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5	Editorial
7	<i>Discipline: On Writing and Collectivity</i> Federico Campagna
12	<i>(Mon, Dec 14, 2009 at 11:15 AM )</i> Joseph Redwood-Martinez
13	<i>Mr. Who, Miss What and the Auctus disease</i> Federica Bueti
18	<i>Know it? I Wrote it!</i> Jan Verwoert
23	<i>Archeology</i> Vanessa Place
25	<i>(Fri, Feb 12, 2010 at 11:40 AM )</i> Joseph Redwood-Martinez
26	<i>Queer's Contradictions (and Radical Sexual Politics for Precarious Times)</i> Cavin Brown
31	<i>I'm your rainbow</i> Övül Durmusoglu
32	<i>Frick</i> Erica Baum
34	<i>NOT NOT LIKE</i> Caleb Waldorf
36	<i>The Curious World of Art &amp; Hacktivism</i> Marc Garrett
43	<i>(Wed, Oct 6, 2010 at 7:08 AM)</i> Joseph Redwood-Martinez
44	<i>Curatorial Business</i> Pedro Neves Marques
53	<i>(Mon, Mar 22, 2010 at 10:36 AM)</i> Joseph Redwood-Martinez
54	<i>Manifesto for A NEW PUBLIC</i> Freee



How and why do we articulate discourses? What are the possible implications of putting those discourses into circulation today? How do we deal with connective apparatuses that transform social interaction and knowledge into modes of production? One approach could be to rethink the way language is used, debates articulated and systems of relations produced and eventually exploited. If we then align the question of operation and circulation of discourses with the one of contemporary forms of authorship, what might need to be asked is: what kind of knowledge do we really possess about this (sometimes) unquestioned language, which we use to communicate on a daily basis? Although we are not strictly interested in algorithms, accessibility of knowledge and forms of authorship mainly depend today on access to data, from which we appropriate, compose and recombine information endlessly. Even when the way of generating this knowledge is questioned, we have the feeling that the basic grammar remains prevalently obscure to most of us. When Joseph K. in Kafka's *The Trial*<sup>1</sup> discovered that he knew nothing about courts—their structures and rituals—he realized that his ignorance wouldn't have helped him succeed in demonstrating his innocence against the inexplicable reasons for that trial. He needed to learn the grammar of the game—for ignoring the court's rules was equal to preemptively admit one's guilt and remaining entrapped in the suffocating chambers of that system. Knowing how certain discourses function might at least help in becoming the author of one's own destiny, instead of becoming the witness of our own trial.

<sup>1</sup> Kafka J., (1925) *The Trial*, (trs. Willa and Edwin Muir, 1937; Douglas Scott and Chris Waller, 1977; Breon Mitchell, 1998; David Wyllie, 2009), edit. Penguin Classics.

This third issue of ...ment looks at forms of authorship—both individual and collective—as they emerge in a cultural context where the value of knowledge is created by the circulation and distribution of information. Whatever the content, in our digital culture too often discourses are granted the status of 'valuable information' as long as the audience increases: if this is not the case, then thoughts and ideas can easily be discharged as having no specific value. As a result, our society accumulates information, but as the market logic of scarcity is applied what can be read or downloaded is only a portion of what is really available. Moreover, abundance is limited by copyright policies, ownership, data protection and other forms of regulation. So what happens to all the material that is left behind? What kind of agency does the author possess on the circulation of content? And what kind of responsibility, if any at all? Those questions bring us to consider the role of appropriation, its potentialities and limitations. On the one hand, as Foucault suggested<sup>2</sup>, appropriation can be seen as a limitation to the potentiality of the author (as it literally goes on to define forms

<sup>2</sup> Foucault M. (1998) 'What Is an Author?', in *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley. New York: New Press, pp. 205-22.

of property and legal actions as punishments against the violation of the right to ownership). By reducing the author to the person, it reduces the active potential of the *author* as generator of discourse. On the other hand, appropriation could be regarded as a process of *wild* accumulation. One where the overabundance of available knowledge produces a surplus that does not need to be absorbed by the market, but that flourishes and proliferates uncontrolled. Another form of consumption that might lead us—the author and the public—to think of the advantages of an economy of abundance, where things are simply available to anyone, at any time and in every place. But then again, when imagining how accumulation, abundance and re-appropriation act as emancipatory factors in the hands of the author—regaining political agency in the world he or she inhabits—it is crucial to understand the way such abundance is constructed and distributed in a given society. After all, accumulation is not such a bad thing, is it? And appropriation can become a good strategy of turning upside down the logic of semiotic production, but on the condition that we understand the language and mechanisms regulating such appropriation.

From this perspective, this issue of ...ment attempts to understand how today, authors from observers of facts and producers of imaginary worlds become conductors of new linguistic settings, ways of thinking of and acting on reality. By means of language and actions, the author is an active agent that facilitates another kind of consciousness and another sensibility. The question is also how these worlds are generated and what are the reasons for creating and developing them.

Authorship as a political space of reflection and action, in which joint efforts towards common goals and their possible results are simultaneously distributed or appropriated, represent to us a way of thinking about the mechanisms and politics of cultural production today. What it means to work, think or act both as individuals and together, what level of productive interaction we can hope to reach between the minority and the majority, the individual and the collective, the social and the political or the author and the public. We aim to reflect on authorship as a place of encounter. A space from which—as Giorgio Agamben suggests—a subjectivity is created where the being encounters language and puts itself into play without reserve, affirming the impossibility of reducing its presence to the gesture of the author.<sup>3</sup> An encounter, between the author and the public, that gives shape to a new form of life.

3 Agamben G. (2007) 'The Author as Gesture', in *Profanation*, trans. Jeff Fort. Zone Books.

# DISCIPLINE: ON WRITING AND COLLECTIVITY

Federico Campagna

**If you meet the Buddha, kill him.**

— Linji Yixuan<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Yixuan L., B. Watson (ed) (1993) *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi: a Translation of the Lin-chi Lu*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, p.52.

It is common practice to look at humans through the filter of the collectivities they supposedly belong to. This is particularly evident in conservative discourses, such as those on Nation and Ethnicity, or in the marketing categorizations of different consumer typologies. But also discourses which self-define as emancipatory rarely constitute an exception to this norm. When fighting for gender equality, for example, it is always through the filter of Gender that we look at our fellow humans kettled inside the various gender categories. Even when talking about humanity *tout court*, it is once again through the filter of Humanity that we look at the singular lives that are gathered on this planet. This is how we often end up fighting for the Woman, the Migrant, the Human, and so on, and hardly ever for the individual woman, the individual migrant, the individual human. Fooled by the pretense of such abstract collectivities to truly embody those who are comprised within them, we often find ourselves fighting, not for the emancipation of our fellow humans, but for that of their collective, capitalized names.

What is the origin of this capitalising process, which turns the multitudes of singularities into abstract conglomerates? If we borrowed the language of economics, we could call this element a *surplus*—that is, an excess which is produced by human congregations and which, it seems inevitably, ends up enveloping them and imposing itself above them. Under the iron sky of such capitalisations, humans cease to be unique individuals, melting instead into the magmatic material of abstraction. Progressively, this collective surplus takes over the individuals who originally produced it, impersonating them through the ‘mystical body’ of an abstract name. Like in the early horror movie *The Great Gabbo*<sup>2</sup>, these collective abstractions, which we thought we could dominate and use as our ventriloquists’ dummies, finally end up possessing us, forcing us into complete silence.

But is this really the unavoidable result of any attempt at community-making? Is it really impossible to imagine any authentic form of collective composition, even within the struggle for emancipation? On the contrary. For example, as we have recently seen with the actions of the hacker multitude which goes under the name of Anonymous, the possibility of hiding one’s actions

<sup>2</sup> Cruze J. (dir) (1929) *The Great Gabbo*. New York: Kino International.

behind the mask of a shared identity can bring some extremely useful advantages, both in terms of security, of effectiveness and of 'military' strategy. However, if we wish to use such abstract devices, we must do so with the necessary distance, whilst retaining consciousness of the risks involved. Collective identities can be as powerful as hammers, but, like hammers, there is a crucial difference between having them in our hands, or dangerously floating above our heads. At any time, we must maintain a sharp awareness of the substantial difference between the reality of the singular individuals and the dangerous surplus which constitutes the name of the collectivity they decide—or are decided—to belong to.

The same applies to writing. Indeed, from a technical point of view, we might even consider Anonymous as a writing collective, since programming is a practice based on an alphanumeric language. When looking at forms of collective writing, especially in the context of a struggle for emancipation, we must always remember the fictionality of the collective construct and the reality of its composing parts. Even when a writer is part of a collective project, it is always him or her who is doing his or her share of writing. It is him or her who has to face responsibility for his or her practice (Instead, I might add, of toying with the ever too common, bloodless critiques of the actions of their own or of someone else's collective, as if such things really existed). It is the individual writer who has to find within him or herself the necessary discipline to give life to the most adequate writing, with the aim of furthering a struggle which must be, first of all, for his or her own individual emancipation.

Such a focus on individuality is not a resignation to a state of existential isolation. It is immediately evident how a writer can never be alone, nor will he or she ever be in the position of thinking his or her practice as disjointed from a universe of others with which it interacts.

First of all, an examination of the *other* which the writer is to him or herself. When writing, one is always forced to investigate oneself while searching for ideas, logic or flow. In doing so, one will inescapably meet one's *self*, which he or she will meet as if it was an other. Such an encounter with the other, as Emmanuel Lévinas reminds us, is always unsettling<sup>3</sup>, and produces at least as much disquiet as surprise. However, a radical transformation of the two parts involved also originates from this encounter. Upon meeting oneself as an other, one is forced to open him or herself to it, losing his or her apparent full sovereignty as an individual, and to start to share his or her individual status with this other. A new, shared space is created between the two, and from this space an infinite, mutual responsibility originates for both: mutual, as it refers to the new state of the two parts being intertwined, and infinite, as its substance is made of the stuff of dreams, desires and necessities.

3 Lévinas E. (1992) 'Transcending Words: Concerning Word-Erasing' in *Yale French Studies*, No. 81, Yale: Yale University Press, pp. 145-150.

4 Stirner, M., S. Byington (trans) (1973) *The Ego and His Own*. New York: Dover.

In order for writing to become translated into an emancipatory discourse, the writer must develop what Max Stirner used to define as an *egoistic* approach<sup>4</sup>: that is, the constant, tireless act of reminding oneself that the dreams, desires and necessities, shared with one's own other, are the core of one's practice and the first aim of one's struggle for emancipation. The disquiet generated by this traumatic encounter leads to two opposite, yet connected, directions; outwards, to the transformation of the urgency for one's emancipation into the concrete practice of insurrection; inwards, to the creation by one's own hands of one's *discipline*. Discipline, thus, ceases to be the obedient interiorization of an external command, rather becoming the embodiment into one's own practice of one's infinite responsibility for the space which one shares with that particular other, which is one's self. In this sense, discipline, thus, has to be intended—and re-imagined—as a radical method of emancipatory urgency, born out of the solidarity between one and one's self, and aimed at the unleashing of the full potential of one's dreams, desires and necessities—in other words, at emancipation.

Notoriously, discipline has been one of the most difficult aspects associated with the practice of writing. Especially today, in the age of endless distractions, finding sufficient willpower to simply continue writing for a decent span of time has for many become an almost insurmountable challenge. But we should not be clouded by the annoyance caused to us by the struggle for discipline. It is exactly this quest that might constitute the most powerful reminder of the reasons why we should be writing at all. In fact, the radicality of discipline-as-method consists in its being connected to the *why* of action, rather than to the *how*. As experience teaches us, the iron fist of dictatorially self-imposed, traditional discipline can do very little against the soft power of distractions. Facebook is always too close, YouTube is always too available, and if one doesn't have the Internet it might be drinking, or smoking, or god-knows-what that will, with cruel persistence, break the fragile pretense of self-inflicted, military discipline. It is only the reminder of *why* we are doing something—for example, why we are writing—that can lift us above the muddy waters of distractions. All actions which do not pass the test of this discipline, are probably not worth being accomplished.

In his or her practice, the writer is also in constant interaction with the objects or characters he or she creates. In truth, writing is always an exercise in crowd control. Concepts, adjectives, characters, landscapes exist on the page as the defenseless subjects of the writer's absolute monarchy. Their fictional lives depend on us and have nothing to defend themselves with, apart from the infective weapons of the abstract dummy. While having to guard ourselves from their passive-aggressive potential, we should also understand the opportunity of using our writing as a

place for practical experimentation. Approaching one's fictional characters or abstract constructs in a considerate manner can become a good training exercise for the relationship with equally 'empty' objects in the real world, such as those commonly defined as materials and resources in the language of economics. Producing useless writing, hopeless characters, superfluous concepts should thus be understood as a metaphor of our everyday production of useless commodities, hopeless subjectivities, superfluous action, and so on. Far from advocating puritan restraint in writing, I would like to invite fellow writers to insert a political and economic dimension into their dealings with their creative objects, in order to strengthen and refine their political and economic practice in their everyday lives.

But writers don't only deal with their selves and their fictional creations. Readers, of course, are their fundamental counterparts. Better said, *the* reader, as a singular entity. Due to the very technology of writing, reading is a solitary act, in which the writer and the reader meet through the medium of the text. A writer always talks to one reader at any one time. It was with a deep understanding of the constraints of the written medium that Mussolini famously declared cinema, and not writing, to be the 'strongest weapon' for propaganda. The dialogue between the writer and the reader happens silently, almost secretly, and passes from one singularity to the other. All other writing, especially that type of discourse-to-all-dummies commonly defined as journalism, is little more than an archaic and ineffective form of propaganda: talking to the ghosts of our abstract names—or worse, to the holy ghost of the 'masses' or of the 'general readership'—and trying to persuade them, as if they really existed.

In their secret liaison, what are the writer and reader whispering? Their dialogue reminds us of that between instruments in an orchestra, constantly calling and inviting each other; the writer, through his words; the reader, through the equally creative process of interpretation and completion. Of course, only until they swap roles, as the once-reader will start writing, and the former writer will start reading. Through his or her writing, the writer invites the reader to form an alliance. A willful complicity. When the writer reveals a fictional landscape on the page, he or she does so only with the intent of inviting the reader to participate to its creation, inside and outside the page. This is why writing is never about communication: it is the constant invitation, from the writer to the reader, to become accomplices in drawing one of those 'cartographies of lands yet to come' discussed by Gilles Deleuze<sup>5</sup>. Thus writing and reading, the solitary acts *par excellence*, reveal themselves to be extremely powerful moments of creation for new collectivities. True to the secrecy of their origin, such new collectivities do not establish themselves upon the loud boasting of some shared name, to be repeated *ad infinitum* by all members until their complete self-annihilation. On the contrary, in order

5 Deleuze, G., Guattari, F., Massumi, B. (trans) (1987) *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

for these new collectivities to take real life and acquire autonomy, they will have to flee the page they were born in, and the realm of abstract language, as soon as possible. Readers and writers should look for each other in real life, meet, conspire, develop together in reality what they began to sketch on paper. Such an act of bringing secret complicities to a state of reality-production is the basic form of insurrection.

All the rest, the tiring refrain of the 'need for organization', will come by itself, structured around each individual's discipline and the discipline that derives from the encounter with one's accomplice as an *other* and from the creation of a shared space of dreams, desires and necessities. *Organization* thus becomes a practical realization of the meeting of *disciplines*. Like the disquiet caused by one's encounter with one's self leading to a transformation of the emancipatory urgency into discipline, the encounter with the discipline of the accomplice—understood as an other who has already encountered him or herself as his or her own other—provides the practical ground where such discipline can flourish as insurrection. This insurrectionary blossoming, truthful to the infinite nature of its places of origin, unfolds as an organization of infinities. In other words, an ever-changing organization of ethics, rather than as some scaffolding constructed of fixed norms morality. The field of organization thus ceases to be the totalitarian space of the social factory, or of the party factory, and becomes the process of translation into reality of the ethical responsibility of our encounter with the co-existence of several infinities both within ourselves and in the spaces of contact with the others.

Organization, intended as the insurrectionary meeting of disciplines, constitutes the foundation from which new collectivities can spring to life. Such collectives will be born as naturally unable to produce that surplus which would ultimately overtake their components. In fact, collectives such as these will never need a name, a flag or a party symbol. They will no longer be dominating dummies, nor will they be heavy hammers floating over our heads. Rather, they will resemble a good pair of boots. Something which, like utopia in the words of Eduardo Galeano<sup>6</sup>, is just what we need for walking.

6 Galeano, E. (1998) *Las Palabras Andantes*. Mexico: Siglo XXI Editores, S.A. de C.V.

Mon, Dec 14, 2009 at 11:15 AM

attempting to create a space where  
something is bound to take place.

, indecipherable in its purpose - neither  
revealing, nor concealing.  
a more ambiguous character  
of revelation and discourse.

if one were to herald a community as  
something other than a limited audience  
, for whom social histories and civic positions  
were consciously and entirely forgotten.

moved to the periphery  
to see in, around, and  
through the action taking place.

, unknown as yet by the actors themselves.  
becoming present in the space  
where we least expect them.

In September of 2009, Joseph Redwood-Martinez subscribed to e-flux, the art world email digest that reaches tens of thousands of institutions and individuals on a thrice daily basis. To make sense of the sudden deluge of information, Redwood-Martinez began selectively reconfiguring pieces of each press release into a body of text pieces. As a poetic intervention, *event statements* is an entirely subjective mapping of the archive by way of core samples and screen shots. The project is without beginning or end, it spills out from the milieu, acting poetically as a rhizome— ceaselessly establishing connections and complicating a worldview written by way of press release.

# MR. WHO, MISS WHAT AND THE AUCTUS DISEASE

Federica Bueti

I've become very concerned about the use of the pronoun 'Who'. I can feel the thickness of the sound, 'W-H-H-U' unpleasantly penetrating my ears with such an insistence that it has become an intolerable noise. But, I'm aware that I'll never completely get rid of this process of putting one word in the place of another, since this process with nouns, pronouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, conjunctions is endless: a thought put into language can be addressed, reversed, amended, adjusted, adapted, twisted, re-addressed, reinvented, turned upside down or inside out, but the fact is that language never slips away, it remains there, ready for new combinations. A friend told me that he is writing a letter to a concept. I thought: Whhooow, this is serious. You must be able to write a letter to a concept in the same way that you may feel the need to write a letter to someone, your beloved, for instance. It's about communication, expressing your concerns, disappointments, but also your commitment to a relationship. All in the space of an exquisite letter. I would love to write a letter to Mr. Who to express all my concerns, I thought. But ... then, what to write? How to write? And more importantly, why should I write a letter to a pronoun? Since I was clearly unable to answer all these questions, to make sense of the many thoughts crossing my confused brain, the only thoughtful thing I could do was to stop asking questions and try to meditate. Actually, I've kept on thinking about this unlucky pronoun that torments my life with its authoritative sound 'W-H-H-U'. For a while, I stared at its shape like a doped fish observing with certain surprise the spherical glass tank he cannot escape, but only tries to make sense of. And to make sense of this exasperating situation, I thought that a viable solution would have been to change the question the pronoun addressed, or change the pronoun and get rid of the question entirely, or get rid of pronoun and question together. Nonetheless, Mr. Who is still there. But, you know, these days one should feel obligated to deal with certain weighty presences. With patience and by applying a certain logic and method, I should be able to torch the head of this ferocious animal and transformed my irritation into a productive impulse. Poor Mr. Who, who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time: it isn't its fault! The thing is that he happens to be sited in the wrong question.

Right now, I consider Mr. Who an unwelcomed guest: to be honest I cannot bear the sound of his bossy presence. As disappearing is akin to exiting from view, Mr. Who is like a ghost—never got rid of entirely, but always remaining somewhere in the background. But I have thought of a means of making Mr. Who disappear from my horizon, by trying a different trick—changing perspective. I don't think that my question needs to be addressed with a Mr. Who, I would rather go for a different perspective or another ghost, perhaps Miss What can become a more friendly presence. I want to choose the right pronoun to make sure I will be able to sharply articulate my question. Pronouns take an enormous responsibility for the rest of the group whilst maintaining a certain strange anonymity, including Mr. Who and Miss What. They possess the power of opening up the space in which a question can be asked, a world sketched out and thoughts be propelled towards new territories. And since the aim of this edition of the journal is to think about forms of authorship, following a certain tradition, I really desire to ask—what is an author and avoid the fatidic question—Who is the author?

We know that authorship is first of all a question of property—intellectual, economical, political, social: it is about things and how things take on humanized shapes keeping us alive. If a discursive function—how Foucault defined it<sup>1</sup>—or a gesture—as Agamben described it<sup>2</sup>—sounds too abstract, then we can perhaps think of the author as a thing. Whether political, cultural or magical, the thing is practising the world, a peculiar and ever different way of touching, smelling, hearing and experiencing the world. I can see how it looks and functions when I place Miss What within the other words on the page: she is gorgeous, charming, gifted with an extraordinary energy, so that I can hardly contain the undisciplined excitement shown by nouns, pronouns, adjectives and verbs at her presence. The moment I decided that yes, she was what I really needed, I welcomed her and with a resolute tone she asked: what are we doing here? I was so delighted to hear her gentle voice, you cannot imagine. Then, I looked for a good way to articulate a couple of sentences and said: 'well, I am looking for the author and I need your help'. She was enormously surprised and asked: 'what brought you to me and why do you think I could be of any help to you?'. I had a moment of discomfort, I didn't know exactly what had brought me to her, but I knew it was the right thing to do: I could have explained my reasons resuscitating Foucault or bringing some examples of recent debates about authorship, collective authorship, ownership, property, copyright, copyleft, private and public, forms of resistance, open culture, appropriation and dispossession, but everything sounded so vague and abstract compared to the genuine simplicity of Ms. What that I felt uncomfortable putting such sophisticated arguments on the table. With elegance and intuitiveness Ms. What took the initiative and said: 'OK. Don't worry. I don't expect you to give me any answers. We'd

1 Foucault M. (1998) 'What Is an Author?', in *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley. New York: New Press, pp. 205-22.

2 Agamben G. (2007) 'The Author as Gesture', in *Profanation*, trans. Jeff Fort. Zone Books.

better have a look at the vocabulary’—she said—‘It is often worth starting from simple things these days, since the world sounds already so complicated that perhaps the basics can help a bit more to understand what we are talking about’. And she was right. In fact it really helped, for when we checked the vocabulary it wasn’t so difficult to understand how the author deals with things:

**‘AUTHOR’, from L. verb ‘Augere’—augeo, augere, auxi, auctus; ‘to increase; to enlarge; to make greater’ n. auctorem (nom. auctor) ‘enlarger; founder; master; leader’, lit. ‘one who causes to grow’, agent noun from auctus. Meaning ‘one who sets forth written statements’ is from late 14c. The ‘t’ changed to ‘th’ 16c. on mistaken assumption of Greek origin. c.1300, autor ‘father’ from O.Fr. auctor, acteor ‘originator, creator, instigator’ (12c., Mod.Fr. auteur)**

When Miss What read the definition, she pointed out that it reminded her of an old story she had heard some time ago which surprisingly remained in the back of her mind—for she could hardly make any sense of it—but somehow it was extremely fascinating in its implausibility. So she kept recounting it:

**It is said that in the final days of the Roman Empire, the Byzantine emperor Flavius Petrus Sabbatius Justinianus Augustus, also named ‘Justinianus I’—who was well-known for being the most educated emperor and whose impact extended far beyond the boundaries of his time and domain—had an auctus disease which caused him physical weakness and mental paranoia. This auctus disease was apparently caused by a bacterium known as the possessum bacterium that colonized the entire body of the affected person—from the stomach to the toe, to the fingertips to the brain—provoking a sense of possession, but also poisoning the person with a strong desire to possess.**

He heard voices like refrains that pressured him to become great. I imagine something like loud voices screaming in his ears: *‘Augere! Augere! Augere!’* (Make greater! Make greater! GREATER!) The illness was so tormenting that his loyal council suggested treating the disease with ‘property therapy’—mainly consisting of the act of conquering more territories for his Empire. Indeed, Justinianus looked for a way to revive the Empire’s greatness and re-conquer the lost Western half of Roman Empire. He tried everything with very little success. Finally, he decided, rather than the impossible expansion of his empire, to opt for expansion by a new means of individual possession so that instead of trying to subjugate other populations and new territories, he would simply become the most powerful man in the entire empire. This option was very simple. This was because it would have been easier to

possess as many things as he wanted within the limits of his already limited Empire, instead of seeking other forms of expansion. So, the council invented and devised a law—the right to possession (or what constitutes ‘ownership’ today)—a more accurate and also restricted version of the ‘property therapy’, and camouflaged it into a public law. This right was about establishing a clear relationship with the ‘thingness’ of the world, for it was this ‘thingness’ (accumulation of wealth and slaves) that could cure the disorder.

So, Miss What—who was clearly horrified by the entire story and the discovery that there was a Mr. What competing with her in another time and space, whereas she thought she was the only honourable creature with this name—explained that according to this story, the law that Justinianus, promoted, serves to legitimize the position of the emperor by means of establishing a right on things. In this what, the author (this process of enlargement, of possession, of thingness) became a tool and Justinianus became Mr. What. Indeed, it was the becoming ‘thingness’ that the right to property was addressing and that it legitimated the subject that exercises this right. The traumatic experience of acknowledging the existence of a Mr. What that was playing around like a gambler seeking for new comrades to join his club of possession put Miss. What in a state of confusion, and she started thinking seriously about this previously unknown ancestor. If it was her ancestor at all—she carefully made clear—perhaps it was a simple rival that was disgracing her name. I understood her concerns, but I couldn’t really help the situation. I found again myself discomforted staring at the glamorous shape of Miss What and then suddenly I realized. Whether an ancestor, a gambler or an antagonist, there was a simple thing that needed to be acknowledged: Mr. What was affected by auctus disease and this made his presence contagious and very dangerous for the people living in the emperor’s neighbourhood. Instead, Miss What’s presence was striking and reassuring; she was healthy, no doubt. So, I felt I should explain to her that yes, there may be other Whats and other Whos, and that they will always be around to make us feel uncomfortable: some with their paranoid behaviours, others with their tendency to betray and gamble. ‘But—I said—what really make the difference is that you are the living evidence of a different possibility of existence, you make clear that it is possible, Miss What, to be a figure of speech untroubled by a contagious disease. So please, dear Miss What, you are helping my research, you are making me change my perspective ... I gave up with Mr. Who and his unlucky presence and you gave me the chance to understand that it is a matter of choosing, of making clear your position. Don’t be so sad’. She cried: ‘Well, I would have loved to meet Mr. What and made him assume a different perspective’.

She was very aggressive, but then she came back to her senses and said: ‘Well, perhaps Romans were too stubborn and trivial, I couldn’t have done that much. Who knows! They made the

author not only become a thing, but also a means of expansion and a reason for possession in order to cure Mr. What 's disease. What a horrible thing!!! Have you ever thought about turning an illness into a right to possess and turning a process of decadence into an enjoyable thing? You have abandoned Mr. Who for very good reasons, I guess, and I am sure you are right, but really ... what about me? do you think it is possible to imagine a Mr. What without auctus disease? And can we conceive of a proliferation of Whats who don't respond to this pestilential illness, that it is free from possession and can make Mr. What a generous person?

# KNOW IT? I WROTE IT!

Jan Verwoert

Have you heard this one? ... So there's this amazing songwriter. His tunes are so good that they could easily score him a hit. If only his lyrics weren't so terrible. Somehow he only ever comes up with lines like 'Your ass is so big it makes me sick', 'Your dull face is boring me out of my wits' or 'I'm dying to come on your mother's face'. It's really going nowhere with him. To get by he has to play background muzak on the piano in bars, lounges and so on. Things get worse as he's hitting the bottle hard. So on one of these nights, he's playing in a posh restaurant and having already had too much to drink, he stops to take a leak. When he returns to the piano, this guy with a bow-tie and suit approaches him and politely asks: 'I'm sorry, Sir, but do you know... Your dick is hanging out of your pants?' The piano player stares back at him, in disbelief, and growls, scornfully: '*Know it??? ... I wrote it!!!*'

The person who told me this joke is an artist and writer whose work I tremendously appreciate, and to whom this essay is very much indebted: Frances Stark. Laughing about the joke I thought, it's true, that's what I so like about her practice. It thrives on the intuition that the one property that qualifies something as a *proper* piece of art or writing (ie something not merely designed to satisfy demands or meet expectations and deadlines) is its potential *impropriety*! The tragedy of course is that, as the fate of her joke's protagonist proves, the potential of impropriety is impossible to control or capitalize on. It's not an asset to bank on. It can work for as much as against you. It's not even sure whether you could purposefully produce it. With the poor piano player, it's much rather a case of: he can't help creating it. It? Meaning: ever so many disjunctions between tunes and lyrics, forms and their contents, urges and their articulations. Those disjunctions, however, don't just generate the merely disjointed. On the contrary, a beautiful tune may fit terrible words well, because, by virtue of creating the perfect misfit, they clearly voice what's non-befitting. Yet, this is neither a formula nor a recipe. It's only a joke.

But the parallel between the impropriety of a proper joke and the properties of authorship goes so deep that it would probably not be wrong to say that being an author is indeed a bit of a joke! And that is something to take pride in. In her portrait of the life and work of Walter Benjamin, this is precisely what Hannah Arendt seems to suggest<sup>1</sup>: she celebrates him as an exemplary writer, yet she does so by describing him as a character who, either out of bad luck or due to his otherworldly manners—much like a slapstick hero—fails to do what's deemed 'proper' and hence

<sup>1</sup> Arendt H. (1969) 'Introduction – Walter Benjamin 1892–1940', in *Walter Benjamin, Illuminations*. New York: Schocken.

perpetually remains at odds with his surroundings. Alienated from his German-Jewish background as much as from the cultural mainstream, he would, half unwittingly, also alienate people in the academic establishment who could have supported him. Arendt takes care not to propagate the modern myth of the true artist as an isolated outsider here. On the contrary, she emphasizes that Benjamin's writing came out of exchanges with artists and intellectuals, as well as out of a process of connecting with the world at large through recording daily observations and collecting books and excerpts from newspapers and many other sources. At the same time, she does insist that what defined Benjamin as the writer he is, was his unwillingness or inability to fully enter institutional environments in which his practice would have been validated as 'proper' according to varying professional standards. His troubled attempts to live the life of a man of letters, without sufficient financial means, in a society hostile to this form of intellectual culture, reveals a general condition: at this point in German history and society, to properly practice the trade of writing as a cultural critic meant to do so from a position of overall social impropriety.

Connected to cultural, artistic and literary production at large, but operating under conditions of general impropriety, writing comes into its own, as a practice that can articulate the spirit of the contemporary, because it is exercised from the unctemporary position of an eccentric *homme de lettre*. This is how Arendt portrays Benjamin's practice. In doing so, she develops Benjamin's concepts by applying them to the description of his overall approach. For instance, she describes the peculiar pride of the eccentric collector and writer by citing passages from Benjamin's essay on the joys of collecting books, *Unpacking My Library*. She writes that everything which is said from the angle of the true 'collector' is bound to appear as 'whimsical', as the 'typically Jean Paulian vision of one of those writers *who write books* not because they are poor, but because they are dissatisfied with the books which they could buy but do not like [...]'<sup>2</sup>

2 Ibid., p.43.

In a sense what we find in Arendt paraphrasing Benjamin, is the punchline of Stark's joke—'Know it? I wrote it'—explicated as the ideal of a writer who takes the position of a defiant eccentric. And indeed one could find many writers who identified themselves with this position using similar lines to declare themselves, Gustave Flaubert being but one: 'I write for myself, only for myself as I smoke and sleep', he confessed in a letter to Louise Colet on the 16th August, 1847. This 'whimsicality', Arendt stresses, 'has some noteworthy and not so harmless peculiarities'. It testifies, she argues, to the insight that it is impossible to write in service of the established cultural traditions, as interrupted by modernity they are in ruins, and after centuries of being shaped by corruption and lies, would not be worth continuing anyhow. The point is to further destroy what remains of the aura of their validity. Not neces-

sarily, however, as a way of supporting the forces of modernisation either, as they produce a world governed by the dictates of instrumental reason which is equally uninhabitable for the writer. As it can neither be proper to tradition nor to modernity, writing finds itself navigating between Scylla and Charybdis, in a situation where its impropriety becomes its very historical reason to be. Only from a perpetually (precariously and painfully) decentred position vis-à-vis the past and present, can it attack the false glory of resurrected ciphers of tradition on the one hand, and from the other, annoy the modern prophets of progress by insisting on a defiant nostalgia for strange things and thoughts lost but not forgotten.

Yes, but what about the *hubris* associated with the act of claiming the position of being that singular kind of writer who's out there on a limb, resisting the powers that be? For all we know, it may as well be completely delusional to think about one's practice in such terms. Take the example of the piano player: an uncontemporary genius, contemporary only to Flaubert to whom he lends his voice as he returns from the bathroom break? Or is he just a vain man? It's difficult to tell sometimes, even and especially when it comes to some of the strongest ciphers of resistance our ruinous traditions hold in stock. For it is not only the voice of the eccentric aesthete that resonates in the piano player's obscene 'Know it? I wrote it!'; it's also that of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Prometheus*. Written in 1772–1774, but only published anonymously in 1785, in the years immediately preceding the French Revolution, the poem is an outcry against the legitimacy of any kind of higher authority, articulated from the position of a proud author. Prometheus mocks the gods for their aloofness and their incapacity to achieve what he has achieved (built his own stove and hut) in the world he proudly claims as 'my Earth'. Provoking the gods, Prometheus inquires:

**Who helped me  
Against the Titans' might?  
Who saved me from Death,  
From Slavery?  
Did you not accomplish it all yourself,  
Holy glowing Heart?  
And glowed, young and good,  
Deceived, thanks for salvation  
To the sleeping one up there?**

**Shall I honour you? What for? [...]**

If 'Did you not accomplish it all yourself, Holy Glowing Heart?' and 'Know it? I wrote it!' is compared, there may be a difference in tone, but the message delivered and attitude expressed is much the same: the spirit of angry defiance voiced in a moment of open

hostility. In the case of *Prometheus* it is arguably an iconic formulation of the spirit of the rebel that attacks, not just tradition, but the source of the law—divine authority—as lacking justification. Still, a long history of self-styled heralds of rebellion sticking to this formula, has by now made us all too aware of the fact that the stance of heroic defiance may easily be no more than a manifestation of unbearable vanity. Yes, Prometheus may challenge the traditional foundations of authority. But he justifies his righteous anger with an appeal to grounds that are as non-negotiable, and hence as questionable, as those he purports to challenge. As he proudly declares to be self created by virtue of the power given to him by the Earth, his Earth, he lays claim to the mythical auto-procreative force of the *autochthonous* (of all things that rise from the ground because the ground makes them do so). There's nothing here of the precarious eccentric who knows of the impossibility of claiming incontestable (ie 'proper') grounds of legitimacy for his or her practice. No, it's the rush of power derived from having blind faith in oneself that Prometheus appears to be thriving on here. And his blunt self-assertiveness has never quite gone out of fashion. On the contrary, you can go and take classes today to acquire that attitude, so you can be more competitive.

But it's not the defiance that makes Prometheus unbearable. It's the flat out denial of all the influences and external forces which shape him while he shapes things—and the very existence of which he negates by addressing the rhetorical question to himself: 'Did you not accomplish it all yourself, Holy Glowing Heart?' In this act he symbolically cuts himself off from the field of collective creation which even and especially the most eccentric characters fundamentally tap into when channelling the energies needed to assault the reifying forces of tradition and technocratic modernization alike. So, given his all too familiar conceits, perhaps Prometheus is no longer much of an inspiration.

Still, it seems hardly satisfactory to simply claim sanity as the rationale for the eccentric practice of mobilising and channelling those energies of defiance. For, in all its ridiculous obscenity, the proud confession 'Know it? I wrote it!' may in the end be the only thing left to profess to eccentric writers who seek to declare their position. There remains nothing else to fall back on. But still there remains a lot to be written. And how do you defend, beyond the need to write, the necessity of writing itself? What do you do when writing is your concern? This is a general concern because a world without writing would be truly unbearable (even more so perhaps than Promethean vanity). But, if you happen to write, it will always also be a particular concern, because the writing not just produced but also defended before editors and sold to publishers, will be yours. If you follow the quaint desire to 'live by the pen' and don't enjoy the benefits of a lifelong trust fund to make that urge seem natural, to sell your work is what you need to learn if you want to find a way to continue working, as a free agent. So how

do you sell it? With pride! With hubris? Why not? It all depends on how you play that card. For there can be humour in hubris, precisely because of its obscene ridiculousness. And who said that hubris was just and only a personal disposition and vice? After all, hip-hop and R&B lyrics teach us that, on the contrary, hubris can simply be a very useful rhetorical means! It is a highly effective technique for announcing who you are and what you have to offer, in a hyperbolic key through paraphrase and metaphor. Listen to Kelis for instance selling her goods and declaring herself in one and the same breath in *Milkshake* (2003):

**My milkshake brings all the boys to the yard,  
And they're like,  
Its better than yours,  
Damn right it's better than yours,  
I can teach you,  
But I have to charge**

It's a good set of lines. Remember them if you are a writer, the next time you negotiate your fee. Eccentric as you may appear to be, offering shakes on the yard, you may not sound too unbearably Promethean, but still show your pride—that pride which is proper to the practice of writing only if it thrives on a deep understanding of the indefatigable impropriety of that practice—when you clarify what exactly brings all the boys to the yard. So what is it all about—writing? How do we know? 'Know it?' For all I know, what I know about it is because 'I wrote it!' And 'I' here is really not just me but her and him and them and us who took their shakes to the yard and were not too modest to admit that they did it. Sounds good? If so, go ahead, take it, run with it, and write it.

*Archeology*, p. 28

We must ask ourselves  
ultimately served by this  
all the accepted  
if, in the end, we return to  
that we pretended to question  
In fact,

what purpose is  
suspension of  
unities  
the unities  
at the outset.

the systemic erasure of  
enables us first of all  
the statement  
of its occurrence,  
that  
is one of those great  
that

all given unities  
to restore to  
the specificity  
and to show  
discontinuity  
accidents  
create cracks

not only in the geology  
but also in the simple  
of the statement;

of history,  
fact

it emerges in its historical irruption;  
what we try to examine is the incision

that it  
makes, that

irreducible—

and very often tiny  
—emergence.

However banal it may be,  
however unimportant its consequences may appear to be,  
however quickly it may be forgotten after its appearance,  
however little heard or however badly deciphered  
we may suppose it to be,

a statement is always an event

that neither the language (*langue*) nor the meaning  
can quite exhaust.

It is certainly a strange event:  
first, because on the one hand

it is linked to the gesture of  
writing or to the articulation of

speech,

and also on the other hand  
it opens up to itself a residual  
in the field of a memory, or in the materiality of  
books, or any other form of recording;  
secondly, because, like every  
event,  
it is unique, yet subject to repetition, transformation, and reactivation;  
thirdly, because it is linked not only to the situations that provoke it, and to the consequences  
that it gives rise to, but at the same time, and in accordance with a quite different modality, to  
the statements that precede and  
follow it.

Above and previous:  
Vanessa Place, *Archeology*,  
Textautor, 2012, 167.6 × 40.6  
× 15.2 cm, Los Angeles,  
California, USA.

...ment

Fri, Feb 12, 2010 at 11:40 AM

and of course even despite all the effort, it fails.  
with the oscillation between the disenchantment and the  
re-enchantment of our world, it fails to do anything  
permanent, to disrupt the single, impossible, eternal  
condition of any exhibition space: that it remains empty.

# QUEER'S CONTRADICTIONS (AND RADICAL SEXUAL POLITICS FOR PRECARIOUS TIMES)<sup>1</sup>

Clavin Brown

In January 2012, Duke University Press killed off its influential *Series Q* imprint of academic queer theory texts. After nearly two decades, the publisher no longer saw the need to promote queer theory as a distinct strand of literature. Queer theory, it seems, has now officially entered the mainstream of academia and academic publishing. From the very beginning, queer theory in academia emerged and developed in parallel with the new breed of queer activism. Queer theory was rooted in a broader radical project. In the last twenty years, the relationship between queer theory and radical street-based activism has become more tenuous and more strained. Queer activism has, of course, changed dramatically over this period too. In this article, I question what has become of queer's radical project, exposing its contradictions, and asking what can become of that project (now that queer theory has become more centrally incorporated into the academic mainstream and queer activism is looking tired and worn out)?

The first wave of queer activism in the early 1990s offered the promise of thorough resistance to regimes of the normal as an alternative to earlier identity-based politics of representation. On both sides of the Atlantic, this political development grew out of the involvement of lesbian and gay activists in AIDS activism and civil disobedience organized through ACT UP (the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power). In the USA, at least, this occurred partly because ACT UP had been so successful in building a coalition of those affected by HIV/AIDS that it partially lost its earlier focus on fighting the homophobia that underpinned the neglect of many people with AIDS. The militancy of the ACT UP groups in many major US cities (but particularly New York and San Francisco) was founded on the 'class dislocation' that many upper middle class gay men experienced as a result of AIDS: not only were their friendship networks being decimated by the disease, their (sexual) citizenship was undermined and their ability to consume as 'normal' was disrupted by the cost of health-care. As a result, although their tactics of non-violent direct action appeared radical, the politics that underpinned them were more complex and contradictory. There was always a danger that in employing transgressive tactics to expose the ubiquity of heterosexual privilege, these groups

<sup>1</sup> Some elements of this article has previously appeared in Brown G. (2007) 'Autonomy, Affinity and Play in the Spaces of Radical Queer Activism', in *Geographies of Sexualities: Theory, Practices and Politics*, Browne K., Lim J. and Brown G. (eds.). Aldershot: Ashgate. This short article builds on and reflects upon the analysis I offered five years ago.

actually served to draw attention to and, ultimately, reinforce the homo/hetero binary (rather than undermining it, as the queer project aspired to do).

In contrast, the most radical queer politics of the last decade or so has attempted to creatively experiment on the basis of affinity and autonomy to find means of fostering non-hierarchical queer community of 'for queers of all sexualities and genders'. The diffuse activist networks that constructed these experiments were avowedly anti-assimilationist and sex positive. In the words of the North American collective, they were 'against equality'<sup>2</sup>—the right to serve in neo-colonial military adventures, climb the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and marry were not rights that overly concerned them. Similarly they asked pertinent and awkward questions about who benefitted most (through the reconfiguration of privilege) from the proliferation of hate crime legislation. Instead, they celebrated and defended the diversity of people struggling to live outside the confines of heteronormativity, whilst also critiquing those within lesbian and gay communities who were attempting to muscle in on the institutions that sustained that privilege. This newer queer activism has been as opposed to homonormativity as its predecessors were to heteronormativity. It opposes and contests the complacent politics of mainstream gay politicians who actively work to win gay people's compliance to a depoliticized culture based on domesticity and privatized consumption. Whilst the critique of homonormativity has been vitally important, I fear that too often this has meant that queer radicals expend more energy protesting gay liberals than they do challenging persistent heteronormativity and, in the process, cede that political terrain to the liberal proponents of 'equality', 'diversity' and 'post-homophobic policing' delivered by the neoliberal state.

Queer has always celebrated gender and sexual fluidity and worked tirelessly to blur binaries (to 'queer' them). Queer revels in its otherness, difference and distance from mainstream society (gay or straight), even as it recognizes that this distance is always incomplete. In attempting to rearticulate queer politics over the last decade some queer activists, especially those influenced by aspects of anarchist thought, have sought to develop a radical politics of gender and sexuality that moved beyond transgression, and towards the incorporation of certain ethical goals (for example, co-operative, non-hierarchical, sex-positive relationships) into its practice. I fear that in many respects, this political project has failed and that queer has been reduced to a subcultural form of hipster chic that gains cultural capital from its knowing playfulness with the boundaries of more dominant sexual and gender identities. In doing so, certain racial and class privileges are reproduced. In the process, both early queer activism's commitment to coalitional praxis, and later queer activism's commitment to prefigurative experiments with post-capitalist social relations have been lost.

<sup>2</sup> Against Equality is an online archive, publishing, and arts collective focused on critiquing mainstream gay and lesbian politics, [www.againstequality.org](http://www.againstequality.org)

Homonormativity—the social, economic and legal incorporation of certain expressions of homosexuality—has been described as the sexual politics of neoliberalism. Domesticated same sex couples have been privileged on the basis of their spending power and their willingness to privatize within the home the costs of social reproduction and welfare. Queer activists and theorists have been vocal in their opposition to homonormativity over the last decade. But, neoliberalism is more than just a set of economic policies promoting the free market and the rolling back of state welfare provision. It is also a form of governmentality that validates certain marketized social relations through rhetorics of personal responsibility, individual autonomy and free choice. The clamour of angry voices critiquing homonormativity fail to recognise that queer too is a product of neoliberal times and celebrates subjectivities that are often just as consistent with neoliberal imperatives as the most homonormative of gay consumers. Queer politics and theory, as it has developed over the last two decades, and despite its pretensions, is entirely consistent with modes of governmentality based on personal responsibility, individual choice. For all its critique of normative discourses, queer's antipathy to the representational appeals of identity politics has actually further prioritized the individual over the collective.

Although many queer radicals from the last decade have experimented with more collective forms of affinity-based organising and social autonomy, they continue to exist in a contradictory relationship to neoliberalism's promotion of individual free choice. After all, the very allure of autonomy stems from the desire for freedom. The anarchist and autonomist traditions that have inspired some strands of queer radicalism over the last decade seek collective forms of self-organization, mutual aid and solidarity as both a means and an end towards forms of social autonomy. In doing so, they continually negotiate the potentially conflicting demands of personal freedom and collective responsibility—not always successfully. Too frequently these radical queer experiments become recuperated as subcultural capital and individual fashion statement or lifestyle choice. That is not surprising, but nor should those experiments be rejected out of hand as a result. At their best they have taken several steps in the right direction and provided their participants with insights into how life (and sexual difference, in particular) might be lived differently. The orientation of these experiments was not necessarily at fault, but the mode of travelling needs refining and refuelling.

In order to think through the possibilities for expanding (collective) queer autonomy, it is useful to examine in more detail the social relations of capitalism that perpetually undermine it. The social tendencies that have produced homonormativity as the sexual politics of neoliberalism are the same ones that derail the queer potential to live life differently. In the metropolitan centres of the Global North, gay life is saturated by the commodity.

3 John Holloway (2002) 'Twelve Thesis on Changing the World without Taking Power', *The Commoner*, 4 (May), [www.commoner.org.uk](http://www.commoner.org.uk)

4 Margot Weiss makes this point exceptionally well, in relation to BDSM subcultures in the Bay Area of California, in her (2011) book *Techniques of Pleasure: BDSM and the circuits of sexuality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press).

5 Richard J.F. Day (2004) 'From Hegemony to Affinity. The political logic of the newest social movements', *Cultural Studies* 18 (5): 716-748.(pg 719).

Through it, people consume products and experiences that confirm their identity as 'gay'. This investment in consumption means that people no longer relate to each other as active participants in the creation of society, but as the owners (or not) of things that are divorced from the processes by which they came into being. The social relations of production, of 'doing', are converted into 'being' (in this case, *being gay*). As John Holloway has argued<sup>3</sup>, capitalism is precisely that: the separating of people from their own doing. It is relatively easy to critique hegemonic gay identities, culture and politics on this basis – sexuality has become reduced to the acquisition of commodities that have been separated from the conditions of their production, and the experiences of those that produced them. What is a less common (and less popular) argument is that 'queer' subcultures, whilst self-consciously playing to different rules, can still become a transgressive experience to be consumed in pursuit of an identity founded on specific (neoliberal) techniques of the self<sup>4</sup>.

Radical (anarcha-) queer activism has moved away from the demands-based politics of the homonormative mainstream that is oriented towards the state. In contrast to this experience of life on the receiving end of an anti-social 'power-over', those radical queers with an affinity for social autonomy have been making modest, low-key attempts to re-engage their 'power-to-do' (which is always part of a social process of doing with others). In doing so, they have reformulated 'queer' in their praxis as a relational process, rather than either an identity category or a mode of critique. A queer subjectivity, in this context, is produced through the very process of working collectively to create a less alienated and more empowered space in which to explore a multiplicity of sexual and gendered potentialities. In other words, these newest radical queer social movements, are not attempting to gain influence and power-over within the system of states and corporations, but are focused instead on strategies of exodus and what Richard Day has called 'the possibilities offered by the *displacement* and *replacement* of this system'<sup>5</sup>.

Radical queer gatherings and 'do-it-yourself' social spaces reveal cracks in capitalist social relations. If too many radical queer experiments with social autonomy have failed and been recuperated it is, in part, because the balance between individual autonomy and collective freedom has been undone. But, it is also because those experiments have been short-lived or episodic retreats from the work of labour. For social autonomy to spread, it needs to be embedded in social relations *through* daily practice. In its purest expression, collective autonomy is a refusal to engage in mainstream circuits of capitalism; but, its promise lives in moments and spaces where forms of unalienated work—*doing*—takes hold. Autonomy's refusals are collective acts of creation. Autonomy creates the tools and strategies for changing the world through its creative experimentation in the co-authoring of new social relations and ways of being.

A quarter of a century after the birth of 'queer', the radical potential of both queer theory and queer activism seems spent. Queer theory has become incorporated into the academic mainstream (albeit not without a degree of hostility and suspicion). Divorced from radical street-based politics, too much queer theory has become caught in the spiralling pursuit of ever more marginal subjects. Queer activism in many places has dissolved itself into hipster subcultures and now spends most of its efforts critiquing the homonormative agenda of mainstream lesbian and gay politics, rather than challenging heteronormative social relations. Homonormativity may be an expression of the sexual politics of neoliberalism, but queer's central contradiction is that it was born out of (disrupted) privilege and is just as much an expression of neoliberal forms of governmentality as the mainstream it critiques. Queer, despite its protestations to the contrary, resides in a countercultural avant-garde that is either unwilling to reflect on its own privilege or paralysed by liberal guilt and self-doubt when it does so. Queer activism and theory is now too far removed from the everyday joys and troubles of the majority of sexual/gender minority people to be of much use to them.

The experiments with queer autonomy of the last dozen years offered a promising alternative, a way out of neoliberal social relations, but they too are in retreat just when they are needed most. That spirit of creative experimentation and collective co-authorship of alternative ways of living could still be of utility; but, it now needs to break out of its subcultural ghetto. It needs to find ways of engaging with the concerns of sexual minorities who find themselves struggling in the face of austerity, enraged by the prejudice that persists in 'tolerant' societies, and bored by the options sold to them by the homonormative mainstream. Queer has probably outlived its usefulness, but the lessons of its rise and fall will be crucial to forging a new radical sexual politics for precarious times.

I'm your rainbow

Male authors and authorities white  
Ain't they love defining our limits  
Beware! They have rulers  
Ain't they into practicing on continents

Male authors and authorities white  
With their rule books open wide  
Klink! They have dollar eyes  
Only think of profit when you mention rights

Just remain leaping into that void baby  
Heyyeah heyyeah  
Free is your main question  
Sometimes non-act is the best supermario act

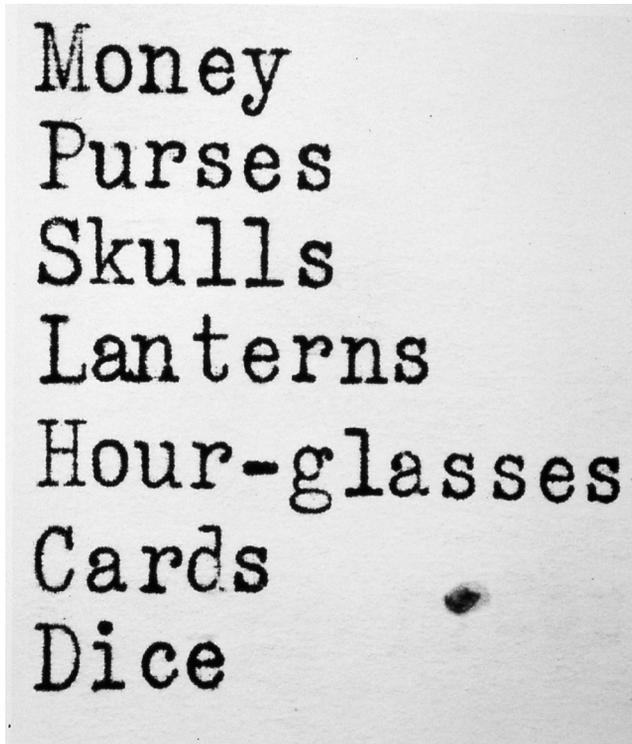
Male authors and authorities white  
They love parceling open access  
Those were the days babe when they said  
How transparent are our democracies

Male authors and authorities white  
Wizzz! Then and now reboots capital worship  
Occupy your moment and expand baby  
That's what all the wise queerness demands

Just remain leaping into that void baby  
Heyyeah heyyeah  
Common is your main question  
Sometimes non-act is the best supermario act

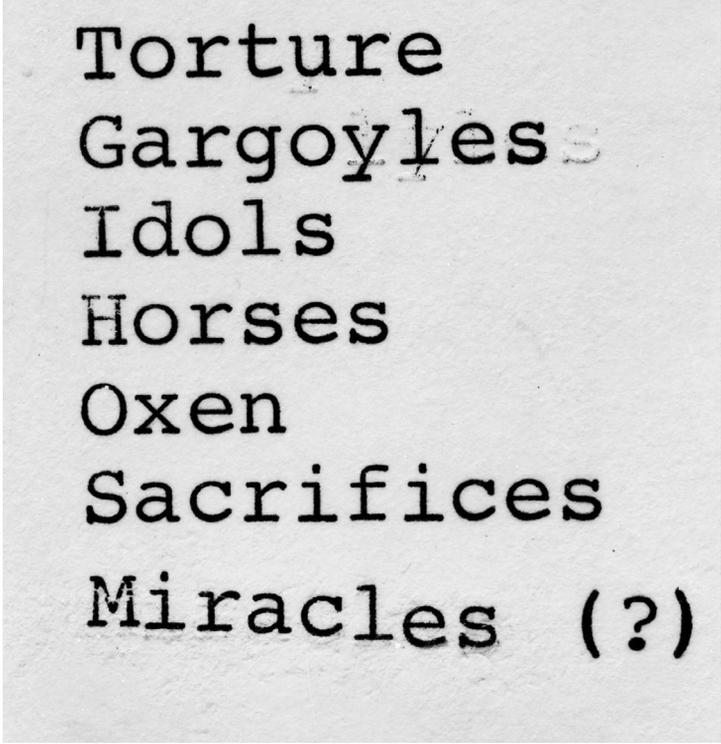
(Refrain)

If we are born to die, we are free to share and  
free to write  
If we are born to die, we are free to share and  
free to write  
If we are born to die, we are free to share and  
free to write  
If we are born to die, we are free to share and  
free to write



Money  
Purses  
Skulls  
Lanterns  
Hour-glasses  
Cards  
Dice

Erica Baum, *Untitled*  
(*Money Purses*  
*Skulls*), 1998 (Frick);  
Gelatin silver print.

A rectangular gelatin silver print showing a list of words typed on a piece of paper. The words are arranged vertically, one per line, in a monospaced typewriter font. The list includes: Torture, Gargoyless, Idols, Horses, Oxen, Sacrifices, and Miracles (?).

Torture  
Gargoyless  
Idols  
Horses  
Oxen  
Sacrifices  
Miracles (?)

Erica Baum, *Untitled*  
(*Torture*), 1998 (Frick);  
Gelatin silver print.

## NOT NOT LIKE — A Browser Extension

### What does it do?

Removes the Like button on Facebook.<sup>1</sup>

### How does it do it?

Through a little bit of CSS:

```
button.as_link,  
.uiUfiLikeIcon,  
.fbPhotosPhotoButtons {display:none !important;}
```

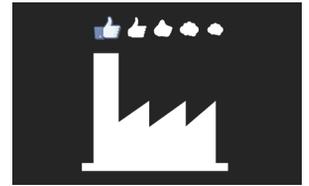
### Why does it do this?

To subtract one type of interaction that takes place on Facebook.

### Why would you want to subtract this form of interaction on Facebook?

Facebook made a profit of nearly \$1 billion in 2011. Around 85% of this revenue was derived from targeted advertisements displayed throughout the site. These ads are directed specifically to individual users based on algorithms that track a user's activity - commenting, sharing content and, most importantly, clicking the Like button - to determine what products and services she is most likely to be attracted to.<sup>2</sup> The Like button's success demonstrates one way in which communication has been instrumentalized in the service of economic interaction within our current form of capitalism.

Today's workers are generally required to express a positive attitude and display proficiency in communicating within a linguistic framework that is oriented around efficiency and therefore limited in scope. Success can be measured by the worker's effectiveness in using language to create a space of coproduction and common understanding across a wide field of economic and social actors, in the service of capital. To master these skills is to be a productive affective worker. The Like button is a perfectly optimized system for extracting value from an individual's labor and, concurrently, training her to better fit into the larger workforce and society in general. Each time we "like" something our productivity increases, while our communicative skills are homogenized and impoverished. The Like button purports to mitigate the sense of precarity and



1 The plugin does not remove the Like button from Facebook "pages", since it is the only way to subscribe to that content.

2 This does not just take place on Facebook. There are between 2.5-3 billion Like buttons on external sites. A future version of this plugin will add the option to remove these Like buttons as well.

disconnection endemic to the contemporary economy and workplace even while leveraging those conditions to produce greater profits.

Removing the Like button may not fundamentally change these dynamics. But purging the button from our interfaces can work to diminish the profits garnered by Facebook each time we click, eroding the power it has in our subjugation.<sup>3</sup>

3 Another option is to simply leave Facebook and online social networks altogether, or join an alternative platform. Regarding the latter, “liking” or “favoriting” are still primary means of interaction on other systems. The benefit of staying on Facebook is that it allows for an incomparable scale of communication and organization, which can be marshaled to resist exploitation under current oppressive economic and political systems.

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# REVISITING THE CURIOUS WORLD OF ART & HACKTIVISM<sup>1</sup>

Marc Garrett

*Revisiting the Curious World of Art & Hactivism*, is the first of a series of articles exploring how contemporary artists engaged with technology and activism are transcending established art behaviours. Crossing over into territories that reflect not only social and political contexts, but new dialogues of experiencing and understanding art. The politics of today becomes the background, the material and canvas of imaginative and critical play.

**It is not accidental that at a point in history when hierarchical power and manipulation have reached their most threatening proportions, the very concepts of hierarchy, power and manipulation come into question. The challenge to these concepts comes from a rediscovery of the importance of spontaneity—a rediscovery nourished by ecology, by a heightened conception of self-development, and by a new understanding of the revolutionary process in society.**

— Bookchin M. (1971)<sup>2</sup>

The rise of neo-liberalism as a hegemonic mode of discourse infiltrates every aspect of our social lives. Its exponential growth has been helped by gate-keepers of top-down orientated alliances; holding key positions of power and considerable wealth and influence. Educational, collective and social institutions have been dismantled, especially community groups and organizations sharing values associated with social needs in the public realm (Bourdieu P. 1998).<sup>3</sup>

In this networked society, there are controversies and battles taking place all the time. Battles between corporations, nation states and those who wish to preserve and expand their individual and collective freedoms. Hactivist artists work with technology to explore how to develop their critical and imaginative practice in ways that exist beyond traditional frameworks of art establishment and its traditions. This article highlights a small selection of artists and collaborative groups, whose work is linked by an imaginative use of technology in order to critique and intervene into the oppressive effects of political and social borders.

<sup>1</sup> This article was published on Furtherfield, 10 March 2012. For the complete version visit [www.furtherfield.org/features/articles/revisiting-curious-world-art-hactivism](http://www.furtherfield.org/features/articles/revisiting-curious-world-art-hactivism). If you wish to use any of this information contact marc.garrett@furtherfield.org

<sup>2</sup> Bookchin M. (1968) *Post-scarcity and Anarchism*. Ramparts Press.

<sup>3</sup> Bourdieu P. (1998) 'The Essence of Neoliberalism: Utopia of Endless Exploitation', *Le Monde Diplomatique*, December 1998, Translated by Jeremy J. Shapiro.

## HACKING & CRACKING

4 American software freedom activist and computer programmer who launched the GNU Project in 1983.

5 GNU Operating System; [www.gnu.org](http://www.gnu.org)

In June 2000, Richard Stallman<sup>4</sup> when visiting Korea, illustrated the meaning of the word ‘hacker’ in a fun way. When at lunch with some GNU<sup>5</sup> fans, a waitress placed six chopsticks in front of him. Of course he knew they were meant for three people but he found it amusing to find another way to use them. Stallman managed to use three in his right hand and then successfully pick up a piece of food placing it into his mouth.

**It didn’t become easy—for practical purposes, using two chopsticks is completely superior. But precisely because using three in one hand is hard and ordinarily never thought of, it has ‘hack value’, as my lunch companions immediately recognized. Playfully doing something difficult, whether useful or not, that is hacking.**

— Stallman R. (2002)<sup>6</sup>

6 Stallman R. (2002) On Hacking; [www.stallman.org/articles/on-hacking.html#cracker](http://www.stallman.org/articles/on-hacking.html#cracker)

The word ‘hacker’ has been loosely appropriated and compressed for the sound-bite language of film, tv and newspapers. These commercial outlets hungry for sensational stories have misrepresented hacker culture, creating mythic heroes and anti-heroes in order to amaze and shock an unaware, mediated public. Yet, at the same time hackers or ‘crackers’ have exploited this mythology to get their own agendas across. Before these more confusing times, hacking was considered a less dramatic activity. In the 1960s and 1970s, the hacker realm was dominated by computer nerds, professional programmers and hobbyists.

In contrast to what was considered as negative stereotypes of hackers in the media, Steven Levy, in 1984 published *Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution*<sup>7</sup>. In three parts, he writes about the canonical AI hackers of MIT, the hardware hackers who invented the personal computer industry in Silicon Valley, and the third-generation game hackers in the early 1980s. Yet, in this publication, what has had the most impact on hacker culture and is still used widely as a guideline by many is the ‘hacker ethic’. He identified it to be a code of practice consisting of key points such as that ‘all information is free’, and that this information should be used to ‘change life for the better’.

7 Levy S. (first published in 1984) *Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution*. 25th anniversary edition (2010) O’Reilly.

## THE HACKER ETHIC

- 1 **Access to computers—and anything which might teach you something about the way the world works—should be unlimited and total. Always yield to the Hands-on Imperative!**
- 2 **All information should be free.**
- 3 **Mistrust authority—promote decentralization.**
- 4 **Hackers should be judged by their hacking, not bogus criteria such as degrees, age, race or position.**

**You can create art and beauty on a computer.  
Computers can change your life for the better.**

Levy's hacker ethic promotes the idea of performing a duty for the common good, an analogy to a modern day 'Robin Hood'. Proposing the concept that hackers are self-reliant whilst embracing a 'healthy' anti-authoritarian stance, combined with free and critical thinking. Levy also says that the Free and open-source software (FOSS) movement is the descendant of the hacker ethic. However, Levy's hacker ethic has often been quoted out of context and misunderstood as to refer to hacking as 'breaking' into computers. This specifically prescribed role, denies the wider and creative context of what hacking is and could be. It does not have to be just about computer security.

This leads us to 'crackers'. All crackers hack and all hackers hack. But, crackers are seen as second rate wannabe hackers by the older generation of hackers. The Black Hat Hacker or cracker designs and releases malicious code, gathers dangerous information and brings down sensitive systems. The White Hat Hacker hunts down and destroys malicious code, and the casual hacker who hacks in order to learn information for his or her own curiosity; both generally dislike Black Hats and crackers, who they tend to view as computer criminals, dysfunctional juveniles. Lately, crackers have also been labelled as 'script kiddies'. As a kind of snobbish insult, it refers to those who are not capable of building or programming their own tools, but tend to use scripts and programmes written by others to perform their intrusions. To add to the confusion we also have the term 'Grey hat', which refers to a hacker acting between Black Hat and White Hat. Indeed, this could demonstrate where art hacktivists reside, challenging the trappings of the traditional concept of goody and baddy. As Eric Raymond stated, 'the basic difference is this: hackers build things, crackers break them.'<sup>8</sup>

## ART & HACKTIVISM

**Hactivism is a continually evolving and open process; its tactics and methodology are not static. In this sense no one owns hactivism—it has no prophet, no gospel and no canonized literature. Hactivism is a rhizomic, open-source phenomenon.  
— metac0m (2003)**

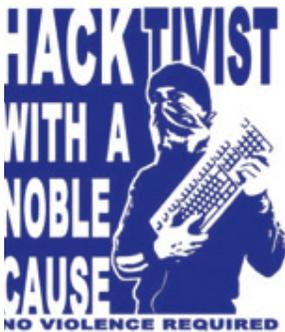
The term hactivism was officially coined by techno-culture writer Jason Sack in 1995. Yet, the CULT OF THE DEAD COW<sup>9</sup> are also acknowledged as defining the term. They say the hactivism phrase was originally intended to refer to the development and use of technology to foster human rights and the open exchange of information.

8 Raymond E. The Jargon File (version 4.4.7); [www.catb.org/jargon/html/index.html](http://www.catb.org/jargon/html/index.html)

9 Based in Lubbock, Texas, CULT OF THE DEAD COW (cDc) is the most-accomplished and longest-running group in the computer underground, founded in 1984; [w3.cultdeadcow.com/cms](http://w3.cultdeadcow.com/cms)

The practice or behaviour of hacktivism is at least as old as October 1989, when DOE, HEPNET and SPAN (NASA) connected to (virtual) networked machines world wide. They were penetrated by the anti-nuclear group WANK worm.

Hacktivism techniques include DoS attacks, website defacement, information theft, and virtual sabotage. Famous examples of hacktivism include the recent knocking out of the PlayStation Network, various assistances to countries participating in the Arab Spring, such as attacks on Tunisian and Egyptian government websites, and attacks on Mastercard and Visa after they ceased to process payments to WikiLeaks.



### HACKING BORDERS: EXAMPLES OF ART HACKTIVISM & CULTURAL HACKING

**Radical groups are discovering what hackers have always known: traditional social institutions are more vulnerable in cyberspace than they are in the physical world. And some members of the famously sophomoric hacker underground are becoming motivated by causes other than ego gratification.**

— Harmon A. (1998)<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Harmon A. (1998) "Hacktivists' of All Persuasions Take Their Struggle to the Web", *The New York Times*; [www.nytimes.com/1998/10/31/world/hacktivism-of-all-persuasions-take-their-struggle-to-the-web.html](http://www.nytimes.com/1998/10/31/world/hacktivism-of-all-persuasions-take-their-struggle-to-the-web.html)

<sup>11</sup> Garrett M. (2010) An Interview With Danja Vasiliev, *Furtherfield.org*; [www.furtherfield.org/interviews/interview-danja-vasiliev](http://www.furtherfield.org/interviews/interview-danja-vasiliev)

<sup>12</sup> [www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=122379695](http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=122379695)

Hacktivism exploits technology and the Internet, experimenting with the immediacy of distributable networks as a playful medium for independent, creative and free expression. There has been a gradual and natural shift from net art (and net.art) into hacktivism. Net art in spirit, has never really been just about art being viewed on a web browser alone. Some of the very same artists whose artwork involved being shown in browsers and making code behind the browser as part of the art, have also expanded their practice outside of the browser. One such artist is Danja Vasiliev, who explained in an interview that 'Fifteen years ago www was something very new in Russia and besides the new dial-up aesthetics and world-wide means it brought a complete new layer of existence—"netosphere", which made my youth.' Vasiliev very soon moved on from playing with browsers into a whole new territory.<sup>11</sup>

Vasiliev co-founded media-lab moddr\_ in 2007, a joint project at the Piet Zwart Institute alumni and WORM Foundation. Based in Rotterdam, moddr\_ is a place for artists and hackers, engaging with critical forms of media-art practice. He collaborated with Gordan Savicic and Walter Langelaar from the moddr.net lab on the project Web 2.0 Suicide Machine<sup>12</sup>, which lets you delete your social networking profiles and kill your virtual friends, whilst also deletes your own profile, leaving your profile image replaced by a noose. 'The idea of the "Web 2.0 Suicide Machine" is to abandon your virtual life—so you can get your actual life back, Gordan Savicic tells NPR's Mary Louise Kelly. Savicic is the CEO—which Vasiliev says stands for "chief euthanasia officer"—of SuicideMachine.org.'

Just like another project called Face to Facebook which stole one million Facebook profiles and re-contextualized them on a custom made dating website (lovely-faces.com), set up by Italian artists Paolo Cirio and Alessandro Ludovico, whom also just so happens to be Editor-in-chief of *Neural* magazine. Web 2.0 Suicide Machine, had to close its connections down regarding its Facebook activities after receiving a cease and desist letter from Facebook.<sup>13</sup>

13 [www.suicidemachine.org/download/Web\\_2.0\\_Suicide\\_Machine.pdf](http://www.suicidemachine.org/download/Web_2.0_Suicide_Machine.pdf)

Julian Oliver and Danja Vasiliev teamed up and formed the mysterious group Men in Grey. The Men in Grey explore our online vulnerabilities by tapping and intervening into wireless network traffic. Observing, tracing and copying what we do, this hack then redisplayes our activities back to us, showing the data of our online interactions.

The Men in Grey emerge as a manifestation of Network Anxiety, a fearful apparition in a time of government wiretaps, Facebook spies, Google caches, Internet filters and mandatory ISP logging. At first, no one knew who they were. When they first arrived on the scene I started an interview with them and then suddenly, I was asked to hold back due to their antics on the Internet and interventions in public environments receiving much coverage. They were not sure how it would pan out for them. Partly due to the anonymous nature of their project, and also because of the sudden impact of the larger hacktivist group Anonymous getting much press in commercial media themselves.

'Spooks are listening into calls, just like they always have', said Eric King of London's Privacy International, in an email. 'With A5/1 being broken—you can decrypt and listen into 60 calls at once with a box smaller than a laptop.'<sup>14</sup>

14 Farivar C. (2012) 'From encryption to darknets: As governments snoop, activists fight back', *arstechnica*; [www.arstechnica.com/business/the-net-worked-society/2012/02/from-encryption-to-darknets-as-governments-snoop-activists-fight-back.ars](http://www.arstechnica.com/business/the-net-worked-society/2012/02/from-encryption-to-darknets-as-governments-snoop-activists-fight-back.ars)



Taken from the Men in Grey Video. 'HI606: Field Officer Protocol'.

Hacktivism involves many different levels of social intervention and engagement. Whether it is to do with direct action, self-referential geekiness, obscure networked antics, critical gaming, or peer 2 peer and collective change. Hacktivists challenge defaults put in place by other people, usually the systems imposed upon them and the rest of us by authority. Even though the subjects themselves may be concerning serious matters, humour and playfulness are both essential ingredients.

**A promising tactic for the early Situationists was the unpredictable yet forceful potential of play—what anthropologist Victor Turner termed the ‘liminoid’, or the freeing and transformational, moments of play when the normal roles and rules of a community or society are relaxed.**

— Dovey J. & Kennedy W. H. (2006)<sup>15</sup>

15 Dovey J. & Kennedy H. W. (2006) *Game Cultures*. London: Open University Press.

16 [www.tiltfactor.org](http://www.tiltfactor.org)

17 Barber B. (2011) ‘Game Developed at Dartmouth Helps Players Understand Infectious Disease Control’, *Dartmouth Now*; [now.dartmouth.edu/2011/04/game-developed-at-dartmouth-helps-players-understand-infectious-disease-control](http://now.dartmouth.edu/2011/04/game-developed-at-dartmouth-helps-players-understand-infectious-disease-control)



One group crossing over from the digital into physical and social realms, is Tiltfactor.<sup>16</sup> Their form of intervention is not necessarily about causing political controversy, but is engaged in reaching people through games of play. Experimenting with social everyday contexts, making games that tackle less traditional topics, such as public health, layoffs, CMO crops. One of the many games creating awareness on these subjects, is POX: ‘our game actually helps a player understand how a disease can spread from one place to another and how an outbreak might happen’ says Mary Flanagan.<sup>17</sup>

A local public health group called Mascoma Valley Health in the New Hampshire region, USA, approached Tiltfactor with the problem of the lack of immunization. About this project, Mary Flanagan explains that ‘At first, a game about getting people immunized seemed like one of the most “un-fun” concepts imaginable. But that sinking feeling of impossibility almost always leads to good ideas later.’

**Geopolitical space has always been a conflicted and fragile topic. Borders and frontiers are changing so fast, that sometimes it seems that our sociopolitical status can change from ‘citizen’ to ‘immigrant’ from one moment to another, or simply live under the ‘immigrant’ status all your life. We’re getting used to words like refugees, enclaves, war, borders, limits –and the list has no end.**

— Baraona Pohl E. & Reyes C. (2011)<sup>18</sup>

18 Baraona Pohl E. & Reyes C. (2011) ‘Post-political Attitudes on Immigration, Utopias and the Space Between Us’, *The Funambulist*; [www.thefunambulist.net/2011/08/01/guest-writers-essays-06-post-political-attitudes-on-immigration-utopias-and-the-space-between-us-by-ethel-baraona-pohl-cesar-reyes](http://www.thefunambulist.net/2011/08/01/guest-writers-essays-06-post-political-attitudes-on-immigration-utopias-and-the-space-between-us-by-ethel-baraona-pohl-cesar-reyes)

## CONCLUSION

Since the rise of the Internet, individual and collective actions are symbiotically connected to the every day. In a world transformed, common people have access to tools that can change our cultures independently; sharing information, motivating actions and changing situations. We know of the Arab Spring, the Occupy movement, Anonymous and Wikileaks and how successful they have been in exploiting technology and social networks. Technology just like any other medium is a flexible material. By tweaking, breaking and remaking something you can re-root its function, change its purpose.

The links between these mass social movements and the artists here are not just relating to technology’s use but, a shared critique at the same enemy, neo-liberalism.

**'Neo-liberalism' is a set of economic policies that have become widespread during the last 25 years or so. Although the word is rarely heard in the United States, you can clearly see the effects of neo-liberalism here as the rich grow richer and the poor grow poorer.**

— Martinez E. & Garcia A. (1997)<sup>19</sup>

At the same time as highlighting the continual privatization of human society, this form of art practice shows us the cracks of where a social divide of gate-keeping has maintained power within the Western World's traditional art structures. We now realize that the art canons we have been taught to rely on as reference are more based around privilege, centralization and market dominance rather than democratic representation or even just pure talent. Hactivist artists adapt and recontextualize with a critical approach, towards a larger and more inclusive context beyond their own immediate selves. Demonstrating a respect and use of autonomy, and an awareness of social contexts and political nuances, freeing up dialogue for new discussions which include a recognition of social contexts, as a vital ingredient and valued resource in art. Re-aligning, reconfiguring the defaults of what art is today.

19 Martinez E. and Garcia A. (1997) 'What is Neoliberalism? A Brief Definition for Activists' National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (January 1, 1997). [A critical discussion of neoliberalism.]

...ment

Wed, Oct 6, 2010 at 7:08 AM

an exhaustingly nice walk through  
tiny pieces of reality  
combined, transformed, and retold.

innumerable strategies of survival, in which  
intensity somehow becomes predictable.

# CURATORIAL BUSINESS

Pedro Neves Marques

**Think of yourself as a curator. Think of yourself as a community builder. Think of you as a context provider whereby you encourage people to self organize and to co-innovate value with you.**

**— Don Tapscott at the World Business Forum, Milan, 27–28 October 2010**

## IS THE CURATOR A PROSUMER, OR SHOULD THE QUESTION BE PUT OTHERWISE?

Prosumerism. It is either taken for granted by some or absolutely mistrusted by others, while mesmerising everyone with its ambiguous allegiance both to what feels like late capitalism and to apparently emancipatory struggles.

Unashamed about the transparency of its mechanics, prosumerism draws the consumer voluntarily into the process of production, no longer solely as a tester of products, a behaviour provider or, at its basest level, a smart buyer, but as a true and veritable partner. Yet, to grant powers of persuasion solely to producers would be one-sided. Prosumerism is as much an invitation from the part of producers as from consumers—in fact, given its implications, one can no longer guarantee where one ends and the other begins. Bridging distances (in the production and dissemination process) is the responsibility of both. The post-war psychoanalytical turn in advertisement relied on filtering, channelling and invigorating the projection of consumer desires onto objects and lifestyles. In comparison, with prosumerism consumers intently, and literally, *imbue* the production line with these same desires, but also with insights and usages at construction level.

This reciprocity can only but contribute to the term's ambiguity. The openness of companies in granting a precocious usage of products to consumers (if not raw material itself), in drawing consumers into the conceptual processes, or in promoting critical analysis of products and their dissemination, runs the risk of displacing decision-making from shareholders, with huge costs to companies at the experimental level. Even more, such openness runs the risk of appropriation, of deviation, sharing and viral circulation beyond corporate business and profit making—hence the thin line between the inclusion of consumers into production and its constrain via copyright.<sup>1</sup> Consumers, on the other hand, suddenly find themselves in-between the empowerment of a grass roots sensibility and a capitalist exploitation of personal experimentation, as well as of labour and free time beyond any safety

<sup>1</sup> In this logic, one could see prosumerism accompanying the turn in financial economics towards risk and accountability.

net, ie welfare or income for services (voluntarily) provided. The consequences transcend the production and marketing of goods, impacting on the writing of acclamations and downfalls (be these corporations or national governments), of aesthetics and ethics, and hence of history and culture.

Given the above, one could say that prosumerism implies not only the production of the social, but also the socialization of production itself. In line with the contemporary flexibilization of labour and the intrusion of capitalism into life(style), everything becomes production and the object of economic management. Consequently, it is authorship, and property along with it, that becomes diffuse, both on the side of corporate identity and of individual citizens. Given the mist, it would be hasty to claim a revolutionary potential in deviant prosumerism, that is, the contamination of production processes or the appropriation of source material (be it a Blackberry or New York Times) for other matter (revolution or otherwise). But it would also be counterproductive to obsess on the exploitation or control it may allow, that is, on social engineering. Instead, the task awaits us of embodying the ambiguity of the trend; to understand its timely arrival; its operative cynicism.

The prosumer is not a lone trend—it is only one of several recent figures resulting from the sophistication of the means for social participation, and from the personalization of the social. Alongside it one can find an array of other neologisms, such as ‘nowism’ or ‘ownerless’, to quote just a few.<sup>2</sup> Why the prosumer then? Because prosumerism encapsulates most of the above trends, in its inclusive scope of users and dissolution of hierarchical barriers in the production line—be it the production of commodities, platforms, cultures, lifestyles, and so on. One could even say that the prosumer is the mother ship, conceptually and figuratively, from which contemporary economic management starts. However, it wouldn’t be far from the truth to say that all modes of contemporary revolution, upheaval and collectivity are, in what concerns its forms, not so distant from management: the management of militancy, the management of channels for revolt, the management of anonymity and of convergence.<sup>3</sup> The genealogy (ie etymology) of such figures is more marketing than philosophy, or, as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari would have it, philosophy hijacked by marketing—and their breeding, their shifts in meaning from field to field, their allegiances and instrumental appropriations, as much spontaneous as clinically orchestrated.<sup>4</sup>

Not surprisingly, from this horizontality of desire production, of lifestyle values and object qualifications, the *curator* is increasingly appearing outside of its usual circles. Out of museology and into marketing, it seems to constitute a partner for the prosumer trend, but also a more substantial ontological condition. Colloquially, though meticulously, expanded beyond its competencies and discussion within the artistic field, it is no longer making its

<sup>2</sup> As presented in [www.trendwatching.com](http://www.trendwatching.com). The notions of Nowism and Ownerless were placed in between the ten top trends for 2011, and possibly the new decade. According to the website, ‘nowism’ stands for ‘consumers [...] feverishly contributing to the real-time content avalanche that’s building as we speak’, while ‘ownerless’, or more precisely owner-less (but why the hyphen?), testifies to the willfulness of users to share property or abdicate one’s own property for the availability of communitarian goods (the examples mostly referring to mobility devices such as bicycles and cars).

<sup>3</sup> 2011, in all its revolutionary singularity, from Anonymous’ DDoS counterattacks on PayPal and Mastercard (in defense of Wikileaks) to the Arab Spring and the Occupy movements, proved an exemplary case of management, with implications to both terms: management; and exemplarity.

<sup>4</sup> Deleuze, G and Félix Guattari (1994) *What is Philosophy?* New York; Columbia University Press, 10.

appearance as the specialist in art and culture (yet still as the master organizer), but rather as the overall qualifier for the introduction of a new form of contemporary ontology, beyond appropriation and circulation and into the personalization of management and historical decision-making.<sup>5</sup> While in the artworld the curatorial is being increasingly professionalized—opening the term and its correlated practice to an intense debate—at large it seems to walk in the opposite direction, being deployed, particularly in management circles, as referring to the supposed prosumerist democratization process. Is this capture? Or is it freedom?

### IS THE MANAGEMENT OF CURATING THE SAME AS CURATING MANAGEMENT?

Going through the writings and lectures of Don ‘Wikinomics’ Tapscott, one finds plenty of references to the curatorial as that which sits alongside the prosumer.<sup>6</sup> In fact, it is by being set in relation to prosumerism that the curatorial is presented by Tapscott as a particularly productive site, but also as the space for a particular kind of production: a space for the production, reproduction or non-production of knowledge (commodities included) through strategies of accessibility, contextualization and the distribution of creative flows. Apparently, the case is not so distinct from its debate within the arts. However, a substantial difference between the use of the term in the arts and in management is its actualization as an *activity* no longer acted out from a given original point or authority, but rather from the confluence between distinct intentions and intensities. Here, the curatorial is a matter of individuality, even of singularity, but more so of a collective connectivity, where none of the authors can be said to have a particular stance on authorship. Given the competition inherent to free markets and free individuals it does not, nevertheless, exclude issues of dispute. It is out of this scenario that the curator is set first and foremost as a prosumer: an engaging agent of knowledge and creativity, both inclusive (in its multiplicity and openness to collaboration) and exclusive (in the selection and variabilities it vocalizes).

Yet, there is a distinction to be made between both figures. A distinction attested by the evolution of the vocabulary used in *Wikinomics* and *Macrowikinomics*. While in the former book (2006) the emphasis is on prosumers, in the latter (2010) it shifts, shyly but with preciseness, to curating. If prosumers are at first posited as ‘consumers [that] actually co-innovate and co-produce the products they consume’, to the extent that they ‘do more than customize or personalize their wares; [that] they can self-organize and create their own’, the curator is suggested as a figure of distribution, mediation and gathering—that is, of management. As such, while the former is framed as an autonomous agent of production, no longer waiting ‘for an invitation to turn a product into a plat-

5 In this text, I will only touch on this ontological quality, or consequence, of the curatorial obliquely. Yet, a more direct speculation is necessarily due.

6 Don Tapscott is the author of the bestselling books *Wikinomics* (2006) with Anthony D. Williams: London: Penguin and *Macrowikinomics* with Anthony D. Williams (2010) London: Penguin, and chairman of consulting agency Ngenero Insight.

7 Tapscott, D. and A. Williams (2006) *Wikinomics*. 126. Insight.

8 Ibid, 150.

9 Lemke T. (May 2011) 'The Birth of Biopolitics: Michel Foucault's lecture at the Collège de France on Neo-Liberal Governmentality' in *Economy and Society*, vol. 30. 190-207.

form for their own innovations', the latter appears ambiguous, yet instrumental, in regards to the creative position of the prosumer.<sup>7</sup>

In these terms, both figures remain somewhat captive of a dependency: the prosumer—even if past a tester of products—is dependent on pre-given matter, while the curator is dependent on prosumerized contents. It is only when the creative autonomy of both figures is radicalized, that they can be said to blur and overlap politically. The radicalization of the prosumer may be exemplified by its capacity to answer back to consumer necessities and wills beyond pre-given market rules—I guess, not without a pinch of irony, that this is what Tapscott's might mean by 'participating in the economy as an equal'.<sup>8</sup> This endows the curatorial with the basic premise that it is not only an organizational site, but also one of originality and bottom-up creation—instead of being strictly a top-down selective activity.

The curator seems thus to be making its appearance in the discursiveness of management circles not only as an economic figure, but as a true and veritable economist, rearranging the disparate, chaotic, contemporary *oikos* to the infra-level of a personalization—as allowed by prosumerist strategies and the nodal exoskeleton of the www. If this is indeed so, this process is placing the curator one step beyond Michel Foucault's notion of neoliberal economic subjectivation. For Foucault, the intrusion of neoliberal economics into lifestyles has led to the all pervasive notion of homo-oeconomicus, where 'by encoding the social domain as a form of the economic domain, cost-benefit calculations and market criteria can be applied to decision-making processes within the family, married life [and] professional life', shaping henceforth the citizen into an entrepreneurial self-analyst.<sup>9</sup> For the managerial approach to the curatorial, nonetheless, this bio-economics surpasses economic rationalization towards (interpretative) organization and distribution.

From Tapscott's managerial perspective, the curator is the one that is aware of (eco)systemic relays and, attesting to his neoliberal freedom, makes these his own creative conduits. The curator channels accumulated intensities in the direction of knowledge, imagination, power, profit: the making of the past, present and future. Put otherwise, the curator is the one in tune with a regime of equality between radically distinct—though overly confluent—objects, contents, references, all sorts of actors, as well as of—and this has proven the most relevant—production, (self) representation and gatekeeping.

It is at this point that one may perhaps find the distinction between this new curatorial figure and that of the prosumer, or even remix culture. As with the latter, the curatorial still concerns the manipulation of referents, yet it is the character of the manipulation that seems to be other. It is not so much the matter of a formal change, but of distinct contextualizations, of parallelisms and unfathomable proposals on the placing and productivity of

referents within the ecosystem. Even in the artistic context this is not so strange. The motto ‘everyone’s an artist’ may very well be soon substituted by ‘everyone’s a curator’.<sup>10</sup> The difference may be that for the curatorial infosphere, as an ideal, it is no longer Taste nor Art—those two degrees of aesthetic inclusion—but the ‘freedom act’ of either making something one’s own property or of sharing property, that is, to be involved in the continuous (re)making or (re)affirmation of values, matter and codes at each exercise of distribution, that testifies to the egalitarian possibility of ‘anyone’. One could go further and affirm it as the act of inviting others onto property. For his part, Tapscott justifies such claims by stating that ‘if you make it profitable for costumers to get involved, you will always be able to count on a dynamic and fertile *ecosystem* for growth and innovation’.<sup>11</sup> It becomes clearer now why the curatorial is a privileged, if not exemplary, field for contemporary disputes: the collective is at its core.

Whatever the barricade, the curatorial seems thus to imply more than the possibility of any individual becoming his own context provider, which is the same as saying his own genealogist. It extends this possibility further to any actor.<sup>12</sup> And this is of the utmost relevance if one wishes to comprehend its strategic role *for* and *against* politics. For, it is only in this sense that the likes of Tapscott can bridge the term between any individual and headless or organogrammatic platforms so apparently disparate as Amazon.com or national governments. The curatorial is the form of a hub. A space station. A port. A cluster, extending and retracting simultaneously, open ended and penetrable, but not without interests and intentions—in fact, from this perspective, is it not a plural making or multiplicity of wills?

On the question of governmental structures, roles and competencies, there is an interview where Tapscott replies ‘[Answer:] they [government] should be a leader, but not to do it themselves. They should be a leader in creating a context whereby society can self organize. [Question:] A platform again? [A:] Yes, they should be a *curator*.’ Or, from the same interview—Tapscott is obviously fascinated!—‘the new model is government as platform, and what that means is that governments can provide capability or be a *curator of public value* that gets created in new ways.’<sup>13</sup> Undoubtedly, this is a liberal view on the curatorial, as well as on governance, if not a downright neoliberal one. In-this-guise, the curatorial hub is that occupied by governments yielding to the free will of the markets. It is an instigating site, catering to the needs of a managerial economy.

Not surprisingly, from the myriad of corporations Tapscott talks from and talks to, amazon.com or ebay.com are treated in similar vein to governments-as-platforms. Understood as curatorial managing sites, these are creative platforms not for reasons of exclusivity and originality, but rather by their methodologies of inclusion and fostering of the creativity of third partners—this is

10 My question arises from the intuition that the latter’s apparent success thrives from that same aesthetic gesture of proposing something *as* art—owing to Thierry De Duve’s notion of public judgment and jurisprudence—even if the proposal no longer refers to making art but to a value coming from the centrifugation of heterogeneity.

11 Tapscott D., and Anthony D. Williams (2006) *Wikinomics*, 148. The italics are mine. The authors continue and say ‘Don’t think communism. Think of the eBay microeconomy instead. Hundreds of thousands of eBay customers make their living there, while eBay takes a cut of their transactions.’

12 For an introduction to the social twists in the meaning and scope of the term actor, see Latour B. (2005) *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.

13 Tapscott D. in conversation with Allen Greg on tvo.org. Available at [www.tvo.org/TVO/WebObjects/TVO.woa?videoid?689442659001](http://www.tvo.org/TVO/WebObjects/TVO.woa?videoid?689442659001), accessed 31 March 2012.

14 Tapscott D. and Anthony D. Williams (2006) *Wikinomics*, 198.

15 Guattari F. (1995) *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*. USA: Indiana University Press, 129, and Guattari F. and Suely Rolnik (2008) *Molecular Revolution in Brazil*. USA: Semiotext(e), 183.

16 This would also imply a voluntary or involuntary co-option of Giorgio Agamben's war concept of 'profanation', in one more example of the reciprocity of capture.

17 Evidently, appropriation is not the exclusive game of artists. Also, and also evidently I hope, the purpose of this essay is not to reappropriate the curatorial concept, but rather its opposite: to follow it where it goes, and explode it at each necessary time, at each turn and fold.

18 Alvin Toffler is a notable futurologist and consultant. He is commonly known for having written the books *Future Shock* (1970) Bantam Books, *The Third Wave* (1990) Bantam Books and, more recently, *Revolutionary Wealth* (2006) Knopf. As for contestants to Tapscott's throne, Wired's Chris Anderson (2006) *The Long Tail*. New York; Hyperion or Jeff Howe (2008) *Crowdsourcing*. New York: Random House Inc.

19 The recent documentaries by Adam Curtis, *All Watched Over By Machines of Loving Grace*, are particularly affirmative in this respect, mainly episode two of three: *The Use and Abuse of Vegetational Concepts*. It can be found in the video archive of [www.thoughtmaybe.com](http://www.thoughtmaybe.com).

why these may prove, for neoliberals, exceptionally productive examples in comparison to governments, weighted down by the debate around their historical legacy. These platforms survey the vastness of the citizen (as consumer) pool, its depth and width, its wastelands and embryos, structuring mechanisms of capture and condensation which mimic liberation unashamedly in the form of user-friendly interfaces and under the excuse of the opportunistic freedom offered by flexible labour. Apps and widgets, fishing for creativity, for attachments and fusion. By comforting associates and marketplace sellers, 'Amazon harnesses the strength and breadth of its developer ecosystems to release updates to its platform frequently and builds in powerful feedback loops.'<sup>14</sup> In this field, the curatorial is a *model*, not a practice.

And as a model, the curatorial might appear as all-inclusive, transversal and traversed by the many, but if taken as a given it proves to be a fallacy. As such, it becomes rather a position to be contested at (and for) the individual level. This position is at the interstice between the equivalence of the banishment of social welfare to the blind spot of society and the appraisal for the connectivity of users via pre-formatted interfaces. It is also between the (porno)graphic fragmentation of citizenship to individual self-indulgence and the synthetic quality of voluntary agents guided by the liberation of space. Between the concentration of imagination in space station servers and the reshaping of solidarity anew. As Guattari once wrote, '[artists and intellectuals] produce toolkits composed of concepts, percepts and affects, which diverse publics will use at their convenience'. Yes, but also 'any micropolitical approach consists precisely in the attempt to assemble the processes of singularization on the very level which they emerge.'<sup>15</sup> That is the ambiguity at the centre of management. It is also at the centre of the curatorial. And this is, in fact, something even Mr. Don Tapscott, along with his optimistic generalizations, would have to agree with.

### CURATORIAL PLATFORMS / CONCEPTUAL CONTESTATION SITES

Once at play in the field of systems management, the curator is unavoidably profaned out of his professionalized role within the arts—in fact, henceforth, the curatorial may well be all about profanation.<sup>16</sup> Notwithstanding the discursive intensity in the arts and curatorial studies about its contours, leverage and reach, the discussion remains to a large extent insular and oblivious to its usage in other fields—the same, nonetheless, should be said of managers who don't really care that much for the complexity of its terminology.<sup>17</sup>

As with several other books of the kind, Tapscott's enterprises read similarly to Alvin Toffler's futurology, inflated here by the guise of a self-help manual for emerging companies, both private

and governmental, as well as all sorts of entrepreneurs interested in adapting to paradigm changes.<sup>18</sup> Simultaneously an action and a position, but also a condition for survival (in late capitalism), for Tapscott the curatorial is affirmed, rather positively, as central to such a paradigm change. Imbued with a sense of (or will for) equality, this change may be traced back to the mid-20th century cybernetic and ecosystemic revolution, but in overall it is economic in shape and results.<sup>19</sup> The correlation has a long and intricate history, extending well beyond my reach here, connecting ecology with capital by way of ecological energetics, ecosystemics with financial markets via systems dynamics, and cybernetics with statistics via pooling and management, all guided by the increasing individualization of society and the personalization of its actors under neoliberalism.<sup>20</sup> In fact, a comparison to ecology's (ecosystemics and cybernetics included) conceptual ambivalence may prove exemplary, if not due to the impact of ecosystemics and cybernetics in contemporary management. Management, so says Tapscott, is what the curatorial is actually all about. Is it? Tapscott may not be wrong, or at least we must take his word seriously. For if so, it may very well be us (in the arts) and not he, that are being conceptually conservative.

Historically, as we can now see it, the dynamics of reciprocity between ecology and economics was (at least) double. On the one hand, it may have been more, or at least as much, from the inclusion of Green issues in the strategies of large and medium size companies and particular lobbyists (mostly translated into the vocabulary of sustainability), rather than by way of activism, citizenship and governmental policies, that ecological discourse entered most effectively (that is, most economically) into mainstream consumer habits. On the other hand, the structural relevance of ecosystemics+cybernetics for the contemporary financial systems and its correlated evaluation mechanisms is unmistakable.<sup>21</sup> While ecosystemics and the postwar ecological revolution may have been consciously working towards socio-planetary equality and a cybernetic emancipation of the cosmos, undercurrents were already, if not from the beginning, structuring the basics for what was to become the contemporary management of capital, of life and of corporate development.<sup>22</sup> While the latter example testifies to the ambivalence of concepts in regards to any ideological loyalty, the former example (that of the Green economy) highlights their shapelessness, that is, their volatility, extension and contraction, according to given needs. Selling ecology as Green may have its benefits, but it has mostly, though not paradoxically, perpetuated the same modern partitions that an ecosophical thought hopes to transform or even abolish—to be more precise, it is selling the form without dealing with the contents: fundamentals that cannot but break with the modern views of technological industry, citizenship and, more importantly, humanity.<sup>23</sup> There is no such thing as ecological modernization, only ecology.<sup>24</sup>

20 For ecological energetics see the original material by Phillipson J. (1966) *Ecological Energetics*. London: Edward Arnold and by Odum H. and E. (1959) *Fundamentals of Ecology*. W.B.Saunders, and the historical analysis by Worster D. (1977–1994) *Nature's Economy*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press. For systems dynamics in business see Sterman J. (2000) *Business Dynamics: Systems Thinking and Modeling for a Complex World*. McGraw-Hill/Irwin.

21 See, among other, Seymour, B. (2011) 'Shorter Circuits: Finance, Feedback, and Culture in the Second Wave of the Crisis' in *Mute Magazine*, 'Double Negative Feedback', Vol. 3, N. 1. London. Or (2001) 'The Cybernetic Hypothesis' in *Tiqqun*, N. 2.

22 In fact, in a more than ironic case of contemporaneity, the book *St. Callen Management Model* by the Management Department of the University of St. Callen, singular for an early systems dynamics approach to business, was published in that same year of 1972 in which *Anti-Oedipus* answered back to Lacanian psychoanalysis and late capitalism with schizoanalysis, desire and all of those guerrilla concepts that, years on, came to define Cuattari's chaotic ethico-aesthetic paradigm. The 'coincidence' should not be taken purely as such.

23 For the referred ontological variability and the expansion of the term human, in contrast to Mankind, see among others, Latour, B. (2004) *The Politics of Nature*, Cambridge. Also, Castro, E. (2011) *Métaphysiques Cannibales*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France and Stengers, I. (1997) *Cosmopolitiques, I–VII*. Paris; La Découverte, 1997.

24 In this respect, see Latour, B. (2004) *The Politics of Nature*.

25 Deleuze G. and Félix Guattari (1994) *What is Philosophy?*, 34.

26 'In any concept there are usually bits and components that come from other concepts, which corresponded to other problems and presupposed other planes. This is inevitable because each concept carries out a new cutting-out, takes on new contours, and must be reactivated or recut.' followed by 'a concept also has a becoming that involves its relationship with concepts situated on the same plane.' Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1994) *What is Philosophy?*, 18. As to the co-option of the concept of 'concept' itself, the example Deleuze and Guattari give is that of marketing, ie 'the most shameful moment came when computer science, marketing, design, and advertising, all the disciplines of communication, seized hold of the word concept itself and said: "This is our concern, we are the creative ones, we are the *ideas men!*"', *What is Philosophy?*, 10. The example is somewhat ridiculous one must con-

All of the above, though in the apparent shape of a slight detour, should serve to highlight the ambiguity within concepts, bit or small, and in this case within the concept of the curatorial, curating, and even curator. It should also serve, from the turn of the century onwards, for a parallel, that is, a non-museological, genealogy of curating yet to be done. Or, put otherwise, the consolidation of a contemporary space for curatorial activity—as it is now being called—in the midst of financial, image and data overabundance, and a multiplicity of related yet wilfully autonomous spheres (cultural, ideological, etc).

Locating the exercise on the meaning and role of the curatorial within a new economic paradigm cannot but make one feel as if semantics are spreading outside (the artistic sphere) while we (the arts) are happily discoursing. In other words, that a particular set of terms and discourses has already spread to other fields of specialization, if not to common usage. On the one hand, this might mean, in the way of Guattari, the potential for an individualization of terms and notions, functions and roles, at the level of the personal imaginary and beyond the scope of specialization. This dilettantism may contribute to the creation of unexpected, yet urgent, existential sites of appropriation, where new languages, postures and aesthetics can be developed and linked to other discourses, and thus be claimed differently. On the other hand, one is constantly aware of the potential territorialization of concepts (in this case, the curatorial) under the machine of economics, particularly in order to push through particular sets of organizational ideas in regards to others (in this case, neoliberal flexibilization of labour, identities and resources).

As such, if following Deleuze and Guattari, concepts are 'centres of vibration'—a-discursive resonances allowing for action and the expansion of the imagination that do 'not refer to the lived, by way of compensation, but consist, through its own creation, in setting up an event that surveys the whole of the lived no less than every state of affairs'—they are also projection screens for desire.<sup>25</sup> What this means is that, as Guattari often wrote, yielding to all interests involved and traversed by all sorts of parties, concepts are contestation sites tending as much to the liberation of subjectivity as to the constitution of fascistic nodes within relations. As a degree zero of intentions, these pledge no allegiance and are attached to no one except to themselves or to other concepts—to the point that even the concept of concept can be seized.<sup>26</sup>

The openness and ambiguity of concepts, their cynical alliance or bending by capture and contamination, appears foremost as territories of struggle, vigilance and care—not to mention of creativity: in reshaping them anew, or in exchanging them for other more appropriate concepts if need be. If indeed the personalization of production and the politicization of networks complexify the territories and methodologies for political insurrection, such

struggles may well have to start with concepts themselves. Not defensively, in the ways of retrograde critique, but as aggressively as in the streets of Tunis and of Athens. Not in order to substitute them for other concepts—though it may be needed—but not to lose track of their connectivity and the traces of their associations.<sup>27</sup> We have to fight for concepts, because concepts fight for (or against) us.

Once concepts begin to spread, dilute and mutate, emptied out or adulterated throughout the social sphere and throughout the variety of disciplinary realms—as is the case with ecology but with the curatorial as well—the overall feeling might be one of an abandonment and/or substitution of concepts, terms and models. Yet, should one not rather find the strength and the tools to dive into that same dispersion? To acknowledge the contingent life processes of concepts, and affirm them at the transitional moment of their mutation in the hands of others, friends or foes? For again a reminder from Deleuze and Guattari should be noted: ‘every concept always has a history, even though this history zigzags, though it passes, if need be, through other problems and onto different planes.’<sup>28</sup> Is it not then this history, its hybridization, unfaithfulness and even invalidation, which should be made core to militancy? Once again, the curatorial appears, structurally, as a privileged site for the effort of such contestation. According to Tapscott, it may very well be its name.

fess though, a caricature of sorts resembling the golden years of publicity in the 1950–60s more than anything else.

27 In this respect, ‘actor-network-theory’ may indeed prove to be a fruitful war strategy. Latour B. (2005) *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford; Oxford Univ. Press.

28 Deleuze G. and Félix Guattari, 1994, 18.

Mon, Mar 22, 2010 at 10:36 AM

reflections  
repetitions  
infinite loops  
voids  
crossings  
obliterations

a nervous reality.  
one which is unstable  
and open, and which darts  
restlessly between presence  
and absence.

a disturbing and unromantic approach to understanding  
the relation between. creating a parallel territory  
of reflection on the figure of the body and the awkward  
encounters between its mental perception and physical  
expression in space.

a contemporary understanding of nihilism.  
an art work down to its limit.

# MANIFESTO FOR A NEW PUBLIC

Freee

To be read aloud collaboratively in the form of a 'spoken choir' without an audience.

## THESES

- 1 I DECLARE: The militant individual is the bearer of the force of the collective; the act of becoming a subject, of sticking your neck out and having an individual interpretation or holding an opinion, is always a social accomplishment; I owe my individuality to countless others: a socialist has more people to thank than a conservative because the conservative takes all the credit for the work of others!
- 2 WE DECLARE: The courageous individual draws all their strength from the collective; just as the great actor is a careful observer, the great inventor is a studious consumer of the inventions of others; it takes a community to make a great artist, a city to make an art scene capable of sustaining even one great artist, and an artworld to sustain a generation of brilliant artistic talent; every great inventive artist is produced by and is the carrier of the creativity of the collective; the artist must reconnect with the vast creative public that is the source and purpose of its power.
- 3 I SOLEMNLY DECLARE: The collective should be given all the credit for every individual that it produces; the courage of each individual to stand alone in her or his personal conviction is not the negation of the collective but is its greatest expression; the public is neither the enemy of the individual, nor is it merely the aggregation of individuals, but is the force that charges the individual with individuality; I face you here as more of an individual than I am when I face my image in the mirror!
- 4 WE COLLECTIVELY DECLARE: The adventurous individual is the refraction point of the collective's demand for a new world; the vibrant collective gives rise to the energetic individual who, in turn, calls forth new collective possibilities; the initiative of individuals generates new ideas but only the collective body brings realization to these ideas.
- 5 I DECLARE TO THIS PUBLIC: Art is the dynamic unity of the individual and collective; art only appears to be a privileged culture when we fail to give all the credit for its achievements to the collective; art belongs to us all; and when art is connected with real social change in the political system (change of the consumer of democracy to producer of society, and transformation of the viewer into the collaborator of artistic production), the relationship between the individual and collective goes through

an acute revolution. A revolution strengthens the impulse of invention by recharging the forces of the individual and the collective simultaneously, each as the condition for the other; that is why there is a flourishing of art following a revolution, when the interrelationship between the emancipated individual and the revitalized collective is forged anew!

- 6 **WE DECLARE TO ONE ANOTHER:** Invention is always the working out of tendencies and possibilities of the collective and not of the individual; YOU are the precondition for MY potential; WE are the precondition for YOUR potential; we do not gaze at the great individuals and say 'I could not do that!'; we say, 'I made that possible!'
- 7 **I DECLARE IN SOLIDARITY WITH THOSE WHO HAVE NO VOICE TO MAKE DECLARATIONS:** The world of militant individuals and revolutionary collectives has no other purpose than to give everyone a voice, to transfer power to all; the inventive powers of the masses has been repressed, as has their collective powers of organization and self-management; we are for an art that anticipates and calls for the great surge of individual and collective vitality that only the democratization of everything can bring!

## **PROGRAMME**

Artists must abandon all pastoral responsibility for their 'flock'. The artist is not a secular parson or a cultivated bureaucrat. Artists who want to look after people should be rejected by society. Likewise, any public of art that demands the artist to take care of them (or the people they represent) should be rejected by art and artists. Art is not soft management. Artists who willingly adopt the role of the social engineer, cultural do-gooder or aesthetic expert are the tools of power. Art is not cool town planning. The gallery is not nursery school for grown-ups. Artists are not plain-clothes police officers. Artworks are not cheap substitutes for the welfare state.

Those studying in the art schools in Chelsea, Loughborough, Wolverhampton and elsewhere have mustered with local communities and the leaders of the Freee art collective as a united dissensual public for problems of art in the public sphere without shutting themselves off from problems of architecture, the theatre, performance, montage etc. The work of Freee proceeds multilaterally: documentation is combined with graphic design, publishing is combined with the applied modeling of useful objects and sculpture is combined with sound.

The work of Freee is a montaging of people, things and ideas in a given place for a particular purpose. No work is ever re-exhibited but some

works have been reformatted for new contexts. Freee does not make site-specific works or community-specific projects. Art that is suitable for a place or responds sensitively to a community absolves itself from the critical work of transformation. Freee prefers to cut and paste places and people. Our definition of politics is splitting a room with a provocative remark. We are for an art that doesn't belong here. We are not for an art that wins universal assent. We are for an art that provokes disagreement, debate and dissensus. Art establishes its public not like a commodity establishes a market - by targeting those with a desire for it - but like a political movement establishes its constituency - by politicizing and recruiting its allies as well as turning away from its enemies.

It has proved possible to unite eight techniques and nine theories in the production of our work. We make (1) text art, (2) performance, (3) print, (4) sculpture, (5) installation, (6) video, (7) photography, and (8) montage. We develop (1) public sphere theory, (2) speech act theory, (3) Marxist political and economic analysis, (4) the theory of art in the age of mechanical and digital reproducibility, (5) theories of art's social turn, (6) theories of place and space from radical geography, (7) theories of hegemony and multitude, (8) the theory of the philistine, and (9) the political theory of *parrhesia*.

We are nostalgic, funny, naïve, conservative, elitist, not warm, not caring, not addressing the key issues, wasting valuable time, just making art, too focused on advertising, not international enough, too old for a commercial gallery, the most difficult artists ever, the kind of Stalinists that '68 rejected, very privileged, too political for a political art exhibition, the writers of publicity for exhibitions of other artists' work, not a female artist, not shortlisted, not shortlisted again, not in the show but in the book.

We are not protest artists. We do not make activist art. We do not make participatory art. We are not public artists. We are not the debunkers of art. We do not advertise political ideas. We are not graffiti artists. We are not provocateurs. We are not commodity producers. We will not brand your conference. We do not contribute to regeneration projects. We do not gentrify the post-industrial city. We do not use marketing for progressive ends. We do not deconstruct power. We are not the R&D department for the protest movement. We do not oppose big oil sponsorship of the arts because we oppose all sponsorship of the arts. We do not take part in the gossip politics of pointing fingers at the rich and powerful. We do not name and shame the *bad* capitalists because we do not believe that there are any *good* capitalists.

We say what we mean and mean what we say. We stand

by what we say and stick our necks out. We don't ask questions. We do not treat political slogans as ready-mades. We are not the anthropologists of political speech. We do not show a mirror up to ideology. We don't play 'Devil's advocate'. We don't speak ironically. What we say is not open to interpretation. We form opinions and publish them. We are committed to fearless speaking and fearless listening. We are the authors of what we say. We divide the room. We back up our beliefs with actions. We connect our words to our bodies. We take our opinions into the world with us. We give our ideas physical form. We publish. We occupy the spaces monopolized by advertising and marketing. We decolonize the public sphere. We montage reality. We do not ask you to interpret our works. We invite you to agree, disagree, join in or join the opposition.

When will we be able to create a new dialogical world of collective opinion formation that will come to shape art as an integral factor of social life made anew? Now! When will we be able to shed the constraints on art that make it appear extraneous, decorative, aesthetic, poetic, alien and courteous? Now! When will we be able to refunction the gallery so that it is no longer the apparatus of tasteful spectacle? Now! When will we be able to divorce art once and for all from the art market of idiot collectors, dull investors, waxy

speculators, half-dead asset managers and guilt-ridden corporations? Now! When will we be able to take art seriously again without having to entertain tourists, educate new audiences, promote big business, implement state policy, and please the taste of collectors? Now! Now! Now! Now! Now!

The possessive individualism of shuttered personalities within the artworld is not in accordance with the times (occupy the arts!) and is one of the forces (like privatized utilities, austerity economics, kettling, the decimation of the welfare state, the attack on workers' rights, workfare programmes, etc) that attempt to drag us back into the Victorian age. These artists who distinguish themselves from the collective are the landlords and owners of their personalities, styles and trademarks. This is a distorted version of the vital individual. Possessive individualism and the celebrity culture that it dishes out must be set aside by a new economic and cultural system of the commons, for the sake of the common good, within commonism, that is to say, communism. The new economic, social and cultural apparatus for art must take this new road of the commons and enlist the individual in the united collective programme of action in the gallery, at school, in the workplace, in business and commerce, in production and consumption, in debate and public life, in pleasure and knowledge, in

the family and among strangers, and online and in our pockets. Creating the new apparatus for art will achieve a definite programme corresponding to or fulfilling the movement of' the collective. Every step forward in economic, social, political and cultural life comes about because a new form of life is structured by new democratic social relations that produce the individual and the collective simultaneously. New art needs new methods and it is these methods that we apply in the Freee art collective and it has yielded positive results. In devising the programme we cannot restrict ourselves to developing new methods for art but must develop new social situations for the new art to occupy. New art alone does not contribute to the new society of the commons but the new apparatuses of art must contribute to the creation of a new system of collective being in which individuals are formed from a dynamic collective body. This is the only kind of democracy worthy of the name. It is also known as socialism, communism and utopia.

Based on Vladimir Tatlin, 'The Initiative Individual in the Creativity of the Collective' (1919) and the UNOVIS, Program for the Academy at Vitebsk (1920).

Freee is hosting a spoken choir of the *Manifesto for A NEW PUBLIC* at 2pm on Saturday 28 April 2012 as part of the project 'Towards Common Ground' at Clapham Common Bandstand, London. For details visit [www.freee.org.uk](http://www.freee.org.uk) and [www.studiostrike.com/bandstand](http://www.studiostrike.com/bandstand)

**Federico Campagna** is an anarchist writer. He is one of the founders of the online journal *Through Europe* ([www.th-rough.eu](http://www.th-rough.eu)). He contributes to a number of magazines and radio programmes in Italy and the UK and is the editor of Franco Berardi Bifo's forthcoming reader (*Il Saggiatore*, Italy) and of the forthcoming volume *What We Are Fighting For* (Pluto Press, UK). Born in Italy, he currently resides in London.

**Joseph Redwood-Martinez** is an artist and writer from the United States. His writing has appeared in *Frieze* and *Contemporary Art + Visual Culture Broadsheet*, and he is a contributing editor to *...ment*. A book of his recent writing was published in April of 2011 by Publication Studio. He has shown work and curated programmes in Sweden, Germany, Turkey, and the United States. Currently based in Istanbul, he is collaborating with SALT on a long-term research and exhibition project titled *One Day, Everything Will Be Free...*

**Federica Buetti** is a writer. She lives and works in Berlin and is Editor-in-chief of *...ment*.

**Jan Verwoert** is a critic and writer on contemporary art and cultural theory, based in Berlin. He is a contributing editor of *frieze* magazine, his writing has appeared in different journals, anthologies and monographs. He teaches at the Piet Zwart Institute Rotterdam, de Appel curatorial programme, the Ha'Midrasha School of Art, Tel Aviv and the Bergen Academy of Art and Design.

**Vanessa Place** killed poetry. unk. via Twitter.

**Cavin Brown** has been involved in gay and queer activism (amongst other forms of radical politics) in the UK for more than 25 years. He lectures in social and cultural geography at the University of Leicester. He was co-editor (with Kath Browne and Jason Lim) of the collection *Geographies of Sexualities* published by Ashgate in 2007. Currently he is researching the history of the Non-Stop Picket of the South African Embassy in London (1986-1990) and thinking about how solidarity is practiced.

**Övül Durmusoglu** is a curator and writer based in Berlin and Istanbul. Currently she is a Goethe Institut fellow at Maybe Education and Public Programmes of DOCUMENTA(13).

**Erica Baum** is a photographer who took an MFA from the Yale University School of Art and an MA from Hunter College, CUNY, in Applied Linguistics. She has had recent solo exhibitions at Circuits Gallery, Lausanne, Switzerland, Bureau, New York, and Luttgenmeijer, Berlin. She has published *Dog Ear* with Ugly Duckling Press, *Sightings* with Onestar Press and *Bbabaumbaudevin*, Circuit, Bureau and Regency Arts Press. Born in New York, Baum continues to live and work in the city.

**Caleb Waldorf** is an artist currently living in Berlin. Since 2008 he has served on the committee for The Public School, an open framework for pedagogy started in Los Angeles by Telic Arts Exchange. In 2007 he co-founded and is currently the creative director of the magazine, *Triple Canopy*. He is also the co-editor of a journal for short-form writing and media work called *Version* and is part of the editorial collective, *Occupy Everything*.

**Marc Garrett** is co-director and co-founder, with artist Ruth Catlow of the Internet arts collectives and communities: *Furtherfield.org*, *Furthernoise.org*, *Netbehaviour.org*. He is also co-founder and co-curator/director of the *Furtherfield Gallery* in London, UK, (formerly known as *HTTP Gallery*) which curates various contemporary Media Arts exhibitions as well as projects nationally and internationally. He is currently undertaking a PhD in Art history at Birkbeck, University of London.

**Pedro Neves Marques** is a Portuguese visual artist and writer, with an MA in Art & Politics from Goldsmiths, University of London. He is currently finishing a film on the relation between ecology and economics since the 1940s, with amerindian cosmologies and anthropophagy acting as a speculative backdrop. *The Integration Process*, a book gathering four of his short stories will be published by Atlas Projectos in May 2012.

**Freee** is an art collective based in the UK and made up of three artists, Dave Beech, Andy Hewitt and Mel Jordan, who work together on slogans, billboards and publications that challenge the commercial and bureaucratic colonization of the public sphere of opinion formation. Freee occupies the public sphere with works that take sides, speak their mind and divide opinion.

### Some thoughts on *Frick* (1998) by Erica Baum (pp. 32-33)

Who is the author? Where does a story start? Can an image become a co-author? Does it matter? For the series *Frick* Erica Baum became a detective poet in the photo archive of Western Art within the Art Reference Library at the Frick Museum in New York. Her photos show details of the backs of catalogue pages where librarians scribbled and typed cross-referencing notes about the content of the prints. Picture a two-sided card catalogue that corresponds to the black and white photograph of a painting. One side we never see—the regular catalogue entry. The side we do see has lists of subjects comprising the contents of relating to the subject of the painting, so that the librarians can put the cards into multiple categories for the art historians—who may need to find something under flowers, for example. Baum's image becomes a text, which when read in sequence grows from one-worded notes into an image-triggering poem. Yes, these poems are found. Yes, they are not written by the artist. But the artist becomes the author through the framing of the notes, composing them in an image gravitating towards a meaning and towards a second (inner) image. As a viewer, the words—once bound to an image by an art historian looking at the printed painting—are bound back to an image: rendered more abstract as the actual source-serving image is not made visible. The scientific observations were not meant to be a poem, but reveal a poetic side through Baum's lens.

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# POLITICS MY ARSE



'Well, the first thing I want to say is, politics my arse.' Johnny Spencer's cover strapline, borrowed from Gil Scott-Heron, and emblazoned over the image of looters in a London newsagent's, sums up what this issue is all about: protest and (the limits of) political articulation.

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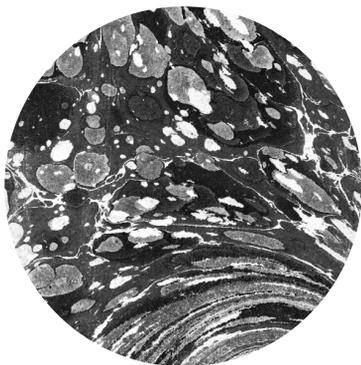
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Erica Baum, *Untitled*  
(*Torture*), 1998 (Frick); *Untitled*  
(*Money Purses Skulls*), 1998  
(Frick); Celatin silver print.  
Courtesy of the artist, Bureau,  
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Issue 3 contains a special  
edition by Erica Baum, *Dragon*  
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