject actively engaging with society but according to his inner duty.

_Also so in Rancièrian thought. For Rancière, subjectivity happens when a particular

inequality in a (social-economic) hierarchy causes a person, or group of people, to rise up against it – thereby becoming autonomous subjects but only in relation to a particular wrong. However, autonomous subjectivisation ceases the moment this wrong is replaced by a new order, even if this new order is agreeable to the demands of those that rose up against the old order. Any new order, even if fair, is precisely that: a hierarchy necessarily bound up with new inequalities – in other words, but another form of “the market”. Autonomy, then, only exists in the moment in which an individual presents his inner belief in his equality against all hierarchies, thereby disrupting the social order but never supplanting it for the risk of becoming it. Rancière thus breaks with abstract freedom’s circular autonomy and proposes instead an autonomy that can in fact be understood as a form of Hegel’s substantive freedom – but then without the substance. In acknowledging that any order will always create new inequalities anyway, Rancière does not prescribe what needs to be done – no Rancièrian blueprint on autonomy is likely to be forthcoming. But in its reliance on action guided by an inner duty that challenges and yet is not destructive of the social, Rancière’s thought clearly echoes Hegel’s.

_The subjectivity/market dialectics thus helps us understand how our circular notion of autonomy today relates to our present neoliberal circumstances, itself grounded in the notion of abstract freedom, and therefore, how changing our present notion of autonomy ultimately would also mean challenging the principles on which our circumstances are built. An autonomy grounded on substantive freedom instead, would then be without substance, happening only as particular and intermittent subjectivities intervening in today’s hierarchies grounded on abstract freedom – but never instituting or prescribing itself as a new plan.

」
Newspaper #2: Frameworks:
PROJECTS:
Intro:
C. Butcher

P = PROJEC

PLEASE MIND THE GAP

CLARE BUTCHER

CTC

Throughout the Autonomy Project's development this last year we've tried to maintain a creative tension between the realms of theory and practice in relation to artistic imagination, production and display. It seems almost inevitable that the imbeddedness of our topic – Autonomy – in a tradition of rigorous Western philosophy and “discourse” is almost impossible to meet with equally substantial forms of...form. Who are the Schillers, the Heideggers, the Rancières of art making? Or is this the wrong way to even think about it? The Autonomy Project Summer School sought to, at least, provide an environment of productive frustration where the discourse hit the road, so to speak. What happens when you get a bunch of young thinkers (i.e. those who're reading Mr. Greenberg, Heidegger et al. on a regular basis), eating, talking, sleeping, learning together with a bunch of young producers (who might also be reading Heidegger et al. but who might just as well be using his texts as material for a papier maché rendering of Vladimir Putin)?

The answer is still compellingly uncertain. From the polyphony of direct responses to the Autonomy Project Summer School, what we can deduce is that in order to bridge the distance between the kinds of vocabulary, methodology and ideology being wielded by these representatives of theory and practice, a certain leap of faith is required. And it is this springiness, this agility which the projects in the following section anticipate.

We are encouraged to see that in the wake of the Summer School's frustrations, some writers/thinkers/doers are taking steps and shifting perspectives, concerning their involvement in activities beyond the “borders” of the Autonomy Project (if those can be said to exist!). Whether they be architectural, structural, social, urban, economic – the relevance and practicality of autonomy not only as a rhetorical device but as a form, as a tool, within real circumstances is being tested. Is there the possibility of an autonomous polis? ¹ Do I want to butt heads with the discourse-makers? What is my position within art history? And, when the doors of the proverbial tram of artistic experimentation and opportunity are closing fast, what are the lengths to which we'll leap to maintain that urgent dialectic between ideas and application?

¹ The questions around “minding the gap” as well as the possibility of creating an “autonomous polis” were raised by the Chamber of Public Secrets and Transit.org in their recent collective curatorial efforts in Manifesta 8 in Murica and Cartagena, Spain. Transit.org's creating of a Constitution for Temporary Display has been extremely valuable in the thought process around this topic.

Newspaper #2: Frameworks:
Making Something out of
Observation and Reflection:
K. Niemann

MAKING SOMETHING OUT OF OBSERVATION & REFLECTION

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KERSTIN NIEMANN

「_The making of something for a research-based experiment is a fluid process, a generative entity that is constantly remaking itself and questioning its own existence. As a location, a space, a single family home, FILTER Detroit is first and foremost a house: a shelter for local as well as research residents outside of Detroit, and home to a permanent tenant; a piece of land shaped by adjacent pieces of land and architectures located in a neighbourhood that is dependent on economic and political developments; a situation where cultural producers from Detroit and outside of the cityscape meet, shape and deconstruct in order to create new shapes again; a context where practice meets research in a neighbourhood in Detroit. Constantly being built up...

_Dedicated to the observation and documentation (in a Living Archive) of socio-cultural movements within its immediate neighbourhood, FILTER DETROIT ^{1]} can be linked to an autonomous practice. An initiative, not an institution, which is kept alive by the initiative itself and input from its invited guests and residents. It is a social

」 art experiment where the transition of the house is intended to create a platform for communication and actions between invited guests and the community. As well as being a practice that is constantly shifting between the private (needs of an individual) and public spheres (do we need to institutionalise in order to mediate and take authority of content or the place?).]

_As a mediator embedded in the local context of a transforming environment, FILTER DETROIT tries to create possibilities of asking questions and exchanging knowledge, while also seeking potentialities, models for being in the world, within or without the “autonomous context” that comes with formal art structures.

_In the summer of 2010, a research field trip by “Urban Heritage” PhD students of the Bauhaus University, Weimar, brought 8 people to live in the Moran Street neighbourhood where FILTER Detroit operates, for 10 days. The Bauhaus University, Weimar doctorate programme is dedicated to the research of cultural heritage in the context of contemporary and future urban development. Operating with an expanded concept of “heritage” it considers the political and sociological constitution of a city as deserving conservation in regard to its capacity for social integration and local democracy.

_In collaboration with Susan La Porte from the College for Creative Studies, Frank Eckhardt, professor from the Bauhaus University and myself as initiator of FILTER Detroit, we limited the field of research for the PhD students to the immediate neighbourhood of Moran Street where FILTER DETROIT is located.

_The students observed the neighbourhood with the feedback, advice and help of local initiators and institutions during their visit. As one task around analysing socio-cultural movement, the students have

^{1]} FILTER DETROIT is part of the PHP network of active participants invested in reexamining the urban landscape. Power House Project (PHP) focuses on neighbourhood stabilization through art, design, architecture and creative industries.

been asked to contribute what their set of expertise and understanding allowed through documentation and analyses of the neighbourhood's processes of transformation.

During a meeting sitting in a single-storey restaurant building temporarily turned into Detroit's Gallery 555, one of the observations Jerzy Elzanowski, PhD student, made in the context of a "Right to a City"² relates back to how autonomous space is being used and how it is inflected by in- and outsiders. The meeting was an introduction by two research artists, Nikos Doulos and João Evangelista "imported" from the Netherlands. The artists were quick to tell their audience, to give back to the place they just had arrived at.

The conversation in the room with Detroiters and non-permanent-Detroiters focused on the city - more precisely, the topic of the "Right to the City". Who has the right to be an artist in Detroit?

In his text (which he contributed to the FILTER DETROIT research trip archive) Elzanowski cites the iconic text The Right to the City by Henri Lefebvre:

"ONLY GROUPS, SOCIAL CLASSES AND CLASS FRACTIONS CAPABLE OF REVOLUTIONARY INITIATIVE CAN TAKE OVER AND REALISE TO FRUITFUL SOLUTIONS TO URBAN PROBLEMS."

Henri Lefebvre,
"The Right to the City"
in The Blackwell City Reader, p. 371.

Elzanowski points out that Lefebvre argues for a compassionate city - one that allows for struggle, where utopia and policy stand in a dialectic relationship of praxis. The dynamics of the 'right to urban life' consider groups of practitioners, political and social fractions in a '[u]topia controlled by dialectical reason [that] serves as a safeguard against (...) visions gone astray.'

According to Elzanowski it seems a ludicrous question to ask of a city. Can we even propose that there are groups or individuals who do not have a right to the city - any city or urban formation? Expanding Lefebvre's concept of "The Right to the City"³ geographer and social theorist David Harvey, expanded this idea from an individual to a common right.

"THE QUESTION OF WHAT KIND OF CITY WE WANT CANNOT BE DIVORCED FROM THAT OF WHAT KIND OF SOCIAL TIES, RELATIONSHIP TO NATURE, LIFESTYLES, TECHNOLOGIES AND AESTHETIC VALUES WE DESIRE. THE RIGHT TO THE CITY IS FAR MORE THAN THE INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY TO ACCESS URBAN RESOURCES: IT IS A RIGHT TO CHANGE OURSELVES BY CHANGING THE CITY. IT IS, MOREOVER, A COMMON RATHER THAN AN INDIVIDUAL RIGHT SINCE THIS TRANSFORMATION INEVITABLY DEPENDS UPON THE EXERCISE OF A COLLECTIVE POWER TO RESHAPE THE PROCESSES OF URBANIZATION. THE FREEDOM TO MAKE AND REMAKE OUR CITIES AND OURSELVES IS, I WANT TO ARGUE, ONE OF THE MOST PRECIOUS YET MOST NEGLECTED OF OUR HUMAN RIGHTS."

Yet in a city that, as architectural researcher Andrew Herscher argues, lies outside the market economy, survival and community is about resisting appropriation by the regime of the market. Detroit's urbanites, such as artists and urban farmers face a difficult issue: how to attract likeminded cultural shapers and at the same time, avoid selling out as for example cultural or porn ruin entrepreneurs?

The summer field trip merged into a study of space, individual movements as well as of the transformations of space in a particular neighbourhood. It evoked a lot of questions of whether artistic initiatives in a civic neighbourhood increase the likelihood of gentrification, produce an exclusive atmosphere, or take up an almost colonial

² Based on a broad application of human rights and urban theories the Right to the City is a movement emerging in urban centers all over the world.

³ Henri Lefebvre first coined the phrase "The Right to the City" as an idea and a slogan in his 1968 book Le Droit à la ville.

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approach while moving and acting without actually involving the present neighbours and their everyday concerns. The field trip was eventually meant to provide information and pose questions about the neighbourhood itself and other cultural practitioners that show an interest in the area, for the building up of a Living Archive at FILTER Detroit.

_After a period of two months the PhD students handed over their ideas, abstracts, maps, analyses, interviews, photos and videos to the design students of Susan La Porte from the College of Creative Studies. In the form of a design class project, the Creative Studies students took these observations and reflections in October and contributed back with a set of different designs and concepts of a publication that would involve their voice, reflections, photos and ideas of how to present their city through the eyes of others as well.

_Thinking about these contributions, the several tours we made to cultural initiatives and community projects related to our research activities, I come back to the ideas of movement and autonomy in space communicated during a lecture by Dan Pietera on Collaborative Design. Pietera, a landscape architect and activist working as urban designer for the Detroit Collaborative Design Center, University of Mercy, School of Architecture, focuses on community collaborations and participatory planning in community projects. He defines community design as a process, which connects people to a place with systems of the design processes instead of with individual items (final products) alone. One could say he plays with the identification and celebration of differences. The lecture revolved around architectural and urban design with community participation. He explained that the design stage involving the community varies from the master planning stage to a particular architecture scheme. Scientific research is an inevitable part, such as door- to- door

interviews and workshops. These research methodologies, being conveyed in the participatory process, are aimed not only at building quantitative data collections for physical diameters, but also at scrutinising cultural conditions in a particular area such as racial distribution, habits and living patterns.

_According to Pietera, a place could only become sustainable when two important conditions exist:

1. People's physical and mental well-being;
2. People's connection to this place.

CONNECTIONS TO A PLACE CAN BE DERIVED THROUGH SOCIAL CONNECTIONS, SUCH AS A NEIGHBORHOOD AND COMMON ACTIVITIES AND EXPERIENCE IN A PLACE.

_Liza Kam, one of the PhD students from the summer research trip, looked particularly at people's connection to their place and thought about the world's "best players": children. She looked into her 2-blocks research area on Moran Street and identified 3 major modes of playing:

1. Planned area to play (play toys on privately marked territories)
2. Motown toys (toys used to move in public and private areas)
3. Let's play with anything (situations and elements that are transformed into toys)

_Thus a toy can be something that constantly moves from the public into the private. To challenge these practices of movement and gaming between a private and public segment of one's constant iteration of being in the world, is perhaps the best way to explain collaborative autonomous practice - via the tactics of a game? Playing within a given context to expand or shrink the borders of that field is valid, but gambling comes with rules.

⁴ David Harvey, New Left Review 53, London, 2008

⁵ Where is the citation for Herscher?

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“RULE 11: PICK THE TARGET, FREEZE IT, PERSONALIZE IT, POLARIZE IT. DON’T TRY TO ATTACK ABSTRACT CORPORATIONS OR BUREAUCRACIES. IDENTIFY A RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL. IGNORE ATTEMPTS TO SHIFT OR SPREAD THE BLAME.” ⁶

_ In 1971, Saul Alinsky wrote a classic on grassroots organising entitled RULES FOR RADICALS. It provides some advice on confrontational tactics. Saul Alinsky emphasises these rules must be translated into real-life tactics that are fluid and responsive to the situation at hand.

“TACTIC MEANS DOING WHAT YOU CAN WITH WHAT YOU HAVE. TACTICS ARE THOSE CONSCIOUSLY DELIBERATE ACTS BY WHICH HUMAN BEINGS LIVE WITH EACH OTHER AND DEAL WITH THE WORLD AROUND THEM. IN THE WORLD OF GIVE AND TAKE, TACTICS IS THE ART OF HOW TO TAKE AND HOW TO GIVE.” ⁷

_ The fixation of rules must certainly be constantly negotiated when considering an autonomous practice within the realm of FILTER, where a continuous influx from the in- and the outside feeds a process of formulating questions about cultural movements and initiatives in Detroit. Yet tactics can function as a set of tools with which one can form shapes and prepare platforms that can relate to creative possibilities or further sites of construction.

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www.filter-hamburg.com
(M.A. in Applied Cultural Science)

⁶ | Saul Alinsky: Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals, New York, 1971

⁷ | Saul D. Alinsky: Rules for Radicals. A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals*, New York 1971, pp. 126-133.

AUTONOMY GRANTED

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SEAN HARVEY

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“Liverpool Biennial is the largest as well as one of the most exciting contemporary visual arts events in the UK, and with 960,000 visits in 2008, it is one of the best attended in the world.”

Liverpool Biennial website

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_One of Liverpool Biennial’s missions is to engage audiences in a city which would not normally engage with contemporary art. It has a festival spirit which makes the work approachable and accessible. Its marketing campaign is a good example of this, and so is its success in rejuvenating abandoned sites around the city, in one case to the extent of installing a model hanok (traditional Korean house) between two 19th century buildings on Duke Street – Do Ho Suh, Bringing Home, 2010. In commissioning works like these and branching out into the public realm so enthusiastically, Liverpool Biennial seems to be the UK Arts Council’s reaction to the stigma of the private space of the museum and the unpopular ‘white cube’ format of exhibiting work, which has resulted in one monolithic outreach programme every two years.

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_The closed space of the museum is disliked today more than ever because it is contrary

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to the apparently open space of contemporary media. Today’s globalised media however cannot be open because it is all-inclusive and total. Similarly, art conceived within a media machine of infinite expansion and inclusion is also not an open space but the artistic counterpart of an imperial media hybrid. However, instead of leaving the ‘white cube’ behind as a way of formatting art, public institutions are simply and literally moving themselves outside into places like Rapid Hardware store (one of the many locations for Liverpool Biennial 2010). Under the guise of the “low-fi” and the “user friendly” we find art that appears to have grown apart from the insular market driven establishment and into the street where high and low culture merge.

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_So although there is plenty more room now for art to take place in the city, all I can see happening in Liverpool is the soft-hand of the same bureaucratic system fixing up the sites capitalism has left behind in the carnage of its own recent economic failure whilst, at the same time, broadening and reinforcing the boundaries that many of the artists showing in these spaces are continually trying to knock down.

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_So, in retrospect, I found Static gallery’s 2008 (and ongoing) Noodle Bar project a refreshing and tactical move in this suffocating situation. I would argue that Noodle Bar was a move away from the spectacle of Liverpool Biennial (and Biennial’s in general) and was, instead, a direct and confrontational intervention into the fabric of bureaucracy which govern cities such as Liverpool.

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_Posed in the fashion of illegal DIY settlements in third world cities, Noodle Bar, (a steel container attached to the gallery in Liverpool which contained a fully functioning Noodle Bar), served its purpose as Static became a host venue for the 2008 biennial, offering visitors a place to take a break from the art circuit in the city and chow down on some noodles. At the same time as this, however, it confronted the city of Liverpool's planning department with the prospect of an inconvenient court battle over planning permission. Liverpool City Council argued that Noodle Bar was an illegal retail outlet constructed without proper planning permission. Static argued that the Noodle Bar was an artistic intervention. In fact, neither could operate as such without the disguise of the other.

AUTONOMY GRANTED

_One concern in my own work is the kind of pseudo autonomy that art has. The notion that art occupies, or even constitutes, a space outside the order of society and that artists are, as a result, granted infinite freedom to criticise society from their autonomous sanctuary. This notion was called into question by the Noodle Bar project.

_The Korean chefs who were employed by Static to work in the Noodle Bar were working in Seoul originally. Usually the chefs could never have passed through UK immigration laws, but were granted permission only under the terms and conditions of an artist's visa. To acquire an artist's visa however the project itself needed to be recognised as a piece of art by Liverpool city council. By simply remaining a host venue as opposed to

┘ a publicised art project in the Biennial's visitors guide Static could work outside the funding agenda's of the council and not have to meet their priorities while, at the same time, maintaining a line of defense against the council's claims it was a business venture. In this way Static's Noodle Bar project maintains a critical distance from art practice sanctioned as public spectacle in the city of Liverpool - investigating the possibility of autonomy which could allow the individual more freedom over architecture, planning, immigration/migration, trade, and art, with little or no distinction between them.

_Liverpool City Council planning department were forced to exert pressure on Static Gallery by indirectly threatening to jeopardise other funding relationships that Static Gallery had developed over the years.

_Faced with an all-encompassing neoliberalism - Static's Noodle Bar project identified that to do something different art practiced today can only use the networks and systems that are already in place. Instead of succumbing to demand for small creative acts that patch up the social waste land of capitalism's relentless march, art can regain its credibility and legitimacy as an engaged force in society.

Newspaper #2: Frameworks:
Autonomy by Numbers:
An Individual Reflection
on a collective Experience:
H. Pierce

AUTONOMY BY NUMBERS

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HANNAH PIERCE

AN INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION ON A COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCE

_On attempting to seek a redefinition of critical autonomy I keep finding myself considering the relationship between autonomy and the individual, or more precisely dissecting the relationship between autonomy and the collective. This becomes almost a case study for me, having worked as part of a collective, Unit 4, for the past year. This exploration has prompted more questions for me than answers and, if I have learnt anything about autonomy, it is the importance of asking the right questions.

_The traditional notion of autonomy places enormous value on the individual. So what is the appeal to artists of working together? The attraction of collaboration, personally, is simply the provision of a vehicle to push the boundaries of art production.

_Is it possible to work autonomously under the guise of a collective? This, of course, has no definitive answer but, speaking at the first Autonomy Project Summer School, Erik Hagoort suggested that working with others requires embracing encounters and reciprocity, which detach us from the outdated notion of autonomy. This very much reflects my experience of working collectively; emphasising discourse, compromise and negotiation to develop shared concepts and processes.

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UNIT 4 began in September 2009, initiated by Paul Sullivan of Static Gallery Liverpool, as an experimental Art and Architecture studio comprising of four recent graduates from Liverpool School of Art and Design (two of the students were from Fine Art and two were from Architecture). With Paul Sullivan's background in architecture, plus funding from The Royal Institute of British Architects, the motivation for the studios inception was directed towards broadening the experience of architecture students working outside of architectural firms. However by the end of the year working together we identified very much as an artist collective.

_Housed in Static Gallery, the studio's aims become more concerned with the process of dialogue between the two disciplines rather than emphasising production; rejecting the traditional art object along with the stability and longevity it represents in favor of open ended projects, public debates, fleeting one night exhibitions and online output. The studio became a space of constant negotiation of varying sets of values, artistically and personally.

_Our first experience of working together was undertaking a series of collective reviews of Liverpool art institutions. Functioning as short burst projects, they resulted in a public discussion of the conclusions we had drawn when questioning potential alternatives for the use of space that local arts organisations currently occupy. Initially we interacted by trading knowledge and skills, resulting in the artist producing some of the most architecturally unsound sketches you are ever likely to see and a couple of flimsy curation and reprogramming proposals from the architects. However, there was more of a general sense that we were compromising our own practice and any possibility of autonomy individually or as a group.

_Quickly recognising the flaws in the dynamic of a skills exchange our output became a convergence of ideas, a general point of view emergent from multiple, distinct perspectives. This was sought through

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extended negotiation and recognising the importance of individual strengths and responsibility - through this I would argue that we each became semi-autonomous within the collective. When approaching a project each of us were able to take individual responsibilities and initiatives, such as writing articles and proposals or chairing public discussions, while maintaining an understanding of our broader, shared intentions and aware of a duty not to force ones own ideas or pre-conceptions onto another.

_This "semi" autonomy is one of individual rather than collective perception, and is admittedly without a consistent definition of a "whole" autonomy. However, it defines for me of what I recognise as the possibility of autonomy within a collective, something that could only be fleetingly identified outside any art objects we produced but, in the process of dialogue and negotiation, inherent within collaborative encounters.

NOTICE —

During June 2010 there was a meeting on
autonomy.

After the program ended

discussions continued

Through a heat wave / In the heat of the
moment an artist and art-
historians

discovered their affinities
and decided to collaborate

MDCLM

we decided —

we belong together /
need each other.

we ask ourselves —

what have we come to stand for

Announcement:

During September 2010 there was a
meeting between artists.

A group of artists

JDJTCM

decided on collaboration with
art-historians

Woo

Woo

—

for what is here
but an announcement
of air and opportunity

and what will we do about it
?

future

Presenting somewhere in the near

Signed,

Charlotte

Deix

Jort

Maria

Debbie

Martje

Laurie

Tobias

Jasper

Martine

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The Autonomy Project
Onomatopee 43.1

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Newspaper #2: Frameworks:

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THE
AUTONOMY
PROJECT.
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The Autonomy Project is an international collaboration between art/research/education institutes and organisations, independent practitioners and thinkers. The project began in early 2010 and seeks to create a dynamic framework which addresses and acts on issues around autonomy in the field of contemporary art. From a multi-faceted geographic and political context, the project is busy facilitating events, seminars, exhibitions and publications in an ongoing discussion. We invite you to track and contribute to our activities via the Autonomy Project NING: <http://theautonomyproject.ning.com>

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