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Acknowledgment

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INTRODUCTION

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

The criticism of *Relational Aesthetics* to date has certainly questioned its support for an intersubjective art of conviviality, challenging Bourriaud's homogenising conception of the social, with a more antagonistic conception of community. Claire Bishop, who coined the term *social turn*, argues for the irreducibility of the relational form to the question of ethics in participation, while Grant Kester in his *Conversation Pieces* attempts to provide a new critical framework for the art of dialogical encounters, with an emphasis on the historical and ideological context of community art more generally.[2] However, what is absent as Stewart Martin points out in his *Critique of Relational Aesthetics*, what in many ways is more fundamental, namely a critique of the political economy of 'the art of social exchange', by analysing the ways in which relational art forms actually relate to or oppose capitalist forms of exchange.[3] Martin's own attempt to draw attention to Bourriaud's limitations here nevertheless, focuses more on the dialectical relation of commodification and art. He considers how the relational form functions as an immanent critique of the commodity form,

1 ——— N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, France, Les Presses du Réel, 2002.
2 ——— C. Bishop, *Artificial Hells : Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, London, Verso, 2012.
G. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2004.
3 ——— S. Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', *Third Text*, Routledge, New York, London, vol. 21, issue 4, 2007, pp. 369-386.

rather than providing models for rethinking relational form's potentialities towards a radically emancipatory practice altogether. This also represents a failure in current discourse around 'relationality', to address the struggle to resist the value form in terms of the individual, i.e. the subject. It also, in turn, points to an urgent need to address the difference at stakes when presenting appropriated aesthetic forms whose political content is supposed to enunciate both critical analysis and action, without considering the very possibilities for action in the first place.

Working transversally across cultural institutions, social movements and education, I have witnessed first-hand how social processes of emancipation can be turned into their opposites, contributing to the subsumption of the 'value form of participation', to fit its purpose within 'culture'. This research project, in fact, emerged out of my genuine frustration due to my inability to grasp a series of contradictions produced when working with museums and galleries on socially engaged projects, and my attempts to activate spaces for dialogue between art and activism. The relationship between autonomy and culture industry, the process of subsumption of art's social value within established curatorial discourse, or the importance of remaining faithful to the constituencies of one's works are all questions that emerged at the very beginning of my collaborative 'training' with sound artist and activist group Ultra-red, back in 2009, and continue to inform my research thinking and practice. The more I worked with community organisers, activists and independent self-organised groups on the one hand, and arts organisations, public institutions and sponsors on the other, the more I realised the relationship between autonomy and industry, self and other, producer and manager, word and action, is a lot more complex than I originally thought. I realised that many fellow practitioners were also deeply dissatisfied with the given discourse and philosophical writing in the field of social practice, and were looking for ways of addressing these questions in more depth by attending to the gaps between theory and practice. My thesis is thus informed by my own practice, and a series of committed attempts to address my research questions in action, as collaborative open-ended co-investigations. One of the starting points for this research project then, and in view of current discourse's failure to address the 'relational' in political economic terms, but also due to my own journey through 'participation' and its discontents, was my determination to investigate relational art's potential to enunciate alternative social forms.

Is it still possible to curate a relatively autonomous participatory experience that manages to escape its own subsumption into 'culture'? What kind of relations do we produce when we 'curate' the 'other' on behalf of

the state? How does discourse relate to struggle? The art collective Ultra-red propose a political-aesthetic project that reverses usual relational models. They query:

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

Chapter breakdown

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

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

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4 ———— Ultra-red, *Mission Statement*, 2000, http://ww.ultrared.org/mission. html, (accessed 27 July 2016).

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

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

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

One systemic function the curator is inescapably a part of -as the journeyman that brings art and culture in relation- is the management of the 'social bond'. One of my research interests, and in view of my own role as a curator of participatory and relational exchanges, is formulated around the particular role of the curator within this new need for the museum to

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

curate relational art's *autonomy*, in order to propagate its social character as fetish[7].

It is important to acknowledge here perhaps the personal style of my writing at certain points in the publication, especially when reflecting on curatorial practice and in view of situating myself as an actor in the midst of this contemporary scene. This is also reflected in the experimental approach of the publication's design, with the main body of text transversed by a series of performative 'interludes' in the otherwise linear theoretical narrative. This is perhaps due to my need to reflect on my role as a researcher, artist, educator and curator that is transversed and directly affected by various institutions and sites, public and private, commercial, or collective, that are often informed by conflicting roles, assumptions and discourses[8]. In this same chapter then, I firstly account for the often bizarre

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7 ——— The concept of 'curated autonomy' comes from Peter Osborne's article on the resignation of curator Chris Gilbert, which I read early on in my research, and has guided most of my theoretical analysis ever since. P. Osborne, 'Living with Contradictions: The Resignation of Chris Gilbert', *Afterall*, vol. 10, Autumn/Winter 2007, http://www.afterall. org/journal/issue.16/living.contradictions.resignation.chris.gilbert.an, (accessed 13 September 2012).

8 ——— These interludes serve as a way into the 'unknown knowns' of my research, disrupting the linear rhythm of the writing and offering the reader a 'pause', like a 'cesura of allowing' a flux of new ideas inside. Inhabiting that state of mind between reflection and actions, where dissonant elements come to disrupt the otherwise resonant thinking. These interludes thus serve more as a way of attending to the 'gaps' or other layers of my own but also the reader's analytic reading. Where the reader inhabits in the 'here and now' of each reading, the context of the questions that arise from the main body of text – a durational activity between thought and non-thought. This in turn reflects my conceptualising of a political aesthetic project that allows for a coming together of participants within an intensified moment of listening that reveals differences between things that were already there, but one couldn't see or better hear before. As Catherine Clément eloquently puts it, when she describes *syncope*, and the philosophy of rupture: 'This sweet feeling of temporary interruption suspends the subject's consciousness by contradicting time's natural progress. Physical time never stops of course [...] but [syncope] seems to accomplish its miraculous suspension'. C. Clement, *Syncope: The Philosophy of Rupture*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1994, p. 5. At times these interludes simply serve as a kind of performative 'testing action', offering a practical example where issues that had so far only been addressed theoretically, can now be given more substance through the presentation of an artistic practice for instance. At other times, they attend to my own inability to make connections between

and ahistorical variations of 'participatory' or 'socially engaged' productions and their effects, by analysing 'relationality' in terms of cultural urban 'regeneration' schemes and neoliberal cultural policies, within the creative industries context. I also examine the effects of this 'democratisation of culture' discourse on the individual level, as I look at artists' and curators' role as cultural entrepreneurs, flexible knowledgeable-labourers always available to skill and un-skill themselves according to the dictates of the ever expanding knowledge market.

This last point in turn led me to question the role of education in chapter 4 'Subsumption of Art into University Discourse' within this new struggle for subjection to the value form by focusing my attention on the educational value of art and the limitations of current *educational* and *curatorial* shifts. Paulo Freire informs a lot of my writing here around the academicising of the arts and the instrumentalising of research, but also my own attitude as a researcher-practitioner reflected in my attempts to experiment with 'participation action research' methodologies of my own.[9] My research question eventually develops around the production of discourse and its role as a legitimising power of the social processes of constructions of truths, how these are maintained and what power relations they carry with them. Can we develop a discursive analytic process without slipping into a set of conditions that lead to the subsumption of its surplus by a master's order and how can this un-subsumable part be redirected towards the commons?

Jacques Lacan's seminar on *The Reverse Side of Psychoanalysis* provided illuminating insights on my analysis of the status of the artist/ student as the subject of social embodiment of surplus value and surplus jouissance, as well as my analysis of the role the curator plays in the circular extraction of surplus value (and surplus jouissance) out of participation. Lacan's discourses, via the Master's discourse, the Hysteric's discourse, the University discourse and the Analytic discourse, allowed me to further develop my self-reflexive analysis of the role of the curator as a neoliberal

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my so far established 'knowledge' and curatorial 'thinking', by 'intruding' with another element in the argument, connecting the flow from one chapter to the next, by interrupting its linear rhythm. They thus form a crucial part of the overall thesis development as they introduce a performative element to the practice of writing and reading that attempts to disrupt the dynamics of accumulation, moving towards a sharing of 'impossible studies' instead.
For more on this see my analysis of Ultra'ed's collective listening exercises as a model for such a political aesthetic project (Chapter 5).

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

product of the history of art but also of my own desire to eventually develop a thesis for an emancipated practice.

My research from this point onwards purposefully attempts to venture out of this maze of contradictions, and continue with an analysis driven by a passing curiosity. After all, for Lacan, the knowledge that defines the subject is the knowledge that is born by the non-sense of the letter; an agency that directs the subject without it knowing. A fundamental tenet of psychoanalysis is that desire is at the core of analysis and interpretation, desire is necessary to give an analysis or interpretation an orientation, structure and even truth, since truth is conveyed in the 'half-saying' that desire conceals of its lack. As Lacan says, 'the only sense is the sense of desire [...] the only truth is the truth of what the said desire for its lack hides, so as to make light of what he does find'.[10] Or as elsewhere, 'Desire is its own Interpretation'.[11] If the split subject cannot position itself within different terrains, unable to make its own connections between academic knowledge, research, and participation in life and society, but is instead 'master of transference' of its own unknown known of surplus, then the subject never has any control of its own agency in the first place.

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

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

11 ——— The title of Lacan's *Seminar VI: Le désir et son interprétation,* 1958, correctly translates as 'Desire and its interpretation', but if pronounced in French this could also sound like 'Desire is its own interpretation' (*Le désir est son interprétation).* This mistranslation is purposefully done here in order to allude to Lacan's own call for analysts to mine or 'extract' the double working of signifiers, in order to attend to those insistent, meaningless, stray elements of *lalangue*, desire echoed in poetic non-meanings. For more on 'mining' instead of reading Lacan's seminars see: P. Buse, 'On the diagonal : Jacques Lacan's reading lists', *Parallax*, 2016, vol. 22(4), pp. 481-499.

The practice of organised listening and the political aesthetic project of sound artist activist collective Ultra-red served as a performative paradigm that exemplifies this pursuit for a fragile yet dynamic exchange between art and political organising, managing to reverse relational models of exchange as discussed in chapter 5: 'Ultra-red: Reversing the Relational Model'. One of the key theoretical points in my analysis of Ultra-red is Paulo Freire's insistence on inter-subjective modes of encounters, or, via Freire's term, dialogic; where those who make meaning and act accordingly do so as *incomplete entities,* not entirely known to themselves nor to each other. Thus, the symbolic accounting for conscious and unconscious registers of experience and the meaning made of that experience becomes apparent. Pierre Schaeffer's theorising of sound as a dynamic exchange between abstract and concrete, subjective and objective realities, as well as theories of the auditory subject became very useful in my analysis of acoustic space as enunciative of social relations. In this chapter therefore, I also consider organised listening's potential as an emancipated practice of critical reflection, analysis *and* action.

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

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

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

Towards the end of his thesis on *Relational Aesthetics*, Bourriaud hints towards some possible expansions of his analysis of the relational as an aesthetic paradigm, for 'the future of art, as an instrument of emancipation, and as a political tool aimed at the liberation of forms of subjectivity'.[14] He refers to Felix Guattari's work on the 'production of subjectivity' and the ways in which Guattari's thinking links with 'the productive machinery with which present-day art is riddled'.[15] How useful is the 'pro-

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

13 ——— *Permissions* is a series of lectures hosted by Goldsmiths University of London public programme (2016) attempting to address issues around current methods of research, study and practice and the way these are connected with the urgent issues of today. For more on this see: http://www.gold.ac.uk/calendar/?id=9452, (accessed 15 June 2016).

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

15 ——— Ibid: 87.

duction of subjectivity' discourse for the development of a dialectical curatorial practice? Guattari's theorising of subjectivity as an ensemble of multiple exchanges approaches a conceptualisation of an emancipatory analytic practice that moves away from representation and towards the direction of co-management (Thesis 4: Subjectivity).

This, of course, involves a repositioning of ourselves within the Real, a giving up or abandoning of authorial curatorial or artistic positions, and a simultaneous dissolution of this residue, back to the community. This state of 'being without' or offloading resonates here with Jean-Luc Nancy's argument for a community of lack or absence, which is thereby defined as being engaged in an always unfinished working through of its own identity.[16] Taking into account how the concept of community is nowadays profoundly abused in social practice discourse and community development projects, how do we move towards a re-definition of community, whose foundation is laid within the self and whose force pours continually outwards? (Thesis 5: Community). In a way it is almost as if what limits the community also provides the key to its liberation. Jacques Rancière's ideas on identification and subjectivisation inform this part of my argument on dissensus, as an intentional move away from consensual collaborations and organising of pseudo-participations towards actual relations based on heterology and collective 'relationality' simultaneously (Thesis 6: Dissensus). I then move on to engage with Felix Guattari's work on psychoanalysis and 'transversality'.[17] The ways in which Guattari engages with the question of the institution and his insistence on a necessary balance to be found between structuralist discoveries and their pragmatic management, feeds into my own insistence on working transversally across cultural institutions, social movements and artistic/curatorial strategies (Thesis 7: Transversality).

In view of my own desire for an emancipated practice and following Guattari's own life and work as a philosopher-psychoanalyst and political activist, I found it more useful to pay closer attention to Guattari's practice and his contributions to the field of group therapy, rather than his immanent and materialist conceptions of philosophy. Guattari's work with the La Borde clinic, and the importance of the institution and its possibilities as 'Institutional Analysis', guides my own analysis of militant research methodologies and their potential contribution towards the collectivising of curatorial analysis and action methodologies more generally

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16 ———— J.L. Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, Minneapolis, Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 1991.

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

(Thesis 8: Militant Research). After all, readings of Guattari's work which do not engage with his analysis of the institution or which consider Guattari's early writings only from the telos of his much publicised collaboration with Deleuze, might fail to consider new and fruitful ways in which Guattari's work might help us solve the urgent problems of linking theory and practice.

Instead of analysing from a distance then, I argue for a curatorial model that moves beyond representation, permitting one to enter a state of awareness of the self. By attending to dissonance and by foregrounding the 'other' against the background of the self, political listening could perhaps drive this dialectical exchange between self and the world, towards a knowledge praxis that is not made of answers but breaks in the 'knowings'. In my preliminary theses towards an organisation of a collective investigation, I also examine the possibility for curators to act as facilitators for the subject's own transition from hysteria to analysis in their own terms (Thesis 9: Curator Analyst).

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

18 ——— I. Rogoff, 'From Criticism to Critique to Criticality', *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies: Transversal Texts*, 2015, http://eipcp. net/transversal/0806/rogoff1/en, (accessed 19 July 2016).

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

CHAPTER 1: RELATIONAL AS FORM

Introducing the Art of Social Exchange

Over the past thirty years, a profusion of arts practice has emerged that use aesthetics to affect social relations, namely Relational Aesthetics. These relational forms often involve the production of collective work that emphasises participation, dialogue and action, ranging from theatre and activism to urban planning, care work and models of 'living' as aesthetic forms, blurring the boundaries between art and life.[20] Relational art, as defined by Nicolas Bourriaud in his book *Relational Aesthetics,* is:

> "a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space".[21]

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

Relational Aesthetics was originally written as an analysis of the often process-based, open-ended and non-medium specific art of the 1990s. Initially published in 1998, the book arose from Bourriaud's curatorial engagement with a generation of artists of that period, such as Félix González-Torres,

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20 ———— N. Thompson, *Living as Form*, Creative Time Books, New York, The MIT Press, 2012.

21 ———— N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, France, Les Presses du Réel, 2002. p. 43.
Originally published in French by same publisher in 1998 as *Ésthetique Relationnelle.*
The term 'relational' was originally coined by Bourriaud in a catalogue for *Traffic,* a group exhibition of contemporary art that took place at CAPC Musée D'art Contemporain de Bordeux, France, February and March, 1996.

Philippe Parreno, Pierre Huyghe, Maurizio Cattelan and Rirkrit Tiravanija. Bourriaud's description of what distinguishes this kind of art reads as follows:

> "Rirkrit Tiravanija organises a dinner in a collector's home, and leaves him all the ingredients required to make a Thai soup. Philippe Parreno invites a few people to pursue their favourite hobbies on May Day, on a factory assembly line. Vanessa Beecroft dresses some twenty women in the same way, complete with a red wig, and the visitor merely gets a glimpse of them through the doorway. Maurizio Cattelan feeds rats on 'Bel Paese' cheese and sells them as multiples, or exhibits recently robbed safes. In a Copenhagen square, Jes Brinch and Henrik Plenge Jacobson install an upturned bus that causes a rival riot in the city. Christine Hill works as a check-out assistant in a supermarket, and organises a weekly gym workshop in a gallery. Carsten Höller re-creates the chemical formula of molecules secreted by the human brain when in love, builds an inflatable yacht, and breeds chaffinches with the aim of teaching them a new song. Noritoshi Hirakawa puts a small ad in a newspaper to find a girl to take part in his show. Pierre Huyghe summons people to a casting session, makes a TV transmitter available to the public, and puts a photo- graph of labourers at work on view just a few yards from the building site. One could add many other names and works to such a list. Anyhow, the liveliest factor that is played out on the chessboard of art has to do with interactive, user-friendly and relational concepts."[22]

Bourriaud introduces here a shift of interest from style or aesthetic trope of nineties art to 'relational concepts' and the extent to which this art has become, more immediately and above all else a matter of its 'social constitution'.[23] By considering relational practices in terms of their social form and how they in turn effect our social relations, Bourriaud in fact insists on art's sociability being the principal 'object' or 'work' of contemporary art, as all art's objects are now subordinate to art's social or relational dimension; 'what the artist produces first and foremost is relations between people and the world, by way of aesthetics objects'.[24]

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22 ———— N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, France, Les Presses du Réel, 2002. p. 8.

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

24 ———— Bourriaud, ibid: 42.

What is more important here perhaps, is the political and critical claims that Bourriaud makes for this new conception of contemporary art, which is now 'developing as a political project when it endeavours to move into the relational realm by turning it into an issue'.[25] Bourriaud elaborates on this, for instance, when he analyses the relational artwork as *social interstice*, which 'fits more or less harmoniously and openly into the overall system, but suggests other trading possibilities than those in effect within this system'.[26] This claim for relational art's disengagement from the everyday rhythm of capitalist exchange, and its offering of potentially different zones of engagement, is perhaps the reason why his analysis has attracted so much attention by a new generation of artists seeking to conceive of a new relation between art and radical politics. This resonates also with the more general emergence of sporadic anti-capitalist movements around the world, since the 1990s.[27] Ranging from theatre and activism to urban planning, care work and models of 'living' and 'organising' as aesthetic forms in their own right, many contemporary artists of the last twenty years have attempted to expand Bourriaud's 'models of sociability' outside the gallery's self-referential context and towards an investigation of the very foundations of these social experiences themselves, with an emphasis on social engagement, participation, dialogue and action, in direct alliance with contemporary social struggles.[28] Bourriaud's discussion of relational practices unfortunately focuses solely on works that already form an integral part of art world establishment, favouring artist-celebrities whose role as 'curators of experience' serves institutional spectacle. He does not attend to the internal contradictions of these rela-

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25 ———— Bourriaud, ibid: 16-7
26 ———— ibid.
       For more on Bourriaud's claim for relational art's resistant political character see my more in-depth analysis in Chapter 2: 'The Political Economy of the Art of Social Exchange'.
27 ———— A characteristic example of this recent attempt by exhibitions and biennials to address political questions was when Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art invited the Occupy movement to camp outside its most visible site, or when DOCUMENTA curator Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev welcomed Occupy activists' interventions, including them hanging a sign in one of the showrooms reading: 'This is not our museum, this is your action space'.
       M.&R. Fowkes, 'The Occupy Effect on Contemporary Art', *Art Monthly*, vol. 359, September 2012, http://www.translocal.org/writings/occupy%20effect.html, (accessed 17 November 2012).
       I. Emmelhainz, 'Art and the Cultural Turn: Farewell to Committed, Autonomous Art?', *e-flux*, no. 42, 2013, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/art-and-the-cultural-turn-farewell-to-committed-autonomous-art/, (accessed 25 February2016).
28 ———— N.Thompson, *Living as Form*, Creative Time Books, New York, The MIT Press, 2012.

tional social forms, or the potency of engaged avant-garde relational practices traversing the boundaries of status quo 'contemporaneity'. Nevertheless, it was perhaps due to Bourriaud's claims for this 'relationality' where his theory was most influential, offering an altogether new framework for the political terms and conditions of relational art practices around the world.[29]

Situating the Relational
within Art History

If truth be told, radical artists have always experimented with alternative social forms and the avant-garde's role has always been to shock us out of our 'perceptual complacency', allowing for one to see the world in a different way.[30] Even though the heritage of the historic avant-garde is hardly central to Bourriaud's radicalism here –with Bourriaud in fact arguing for

[29] ———— As Stewart Martin points out in his critique of relational art however, the widespread interest generated by *Relational Aesthetics* over the years has also been encouraged by Bourriaud's professional status, at the time, as a curator of the prestigious Palais de Tokyo (until 2006), and his role within the art world's contemporary turn to the 'curatorial'. As Martin explains, in fact, there has been considerable criticism about whether Bourriaud's political claims for relational art serve only as a form of strategic professionalism, attracting controversy around this new conception of art's relation to politics.
S. Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', *Third Text*, Routledge, New York, London, vol. 21, issue 4, 2007, p. 370.
Mick Wilson argues further for the whole system of contemporary art nowadays construed as a system of reputational economies, organised and controlled through reputations. Specific instances in the history of art seen as 'moves in a game of reputational stakes'. He then moves on to analyse the role of curatorships in brokering 'reputational transfer' in the calculation of 'reputational capital', which on the one hand can have a positive effect on otherwise marginalised local and community based art practices while on the other it is 'still the dominant ones that territorialise the field, by providing the provisional discursive framework through which the various participants can share thoughts, insights, observations, reactions and so on'.
M. Wilson, 'Curatorial Moments and Discursive Turns' in Paul O'Neill (ed.), *Curating Subjects,* Amsterdam, Open Editions/ de Appel, 2007, p. 215.

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

a 'rupture' with the modern in view of the 'truly' contemporary– it certainly underpins the foundations for it.[31] For Bourriaud, relational artworks can potentially overcome the avant-garde's utopianism, by not simply 'abandoning' it, but instead 'realising' it through alternative ways of living:

> "the role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever the scale chosen by the artist."[32]

Despite Bourriaud's insistence on distancing this new art of the 1990s as a truly 'interactive', 'performative', 'processual', 'user-friendly' and 'live' art of relational encounters however, a history of 20th century art could easily be sketched as the timely embrace of the relational fundamental. This historical legacy can be plotted as early as 1913, with Marcel Duchamp's readymades, for instance, and the latter's emphasis on artistic context over content as Duchamp proposed that it is the viewer who makes the pictures, or later on within the reactionary, politicised and socially engaged movements of the 1960s, like Conceptual Art, and Fluxus.[33] These movements also sought to disengage from processes of Modernism's commodification, and 'present the unpresentable', with nihilistic irony and by shocking the viewer outside the familiar barriers of common language, existing modes of representation, and even their own sense of 'self'. The development of new technologies of communication at the time (post-production), combined with the break-down of medium-specific art forms, provided the possibility for these artists to seek out new ways of appropriating non-hierarchical social forms, now informed by an affinity with a range of other disciplines such as feminism, postcolonial theory, psychoanalysis and critical theory amongst others. The social, cultural and political upheavals of those times is also echoed in the activist legacy of the

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31 ——— Eric Alliez argues that Bourriaud's order of discourse fails to recognise its symptomatic nature as an effect of its claimed 'rupture' with the 'revolutionarism' of the critical art of the sixties, for instance, explaining how in this way 'relational' aesthetics have discharged the 'force of the most innovative theoretical and artistic practices of the sixties and seventies into modest forms, in the "most connections" of a *micro politics of intersubjectivity*'.
E. Alliez, 'Capitalism and Schizophrenia and Consensus: Of the Relational Aesthetic', *Z/X: Journal of the Manukau School of Visual Arts,* vol. 3, 2007, p. 3

32 ——— Bourriaud, ibid: 13

33 ——— Marcel Duchamp began to take utilitarian objects, like a Bottlerack (1914) or a Fountain (1917), and transplanting them from their normal everyday context into an altogether new and alien one: the context of art. P. Wood, *Conceptual Art*, London, Tate Publishing, 2002, p. 11.

Situationists, who departed from the classical Marxist emphasis on the primacy of production in order to corrupt the 'value' of the work and move into the interrogation of everyday life, and the myths of social freedoms – all merged into Guy Debord's *The Society of The Spectacle* (1967).[34]

In this increasing climate of cultural and political radicalism, many artists concerned themselves increasingly with information systems, organisational tactics and the language of mediation, as they turned towards conceptual strategies which in turn, inform today's relational communication-based aesthetic compositions for instance. Joseph Kosuth, John Baldessari, Clido Meireles, John Latham, Richard Long and Art & Language, took art's 'anti-objective' tendency to the next level where art abandoned its materiality completely, and instead became the concept or idea behind the work, setting the ground 'on which nearly all contemporary art exists'.[35] Many of these artists however in their attempt to bypass the art world by stressing thought processes and methods of production as the actual value of their work, became self-reflexive, questioning the structures of the art world themselves, all bound with a wider dissatisfaction with society and government policies (see for example Joseph Beuys' social sculpture).[36] Institutional critique practices of that era, including but not limited to those of Marcel Broodthaers, Jannis Kounellis and Hans Haacke for instance, and artistic gestures to 'primordial returns' akin to Robert Smithton's and Arte Povera, would also bring up issues of authorship found in relational practices of today, raising questions on people's participation in the definition and production of art.[37]

At the same time curatorship emerged as a creative, individually authored mode of production, with a degree of relative autonomy which structured the ways in which art works were communicated to audiences.[38] Post-

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

35 ——— P. Wood, *Conceptual Art*, London, Tate Publishing, 2002, p. 9.

36 ——— The first one to use the term 'institutional critique' in print was Andrea Fraser in her essay on Louise Lawler.
A. Fraser, 'In and Out of Place', *Art in America*, vol. 73, no. 6, June 1985, p. 124.

37 ——— D. Hopkins, 'The Death of the Object: The Move to Conceptualism', After Modern Art 1945-2000, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002.

38 ——— Curator Pontus Hultén, founding director of *Moderna Museet*, Stockholm, in the 1950s, achieved notoriety, for example, with his 1968 exhibition 'She-A Cathedral'. This was a deliberately sensational show, enacted with artists Nike de Saint Phalle, Jean Tinguely, and Per Olof Ultvedt, which took place 'inside a 100-foot long sculpture of a supine woman, between whose legs the public was invited to enter. In her

colonial and collaborative approaches to exhibition making were explored, which in turn had an effect on the ways the artistic canon was read. Many artists rejected traditional principles of craftsmanship, permanency of the object and the notion of the artist as 'author' or 'genius', while the relationship between the artwork and the audience also became the central axis for the emerging forms of arts practice in the 1970s, leading the way to time-based participatory and performance-based art.

Happenings and live experiments were to develop a new composition between politics and art, where social activism was mirrored in street-based arts practices as a radical means to eliminate distinctions between art and political praxis. Relational art and its emphasis on 'social exchange' echoes here perhaps the avant-garde's emphasis on the viewer's new authorial relationship with the world, as well as the overall tendency for art to confront the ritualistic economies of mainstream social forms. One of the central components of the avant-garde's innovations that still resonates with a lot of contemporary 'relational' artists in fact is this insistence for an active participation of the viewer or spectator in the making of the work, where an artwork no longer serves as a text to be read by the viewer, but as something to be performed. Alongside the erosion of categories of art, artists also took on writing and exhibition organising, functions formally assigned exclusively to the art critic or curator.[39]

right breast there was a milk bar, in her left, a planetarium view of the Milky Way; also inside were an aquarium with goldfish and screenings of Greta Garbo films'. Another key example of this turn to curatorship is Szeeman's 'When Attitudes Become Form: Works, Concepts, Processes, Situations, Information' Kunsthalle Bern, 1969
P. O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture*, Cambridge, London, MIT Press, 2012, p. 14.

39 ——— Gallerist Siegelaub writes: 'All the different art word categories were breaking down [...] In a certain way this was part of the 1960s political project. The 'information society' was up and running, and many of these different areas were very touch and go, people were moving between things and doing many different things'. Siegelaub, as Paul O'Neill testifies, coined the term 'demystification' as a necessary process in revealing and evaluating the more hidden curatorial components of an exhibition, making evident that the actions of curators had an impact on which artworks were exhibited, and how they were produced, how they were mediated, and distributed. In Siegelaub words, 'to understand what the curator does is to understand what you are looking at in an exhibition'.
Siegelaub in an interview with O'Neill, Amsterdam, 27 July 2004 in O'Neill, ibid: 19

This fragmentation of authority might also explain relational art's close relationship to what has come to be known as 'participatory art' or the art of social engagement. Many forms of relational and participatory practices nowadays also foreground the role of collaboration, nurturing relationality, responsibility and acts of sharing. Important figures that have expanded post 1960s and 1970s happenings and performance-based actions, are now directed beyond the gallery's all-white walls, linking these new forms of intersubjective experience with social or political activism including Artists Placement Group, Suzanne Lazy amongst others.[40]

The creative power of language and 'performative utterances' has also been part of experimental practice for years of course, but the appeal of the term 'discourse' as a word 'to produce and perform power', indicative of the *discursive turn* -or as Mick Wilson says the 'Foucauldian moment' -in art, could not be more relevant here as it develops parallel to the *relational and curatorial turn.* Discursive events, like lectures, symposia, discussions, talks and workshops, that were previously regarded as supplements to the exhibition have now taken centre stage within the exhibition space and its display, as this is interpreted and curated accordingly.[41] Many of the artists that have now taken up conversation as a subject and form of their artistic-curatorial practice also ground their work on a 'shared horizon of social change'.[42] In this context, one also needs to take into account the social inclusivity agenda realised through 'dialogical practices' of the eighties and nineties (Stephen Willats), as well as the correlation between the turn to the discursive and the explicit thematisation of the infrastructural processes and roles of the art world. All this bound to a tendency to reposition the exhibition space as a research tool or col-

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40 ———— G. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art,* Berkeley, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2004. p.8.

41 ———— M. Wilson, 'Curatorial Moments and Discursive Turns' in P. O'Neill (ed.), *Curating Subjects,* Amsterdam, Open Editions/ de Appel, 2007, pp. 201-216.
One of the discursive turn's typical moments was perhaps when Ian Wilson presented his work 'A Discussion' as art of 2005's Frieze Art Fair, in London. Indicatively, Jane Austin's *How to Do Thing With Words* has become one of the key texts, in fine art, performance and critical studies curriculum of any prestigious art school of the last fifteen years.
Also see: E. Lázár, 'Discursivity', *Curatorial Dictionary*, 2016, http://tranzit.org/curatorialdictionary/index.php/dictionary/discursivity/, (accessed 13 July 2016).

42 ———— M. Szewczyk, 'Art of Conversation, Part II', *e-flux*, vol. 6, 2009, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/art-of-conversation-part-ii/, (accessed 13 July 2016).

lective investigatory process as a performative kind of 'knowledge' event (Tino Seghal's recent occupation of Tate Modern's Turbine Hall with *These Associations* (2012) for instance).[43]

As Gregory Sholette points out in his article 'After OWS: Social Practice Art, Abstraction and the Limits of the Social', contemplating on the growing allure of socially engaged art among young artists as the pressure within art education to work inter-subjectively and collaboratively through 'social and participatory formats' prevailed, and the public context outside the white cube increased, so did the work of artists with specific audiences proposing critical interventions for 'positive social impact'.[44] All this happened as education in the humanities and the arts was now under an ever-increasing pressure to standardise its approaches, especially in Europe under the Bologna Process.[45] Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson in their introduction to *Curating and the Educational Turn* argue for a 'curatorialisation of education' whereby the educative process, both as format and as theme, often becomes the object of curatorial and artistic production itself; 'art as educational praxis'.[46]

43 ——— S. Willats, *Artwork as a Social Model: A Manual of Questions and Propositions*, London, RGAP, 2012.
M. Laurberg, & M. Schavemaker, 'Between the Discursive and the Immersive: Research in the 21st Century Art Museum', *Stedelijk Studies*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 2015, http://www.stedelijkstudies.com/journal/between-the-discursive-and-the-immersive-editorial/, (accessed 13 July 2016).

44 ——— G. Sholette, 'After OWS: social practice art, abstraction, and the limits of the social', *e-flux*, April 25, 2013, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/after-ows-social-practice-art-abstraction-and-the-limits-of-the-social/, (accessed 13 July 2016).

45 ——— As Andrea Phillips explains in a footnote on 'Educational Aesthetics': 'The Bologna Declaration is the main guiding document of the Bologna Process. It was adopted by the ministers of education of 29 European countries at their meeting in Bologna in 1999. It proposed a European Higher Education Area in which students and graduates could move freely between countries, using prior qualifications in one country as acceptable entry requirements for further study in another. The process has caused high profile arguments in political and academic communities'.
A. Phillips, 'Educational Aesthetics' in P. O'Neill, and M. Wilson, (eds.), *Curating and the Educational Turn*, London, Amsterdam, Open Editions/ de Appel, 2010, p. 92.

46 ——— P. O'Neill & M. Wilson, *Curating and the Educational Turn*, London, Amsterdam, Open Editions/ de Appel, 2010, p. 13.

This insistence on the role of art as a tool to ameliorate the 'social bond' and the exhibition as a framework of enquiry for public education to be actualised eventually reached the point where ideas previously considered to belong to social theory and sciences, like primacy of structure and agency, have nowadays found their way into arts education curricula. The term 'social practice' was actually used for the first time to describe artistic experimentation in 2005.[47] Exhibitions of 'social practice' often include participatory work and collaborations with the public, providing pathways for emancipatory change through the art of building social exchange. 'Living as Form' curated by Creative Time, New York (2012), 'Culture in Action' (1993), Shine a Light' at the Portland Art Museum in Portland Oregon (2009-2013), 'Condensation of the Social', New York (2010), or 'Truth is Concrete', Gratz, Austria (2009-2013) are prime examples.

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47 ———— Sholette, who teaches in the Unites Stated, in fact argues that the tendency towards socially engaged art begins to look more like a full-blown pedagogical shift, where contemporary art theory and practice is marked by a turn to education.
Social sciences and abstract political philosophical thinking (drawing from the discourse of political economy and critical theory) thus become very relevant here in the task of 'repairing the social bond' (Sholette, ibid).
As Mick Wilson points out in 'Curatorial Moments and Discursive Turns' there is a rehearsal here, of course, of 'a longstanding Enlightenment value-frame of the public sphere as the very condition of possibility of communicative action'. A speaking together which is supposed to be free of the constraining action of market relations, enunciating alternative processes of subjectivisation altogether.
M. Wilson, 'Curatorial Moments and Discursive Turns' in P. O'Neill (ed.), *Curating Subjects,* Amsterdam, Open Editions/ de Appel, 2007, pp. 201-216.
This sense of realised micro utopian communes of the 'here and now', prevailing in most of the discourse around relational art or art as direct form of reified communities, the art of the 'multitude'. Which can of course also be read as a naive 'harmonistic conception' (Stewart Martin) of the social that does not consider the political economy and the antagonistic relations within the community. Not to mention the difficult case presented here when we consider art's definition historically as the discourse of incomprehensibility which is by nature unclarifiable in the first place, or in the words of Paul Valery, of course: 'A work of art, if it does not leave us mute, is of little value'. Considerations that will follow in my Marxist analysis of Bourriaud's claims and my attempts to emphasise the relationship of participatory forms in relation to value form, and the ways in which art gets subsumed into university discourse.
P. Valery as quoted in J. Fiduccia, 'Report: Bullshit! Calling Out Contemporary Art', *Map,* vol. 22, 2010, http://mapmagazine.co.uk/8981/report-bullshit-calling-out/, (accessed 13 July 2016).

Socially engaged art as well as community art also belongs to this field of the art of 'social bond', where art is used as a tool to enunciate interaction or dialogue with a specific community. The difference from relational or social practices being perhaps that community art is 'art for social change' in a local context, often involving a grass roots approach to bringing people together in order to codevelop participation and change.[48] Grant Kester, when mapping out the history of dialogic practices of today, warns us that this is not a movement but more of an inclination that has developed over the past thirty years:

> "A series of provocative assumptions about the relationship between art and the broader social and political world and about the kinds of knowledge that aesthetic experience is capable of producing."[49]

In this context it is crucial to emphasise the dramatic expansion of the market for contemporary art over the past ten to fifteen years, accompanied by the proliferation of an ostensibly cosmopolitan art world of international art fairs and biennales constrained by the more or less homogenous network of international collectors, curators, critics, and dealers.[50] Indicatively in 2002 auction sales for contemporary art in the United States reached a record high of more than five billion dollars.[51] One of the

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

49 ——— G. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art,* Berkeley, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2004. p.9.

50 ——— M. Babias, 'Subject Production and Political Art Practice', *Afterall*, no.9, Spring/Summer 2004, http://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.9/subject. production.and.political.art.practice, (accessed 13 February 2016).

51 ——— Kester, ibid.
The art world's symbiosis with the profit-driven market is exemplified by the fact that artworks nowadays have become assets for financial investors who want to diversify their investment portfolios and even trade these by hedge funds. So that the art system now runs 'on the

most evident transformations within the art world over the last 25 years in fact, is its increasing operation at an international and transnational level under the guise of Biennales.[52]

Finally, 'the era of the curator has begun' wrote New York Times art critic Michael Brenson in 1998 when the number of independent curators jumped to a new level of visibility with artistic production eventually becoming very theoretical, perhaps even managerial, and at times the art work itself resembling curatorial work.[53] The dramatic interest in collaborative, dialogic and socially engaging art increasing perhaps as a response by many artists that view the monetisation and curation of contemporary art as symptomatic of increasing global divisions of class, wealth and privilege, and thus seek to develop alternative models of distribution and production of their work, less dependent on the legitimising infrastructure of this exclusive world of the 'contemporary'.

Along these lines, the interest in the situational ability of collaborative processes to generate new insight and new forms of knowledge, along with a commitment to duration rather than issues of perception and aesthetic representation has also come to inform this new generation of

basis of speculation and self-promotion'.
S. Bahtsetzis, 'Eikonomia: Notes on Economy and the Labor of Art', *e-flux*, no. 35, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/eikonomia-notes-on-economy-and-the-labor-of-art/, (accessed 27 July 2016).

52 ———— In *Contemporary*'s special issue on curatorship, Isabel Stevens provides a substantive list of eighty official such exhibitions to have been held around the globe between 2005 and 2006 alone. Artists and curators now exemplify the kind of 'global tourists' or 'jet-set flaneurs', as Paul O'Neill puts it, ridiculed by exhibitions like 'Blown Away: Sixth International Caribbean Biennial' (1999), where a selection of artists was invited and an international project was advertised, marketed, and mediated through standard art and media channels, but on arrival at St Kits in the West Indies, the artists and curators enjoyed a holiday together with no exhibition actually taking place. Afterword they produced a glossy, full-colour catalog with holiday snaps, texts, and statements representing the experience. Thus, as O'Neill argues, the 'Caribbean Biennial' could also be seen as a self-reflexive critique of the nomadic curator, increasingly responsible for seeking the new in far-off places', hinting towards the cultural worker's responsibility in supporting a vision of globalism and contemporaneity that does not necessarily apply to non-Western cultures, times and places.
I. Stevens, 'Its So Two Years Ago', *Contemporary* 21, no 7, 2005, pp. 22-32.
P. O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture*, Cambridge, London, MIT Press, 2012, p. 74.

53 ———— G. Sholette & O. Ressler, *It's The Political Economy, Stupid: The Global Financial Crisis in Art and Theory*, London, Pluto Press, 2013, p. 12.

avant-garde artists seeking to re-articulate aesthetic autonomy. Some of the artists working with relational models of participation have developed their practice around the creative facilitation of dialogue among diverse communities. Others are now concerned with provoking social exchanges not amongst aesthetic objects and their viewers or among viewers themselves, but instead using dialogue as a generative process that can help one speak beyond the limits of fixed identities, official discourse and the perceived inevitability of party politics. Testing and expanding models of communication beyond the gallery walls, linking intersubjective experiences of relational models with social or political activism as the specific identity of art is challenged and transformed in contact with other adjacent cultural practices, is foregrounded. As we have moved from institutional critique to curated autonomies and orchestrations of 'dialogic encounters', so is relational, participatory and socially engaging art now called upon to contribute and challenge the formal practices that build the relational 'social bond'. Moving from representations and appropriations of social relations towards an aesthetics of organising, or as sound artist activist collective Ultra-red puts it, towards a conceptualisation of 'organising as *a priori* aesthetic'.[54]

Situating the Relational within Contemporary Praxis

Before I relay my own critique of Bourriaud's manifesto for relational art that is supposed to confront capitalist economies by building new 'social interstices' however, it might be helpful to first present some contemporary examples of artistic practices that attempt to address such critical issues emerging from the praxis of the relational in action. This list of artistic examples serves more as a provocation towards the in-depth analysis of Bourriaud's thesis that follows. I therefore hint towards a number of specific features that might further expose the limits of the relational form before considering in practice how this form relates to or opposes the value form; the form of social relations it produces and the forms of capitalist exchange it resists. I present thus some of today's socially engaged projects that move beyond the -isms of a movement and instead attempt to investigate the kind of relations produced within such discourse, ques-

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[54] ———— Ultra-red, *Mission Statement*, 2000, http://www.ultrared.org/mission.html, (accessed 27 July 2016).

tioning whether we want art to be the place of social change in the first place.

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

EXAMPLE: The question of Community.
For over two years in Belfast, Northern Ireland (200-2001), a team of photographers, film makers and artists worked with a group of bus workers to develop together the ROUTES project; an oral history/audio arts project/ archive, a photographic exhibition, educational resource, performance, videos and film installation, as well as a travelling exhibition based on the bus workers 'contribution to the cause of peace and community in Northern Ireland'.[55] At the centre of the project was an extended process of *listening* and documenting, in which the drivers were encouraged to recount their experiences over the past thirty years, specifically in relationship to 'sectarianism and intimidation in the workplace'.[56]

The bus workers possessed a unique perspective in the city's 'sectarian divide', as the Transport and General Workers Union had decided in 1970 that all drivers would drive all routes in the city regardless of their religious or political affiliation. Public transportation was thus one of the few areas of social life in Belfast in which Protestants and Catholics continued to work together on a daily basis. This decision was made all the more courageous by the fact that drivers operate at key interconnecting areas of the city's neighbourhoods. As a result, the buses were frequent targets of hijacking, stoning, and bombing with thirteen drivers have been killed and 1,400 buses destroyed since the early 1970s.[57] 'I'm not a Catholic, I'm not a Protestant. I'm a bus driver' is how one worker described it.[58]

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55 ———— For more on this see: http://www.littoral.org.uk/project_routes.htm, (accessed 25 May 2015).
56 ———— Ibid.
57 ———— G. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art,* Berkeley, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2004. p.7.
58 ———— Ibid.

Through the facilitation of these arts organisations and their unions, the drivers created a provisional community outside the restrictions of their particular religious identity, and in order to re-direct their accumulated knowledge and experience towards present day's struggles. Grant Kester sums it up:

> "When sectarian differences did arise, the drivers and shop stewards developed their own internal mediation techniques to resolve them. These techniques represent a valuable, but unrecognised, *cultural practice* oriented toward the negotiation of a difference." [59]

Unlike 'site-specific', this new 'community-specific' art thus positions 'relationality' within the context of real struggle. It invokes a very diverse community that moves beyond the sharing of an assumed common identity and moves closer to the production of a social exchange of difference. The significance of community here belies the difference between the aesthetics of organising around urgent social issues and the representation of these relations as contemplative models of relational exchanges. Instead of providing models of imaginary community relations thus this project attempted to attend to the splitting of the assumed unifying 'social bond', moving closer to the participants lives, the urgent issues of the day, and the cultural practices of the community's organising instead.[60]

EXAMPLE: The question of Accountability.
After a residency invitation from the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London in autumn 2010, the Carrot Workers (CW) collective decided to put out an open call for other individuals and collectives to join them in their artistic residency, working together to investigate the many facets of 'precarity'. 'Precarity' refers here to the insecurity, vulnerability, and instability of labour conditions affecting an individual's life. Using forum theatre exercises and co-counselling techniques, but also through film and video materials, they researched for months the issues at hand. As their final exhibition they decided to host the *People's Tribunal* as a public space where voices of the implicated could be witnessed, by listening to the stories, sounds and images of the precarious individuals themselves. Their thematic investigations centred around topics like; the underpaid and unpaid, institutionalised 'precarity', immigration and

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59 ——— Kester describes this as 'new genre public art', distinguishing it from public art of the past, which consists mainly of sculptures and installations in public spaces.
Kester, ibid: 8 [my emphasis]

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

affect. The Precarious Workers Brigade (PWP) was born out of this first residency, in order to continue their analysis of the effect of research funding cuts, privatisation of culture, arts and higher education sectors in the UK, and with the purpose of developing tactics, strategies, formats, practices and knowledges for putting an end to 'precarity'.[61] The Carrot Workers practice exemplifies here perhaps a critique of 'relational autonomy' by not only investigating the precarious nature of relational models of exchange, but also by activating those same spaces as spaces for dialogue between organising and art, where the organisers remain accountable to the constituencies they work with instead of their institutional representations.

EXAMPLE: The question of Transversality.
The *New World Academy* was founded by Dutch visual artist and writer Jonas Staal and BAK (Base for Contemporary Art, Utrecht) in 2013, with an open invitation to stateless political organisations to share with artists and students their views on the role of art and culture in political struggles.[62] Together, 'they 'develop collaborative projects that question and challenge the various frameworks of justice and existing models of representation'.[63] According to their manifesto in fact, *New World Academy* 'proposes new critical alliances between art and progressive politics as a way to confront the democratic deficit in our current politics, economy, and culture'.[64] The academy is part of Staal's larger long-term project called *The New World Summit* (2012-today), an artistic and political organisation dedicated to provide an 'alternative parliament' to organisations that currently find themselves excluded from democracy.[65]

For last year's *New World Academy #5*: *Stateless Democracy (2015)*, the Kurdish Women's Movement itineraries were examined by poets, journalists, artists, anthropologists, sociologists, filmmakers and writers, together with representatives and spokespeople of the movement itself as well as the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) leader and founder. Together with a diverse group of students from art and philosophy courses, as well as theorists, writers and human rights activists, they discussed the meaning of statelessness and the possible alternatives to the state by turning to question the patriarchal and capitalist nature of the very concept of the nation-

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61 ——— http://dismagazine.com/discussion/21416/tools-for-collective-action-precarity-the-peoples-tribunal/, (accessed 13 March 2014).
62 ——— For more on this see official website: http://newworldsummit.eu/about/, (accessed 13 March 2014).
63 ——— Ibid.
64 ——— Ibid.
65 ——— ibid.

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

state itself.[66] In collaboration with the National Democratic Movement of the Philippines, participants studied concepts like 'people's culture' with the use of emancipatory drama techniques used in mass protests and mock-trials of the Filipino State.[67]

The International Pirate Parties also discussed the changing notions of culture and politics in the age of the internet. The internet is pivotal in the discourse of *Relational Aesthetics*, as the emergence of new communication and information technologies has come to 'shape and effect our social relations'.[68] Even though Bourriaud sees technology as a novel emancipatory social form, Jonas Staal's use of the latter seems to move beyond conviviality and towards a critique of the ideological framework that supports the 'value form of participation' in these relational networks in the first place. Staal organises transversal dialogues between different constituencies who connect institutional representatives with members of grass roots social movements, and in a way offers his sophisticated information and communicative tools for the benefit of the communities behind those movements.

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66 ——— http://newworldsummit.eu/locations/rojava/, (accessed 13 March 2014).
67 ——— Ibid.
68 ——— See in particular Bourriaud's subsequent book N. Bourriaud, *Postproduction: Culture as Screen Play: How Art Programmes the World*, New York, Lukas & Sternberg, 2002.

'La Escuelita de Pensamiento Comunitario Tránsito Amaguaña'
(Immigrant Movement International. Photo courtesy of the Queens Museum).

EXAMPLE: The question of Institutional Critique.

With his *Ideological Guide to the Venice Biennale* (2013), an app you can download on your smartphone that makes available information on the political, economical and ideological framework of all the national pavilions of the Biennale, Jonas Staal managed to reveal the history of transnational alliances by which states promote political, economic and military interests, reminiscent of former colonial empires.[69] Like a virtual tour of the geopolitical chessboard that goes well beyond art, the ninety national exhibitions are still modelled after the world fair of 1895, with The United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Spain holding the key positions in the 'Giardini' while Iraq, Mexico, Macedonia occupy the peripheral and more obscure parts of Venice. Staal also provided answers around the way the organisation of the pavilions has been decided upon, i.e. the reasons why a particular artist is chosen to represent this country this year, or even why a particular curator has been appointed. How and with what kind of money has each exhibition has been funded on a national level, as well as how the latter relates to the current social and economic state of that country are all made visible to the public. In his deliberate effort to problematise artistic and creative agency, Staal emphasises the political economy of the relations behind many of the artworks exhibited at the Biennale, their assumed 'open' and 'relational' qualities, as well as the way they inhabit their value form. Last but not least, through this work, Staal also raises questions about the curator's responsibility in this world of 'social exchange'.

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69 ———— http://venicebiennale2013.ideologicalguide.com, (accessed 13 March 2014).

EXAMPLE: The question of Subjectivity.

Tania Bruguera's *Immigrant Movement International (2010-5)*, presented by *Creative Time* and the Queens Museum of Art, is a 'long term artist initiated socio-political movement'.[70] Bruguera, a Cuban installation and performance artist spent a year (2014-5) operating a community space in the neighbourhood of Queens, engaging both local and international communities around the questions of migration. Collaborating with social services, migration organisations and their elected officials, as well as artists and researchers focused on migration, *Immigrant Movement International* explored 'who is defined as an immigrant and the values they share, focusing on the larger question of what it means to be a citizen of the world'.[71] Bruguera exemplifies here perhaps the artist's role as a co-researcher, embodying criticality by working in parallel with the 'other' in order to go beyond models of sociability and inter-subjective relationality, and towards a re-invention of subjectivity by working in a dialectical relation with the individuals and groups whose citizens' status are at stake.

EXAMPLE: The question of 'militant research'.

The Silent University is 'an autonomous knowledge exchange platform run by refugees, asylum seekers and migrants'.[72] Led by a group of lecturers, consultants and research fellows and initiated by Turkish artist Ahmet Ogut, the *Silent University* aims to address and reactivate the knowledge of the participants and make the exchange process mutually beneficial by inventing alternative currencies in place of money or free voluntary service.[73] Instead of producing an exhibition or a performance, this artist decided to use his skills and knowledge for the activation of pedagogic spaces that imagine alternative modes of knowledge production. Ogut re-directs art's educational value from inaccessible institutionalisms back to the 'silent' self-organised communities, bringing the movement and the education work in tandem.

EXAMPLE: The question of 'dialogue'.

Back in 1993, Suzanne Lacy, a pioneer of socially engaging art, came up with an ambitious project called *The Roof is on Fire*, consisting of a series of dialogues, collective investigations, analyses and actions on the problems faced by young people of colour in Oakland, California. By bringing together students, community activists as well as the police, the projects

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70 ——— For more on this see artist's official websitehttp://www.taniabruguera.com/cms/486-0-Immigrant+Movement+International.htm, (accessed 13 July .2016).

71 ——— Ibid.

72 ——— http://thesilentuniversity.org, (accessed 13 March 2014).

73 ——— For more on this see artist's official website, http://thesilentuniversity.org, (accessed 13 July 2016).

The Roof is On Fire, (Suzanne Lacy, 1994)

attempted to tackle questions that the students raised around their education, sexuality, family, drugs and culture more generally. The final presentation of the project involved 220 public high school students participating in unedited and unscripted conversations on; racial profiling, media stereotypes, underfunded public schools, as well as their future, as they sat in 100 cars parked on a rooftop garage, with over 100 residents of Oakland listening in.[74]

After this first encounter and over the course of two years, Lacy and her collaborators worked weekly with teachers and students to create a program of media literacy, as well as to develop a curriculum on 'teen identity and politics'. As Grant Kester explains in *Conversation Pieces* prior to this event, the image of young people of Oakland had been dominated by news coverage of a riot featuring a teenager kicking in a plate glass window.[75] As many of the youths involved in the project identified conflicts with the police as a major concern of their everyday lives, Lacy and her collaborators then created a series of six weekly dialogues between young people and police officers, laying the ground for a similar performance at the same parking garage for the police and youths of colour to discuss their respective assumptions and tensions that surround their everyday typical interactions.

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[74]   ———   For more on this see artist's official website, http://www.suzannelacy. com/the-oakland-projects/, (accessed 25 May 2015).
There is also a video documentation that was aired as a one-hour documentary by the NBC, local news and national CNN, https://vimeo. com/39865636, (accessed 13 July 2016).

[75]   ———   G. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2004, pp. 1-16.

Even though this project never really solved the problem of racial profiling, race-related acts of violence and police brutality in the States, as recent extrajudicial killings of black people by police and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement testify, nevertheless it still addressed the need for the development of a critical consciousness for members of the community to engage in an intersubjective transversal dialogue that allows a new set of conversations to happen. The project investigated the assumptions that persist beneath the American dream of 'equal opportunities' in a brutally unequal society, and acted upon the frames and determinations of our individual interactions and experiences as citizens. Recognitions that can break the momentum that laws don't seem to be able to alter are activated by taking abstract relations of social exchange (like those found in institutions, i.e. the classroom or the museum) into a concrete co-investigation of those relations, in order to explore with the constituents if there is a shared stake in this dialogic exchange in the first place.

Relational as form

Atelier Populaire (1968) France

> If, as Serge Denay writes, "all form is a face looking at us" what does a form become when it is plunged into the dimension of dialogue? What is a form that is essentially relational? [76]

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

> "Unlike an object that is closed in on itself by the intervention of a style and a signature, present-day art, shows that form only exists in the encounter and in the dynamic relationship enjoyed by an artistic proposition with other forms, artistic or otherwise."[77]

Art is thus no longer about objects but about relations and more importantly, these relations consist of 'social relations'. The art work no longer acts as an end in itself but instead materialises relations to the world. The

76 ——— S. Denay in N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, France, Les Presses du Réel, 2002, p. 21.
77 ——— N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Les Presses du Réel, France, 2002, p. 21

art exhibition, according to Bourriaud, is thus seen as a 'state of encounter' that facilitates intimacy and proximity, allowing for something other than a purely aesthetic experience. This encounter is meant to transcend the demand that the viewer thinks about the 'art' and instead encourages dialogues with potential alternative worlds, or possible inter-human relations of the future. As Bourriaud explains:

> "[These installations] negotiate open relationships with the viewer, which are not resolved beforehand. This latter thus wavers between the status of passive consumer and the status of witness, associate, customer, guest, co-producer, and protagonist [...] we know that attitudes become forms, and we should now realise that forms prompt *models of sociability*." [78]

The artwork is therefore no longer about the compositional unity or perhaps the syntax of its elementary parts, but instead it is about the work's ability to enunciate dialogic and participatory encounters with the viewer. This 'rendez-vous' as Bouriaud characteristically puts it, is therefore about 'forms' or mostly about 'formations' that include 'actions', for 'dialogues' and 'encounters'. A space where artists and curators organise a set-up of collaborative exchanges and participatory 'contracts' to be performed or re-enacted by the participants. Bourriaud thus proposes as artworks not the objects, but the very models of these very particular 'inter-subjective proximities' orchestrated by artists and curators alike.[79] These 'contracts' of new art and new models of sociability are in fact offered to the viewer as 'transitive', 'dynamic' and 'flexible'. Culture producers function here as creators and explorers of participatory 'relational' schemes, whose projects eventually form several different relational 'microterritories' in the depth of the contemporary 'socius'.[80] Unlike an object of modernist aesthetics referring to a specific style or formal content, 'relational' art, on the contrary, only exists in the formal 'model of sociability', or an object produced out of this sociability.[81]

'Form only assumes its texture (and only acquires real existence) when it introduces human interactions'.[82] Consequently, the artist invents a relational dialogue between consciousness, as in an intersubjective 'field' formed by the audience, within the particular conditions of each encounter. Isn't this the predicament for most contemporary art today where all

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78 ——— Ibid, [my emphasis]
79 ——— Ibid.
80 ——— N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Les Presses du Réel, France,2002, p. 21
81 ——— Ibid.
82 ——— Ibid.

meaning comes down to different kinds of reception by the audience via performative interaction of a context slowly taking over critical interpretative tools? The work's qualities serving perhaps a better social setting for the reception of the art, as the potential 'participant' performs the work's (predetermined) context anew in the here and now of each encounter. Bourriaud in fact argues for a 'relationist' theory of art where 'inter-subjectivity does not only represent the social setting for the reception of art, which is its 'environment' or its 'field', but paradoxically also becomes the quintessence of artistic practice'.[83]

This elucidates where an artwork no longer needs to embody conviction in its form, but instead enunciates all kinds of different interests from different beholders, which by extension of course opens up new niche areas of interests for the ways in which art is perceived. Art's value now resides not in the workings of the art itself, but more in the way it is perceived and thus paradoxically by the way it can be valued. For participatory art that assumes political effects, thus, the 'value form of participation' takes on another meaning altogether, where the aesthetics of participation have gone from mode of addressing an audience to another 'representation of experience' and eventually to 'representation as experience'.[84]

If we take into account how this current emphasis on relational processes over production or perhaps more accurately as Claire Bishop puts it in *Artificial Hells*, 'on social process as product' is justified on the straightforward basis of inverting capitalism's predilection for the contrary, then we inevitably arrive at a paradox.[85] On the one hand, for many artists and theorists autonomous art 'proper' is out of fashion, because art should no longer be about the subjective self-expressions of an individual artist, but rather to serve a purpose and do something to change the world by providing models of democratic participation, via 'relational aesthetics' for example. On the other, art serves the institution's need for social validation, eventually appropriating a practice of political engagement in accordance with the institutions' pre-established understanding of democratic equalities 'of aesthetic taste' [and beyond], in the first place.[86]

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83 ——— Ibid: 22.

84 ——— T. Griffin speaking as a response to 'Why call it art? The Aesthetics of Participation: P. Helguera', http://www.queensmuseum.org/blog/?p=4427 , (accessed 24 May 2013).

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

86 ——— Participatory art's embodiment of this paradox becomes even more obvious when looking at contemporary art's insistence on pluralism, and this 'surplus of possible images' as Boris Groys puts it, that contemporary art tends to refer to, that does not correspond or even have a specific appeal to any specific individual, high or marginal taste, or

Relational art embodies these contradictions in its very own form as it is introduced when dominant value systems, like those of the museum, subordinate the emergent. Artistic labour and the value of taking part are determined here as a particular instance of abstracted [economic] relations itself. In a time where art's role has shifted to a more embedded context in society whilst still maintaining the premise as a space for independent reflexion, where does this leave valuation, and what means do we have for determining what we mean by 'value', and last but not least, 'who' is this value for? [87]

A key text here is Claire-Bishops' seminal essay 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents' published in *Artforum* in 2006.[88] Bishop's in-depth theoretical investigation of the origins and historical development of social practices over the years challenges such practices' ambitions in the political, by scrutinising their methodologies and their emancipatory potential. One of her key arguments is that any kind of perceptual re-education lead by an artist, organiser or curator that aims to activate and expand the subject's perception always already involves a kind of 'banal and earnest didacticism' that keeps the ongoing paradox of participation alive.[89] Hence, the viewer must 'complete' the work correctly in order for participation to have any power as an activation device.

even the taste of the masses, but instead somehow addresses a surplus of unwanted images.
B. Groys, *Art Power*, Massachusetts, London, MIT Press, 2008, p. 2.

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

[88] ——— C. Bishop, 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents', *Artforum*, February, 2006, pp. 179-185

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

This is akin to organising participation in something where it is possible to participate without a choice not to participate; our participation has always already been organised for us via an organised passivity/ activity that replicates capitalist structures –a highly 'ideologised' convention of a naive 'pseudo-participation'.[90] This reduced autonomy of the artist in the field of participatory practices often results in further problematisation of the autonomy of art in general. In this model for social exchange the curator acts as the legislator of a certain set of illusory options that replicate the systematised 'information control' exercised over us on a daily basis.[91] Claire Bishop's historical overview of such 'social practices', from Futurists and Dada to the Situationists, Happenings and the Artists Placement Group (APG) to more recent works like those of Tania Bruguera, Thomas Hirschhorn and Paul Chan, in fact reveals the insufficiencies involved when such works are judged by ethical criteria. Bishops explains:

> "Instead of turning to appropriately social practices as points of comparison, the tendency is always to compare artist's projects with other artists on the basis of ethical one-upmanship– the degree to which artists supply a good or bad model of collaboration– and to criticise them for any hint of potential exploitation that fails to 'fully' represent their subjects' (as if such a thing were possible)." [92]

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90 ——— Bishop, ibid.

91 ——— This system of 'information control' is of particular concern to us today, as according to Deleuze, we are now entering a society that can be called 'a society of control', a term put forth by William S Burroughs. A new type of society that is very different from Foucault's disciplinary societies and their accumulation of structures of confinement like prisons, schools, hospitals, and in our case museums. These structures, according to Deleuze, are no longer necessary, as they are already sites of permanent discussion.
Thus the 'curing' treatment is spread out outside the museum, to the streets, to the home. Where people can take part infinitely and 'freely' without being at all confined yet while still being perfectly controlled. Deleuze writes: 'No counter-information ever disturbed Hitler. Except in one case. What was that case? And here lies the importance. The only response would be that counter-information only effectively becomes useful when it is- and it is this by nature-or when it becomes an act of resistance. And the act of resistance is neither information nor counter-information. Counter-information is effective only when it becomes an act of resistance'.
G. Deleuze, 'Having an Idea in Cinema: On the Cinema of Straub and Huilliet' in E. Kayfman, and K. Jon Heller, (eds.), *Deleuze & Guattari: New Mappings in Politics, Philosophy and Culture*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1998, p. 18.

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

 If one were to follow Bishop's argument on practices of 'pseudo-particip-ation', one could argue by extension that partaking in the 'relational' usu-ally stems out of a feeling of 'social obligation', i.e. the drive here being that of guilt rather than genuine curiosity.[93] Hence we arrive at the famous *ethical turn* in contemporary thought, where participatory practices today are increasingly submitted to moral judgement bearing on the validity of their principles and the effects of their practices.

Bourriaud's argument in relation to the ethics of the relational form refers poignantly to Emmanuel Lévinas' formula, for whom the face represents the sign of ethical taboo.[94] The face, argues Levinas, is that which 'orders me to serve the other', 'what forbids me to kill'.[95] So that any inter-sub-jective relation proceeds by way of the face, which in turn symbolises the responsibility we have towards others. 'The bond with others is only made as responsibility', writes Lévinas, hinting again at Bishop's argument on 'social obligation' and the question of guilt. The problem here being whether the image that Daney argues for when he writes that *'all form is a face looking at us',* is always loaded with this burden of responsibility or whether we can imagine a dialogue that escapes the sense of (consensual) social obligation, guilt and sympathy and is driven instead by the im-possible; the genuine desire and curiosity towards that which limits the self in the first place. Bourriaud argues that:

> "For Daney the image is not "immoral" when it puts us "in the place where we were not, when it 'takes the place of another". [...] He maintains that *form is nothing other than the representation of desire*. Producing a form is to invent possible encounters, receiving a form is to create the conditions for an exchange, the way you return a ser-vice in a game of tennis. If we nudge Daney's reasoning a bit further, form is the representative of desire in the image. It is the horizon based on which the image may have a meaning, by pointing to a desired world, which the beholder thus becomes capable of discuss-ing, and based on which his own desire can rebound."[96]

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93 ———— See for instance Bishop's analysis of Argentinian art of the 1960s, under the influence of Oscar Masotta, and the western interest in this.
C. Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectator-ship*, London, Verso, 2012, pp. 105-128

94 ———— N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Les Presses du Réel, France,2002, p. 22.

95 ———— E. Levinas in Bourriaud, ibid: 22.

96 ———— N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Les Presses du Réel, France, 2002, p. 22.
To put it in Lacanian terms, the relational form not only represents our desire to know, as the desire of the Other, but becomes the very

This 'face to face' encounter that Levinas describes as the ethics of inter-subjective experience, derives here not from some transcendental subjectivity but from a given participatory or as Grant Kester, the advocate of dialogical aesthetics, eloquently puts it, a 'dialogical situation in all its concrete historicity and individuality'.[97] Levinas explains further:

> "But in knowledge there also appears the notion of an intellectual activity or of a reasoning will–a way of doing something which consists precisely of thinking through knowing, of seizing something and making it one's own, of reducing presence and representing the difference of being, an activity which appropriates and grasps the otherness of the known." [98]

substance of this relationship, providing the habitat (time/space) for such a dialogue to take place in the first place. Form coming about from a meeting between the imaginary and the symbolic.

I can't help but think of my first ever exhibition here, curated by David Burrows, together with a group of fellow graduates from Goldsmiths University of London (2009). Our intention was to work as a group, investigating notions of 'inter-subjectivity', 'taking-part by doing nothing', 'temporary autonomous zones', and 'pirate utopias', all anchored with our common obsession with bees, beehives and swarming.

Our relational welcoming 'free' space however was soon occupied by a group of participants who had a completely different understanding of the 'ethics of the relational', 'tolerance' and 'democratic participation'. 'Our bundle of relations with the world, giving rise to other relations' which did not necessarily fit our 'pirate' sense of a-signifying machines. Eventually bringing our 'experiment in alternative models of participation' to a total crisis that the curator now had to manage and resolve by 'administering the crisis'; eventually putting an end to our individual-collective experiment altogether.

The exhibition ended up being more of an orchestrated presentation of individual works followed by a publication that showcased a kind of proof for our 'pool of signifiers' as a map of our 'archipelago of thoughts'.

Exemplifying in turn the problems created for the curator as well (as the manager of the relational), when the aesthetics of social practices and the organising structures behind them, avoid being judged as *a priori* aesthetic, focusing more around the kinds of participation they suggest, and the ethics of facilitating such participations. My argument being here that organising, as in the relations of people coming together, and as these connections slip and slide, is *a priori* aesthetic. A more detailed analysis of this argument follows in the chapter on sound artist, activist collective Ultra-red.

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

98 ———— E. Levinas, 'Ethics as First Philosophy' in S. Hand, (ed.), *The Levinas Reader*, Oxford, England, Blackwell, 1989, p. 76.

This highlights our desire to interact with others in an ethical manner and not as an abstract sense of duty due to our direct positioning in the 'here and now' experience, the 'lived' time and place of our affective and meaningful relationship with concrete others.[99] Bourriaud's 'harmonistic conception' of the social inevitably coming 'face to face' with the agonistic conceptions of political communities, who in this process of empathetic identification and critical analysis insist on preserving that 'irreducible element in human contact' that resists co-optation by more general or abstract conceptual powers. To put it simply, empathetic identification is a necessary component of dialogical practices of course, but empathy can also slide into sympathy, as is very often used to deny the real social differences and antagonisms that exist between artists and their collaborators or the artist naively (or arrogantly) adapting a position of authority to speak on behalf of a disenfranchised other.[100] The social relations supposed here by Bourriaud, and the momentary freedom from capitalist exchange they may offer, manage to create contradictions that draw attention to the social constitution of capitalist exchange itself. Bourriaud's claim for an art that confronts service economies of informational capitalism and his manifesto for a radicalisation of social exchange against fetishism in fact, often produces the very error that Karl Marx called 'fetishism' in the first place, or more specifically in this case 'the fetishism of the social'. Marx writes:

> "... to find an analogy [to the fetishism of commodities] we must take flight into the misty realm of religion. There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands."[101]

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99 ——— G. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2004, pp. 118-119.
The broader philosophical implications of this approach discussed further by T. Nealon, Jeffrey *Alterity Politics: Ethics and Performative Subjectivity,* where Nealon examines the constitution of subjectivity in terms of communicative interaction focusing on Mikhail Bakhtin's model of 'dialogical experience' and Emmanuel Levinas's concept of 'responsibility'.
J. Nealon, *Alterity Politics: Ethics and Performative Subjectivity,* Durham, Duke University Press, 1998.

100 ——— Kester, ibid: 150

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

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

If the whole point of contemporary art today being 'relational' or 'socially engaging' is to exert a direct influence on the participant's behaviour and perhaps replace the work of art or performance with a situation that facilitates the spectator's 'taking part' and meeting with 'the other', then of course the question of ethical and moral standards of participation is useful. The problem for me however, is that there is no good conscience to be had in art institutions altogether, as art institutions are always already part of the capitalist machine of information production, distribution and circulation. Conscience or ethics, might not exactly be the issue here.

It is also not an issue of emphasis on conviviality rather than antagonism. As Stewart Martin argues in the following, commenting on the most prominent critics' approach to their analysis of *Relational Aesthetics* like Claire Bishop, Liam Gallic and Grant Kester:

> "By proposing antagonism as simply an alternative form of freedom or democracy only reproduces the problem. In any case, the issue is not just the internal social relations of art, but how it relates to capitalist exchange as, supposedly, something outside it."[102]

The criticism of Bourriaud's manifesto to date has questioned the assumed critical value of its 'open' and 'relational' qualities, as well as 'the irreducibility of judgements of form to ethics' in relational art.[103] However, what is absent is 'criticism of […] a critique of the political economy of social exchange that is implicitly proposed by *Relational Aesthetics*'.[104]

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102 ——— S. Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', *Third Text*, Routledge, New York, London, vol. 21, issue 4, 2007, p. 378.
103 ——— S. Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', *Third Text*, Routledge, New York, London, vol. 21, issue 4, 2007, p. 370.
104 ——— Ibid.

CHAPTER 2:
THE POLITICAL ECONOMY
OF THE ART
OF SOCIAL EXCHANGE

If *Relational Aesthetics* is pre-eminently a theory of art as a form of social exchange, then the crucial question that must follow in order to consider its relation (as resistance) to commodification is; how does relational art's form of social exchange relate to the form of capitalist exchange and by extension, how does relational art's form resist the value form?[105] Bourriaud certainly acknowledges these questions by recognising the affinity of the 'social exchange' in art with the 'exchange-value' of commerce, but insists that these forms of exchange are essentially distinct. His ambition, of course, is for art to have a critical relation to capitalist culture defined by its resistance to commerce and 'exchange-value', and by implication, its 'struggle with subjection to the value form', as Stewart Martin puts it in his critique of *Relational Aesthetics.*[106] However, the exact character of this 'struggle to subjection to the value form' is never really determined. Bourriaud describes art's resistance to, or departure from, capitalist exchange forms as achieved simply by virtue of a general 'antipathy' of its 'own economy' from the 'general economy'.[107] The relational artwork, according to Bourriaud offers an alternative to our mass mediated world of commodified relationships, 'alternatives for living' in a transition between what is 'outside of capitalism' and our otherwise commodified existence.[108] At one point, Bourriaud suggests that what is at stake in art's social exchange is 'an exchange whose form is defined by that of the object itself, before being so defined by definitions foreign to it'.[109] Bourriaud writes:

> "[The work of art] is devoted […] right away, to the world of exchange and communication, the world of "commerce", in both meanings of the term. What all goods have in common is the fact that they have a value, that is, a common substance that permits their exchange. This substance, according to Marx, is the "amount of abstract labour" used to produce this item. It is represented by a sum of money, which

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

106 ——— Ibid.

107 ——— N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, France, Les Presses du Réel, 2002, p. 42.

108 ——— Bourriaud's understanding of 'social relations' is partly informed by Guy Debord's Society of the Spectacle (1967) where the spectacle is not only the collection of images but in fact the very relation amongst people, as this is mediated by the images. Debord's claim of a social conditioning and alienation of the self into a commodity form resonating with contemporary struggles for subjection, where people's desires are being commodified and sold back to them as packaged goods, highlight this.
G. Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, New York, Zone Books, 1967/2006, p. 12.

109 ——— Bourriaud, ibid.

is the "abstract general equivalent" of all goods between them. It has been said of art, and Marx was the first, that it represents the "absolute merchandise", because it is the actual image of [...] value. But what exactly are we talking about? About the art object, not about artistic practice, about the work as it is assumed by the general economy, and not its own economy. Art represents a barter activity that cannot be regulated by any currency, or any "common substance". It is the division of meaning in the wild state – an exchange whose form is defined by that of the object itself, before being so defined by definitions foreign to it. The artist's practice, and his behaviour as producer, determines the relationship that will be struck up with his work. *In other words, what he produces, first and foremost, is relations between people and the world, by way of aesthetic objects*." [110]

However, as Stewart Martin rightly points outs, this seems to merely inflect the general argument that 'the distinction of the social exchange of *art* from the social exchange of *value* is the dissolution, or at least subordination, of relations to objects to relations between people'.[111] This makes sense if we think of it as a metathesis of Marx's own description of commodity fetishism, which is presumably Bourriaud's intention.[112] In Marx's account of commodification, we have an inversion of the dialectic between subject and object (persons and things), where:

> "the social relations between their [the producers'] private labourers appear as what they are, i.e. they do not appear as direct social relations between persons in their work, but rather as material relations between persons, and social relations between things'."[113]

In Marxian terms, and in accordance with Stewart Martin's analysis, we can understand *Relational Aesthetics* as arguing that relational artworks involve a refusal of commodity fetishism; a reassertion of social relations between 'persons' against social relations between commodities. This is, of course, the purpose of all avant-garde, anti-objective, and 'anti-art' art in a way. How are we to understand this refusal of commodity fetishism however, without a recognition of the contradiction internal to the com-

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110 ———— N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, France, Les Presses du Réel, 2002, p 42 [my emphasis].

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

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

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

modity form? Without a recognition of relational art's double nature, with its autonomy conceived as a fetish, in Marx's sense, as this in turn obscures or refuses to be 'sympathetic', as Bourriaud says, with its own social determination?

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

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

> "The space where their works are displayed is altogether the space of interaction, the space of openness that ushers in all dialogues (Georges Bataille would have written: 'rift (déchirure)). What they produce are relational space-time elements, inter-human experiences trying to rid themselves of the straightjacket of the ideology of mass communications, in a way, of the places where alternative forms of sociability, critical models and moments of conviviality are worked out." [114]

This exemption from economic relations of corruption, according to Bourriaud, is in fact due to the very nature of the relational art work itself, an art that is based on social relations that go beyond commodities and objects. A kind of 'operative realism', that allows for a wavering between contemplation and use.[115] In this relational space artists enable:

> "an arena of representational context that creates free areas, and time spans whose rhythm contrasts with those structuring everyday life, and it encourages an inter-human commerce that differs from the "communication zones" imposed upon us." [116]

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114 ———— N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, France, Les Presses du Réel, 2002, p 44.
115 ———— Ibid.
116 ———— Ibid.

'Operative realism' thus describes artists who move beyond this transitive interstice model and deploy 'mimicry' as a subversive strategy to refuse the fetishism of commodities, or fetishism of the social. Bourriaud makes the ambitious claim that 'make-believe' is a successful tactic because, by its very powers of imitation, it exposes the actual condition of today's reality. By using this 'operative realism' strategy, and as a consequence of this very opening up of a dynamic space for 'free dialogue' however, one could plausibly argue for the dissolution of autonomous workmanship altogether since ideas like artist's intentions, the purpose or meaning of an artwork as such, or to put it simply what the artwork says or does, no longer apply. Or even as Stewart Martin argues, this 'operative realism' can also serve as a 'naive mimesis or aestheticisation of novel forms of capitalist exploitation'.[117]

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

> "This *interstice* term was used by Karl Marx to describe trading communities that elude the capitalist economic context by being removed from the law of profit: barter, merchandising, autarkic types of production, etc. The *interstice* is a space in human relations which fits more or less harmoniously and openly into the overall system, but suggests other trading possibilities than those in effect within this system."[118]

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

> "This is the precise nature of contemporary art exhibition in the arena of representational commerce: it creates free areas and time/spans whose rhythm contrasts with those structuring everyday life,

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117 ———— S. Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', *Third Text*, Routledge, New York, London, vol. 21, issue 4, 2007, p. 371.
118 ———— N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, France, Les Presses du Réel, 2002, p. 16.

and it encourages an inter-human commerce that differs from the 'communication zones' that are imposed on us." [119]

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

> "So the exhibition does not deny the social relationships in effect, but it does distort them and project them into a space-time frame encoded by the art system and by the artist him/herself." [120]

When one endeavours towads such ambitious claims however, one should be very suspicious of current enthusiasm by museums and galleries to showcase such 'free' relational, curatorial exchanges. After all, such enthusiasm is not guided by the institution's commitment to anti-capitalist politics or any sort of resistance strategy for a better society, to begin with. For neoliberal institutions, including museums and universities, on the contrary, and as Margaret Thatcher famously argued, there is no 'society'. There are only social relations founded on abstract freedom and equality, and supported by the right to private property and interest. On the contrary, a dialectical materialist method as a theory of relations of production, reintroduces the rejected problematic of structural non-relation which drives the capitalist mode of production, amounting to Marx's central hypothesis in *Capital*; there is no such thing as social relation, i.e. there is a society, albeit without an underlying social relation.[121]

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

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119 ——— Ibid.

120 ——— N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, France, Les Presses du Réel, 2002, p 82.

121 ——— S. Tomšič, *The Capitalist Unconscious*, London, Verso, 2015, pp. 4-10.

"Let us now picture to ourselves, by way of change, a community of free individuals, carrying on their work with the means of production in common, in which the labour power of all the different individuals is consciously applied as the combined labour power of the community. [...] The total product of our community is a social product. One portion serves as fresh means of production and remains social. But another portion is consumed by the members as means of subsistence. A distribution of this portion amongst them is consequently necessary. The mode of this distribution will vary with the productive organisation of the community, and the degree of historical development attained by the producers. [...] The social relations of the individual producers, with regard both to their labour and to its products, are in this case perfectly simple and intelligible, and that with regard not only to production but also to distribution."[122]

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

Unfortunately for us however, such 'innocent' trading relationships exist only in pre-capitalist societies of primitive accumulation.[123] They can arise and exist only when the development of the productive power of labour has not risen beyond a low stage, and when, therefore, the social

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122 ———— K. Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy,* Vol.1, London, Penguin, 1867/1990, pp. 171-172..

123 ———— Many artists and philosophers (post-1968) interpret this distinction between formal and real subsumption as the basis for historical periodising of capital relations. Some see it as an assertion of a total integration of the realms of culture, education and life itself under capital. While for others, it is a way out of capital, a promise that art is supposed to fulfil with a people to come, sometime in a future utopia. Gilles Deleuze writes characteristically on the cinema of Straub-Huiliet:
'What relationship is there between human struggle and a work of art? The closest and for me the most mysterious relationship of all. Exactly what Paul Klee meant when he said: "You know, the people are missing." The people are missing and at the same time, they are not missing. The people are missing means that the fundamental affinity between a work of art and a people that does not yet exist is not, will never be clear. There is no work of art that does not call on a people who does not yet exist'.
G. Deleuze, 'Having an Idea in Cinema: On the Cinema of Straub and Huilliet' in E. Kayfman and K. Jon Heller, (eds), *Deleuze & Guattari: New Mappings in Politics, Philosophy and Culture*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1998, p. 19.

relations within the sphere of material life are correspondingly narrow. Bourriaud's claim that contemporary art helps model such a 'community of free individuals' could perhaps hold truth if it was projected for a community of individuals that functioned outside late capitalism and the law of relative accumulation.[124] However, the truth of the matter is that the art world, as it operates today, is not exactly like a 'community of free individuals', and the work of an artist, no matter how relational and socially enunciative, unless it enters into the capitalist mode of circulation, production and distribution, has no chance of validating its social importance. If there is no exposure, there is no social validity, and thus any claim for free relational value is automatically extinguished.[125]

Thus, what Bourriaud seems to ignore when he argues for an emancipatory potential inherent in the relational 'social interstice' practices, is that both artist and curator need to offer their labour to the capitalist market if they are to sustain their lives. The means of production for the artist are the means of his existence, the means of his/her subsistence. For the relational artist/curator who works with participation, it is an offering of his/

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124 ———— Ibid.
More pointedly, in *Postproduction,* Bourriaud further elaborates on this concept of alternative or resistant social exchange that appeals to an altogether pre-capitalist notion of the 'market-form', in which human relations of exchange are not yet abstracted as they are within capitalist markets.
N. Bourriaud, *Postproduction: Culture as Screen Play: How Art Programmes the World*, New York, Lukas & Sternberg, 2002, p. 23

125 ———— Boris Groys analyses this further and explains that art is generally regarded at its most 'authentic' and 'genuinely successful' when there is no need for any curating at all, when the artwork can stand on its own, enabling a direct confrontation with the viewer ('nil-curating' or 'non-curating'). At the same time however, Groys quickly points out, 'such contemplation cannot go ahead without the artwork's being exhibited'. He writes:
'A work of art can't in fact present itself by virtue of its own definition and force the viewer into contemplation—artworks lack vitality, energy and health. They seem to be genuinely sick and helpless—a spectator has to be led to the artwork, as hospital workers might take a visitor to see a bedridden patient. It is no coincidence that the word "curator" is etymologically related to "cure". Curating is curing. The process of curating cures the image's powerlessness, its incapacity to present itself. The artwork needs external help, it needs an exhibition and a curator to become visible'.
B. Groys, 'The Curator as Iconoclast', *History and Theory, Bezalel II: New Approaches in Contemporary Curating*, issue 2, Spring 2006 http://bezalel.secured.co.il/zope/home/en/1143538156/1143802471_en, (accessed 27 July 2016).

her value producing labour in the domain of 'culture', i.e. the symbolic capital produced as soon as participation obtains its value form. As soon as the products of his/her labour enter this market, as commodity form, he/she thus gives up on any sort of pre-capitalist exchange relation form in order to live. His/her labour now appears to have a life of its own, independent of the producer. Both artist and curator however, participate in capitalist models of sociability, implied by the autonomy of exchange of the value form, and by inevitably offering their labour to the market.[126]

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

126 —————— Eric Alliez puts it eloquently here; 'Is its truly schizophrenic when the relational aesthetic tries to credit its *surfing* on the new universes of communication with a function of alternative democratisation. Far from liberating the 'inter-human exchange' from its economic reification 'in the cracks of existing social forms' (as the relational aesthetic claims –but without ever losing sight of the trajectory from the gallery to the museum-laboratories of the new economy of art and the *accelerated return* by a succession of Biennales, Triennials, Manifestas…), it instead promotes new criteria of merchandisation and participatory management of life by means of these exhibition devices that showcase the intensive extension of the "culture of interactivity." The relation here is actually *transaction*'.
E. Alliez, 'Capitalism and Schizophrenia and Consensus: Of the Relational Aesthetic', *Z/X: Journal of the Manukau School of Visual Arts,* vol. 3, 2007, p. 4

Subsumption: Formal and Real

"Co-operation remains the fundamental form of capitalist mode of production, although in its simple shape it continues to *appear* as one particular form alongside the more developed ones".[127]

The key task here is thus is to examine what exactly is subsumed in the first place when we talk about co-operation, and by extension about the 'relational formations of non-capitalist processes' like the ones suggested by Bourriauds's aesthetics. In his critique of political economy Marx describes subsumption as the relation of domination that exists between capital and labour, so that a particular labour can be said to be subsumed under the universalised process of capital by way of managing the production process itself. In this way labour gets subsumed under capital and is thus determined as a particular instance of it.[128]

In the beginning, the labourer freely offers his labour for capital to be taken under its control formally by entering a relationship with it, purely at the level of economic exchange. The worker voluntarily subjects his/her labour's use value to the supervision of a capitalist validating machine, entering into a wage relation and establishing the social command of capital. Co-operation, according to Marx, plays a very important role within

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127 ——— K. Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy,* Vol.1, London, Penguin, 1867/1990, p. 454.

128 ——— It is worth mentioning here perhaps that 'subsumption' more generally determines the process in which a general rule (or concept) is applied to a particular case or instance of the universal (objective experience), in the case of a possible condition (intuition). For Immanuel Kant in fact, it is through the act of subsumption that an 'inferential judgement' can take place within the process of syllogistic cognition (pure reason), as this gets unified within conscious experiences.
I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press,1998, A330
Andrés Sáenz De Sicilia, elaborates further on the ways in which Kant's whole theory of rational cognition is modelled around this idea of the process of subsumption acting as 'the mediating condition' connecting particulars with the conceptual 'mark's or predicates of universals'. He then analyses the manner in which contemporary thought has inherited and further developed Kant's understanding of subsumption, identifying issues and solutions that emerge out of this analysis, from Kant, Hegel and Marx all the way to contemporary post-Marxists thinkers.
A. Sáenz de Sicilia, *The Problem of Subsumption in Kant, Hegel and Marx*, Ph.D. diss., Centre for Research in Modern European History, Surrey, Kingston, 2016.

the general foundation of the capitalist system, as it is 'the first change experienced by the actual labour process when subjected to capital'.[129] 'This starting point coincides with the birth of capital itself', through the establishment of wage relations between workers and capitalists.[130]

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

> "If then, on the one hand, the capitalist mode of production appears to be the historically necessary condition for the transformation of the labour process into a social process, so, on the other hand, this social form of the labour process is a method employed by capital for the more profitable exploitation of labour, by increasing its productive power." [131]

At its highest level of abstraction, this social form of co-operation ceases to lie outside capital and becomes embodied in the development of the production process itself. The capitalist employs highly sophisticated strategies of technically re-organising the labour so that the production process itself – in this case the artistic process – will eventually become driven by the imperative of creating surplus value. According to this, the entire *real* form of production is revolutionised, and artistic labour itself is not only directed towards the augmentation of value by gaining recognition by an institution for example, but this goal eventually gets inscribed in its concrete structure via its relational actuality, determining its means, methods and development. At the level of *real* subsumption then, the entire production process gets determined by, as, and for the capitalist command. Marx explains:

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

129 ———— Ibid.
130 ———— Ibid: 453.
131 ———— Ibid.

of production is now as indispensable as that a general should command on the field of battle." [132]

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

> "...it [the formal subsumption of labour under capital], is the general form of every capitalist process of production; at the same time, however, it can be found as a particular form alongside the specifically capitalist mode of production in its developed form, because the latter entails the former, the converse does not necessarily obtain." [133]

Marx implies here that when the specifically capitalist mode of production has not been fully developed, then artistic labour holds the potential to retain its status as a commodity subsumed only within formal terms, and thus, the relations of production possibly escaping definition as a particular instance in the development of capital as a whole is made visible.[134] As long as the commodification of artistic labour remains in the realm of formal subsumption, and given its petty commodity character, it can never get totally subsumed. The circular nature of my argument at this point corresponds perhaps to the historical development of capital itself, and the not so useful attempts by some to pin down the problem within clearly defined moments of historical transitions from one form of subsumption to the next.[135]

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132 ———— A. Sáenz de Sicilia, *The Problem of Subsumption in Kant, Hegel and Marx*, Ph.D. diss., Centre for Research in Modern European History, Surrey, Kingston, 2016, p448.

133 ———— K. Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy,* Vol.1, London, Penguin, 1867/1990, p.1019.

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

135 ———— R. Lucas, 'On the Uses and Abuses of Abstract Temporal Concepts for History', *The Theory and Politics of Subsumption: Workshop I*, London, Birbeck, University of London, 2013.

It is important to clarify perhaps that even though Marx clearly presents us with a transitional development of this process within the historical development of capital in general, this does not necessarily mean that this process has been historically completed in all different sectors of the labour process. Taking into account how the 'art world' is not one single unified market but one of many distinct and greatly differentiated sectors, how different artistic production processes occupy different stages of development at the same time (as painting, design, fashion for instance) or last but not least, how subsumption in art is always mediated by the production process (its relational-social form never really getting directly –immediately– determined by capital, through wage relations and social command), then perhaps one needs to consider this particular mode of production in its own terms; outside the globalised perception of capital's development as a whole. This moves towards a dispersed non-synchronised temporality, i.e. a temporality of the present, where relative autonomies function at the level of individual works. [136]

Frederic Jameson and his pessimistic view on total subsumption comes to mind here; where nothing escapes capital, everything has been subsumed, subsumption of the social per se, and there is no longer any outside.[137] This approach exemplifies the problems arising from a conception of the completion of real subsumption in an evolutionary stage by stage manner, as it is presented within a unified perception of a temporality of the present promoted by Bourriaud's conception of the 'lived time' for instance: as 'new artistic content' concerned with the immediacy and proximity of the unified present. The art world is therefore falsely perceived as a unified singularity, both in geographical and temporal terms whose expression is nothing but the 'contemporary' itself.[138]

See also:

A. Negri, 'The Constitutions of Time', *Time for Revolution*, London, Continuum, 2013.

Endnotes, 'The History of Subsumption', *Endnotes: Misery and the Value Form*, no. 2, 2010, https://endnotes.org.uk/issues/2/en/endnotes-the-history-of-subsumption, (accessed 17 March 2016).

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

A. Sáenz de Sicilia, 'Time and Subsumption', *Society for European Philosophy / Forum for European Philosophy Annual Conference*, Surrey, United Kingdom, Kingston University, September 2013.

137 ——— Fredrik Jameson, *Representing Capital: A Reading of Volume 1,* London, Verso, 2014, p. 71.

138 ——— Andrés Sáenz de Sicilia argues against this and proposes instead that 'the global unity of social relations and practices be thought as a dis-

My contention here is that any insistence on a strict stage by stage transitional understanding of the process of subsumption does not necessarily apply for those non-immediate ways of domination and subordination; as on the one hand they do *not* comply strictly to the capitalist command, but on the other, they still contribute to the augmentation of surplus value. Their production process remains *relatively autonomous* and independent of the capitalist command (no wage labour), but their use value inevitably goes back to capital as the market is still regulating the intensity and productivity of this expanded and formally subsumed labour, namely via the form of *hybrid* subsumption.[139]As Marx himself explains:

> "...it will be sufficient if we merely refer to certain hybrid forms, in which although surplus labour is not extorted by direct compulsion from the producer, the producer has not yet become formally subordinate to capital." [140]

After all, relational art can never complete its commodity character in full, given its 'petty commodity' character and the individuality of artistic production, where division of labour and machinery play an insignificant part in the artistic production process per se. It is perhaps more plausible henceforth, and for the purposes of this publication, to think of art's integration into the culture industry in terms of a change in the character of *formal* subsumption, rather than as a transition from *formal* to *real*. Art's relation to the struggle of subjection to commodification has historically

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junctive synthesis of conflicting and contradictory temporalities, which are distributed unevenly, develop asynchronously and reciprocally affect one another'.

A. Sáenz de Sicilia, 'Time and Subsumption', *Society for European Philosophy / Forum for European Philosophy Annual Conference*, Surrey, United Kingdom, Kingston University, September 2013.

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

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

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

139 ——— M. Tomba, 'Hybrid Subsumption and Modern Forms of Slavery', *The Theory and Politics of Subsumption: Workshop I*, London, Birbeck, London University Press, 2013.

140 ——— K. Marx*, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy,* Vol.1, London, Penguin, 1867/1990, p.645.

revolved around the issue of whether or not art is a commodity, and as such either enables humanity's subjection to capital or whether art is not a commodity, and thereby or alternatively, resists this subjection.[141] But this debate between art and anti-art, as Adorno has shown us, involves the two faces of the same coin, as it is based on the internal contradiction of commodity form itself. My suggestion here is that we should also aim to interpret relational art's paradoxes through the dialectic of commodification if we are to reveal its radical dimensions.

Interlude: Public Space is the Place

Oda Projesi, in Turkish meaning 'Room Project', was an artist collective based in Istanbul between 1977 and 2005. The three women artists rented a flat in not-yet-gentrified Galata to function as a meeting place for their neighbours –mostly children and teenagers– while simultaneously providing a platform for their artistic projects, 'inside and outside its walls'.[142] They built up strong relationships with their local environment over the years and organised a series of activities whose common denominator, as Maria Lind, a Swedish curator who visited them at the time, puts it:

> "…[is that] they are not about showing or exhibiting a work but about using art as a means of creating and recreating new relations between people through diverse investigation and shaping of both private and public space." [143]

The social form of engagement they proposed was localised outside the institution, in the streets and with their neighbours. The collaborations they produced thus managed to remain within the co-ordinates of local geopolitical struggles. Their work contributes its use value to the universal 'contemporary' time of capital, whilst still retaining its particularities as a *relative* kind of *autonomous* organisation, outside immediate determination by capitalist means. Nevertheless, a few years later, the same curator that had previously praised the value of such forms of co-operation, re-contextualised the group's 'self-organised' *formal* terms by inviting the

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141 ———— S. Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', *Third Text*, Routledge, New York, London, vol. 21, issue 4, 2007, p. 373.

142 ———— M. Lind, 'Actualisation of Space: The Case of Oda Projesi, 2004', *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Politics*, 2004, http://eipcp.net/transversal/1204/lind/en, (accessed 21 January 2013).

143 ———— Ibid.

group to exhibit their neighbourhood-specific project in Tensta Konsthall, Sweden (2004). Tensta is one of Stockholm's more 'diverse' public spaces devoted to art; 'an institution with a given place in the local community' which at the same time aims to offer 'a program of the highest international quality, [and] to be an ongoing and self-evident destination for people interested in art' – where Lind is the director.[144]

The suburb of Tensta more generally – where Tensta Konsthall is located – has a large concentration of immigrants, high rates of unemployed and people on social welfare. The unemployment rate is 43.5% (2009) and immigrants make up 66% of the population, while 95-100% of the children in local schools are of foreign origin.[145] The Swedish government has decided to boost Sweden's suburbs grappling with social exclusion with a cash injection, one of them being Tensta's art gallery. This subsidy – which is performance based – is awarded according to three criteria; how the areas deal with education, employment and social benefits.[146] Lind's role becomes even more important here as a curator of culture and an interlocutor of this transition from an art collective that appears to own its terms and conditions of coming together, to a collective whose co-operation is now required to perform a particular role in the general socio-economic process, as this is determined by the state's capitalist mode of validation. The curator then administers a shift in the relational equation, where the 'relational' value performatively reveals the construction of the discourse that regulates public space and who has access to speak therein, from local to national context. The critical issue raised here, being less the one flagged by the social relations themselves, like the class interests of museums for example, than how it is possible for projects like Oda Projesi to be realised without consensual management by way of curatorial and cultural 'order', while still occupying the structures inherited within an institution like Tensta. This belies the classic opposition between autonomous art and culture industry, as well as an analysis of the current state of institutional critique.

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144 ——— From Tensta Konsthall's official website, http://www.tenstakonsthall.se/english/#about, (accessed 21 January 2013).

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

146 ——— For more information on this see: http://www.thelocal.se/42976/20120903/#.UQe-6qVhpR4, (accessed 28 January 2013).

CHAPTER 3:
CURATION OF AUTONOMY

The Dialectic of Commodification: Autonomous Art and Culture Industry

Theodor Adorno, in one of his letters to Walter Benjamin in 'The Complete Correspondence 1928-1940' (1936), and in relation to the highest and lowest art forms namely autonomous art and culture industry and the dialectical relationship between them, argued that both are 'torn halves of an internal freedom, to which, however, they do not add up'.[147] The dialectic of the lowest and the dialectic of the highest art forms are no longer in opposition with each other, but instead feed into each other to such an extent, that autonomy and commodity are no longer in an external relationship. Commodification, according to Adorno, is in fact the condition of autonomy.[148] Art acquires its specificity by separating itself from its origins (what it developed from).[149] In *Aesthetic Theory* (1970), Adorno writes:

> "In the face of the abnormality into which reality is developing, art's inescapable affirmative essence has become insufferable.

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[147] ——— T. Adorno, *Letter to Benjamin, 18 March 1936*, in T. Adorno & W. Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1999, p. 130.

[148] ——— Hence, whereas for Adorno it is the non-communicativeness and enigmatic character of art that makes it critical, for Bourriaud it is precisely its communicativeness and transparency that allows art to achieve an 'anti-commodity' autonomous status. Stewart Martin elaborates on this:
'Adorno's point is not that art is actually autonomous from its social constitution. Following Marx, he thinks this would be a fetishisation or illusion. But in generating the illusion of autonomy Adorno claims that art criticises the illusion – intensified within a universally commodified culture – that nothing is valuable independently of its exchange value […] If art's claim to autonomy is to be self-critical it must be achieved through mediation with an anti-artistic or heteronomous dimension'.
Martin then concludes:
'Whereas Adorno discerns an ironic recuperation of the affinity of art to commodity fetishism, as an immanent critique of the commodity form, Bourriaud interprets the social or non-object- oriented character of relational artworks as the simple negation of social relations between things, and the affirmation of social relations between persons, thereby rejecting Adorno's whole strategy. (Bourriaud pointedly opposes Adorno's aesthetics at several points).
S. Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', *Third Text*, Routledge, New York, London, vol. 21, issue 4, 2007, pp. 375-6.

[149] ——— T. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, London, Continuum, 1970/ 1997, p. 21.

> Art must turn against itself, in opposition to its own concept, and thus become uncertain of itself right into its innermost fibre. Yet art is not to be dismissed simply by its abstract negation. By attacking what seemed to be its foundation throughout the whole of its tradition, art had been qualitatively transformed; it itself becomes qualitatively other. It can do this because through the ages by means of its form, art has turned against the status quo and what merely exists just as much as it has come to its aid by giving form to its elements. Art can no more be reduced to the general formula of consolation than to its opposite." [150]

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

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

They write:

> "Only what has been industrialised, rigorously subsumed, is fully adequate to this concept of culture [as administration]. Only by subordinating all branches of intellectual production equally to the single purpose of imposing on the senses of the human beings, from the time they leave the factory in the evening to the time they clock on in the morning, the imprint of the work routine which they must

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[150] ———— T. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, London, Continuum, 1970/ 1997, p. 27.

sustain throughout the day, does this culture mockingly fulfil the notion of a unified culture which the philosophers of the individual personality held out against mass culture." [151]

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

> "[…] in the age of overproduction the commodity's use value has become questionable and yields to the secondary gratification of prestige, of being in step, and finally in the commodity character itself: a parody of aesthetic semblance. Nothing remains of the autonomy of art […] other than the fetish character of the commodity, regression to the archaic fetishism in the origin of art […]." [152]

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

> "…to read Marx through Kant, thereby reducing subsumption to the value form to an instance of the general logic of equivalence of an instrumental rationality that also – indeed primarily – characterises administration. Hence the running together of economic and political forces that characterises their concept of the "culture industry"." [153]

The curator is thus called upon to manage the artwork so that it will retain its illusory fetish character and curate its illusory autonomy, so that it will be able to perform its distribution by way of exhibitions, reproduction and general circulation, and thus produce value for other parts of the culture industry. In this way, any artistic participatory model that attempts to provide models of resistance and bring the institution into crisis – and

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[151] M. Horkheimer & T. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1944/2002, p.104.
It is only when wage relations and efficient control of labour time is imposed on cultural process, that the capitalist control of the value producing labour of cultural workers can transition from formal to real subsumption.

[152] T. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, London, Continuum, 1970/ 1997, p. 22.

[153] P. Osborne, 'Living with Contradictions: The Resignation of Chris Gilbert', *Afterall*, vol. 10, Autumn/Winter 2007, http://www.afterall. org/journal/issue.16/living.contradictions.resignation.chris.gilbert.an, (accessed 13 September 2012).

in fact the very value of its free, open, inclusive, and 'democratic' participation – risks the danger of 'superintendence' by the curator's command. Adorno writes for instance:

> "The general designation "culture" already contains, virtually, the process of identifying, cataloging, and classifying which imports culture into the realm of administration." [154]

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

> "numerous terrains and practices (gigantic museums that operate as entertainment machines, international conglomerates of art galleries, small cornerstones that are trying to show new work or unrecognised artists, self-organised groups that see their practice as intervention, mimicking of institutional structures by ad-hoc gatherings dedicated to education or communal organisation or political intervention, from reading groups in basements to endless study days and think tanks devoted to the state of the arts in... or to the role of the museum in...)." [155]

This division of artistic labour is also before we have taken into account the openings, fundraisers, private events, corporate parties, and auctions as well as educational events, workshops, reading groups and self-organised collectives.[156] Peter Osborne sums it up in the following:

> "What was previously largely an external relation of appropriation between distinct cultural spheres (art and culture industry) has increasingly become internalised to a more integrated cultural-economic system. The dominant not only appropriates the emergent, it facilitates its production as emergent, as the condition of its appropriation." [157]

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154 ——— M. Horkheimer & T. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1944/2002, p.104

155 ——— *On Being Serious in The Art World* [online video], Presenter I. Rogoff, Institutional Attitudes, Chapter 2, Beyond Criticality, Sunday April 25th 2010, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_F2KNmV4QsE, (accessed 16 November 2012).

156 ——— Ibid.

157 ——— P. Osborne, 'Living with Contradictions: The Resignation of Chris

If we think of current fashionable theories that conceive of the integration of art institutions into the culture industry in terms of a historical transition from formal to real subsumption as explained previously, it is perhaps logical to proclaim the end of autonomous art altogether hence the term 'post-autonomous art'.[158] However, given the enduring singularity of artistic production and in view of Adorno's contention that autonomous art involved only its formal subsumption by capital - that is at the level of exchange and absolute surplus value - let us assume for the purposes of this publication that the work of art holds the promise of resisting its commodity status via absolutising its character as fetish. In other words, that there is still a form of *impossible* participation in social practice whose value, in its formal shape, continues to appear as one particular form alongside the more developed (really commodified) ones. What would the use-value of such an impossible discourse be and how then does the institution manage to transform this into a fundamental form of the capitalist mode of production where the institution tends to turn this participatory model on its head and organises the social form of production under its own command? [159]

Gilbert', *Afterall*, vol. 10, Autumn/Winter 2007, http://www.afterall. org/journal/issue.16/living.contradictions.resignation.chris.gilbert.an, (accessed 13 September 2012).

158 ——— Hence Michael Lingner's useful term 'post-autonomous' art.
M. Lingner, 'Art as a System within Society', *Place- Position- Public,* Maastricht, Jan van Eyck Akademie, 1993.
For more on current theories on subsumption of the social, see for example Italian autonomist-Marxists like: M. Hardt & A. Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge and London, Harvard University Press, 2000, pp. 254-59.

159 ——— The 'use value of the impossible', is the title of an article by Dennis Hollier, on the history of *Documents*, one of the first ever publications to go beyond anthropology's and nomismatics' disciplines characteristic objects of study and allow itself to be contaminated by 'the irritating and the heteroclite, if not the disturbing'. Describing 'Metaphor' an article by Leiris, Hollier writes: 'it is not yet the shadow of the bull's horn, but something bites into the very page that wanted to appropriate it, something that is not in its place, something heterogeneous. Like the fly on the lecturer's nose. Or like the ego in the metaphysical whole. The appearance of the ego, Bataille says, is utterly shocking' D. Hollier, 'The Use Value of the Impossible', *October*, Vol. 60, Spring 2012, MIT Press, p. 16.

The Curator's Role

In a recent article published in *Red Hook Journal*, artist Natascha Sahr Haghighian writes:

'Dear Curator,

I've been meaning to write to you, but it's only now, since your invitation, that I've made the time to respond. That's actually funny, since I've long been trying to somehow break this pattern in our relationship'. [...] It's been a little confusing for me since we became friends. I started seeing you as a person. Well, that sounds silly, of course I knew you were a person, from the start— but I didn't allow that to enter into our relationship. When I found myself meeting you in my favourite neighbourhood cafes, or even inviting you for dinner, I noticed something was different. I actually started seeing you, even liking you. Not for your job, no, but as a person. [...] Why had I tried to avoid that before? Well, because I did not want to mingle in that way, and randomly expose things that I like, or that matter to me, to the gaze of someone whose job it is to constantly rate, pick, choose, make lists and redistribute. I still won't make those lists you asked for—lists of people I think you should meet —but honestly, I don't know what to protect from your gaze any longer'.[160]

I found this letter very revealing with regards to the level of integration of autonomous art into the culture industry today, due to its anecdotal take on the suggested dialectic between the artist and the curator. This involves a kind of resistance from the artist to her commodified form, to the extent to which she has persistently tried to absolutise the most mystical aspect of it, her character as the curator's fetish. This exchange is consistent with the current indeterminacy of art and non-art or life on the one hand and on the other, the extension of subsumption of artistic labour by cultural capital seemingly running the danger of subsuming the artist's life itself. A 'one-to-one' encounter between the two however, as the artist seems to suggest here, holds the potential of exposing the inherent contradictions between this paradoxical relationship, perhaps even hinting towards a gap between 'the curator's gaze' and the artist's supposed knowledge, where impossible desire (as agency) resides.

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[160] ———— Natscha Sadr Haghighian, 'Dear Curator', *Red Hook Journal*, 2013, http://www.bard.edu/ccs/redhook/dear-curator/, (accessed 21 January 2013).

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

In this seemingly post-autonomous era of relational models of inter-subjectivity, by implication, arises a new set of obligations and duties for the curator too, who is now called upon to manage the social and economic conditions that shape art's new ethical and social premise. The curator's role is no longer limited to designing the arrangement of the artist's work in space, but also orchestrating the particular kind of rhythm needed for the beholder to experience and perform its 'relational' meaning. The curator needs to assume some kind of control over the network of intersubjective relationships of the relational form itself, in order to set-up a legible map of lurking signifiers for our working memory to navigate and identify with. Like a traffic policeman, the curator now needs to organise a composition of people in his/her 'value' manual, seeking new ways of communicating, interpreting and allowing access to information - as knowledge and by extension value - hidden behind the work.[161] The curator eventually completes the cycle of exchange by translating the artwork or the participatory experience into a meaning-making assemblage, by presenting its 'presentedness' to the beholder, so that she can experience its 'relationality' according to the curatorial/relational/dialogical/educational and ethical symbolic orders.

The truth of the matter is that the booming art market - exploding post-1989 as a haven for newly accumulated capital across the world - has inscribed art institutions more deeply into the transnational circuits of capital. The curator's role nowadays includes not only to command the capitalist processes of augmentation of value, but also to secure the har-

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[161] In his seminal book *Inside the White Cube* (1976), Brian O'Doherty prophetically writes:
'It is inescapably modern that alienation may now be a necessary preface to experience...much of our experience can only be brought home through mediation...In most areas of exchange there is a busy traffic in proxies and surrogates...as with other mediated experience, 'feeling' is turned into a customer product'.
B. O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 1986, pp. 52-3.

monious co-operation of the activities of individuals, in the name of the global unified 'art world'. The curator then becomes a kind of independent producer, that takes care that the art work adheres to the normal standards of this seemingly unified 'contemporaneity', hopefully succeeding in extending the work's surplus life-time within the history of art.[162] The curator ensures that the continuity of labour increases so far as there is a constant paymaster. The dealer of the contract where C-M-C haunts M-C-M, ensures that the production process is not only transformed along the way, but in fact ensures that the actual mode of his own labour appears to be revolutionised too. If seen like this, curating thus becomes a way of creative management of capitalism's own process. And the curation of meaning, no matter how 'relational' it is, still involves a production of a relative surplus value for an appeal to a market niche. The curator upgrades the work in terms of societal relevance, charting a linear history for the institution to create the conditions for art to become transformed into a communicative tool, moving from the architecture of the exhibition space and the display mode of experiential formats to a raised status of organiser for democratic 'relational' offerings. Here, the qualitative understandings of artistic value are now equated with demand, through the *manager of relationality*, via the 'curator'.[163]

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162 ——————— Barbara and John Ehrenreich's definition of a 'professional managerial class' comes to mind here, as those salaried 'intellectual' labourers (immaterial labourers) who do not own the means of production and whose major role is the social division of labour, through a management of the reproduction of capitalist class relations, as this in turn hides behind the process of production itself. Ehrereichs refer here to a 'professional managerial class' of administrators, managers and technical workers whose functions are determined by the need to preserve social exchanges in capitalist relations terms, while 'persisting on reassuring [...] that its class interests are identical to the interests of society at large'.
B. & J. Ehrenreich, 'The Professional Managerial Class' in P. Walker (ed.) *In Between Labour and Capital*, Boston, South End Press Political Controversies Series, no1, 1979, p. 21.

163 ——————— In their account of the ontology of the middleman as a performative agent within the transformation of use value to exchange value, Soren Andreasen & Lars Bang Larsen argue that even though this 'third man, intermediary, agent or dealer' has:
'literally established a 'super-market' transforming both use value and exchange value into capital value [..] [this intermediary] is not always a capitalist agent. The traditional revolutionary subject becomes a middle-man in spite of herself by being an intermediary identified with a utopian view or a desire for a different socio-political order: not because of the real political hustle it takes to usher in utopia or social change, but simply because the intention of taking over the means of

Some argue, in fact, that traditional interpretive tools no longer make sense in today's art world as not only content but form itself is determined by the market.[164] Context, no matter how performative its 'here and nowness' is, is still subsumed by the anonymous flow of capital. Either formally, at the level of exchange and by way of curating its illusion of autonomous meaning production, or as its subsumption moves on from *formal* to the *real*, by way of informational/communicative capitalism. The distinction between an intention to curate an active arena of exchange linking the work of art or the artist and the spectator on the one hand, and a programmatic strategy of transforming the production and flow of control through art's relational value within a 'target group' or 'general public' on the other, now feeds into each other in an inter-dependent metabolic process. Eric Alliez has put it very well as follows:

> "The art administrators are overjoyed because they gain at the best possible price the social function of "proximity" indicative of the postmodern democratisation of art breaking away from avant-gardism and "revolutionary" dangerousness in the transformation of forms into forces [...]. The critics (who are here the same) are overjoyed because they recover within intersubjectivity "a theory of form" for which "form is the representative of desire in the image" [...] projected quite consensually by these brokers of desire onto the performative origin of the processes of artistic constitution for which the ready-made would then be the post-historic truth. The biggest hurdle: Judgement then becomes the glossary of a practice that can no longer distinguish between the use value of art and a personalised tourist circuit for the use of the tenants of culture."[165]

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production in order to build a better future for the people in itself is an act of representation.'

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

S. Andreasen & L. B. Larsen, 'The Middleman: Beginning to Talk about Mediation' in P. O'Neill (ed.), *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture*, Cambridge, London, MIT Press, 2012, p. 26.

164 ——— N. Brown, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Real Subsumption*, http://nonsite.org/editorial/the-work-of-art-in-the-age-of-its-real-subsumption-under-capital
(accessed 17 November 2012).

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

Within this terrain of integration of formally autonomous processes of creative production into the culture industry's circulation, many entrepreneurial types will find their way into new categories of economic areas where 'anyone who resists can find their way only by being incorporated'.[166] Adorno and Horkheimer warn us: 'Once registered as diverging from the culture industry, they [entrepreneurs-curators-artists] belong to it as the land reformer does to capitalism'.[167]

One crucial role the curator plays here of course is legitimation. Legitimation is a systemic function of the institution most directly relevant to the curatorial presentations of politics and the curator is the one that affirms both the fetish as well as the socially relevant character of the work. This is where institutional critique becomes relevant.[168] As the work loses its autonomy and as the integration becomes more sophisticated, so does the museum's need to *curate* the work's *autonomy* in order to validate its social status -despite the fact that this validation serves only an illusion.[169] In turn, the art industry incorporates the affirmation of autonomy via the curator's sophisticated ways of producing compatibility - most often via reflexivity - which in turn defers the achievement of any radical autonomy indefinitely. In fact, one could argue that the commodification of art today in the absence of any concrete effective politics serves as the condition for its institutional representation.[170]

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166 ——————— M. Horkheimer & T. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1944/2002, p.104.

167 ——————— Ibid.

168 ——————— A more explicit description of this feedback loop of legitimation is provided by Lisa Tickner's historical account of British Pop Art's contribution to mass culture and the 'export drive', where indicatively she quotes a board of trade officials and their evaluation of British trade-supported-cultural events at the time, as part of the British Council's diplomacy strategies in order to promote exports: 'generally speaking, the local authorities and leaders of opinion will not allow us to 'take over' their city for sordid commercial purposes unless we provide such a [cultural] quid pro quo'. A B Savage to W Pearce, Overseas Trade Fairs Directorate of the Board of Trade, 22 April 1968, as quotedin: L. Tickner, *British Art in the Cultural Field: 1939-69,* London, Wiley-Blackwell, Association of Art Historians, 2012, p. 204.

169 ——————— P. Osborne, 'Living with Contradictions: The Resignation of Chris Gilbert', *Afterall*, vol. 10, Autumn/Winter 2007, http://www.afterall. org/journal/issue.16/living.contradictions.resignation.chris.gilbert.an, (accessed 13 October 2012).

170 ——————— It is important to point out here that the way curatorial presentations of social-political practices fit in this picture largely depends on the relationship of such practices to proper political projects outside the art world, i.e. the work of artists as activists outside the institution and

The curator now becomes the protagonist in this network of co-operations between interrelated affirmative master signifiers of the institution as the penultimate inter-disciplinary profession, that emerged as a result of the more general phenomenon of art's professionalisation within the industry from late 1980s onwards. The escalation of contemporary art exhibitions on a global scale, alongside the emergence of biennales and large-scale group exhibitions, opened up a new market for curators. This was accompanied by the emergence of the 'curatorial' as a new academic discipline that systemically observes the present state of art's autonomy, in order to make connections with the past and thus present the work's historical 'presentness'.[171] The institution maps the integration of new signifying elements into the artistic process and 'reads' the conditions that these need to fulfil in order to affirm it as an altogether new and more complex 'present' state.[172]

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their political functions per se. My contention being here that all this is predicated on the absence of an extra-artistic political force. True radicals of today do not situate themselves within the imaginary, but instead risk occupying the impossible co-ordinates of the Real itself. For more on this see chapter six.

171 ——— 1987 is the year that the arts centre *Le Magasin* in Grenoble France launched the first postgraduate curatorial training program, which is the same year the Art History/Museum Studies element of the Whitney Independent Study Program (ISP) was renamed *Curatorial and Critical Studies*. It is during this period, according to Paul O'Neill, when the figure of the curator moved from a behind the scenes caretaker and organiser of collections to an independent practitioner more centralised within the contemporary art world. O'Neill in fact connects the curator's new authorial status with his/her ability to 'enunciate discourse' *as* part of the curatorial practice, which in turn, according to O'Neill, has fostered frameworks for interactions with other disciplines. P. O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture*, Cambridge, London, MIT Press, 2012, p. 2.

172 ——— Carlos Besualdo referring to contemporary international art fairs like *Documenta* and the *Venice Biennale*, as the 'epiphenomena' of the avant-garde's subsumption by the culture industry writes:
'Pure and simple spectacles whose logic is nothing more than that of capitalism in its late stage, that is the progressive suppression of the multiple system of values and its translation into a universal equivalent, namely exchange value' [...] The duty of criticism had been that of inscribing production into a symbolic field in a way that simultaneously made it accessible to the effects of the mechanisms of production of exchange value; and the duty of art history was that of recovering the specific differential in the work that hinders its complete subordination to exchange value [...] Diplomacy, politics and commerce converge in a powerful movement whose purpose seems to be the appropriation and instrumentalisation of the symbolic value of art'. C. Besualdo, 'The Unstable Institution' in P. O'Neill (ed.), *Curating Subjects,* Amsterdam, Open Editions/ de Appel, 2007, pp. 42, 45.

The function of 'legitimation' in fact, has always been a structural feature of art history, as well as its allied fields; art criticism, aesthetic philosophy, art practice, connoisseurship, the art market, museology, tourism, commodity fashion systems, and the heritage industry. Donald Preziosi, in 'Art History: Making the Visible Legible' (1998), explains how even in the very beginnings of the 'history of art history', where artists and their patrons had a much more separated relationship, art history's role was to interpret its objects of study, as 'evidential in nature'.[173] Preziosi writes:

> "Art objects of all kinds came to have the status of historical documents in the dual sense that (I) each was presumed to provide significant, often unique and, on occasion, profoundly revealing evidence for the character of an age, nation, person or people; and that (II) their appearance was the resultant product of a historical milieu, however narrowly or broadly framed."[174]

In short, the principal aim of all historical study throughout its history has been to make artworks more fully legible in and to the present. Nowadays, taking that to a further degree of legibility of the very 'presentedness' of their presentation via the curatorial – or the display of the display - where the artist's skills and the curators abilities to make connections feed into each other, all part of the same signifying machinery that appears to be historically driven by the dominant systems. At the same time, it is also informed by a series of antagonistic economies that do not necessarily find their way into that history altogether.[175]

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

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

175 ——— Already in 1989, Benjamin Buchloh had argued that there is an urgent need for the curator's function to be acknowledged as part of the institutional superstructure:
'The curator observes his or her operation within the institutional apparatus of art: most prominently the procedure of abstraction and centralisation that seems to be an inescapable consequence of the work's entry into the superstructure apparatus, its transformation from practice to discourse. That almost seems to have been the curator's primary role: to function as an agent who offers exposure and potential prominence in exchange for obtaining a moment of actual practice that is about to be transformed into myth/superstructure'.
B. Buchloh, 'Since Realism There Was…', *L'Exposition Imaginaire: The Art of Exhibiting in the Eighties,* The Hague, Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst, 1989, pp. 96-121.

The criteria for explanatory adequacy, and the purposes to which any such understandings might be put in the present have varied over time. Furthermore, in view of the more integrated state of commodification of the art object and the ways in which its interpretation is mediated - via its subsumption that is always already structurally performed via the curatorial 'language' - runs parallel to the current disagreement regarding the extent to which an art object can be taken, legitimately, as indicative or symptomatic of its historical milieu. Art historical interpretation of form, style, and aesthetic school are no longer relevant, and all explications approach adequacy only with the articulation of the work's 'objecthood'. Validating a work's relational value in the contemporary context, and making legible its connection to the larger historical interdisciplinary 'context', is therefore the means of foregrounding the work's documentary or representational status and thus re-producing the very circumstances of its production and reception.[176]

The regulatory standards for making legible, historicising, curating and contextualising this 'autonomy', have become even more complicated after the failure of institutional critique movements like 'art for art's sake', followed by Duchamp's ready-mades and the historical models of collage and pastiche. Twentieth century avant-gardes, particularly those of the 1960s and 1970s sought to escape such judgements of representational status and the problem of mediation between artist and museum/institution altogether, by aiming for direct contact with the spectator. The Situationists, for example, completely dismissed the institution and took to the streets. Even though some would argue that due to their dogmatic approach against even their fellow Situationists – where at times their events lost their democratic basis by becoming too 'exclusive' –the initial authenticity of their intention to overcome the existing boundaries of art and escape the curatorial 'scanning of the wavelength' of the audience's responses cannot be disputed.[177] They did not expect of the viewer to fulfil a pre-existing set of 'interactivity' options and did not leverage their social

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176 ———— In his critique of Minimalism, or 'Literalism' as he calls it, Michael Fried, in his seminal essay 'Art and Objecthood' claims that 'the experience of literalist art is of an object in a situation – one that, virtually by definition, includes the beholder…'. For Fried it is a symptom of decadence that literal art theatricalises the relation between the object and the beholder, whereas the experience of authentic Modernist art should involve the suspension of both 'objecthood' and of the sense of duration.
          M. Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1967.

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

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

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

> "For the final sense of the integrated spectacle is this – that it has integrated itself into reality to the same extent as it was describing it, and that it was reconstructing it as it was describing it. As a result, this reality no longer confronts the integrated spectacle as something alien."[178]

Adorno, in turn, warns us:

> "Only by immersing its autonomy in society's imagerie can art surmount the heteronomous market. Art is modern art through mimesis of the hardened and alienated; only thereby, and not by the refusal of a mute reality, does art become eloquent; this is why art no longer tolerates the innocuous."[179]

Contemporary art is no longer a separate domain, strategically distancing itself or purposefully connecting to this 'alienated and hardened reality', but instead plays naive to its own integration into international circuits of cultural capital, where art's formal imperatives are gradually taken over by mimesis.[180] High Art or Master Art, after Adorno's argument above,

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178 ———— G. Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, London, Verso, 1998, p. 9.

179 ———— T. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, London, Continuum, 1970/ 1997, p. 21

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

expands its reach and its relevance by absorbing and re-presenting in its own domain that which was not previously deemed an instance of art.[181]

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

> "Art today is subsumed under general social technique as a condition of art's increasing absorption into these new cognitive relations of production. The result is that the inexorable conceptualisation of art since the 1960s has found a ready home within the new relations of production."[182]

Finally, this reaches our current moment, where the non-art elements of relational values and participatory politics have become a register of symbolic autonomy themselves. Within this new complex state of institutional critique, and even if art aims to retain its autonomy from the economic regulation of its means of production, it still needs to somehow retain an external relationship to the institutionalised concept of art as a whole, including form and content.[183] Otherwise, relational art and social

M. Vischmidt, 'Mimesis of the Hardened and Alienated: Social Practice as Business Model', *e-flux journal,* no. 43, 2013, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/"mimesis-of-the-hardened-and-alienated"-social-practice-as-business-model/#_ftn1, (accessed 06 June 2016).

181 ——— The art critic Ben Davis has asserted as much when he insists that: 'What appears at one juncture to be radically opposed to the values of art under capitalism often later appears to have represented a development intrinsic to its future development, for the simple reason that without changing the underlying fact of capitalism, you cannot prevent innovations in art from eventually being given a capitalist articulation'. B. Davis, 'A critique of social practice art: What does it mean to be a political artist?', *International Socialist Review,* no. 90, 2015, http://isreview.org/issue/90/critique-social-practice-art, (accessed 04 January 2016).

182 ——— J. Roberts, *The Political Economisation of Art* cited in G. Sholette and O. Ressler, *It's The Political Economy, Stupid: The Global Financial Crisis in Art and Theory*, London, Pluto Press, 2013, pp. 66-7.

183 ——— Despite an instinctive mistrust towards the middleman curator, and a historical tendency to get rid of the middle man (see for example Joseph Kosuth's insistence on eliminating the role of art critics), Gilles Deleuze on the contrary maintains that mediators are essential if we are to maintain the flow mobile, open and alive. He writes: 'Mediators are fundamental. Creation's all about mediators. Without them nothing happens. They can be people –for a philosopher artists or scientists, for a scientist philosophers or artists, but things too even

practice may have the same predictable destiny as that of its previous attempts of institutional critique, re-legitimising the institutions they aim to criticise. This is a step that most artists and curators are not always willing to take however, since such an attempt most often translates into an exclusion from the art world altogether as the art world owns the means of subsistence of the cultural worker.[184]

plants or animals (...). Whether they are real or imaginary, animate or inanimate, you have to form your mediators. Its a series, If you're not in some series, even a completely imaginary one, you're lost. I need my mediators to express myself and they'd never express themselves without me: you're always working in a group, even when you seem to be on your own'.
G. Deleuze, 'Mediators', *Negotiations 1972-1990*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1990, p. 125.

[184] This also begs the question that Dave Beech and Mark Hutchinson raise in their text 'Inconsequential Bayonets' in their attempt to translate Zizek's notion of 'interpassivity', i.e. as a way to change things that stops them really from changing, within the curatorial realm, where they ask:
'Is it possible to have philistine curators? Or, perhaps for the philistine within each curator to have expression in what the curator does, qua curator?'. They go on to argue that any curation that claims its independence must do so from a position which acknowledges its dependance: that it does not operate under condition of its own choosing'.
[...] The curator of a diverse, troublesome and changing art, surely needs to begin from a position of doubt and uncertainty, or, indeed, from a position of listening'.
They hint here towards the role of the curator as psychoanalyst, that follows in my Lacanian analysis of curatorial discourse.
D. Beech, and M. Hutchinson, 'Inconsequential Bayonets' in P. O'Neill (ed.), *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture*, Cambridge, London, MIT Press, 2012, p. 56.

How Art Plays Along
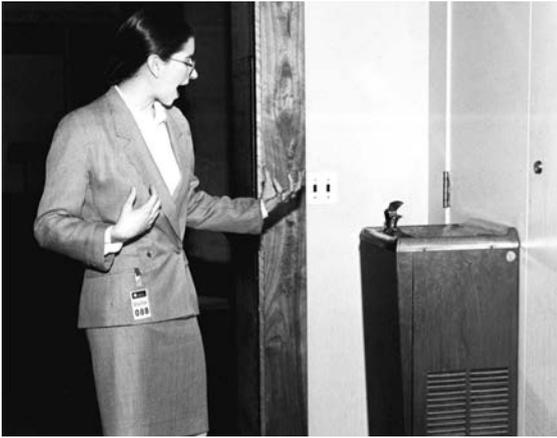
Museum Highlights (1989) (Andrea Fraser, Furtherfield Visitors Studios)

Cultural Regeneration

With our current obsession with interactivity and participation, art in turn is called upon to fulfil its promise immediately and to cease hiding behind its autonomy, as if artists' insistence on the latter somehow involves an incomprehensibility, egocentricity, and irrelevance. Art is now called upon to reveal its communicative pretensions, to be transparent and reveal the domain where it responds. Art must play along and at least appear to contribute to the emergence of a relational society as a whole; the production of 'good subjects'. This task becomes very difficult in today's constellation where there is a certain urge towards 'false freedom' as inherent to the very structures of the art system itself. The production and reception of the arts has nowadays been reshaped within a logic in which audience figures and marketing statistics become essential to secure public funding. The question of what art can do for society is one often used by cultural policy makers in order to justify public spending in and on the arts. This is seen to such an extent where creativity, research and the value of 'experimenting for experiment's sake' gain value only if they fulfil their role in the value-producing machinery of the system. It is important to point out here that the way curatorial presentations of social-political practices fit in this picture largely depends on the relationship of such practices to proper political projects outside the art world,[185] The truth of the matter is that the urge among institutions of art to rush the process of 'rate, pick, choose, make lists and redistribute', laying down,

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[185] for more on this see my analysis on 'transversality' and 'accountability' in the last chapter six, titled 'Towards a Radical Curatorial Practice'.

validating and legitimising criteria to purportedly render intelligible the quality of art's social value, results in sometimes bizarre and ahistorical variations on the semantics of knowledge production. Especially in the last twenty years, and as art became more and more 'participatory' and 'socially engaging', the number of publicly funded galleries and artists organisations interested in 'relational aesthetics' has proliferated too. This is true for the eventual number of 'independent' curators specialising in social practices too. Furthermore, this is followed by the production of a sophisticated discourse around 'relationality' and the development of niche areas of interests. Since the 1990s, critics, educators and curators alike have adapted to the new 'relational' trend of guiding the participation and encouraging 'taking part', that is bound to a will to propagate the artist's re-modelling of social exchange. This is akin to a kind of 'trafficking' of the public through the 'arenas of exchange', that sooner or later becomes a gentrification of the very subjects they aim to emancipate.

This paradoxical relationship between actual struggles and curatorial representations is epitomised by the way 'relational collaborations' are nowadays also used in the context of regeneration schemes. These are shaped by public art programmes focused on community development and consensus-building processes and critique within the context of large-scale urban regeneration initiatives. Artists are parachuted into sites in order to create works meant to engage with the surrounding landscape. In most instances, the booming art market has inscribed art institutions and its disembodied interlocutors to 'cure' art works so as to inevitably facilitate the utilisation of culture by the transnational circuits of capital. Strategies of regional developments and 'regeneration' via the curation of culture are used as a crucial global resource of international globalisation, fully integrated into global political strategies. One only needs to look at the 'Cultural Olympiad' of 2012 and that year's curatorial boom in socially-engaging – but at the same time gentrifying – exhibitions in the city of London. This once again demonstrated how most attempts from governments to 'free' the creative potential of individuals are not designed to foster social inclusion, alternative realities or authentic social relations, but instead to produce a future generation that will be 'good for business'.[186]

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[186] The extent of this transformation in artistic production can be seen if one looks at the recent *DCMS Creative Industries: Mapping Documents*: where investment in the 'creative industries' has almost replaced that of traditional manufacturing. The creative industries are those that 'have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property'; they include music, publishing, films, games, advertising, fashion, design, TV and radio, all of which are considered to have obvious commercial potential.
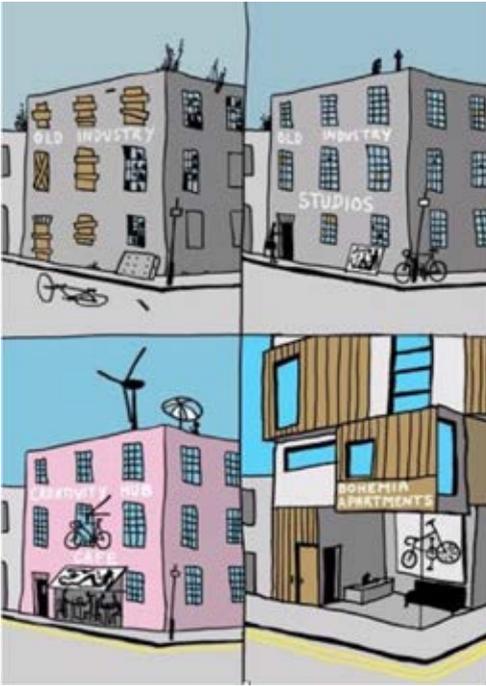
source unknown, courtesy of Dont-Rhine, *Ultra-red,* 2015.

Culture is nowadays utilised as a political resource and the politics of curating contemporary art has now become fully integrated into international political systems and strategies for regional development. 'Astroturfing' – a term that derives from *astroturf,* the synthetic grass carpet that looks like natural grass – is only one example of such regional tactics of the new upcoming 'public relations' techniques used in politics and advertising. Here, fake grass-roots activists appear as experts of 'social practice', and are thus invited to take part in public opinion debates, which feed into policy-making strategies. This inevitably manifests false representation and pseudo-participation at the roots, where altering public viewpoints can create enough doubt to inhibit grass roots actions altogether. Culture is transformed *as* a source of regeneration, and the curator acts no longer as the 'middleman' validator of 'relational' value, but also as a contributor to 'regenerational' capital. In this discourse, instead of turning to appropriate social practices, the tendency is to account instead for the degree to which an artist provides a good model of participation, however mediated that may end up being.

In a debate that recently took place at TATE Modern's online community spaces, curated by Susan Holtham, the discourse seemed to not only focus solely on the positive impact artists have on London city's regeneration,

but even more controversially as to whether cities can afford them. The understanding was that since artists are responsible for adding charm to forgotten neighbourhoods by attracting an 'influx of hipster tourists', they also help indirectly in the 'increase of other rents around them' [...]. Citing from the online conversation indicatively:

> Artists are considered triggers to many of these real estate valuations and people have to acknowledge this, so artists can still live in cities that they themselves help to create.[187]

Even though I understand and empathise with the struggle for affordable live-work spaces, I was admittedly also struck with the kind of naive and at times even arrogant take on regeneration these young artists seemed to imagine, neglecting systemic violence on public housing more widely.

Dont Rhine, one of the founders of artist-activist collective Ultra-red, has been working in solidarity with the residents of Pico Aloso and their ongoing fight for housing justice in Boyle Heights District, alongside the LA river, for the last twenty years. Rhine has recently publicly criticised the recuperation of cultural workers identities to 'wash over' the reality of economic violence happening on the LA River by CurrentLA, one of the newest art programmes funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies. Bloomberg, as we know, is a global Wall Street investment firm that is very clear about its goals: prepare the LA River basin for speculative development. As Rhine explains, the mayor, as well as the City's Council are also very clear about the goals of CurrentLA: prepare the LA River basin for speculative development. It seems thus, that only the artists are confused or deluded into thinking that this is about art or 'reflecting on water', etc. Meanwhile, what is 'washed away' are the working class communities of colour along the banks of the LA River who have the 'indecency' of occupying the land desired for speculative development.

Rhine explains:

> "Developers have learned that a key tool in the speculative real estate game is the use of arts initiatives to change the composition of historically working class and poor neighbourhoods. Art spaces move in, rents go up, tenants and local businesses are evicted, and capital washes away the barrio. This is what we are now seeing in

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187 ———— V. Jung, 'What part do artists play in urban regeneration?', *Tate Debate*, 2013, http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/blogs/tate-debate-what-part-do-artists-play-urban-regeneration, (accessed 14 July 2016).

Boyle Heights but can also identify in neighbourhoods across Los Angeles and beyond. Art-washing has become so prevalent that artists have to ask ourselves some extremely urgent questions: 1) What kind of art spaces are possible and what kind of art institutions do we need to not only refuse complicity but resist gentrification? 2) What kind of art practices can thrive and magically transform everyday life while refusing and resisting being a tool for growth by dispossession? And 3) what political movements can art contribute to that expose the lie of gentrification's inevitability? The fact that few existing arts organisations, art schools, publications, or funders give space for these questions already indicates their complicity in the neoliberal ravaging and class warfare that is speculative development. But I'm optimistic that the *Waters Are Rising*."[188]

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

One only needs to look at the exemplar of the United Nations Educational and Cultural Organisation's (Unesco) 'Road Map to Arts Education (2006)', a document that is used as a template and a set of overall guidelines for research on art education, set in place in order to meet the specific contexts of nations and societies around the world.[189] If we examine this policy's conflicted use of terms like 'cultural exchange' or 'creative economy' and 'creative workforce' as tokens for 'a good outcome', we begin to under-

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188 ——— Interview with the author July 2016.
189 ——— 'Road Map for Arts Education', *The World Conference on Arts Education: Building Creative Capacities for the 21st Century,* Lisbon, 6-9 March 2006, http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/CLT/pdf/Arts_Edu_RoadMap_en.pdf, (accessed 12 April 2015).
Also see enclosed documentation of 'The State of Education' conference where we examined these terms in action through a series of Augosto Boal's exercises, together with the Radical Education Forum (RadEd). For more on this see: http://radicaleducationforum.tumblr.com

stand the paradox of this mutually informing and reciprocally conditioning relationship between culture and production, as it is bound to the language of economic value terms. Market relations are not only brought into the sphere of artistic and cultural production as a general construct, but as established practices at the level of the subject as well. Here, ideas like free schools, self-organisation, 'radical' education and dialogical practices, traditionally belonging to the emancipatory pedagogy projects of the left, are nowadays instrumentalised and appropriated for the sake of a self-directed subsumption of social exchange into neoliberal discourse.

The 'democratisation of culture' agenda claims that it seeks to promote and realise the vaunted values of equality, access, participation, and human rights for all. The UN World Commission on Culture and Development clearly states: '[The] core cultural right is that of each person to participate fully in cultural life'.[190] As, Prelom Kolektiv [Break collective] members Dušan Grlja and Jelena Vesić, explain in an essay titled 'The Neoliberal Institution of Culture and the Critique of Culturalization' that accompanied the *Parallel Chronologies* (2013) exhibition at the New Museum however, it seems that the term 'democratisation of culture' has basically come to signify 'everyone's participation in activities previously reserved for the elites'.[191] Fluctuating according to the political preoccupation of their times, official approaches to the subsidised arts of the last ten to fifteen years, whether instrumental or egalitarian, have always remained pivotal to the formation of cultural policies.[192]

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

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190 ———— 'Our Creative Diversity', *World Commission on Culture and Development,* http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0010/001055/105586e.pdf (accessed 10 June 2016).
Also see: M. Gattinger, 'Democratization of Culture, Cultural Democracy and Governance', *Future Directions in Public Arts Funding: What Are The Shifts Required?,* Yokon, Canadian Public Arts Funders (CPAF), 2011.

191 ———— D. Grlja and J. Vesić, 'The Neoliberal Institution of Culture and the Critique of Culturalization', *New Museum*, 2007, http://www.newmuseum.org/blog/view/the-neoliberal-institution-of-culture-and-the-critique-of-culturalization, (accessed 12 April 2015).

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

turies, with a flourishing of community arts in particular during the 1970s and 1980s.[193] The difference being here perhaps, that museums and galleries now have to prove with *numerical* and *quantifiable data* the ways in which they diversify their audiences, as their 'outreach programmes' success are now measured according to the number of sheer 'new audiences' attending. Lets consider for example how most 'social inclusion' projects with the arts involve an arts organisation working in partnership with *care* (health, housing or education). Or how relative the idea of 'access' becomes in the first place, when one considers the intellectual, psychological and physical aspects of accessibility more generally. Taking all this into account, one can begin to understand the problematic basis of evaluating such projects solely on numbers.

In a conference titled 'Pieties or Policies?' organised by the *Institute of Ideas* at Tate Modern (2001), and with the aim of examining ideas and values of government thinking around cultural policies, the conference posed four pertinent questions; 'How valid is the government's claim that we are all creative? How acceptable is the government's recruitment of museums, galleries and other cultural organisations as part of its strategy to combat social exclusion? Can cultural organisations develop 'joined up' policies with other agencies in society on social exclusion issues? What principals should guide future cultural policy?'[194]

The majority of the speakers at the conference, including a panel from the world of culture, politics, academy and the Institute of Ideas, were very reluctant to defend access/education programmes in the name of spon-

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193 ——— A. Cox and J. Sillis, 'The Climate of Debate: A View from the Ground', *Engage*, issue 11, Winter 2001, http://engage.org/downloads/152E22D98_11.%20Climate%20of%20Debate.pdf, (accessed 20 April 2014).

194 ——— This debate has largely centred on two publications and related events. Art for All? Their Policies and Our Culture, Mark Wallinger and Mary Warnock (eds), was published by Peer and launched at a public debate at the RCA in London in November 2000. Museums for 'the People'? Conversations In Print was published by the Institute of Ideas in 2001, with a related conference 'Pieties or Policies? The language and assumptions of cultural policy' at Tate Modern, November 2001. These publications in turn are a response to government policy documents which place the arts, and particularly museums and galleries, at the centre of its policies to tackle social exclusion. Key documents include, 'Policy Action Team 10: A Report to the Social Exclusion Unit,' Arts and Sports, DCMS, (May 1999) and 'Centres for Social Change: Museums, Galleries and Archives for All,' DCMS (May 2000).
Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS), *Count Me In: The Dimensions of Social Exclusion through Culture*, Media & Sport, Leeds, Leeds Metropolitan University, 2002.

sorship, arguing instead for the museum's value as a place for 'under-
standing and enjoying collections and displays'.[195] Claire Fox, from the
'Institute of Ideas' for example, explained how government policy advoc-
ating 'access to participation' had resulted in a gratuitous programme of
practical arts projects where 'doing' literally means, 'applying paint or
performing, whilst the art works themselves are largely ignored'.[196] One
could go on and argue how Fox reflects perhaps the ignorance of many
cultural workers and curators on the history of gallery education, moving
beyond notions of display. Furthermore, the refusal to acknowledge more
generally art's importance in expanding our ways of thinking about ideas
and issues relevant to the world we inhabit is evident here. The point of
interest however, is that even though there is enough evidence to show
how positive the experience of the arts can be, and regardless of whether
most gallery education 'access' and 'social inclusion' programmes are mis-
understood by cynical critics, the issue still remains that art workers - no
matter how socially engaging or relational they claim to be - simply can-
not replace social workers, community organisers, or therapists. This begs
the question of whether art's role is operatively transformational, to
improve 'educational performance', increase 'employment rates', reduce
levels of crime and standards of health, and produce positive social
impacts in the first place?

It is very hypocritical in fact when policy makers justify their insufficient
welfare reforms with an increased interest to personal development and
social cohesion achieved through the arts pathway, whilst overlooking
the responsibility due for real educational and social reforms. Character-
istically, in a foreword to a 1999 report by Policy Action Teams - one of
several regulators set up by New Labour's government to ensure each
department gave full attention to 'social inclusion' and 'neighbourhood
renewal' agendas - Chris Smith, at the time Secretary of the State of Cul-
ture, stated:

> "This report shows that art and sport can not only make a valuable
> contribution to delivering key outcomes of lower long-term unem-
> ployment, less crime, better health and better qualifications, but can
> also help to deliver the individual pride, community spirit and capa-
> city for responsibility that enable communities to run regeneration
> programmes themselves."[197]

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195 ——— Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS), *Count Me In: The
             Dimensions of Social Exclusion through Culture (*online video), Media &
             Sport, Leeds, Leeds Metropolitan University, 2002, http://www.tate.
             org.uk/modern/programmes/webcasting/pieties.htm.
196 ——— Ibid.
197 ——— C. Smith, *Policy Action Team 10: Report to the Social Exclusion Unit -*

At the heart of this 'performance paradox', as Eleonora Belfiore observes, is whether these measures are supposed to evaluate the socio-economic impact of the arts, including the imposition of targets, performance management, and evidence-based policy-making. She claims that:

> "...a whole range of measures introduced with the aim to improve *transparency* and *accountability* in the public sector – might have resulted, in reality [...] in opaque political messages amounting to little more than doublespeak".[198]

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

In fact, what has been happening as governmental funding to social services diminishes more throughout the years, is that the private sector has also started capitalising on the surplus of participation. Here, the private sector subsumes the "third sector" - including self organised groups, grass roots and nonprofit organisations - and its often symbolic values in the distribution of shrunken welfare-state services.[199] As a result, this non-profit sector of non-governmental organisations and alternative associations, often with charitable status, has come to represent a prospective market for the so-called creators of culture. The third sector is now called upon to play the role of 'catalyst' for the process of replacing the retreating state-led 'second sector' and fostering the growth of the still insufficiently developed 'first sector' of the market.[200] It is a process that has its own economic, and therefore political logic, most prevalent in political ideologies like David Cameron's *Big Society* project for a creative Britain. In Cameron's official launch back in 2010 for instance, we read:

> "We want to give citizens, communities and local government the power and information they need to come together, solve the prob-

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Arts and Sport, London, Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), HMSO, 1999.

198 ——— E. Belfiore, 'On bullshit in cultural policy practice & research', *Variant*, Issue 37, Spring/Summer 2010, http://www.variant.org.uk/37_38texts/Variant37.html#L12, (accessed 11 June 2016).

199 ——— D. Grlja & J. Vesić, 'The Neoliberal Institution of Culture and the Critique of Culturalization', *New Museum*, 2007, http://www.newmuseum.org/blog/view/the-neoliberal-institution-of-culture-and-the-critique-of-culturalization, (accessed 12 April 2015).

200 ——— Ibid.

lems they face and build the Britain they want. [...] Only when people and communities are given more power and take more responsibility can we achieve fairness and opportunity for all."[201]

Reading this, one would assume that the UK government through its new cultural policies would aim to give communities more power and encourage people to actively take part by 'transferring more power from central to local governments, supporting co-ops, mutuals, charities, and social enterprises'. In reality, all recent UK governments (of the last fifteen years at least), gradually withdrew funding from small scale organisations, encouraging a general marketisation of the arts through private investment and entrepreneurialism instead. At the same time, and as a brainchild of New Labour (enthusiastically adopted by subsequent governments), the creative industries - including community arts, socially engaging practices, participatory and alternative education initiatives, all bound with the insistence on the relational social exchange - have been defined by the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport, as:

> "...those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of economic property."[202]

This governmental need for '*proof of economic value for all forms of cultural output*', in the case of fine art, refers exclusively to the market and urges that 'attention should be paid to the range and availability of stock to ensure that buyers continue to be given choices'.[203] To put it simply, artistic production now needs to not only show how it produces value, but also how it accommodates its needs. Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt, one of the key figures behind the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)'s *Culture Value Project*, points out in her recent critique of Jeremy Corbyn's latest *Plan for The Arts*, that for many years the UK's cultural policies have been formulated:

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201 ———— For more on this see: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/78979/building-big-society_0.pdf (accessed 10 June 2016).

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

203 ———— Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), *Art & Antiques Market*, 2001.

"…on the basis of market failure– the grudging acknowledgement that certain artistic endeavours are not supported by the market and must compete for ever-shrinking subsidies."[204]

In the same article, Gordon-Nesbitt explains how publicly funded arts have become subordinate to the market through their evaluation according to the tenets of the HM Treasury's Green Book, which insists on 'attributing monetary values to all impacted of any proposed policy, project, and programme'.[205] This means that any cultural, artistic or community project must now be measured not according to its particular individual or social value, but instead according to its monetary economic value, by competing in the market without any distinction between the arts and other more commercial branches of creativity.[206] On the one hand, and in order to secure public funding, the arts must now showcase what they can do for society by legitimising their function within *Relational Aesthetics* discourse, while at the same time, express their 'social value' in numerical and economic terms in direct relation to commerce and industry.

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

Museums and galleries of course continue to appear as sites of access, diversity, innovation, radicalism, and multiculturalism for a culture that is

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204 ———— R. Gordon-Nesbitt, 'Jeremy Corby's Arts Plan', *Mute*, September 2015, http://www.metamute.org/community/your-posts/jeremy-corbyn's-arts-plan, (accessed 10 June 2016).

205 ———— Ibid.

206 ———— Ibid.

supposed to ensure tolerance and respect for the other, while the pressing problems of repression, precarity, poverty, racism and struggle, remain hidden behind the screens of their 'culturalised' forms. Similar rituals exist within the university, where a material reality of knowledge needs to be created and re-created by the rituals of conduct of the students and academics in their everyday practices. Some even argue that the very articulation of political struggles and social antagonisms have already moved from the "classical" domain of state apparatuses, such as political parties, the parliamentary system, and the procedures of law, to art spaces and their competing 'cultural options'; a further dispersing of political issues into cultural ones. Most importantly perhaps, and as if the creative industries rhetoric has not damaged the way we produce and circulate projects in the arts enough, we have also witnessed the withdrawal of government funding from small scale arts organisations that have historically been responsible for radical curatorial and educational initiatives, independent thinking groups and their supporting 'interpretive communities'.[207]

In a recent conference on 'Public Assets' (2015), organised by Common Practice and Andrea Phillips at Goldsmiths University (London), Phillips pointed out precisely how the neoliberalisation of the cultural institution has brought about a series of contradictory relationships between the front of an organisation -its exhibitions and public events - and the back - how workers are paid for instance.[208] Contradictions, as she explained,

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207 ———— 'Interpretive communities' is a neologism quoted by Kodwo Eshun in
               Public Assets Conference (2015), Goldsmiths University of London,
               2015, to include all those members of a possible community who
               'gather around a concept', in order to build these concepts into subcultures. To quote Eshun himself:
               'They bond through a certain theoretical consistency, through a struggle to develop a vocabulary, through a commitment to developing
               neologisms, to differentiate that project- to metabolise it as an idea
               until it becomes lived as an attitude, shared by anybody who wants to
               commit to the project of building that attitude'.
               Kodwo Eshun reminding us here perhaps the importance of such
               spaces, as spaces for dialogue, listening and exchange beyond value.
208 ———— 'Common Practice', London, founded in 2009, is an advocacy group
               working for the recognition and fostering of the small-scale contemporary visual arts sector in London.
               'The group aims to promote the value of the sector and its activities,
               act as a knowledge base and resource for members and affiliated
               organisations, and develop a dialogue with other visual art organisations on a local, national and international level. The group's founding
               members are Afterall, Chisenhale Gallery, Electra, Gasworks, LUX,
               Matt's Gallery, Mute Publishing, The Showroom, and Studio Voltaire –
               together representing a diverse range of activities including commis-

that cultural workers need to embody in their everyday, as they are left with little to no option but to carry this in their body, performing the domination of the 'cultural industrial infrastructure' on their work and pleasure.[209] In the same conference, speakers were then called upon to analyse artistic value beyond monetary and economic measurability, in defence of small-scale arts organisations, and against the 'totalising effect of the cultural industrial machine', as Phillips put it.[210] This calls for a more pragmatic and practical approach to the problem, through a coming together of art workers in order to reclaim the language of autonomy and egalitarian aesthetic expression via 'the language of creativity, culture, cultural wealth, public participation and engagement' altogether.[211] All of these terms, Phillips explained, have been 'repurposed by the capital that now surrounds the art industry', arguing for a return of art's language to its 'social origin with inclusive work of small scale'.[212] Phillips then drew a comprehensive list of new issues that have now surfaced as a result of the withdrawal of public funding and the marketisation of previously funded industries more generally, shedding light on the particularities of this development within the context of arts relationship to discourse more generally, such as:

> "...the treatment of members of the public as un-informed statistical bodies [...], the encouragement of private enterprise and entrepreneurialism within the arts, as well as a shift in the job of the cultural worker from engagement with art and artists to entrepreneur and fundraiser."[213]

This brings us to the most recent phenomenon of the artist as 'cultural entrepreneur', a 'bio-political condition', according to Phillips, which includes new working patterns of competitive structures like inequality and exploitation, that we are called upon to incorporate into our bodies, living with the contradictions.[214]

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sioning, production, publishing, research, exhibitions, residencies and artists' studios.'
http://www.commonpractice.org.uk/home/, (accessed 10 June 2016).

209 ——— A. Philips, 'Introductory Welcome', *Public Assets Conference*, Goldsmiths University of London, Goldsmiths, London, May 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xTe67R_60Qg, (accessed 05 June 2015).

210 ——— Ibid.

211 ——— Ibid.

212 ——— A. Philips, 'Introductory Welcome', *Public Assets Conference*, Goldsmiths University of London, Goldsmiths, London, May 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xTe67R_60Qg, (accessed 05 June 2015).

213 ——— Ibid.

214 ——— Within the conceptual framework of 'biopolitics' and 'psychopatho-

Artist as Cultural Entrepreneur

The principles of free market competitiveness and entrepreneurship have nowadays also been introduced to the once privileged sphere of artistic and intellectual production, which not only enter the sphere of culture as market relations commanding the social correlations, but also on the individual at the level of the subject. The sheer amount of freelance artists and designers paired up with freelance curators-entrepreneurs, that are all part of small independent companies, collectives and 'free' working groups in the name of a new 'self' employed subject, no longer fits into previously typical patterns of full-time professions. In fact, the very idea of creating a freelance entrepreneurial cultural worker of yourself, that does not fit previous employability patterns of traditional full-time professions is nowadays hailed as a brilliant new way out of unemployment.[215]

The cultural worker today has to be a creative entrepreneur, where on the one hand she "creatively"—meaning profitably—uses the available cultural capital, while on the other, transforms this into more 'culture'. As

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logies' of desire, Franco Bifo Berardi takes this point further and argues that the progressive 'mentalisation' of creative processes has brought about an 'enslavement of the soul'. He writes:

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

Reflecting here perhaps the collapse of the global economy and its effects on the 'dark side' of the soul through fear, anxiety, panic and depression surfacing after a looming decade of austerity and the final collapse of a system based on the neoliberal ideal of an 'inherent balance'. F. B. Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*, Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2009, pp. 24, 207.

[215] Some knowledge workers and 'cognitariats' even see this precariousness as giving them new possibilities for alternative ways of socialisation and production, creating a new kind of 'common' when (or if) it manages to escape the homogenisation and commodification of knowledge work to begin with. The idea is that differences between types of work that once were all important are erased, as all types of work become assimilated and subsumed for they all begin to incorporate cognitive work. As all these activities get increasingly subsumed under capitalist command, they all serve the accumulation process, as society itself becomes an immense knowledge factory. Thus, for some the distinction between productive and unproductive labour vanishes altogether. This theory is appealing for some new groups of activists who despite the difficulties resulting from precarious labour, see within it certain possibilities. S. James, 'Critique of Precarious Labour', *Variant,* issue 37, Spring/Summer 2010, http://www.variant.org.uk/37_38texts/Variant37.html#L9, (accessed 27 July 2016).

Grlja & Vesić suggest, the cultural worker is now supposed to be 'a "funky businessman" in contemporary "karaoke capitalism", transforming the raw material of 'culture' into little more than temporary entertainment'.[216] The curator becomes the communication manager with specialist skills in the management of social relations and the structuring of 'fruitful' relational exchanges and diversifying cooperations, in short, the manager of the production processes furthering and expanding profit.[217]

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216 ———— D. Grlja & J. Vesić, 'The Neoliberal Institution of Culture and the Critique of Culturalization', *New Museum*, 2007, http://www.newmuseum.org/blog/view/the-neoliberal-institution-of-culture-and-the-critique-of-culturalization, (accessed 12 April 2015).

217 ———— Maurizio Lazzarato, in his account of these new forms of organisation of work and his understanding of 'immaterial labour' –which he defines as the labour that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity– refers to two different aspects of labour that exist within this value-producing process:
1. the 'informational content', i.e. the skills of direct labour involving computer control and communications
2. the 'cultural content', i.e. a series of activities that are not normally recognised as work, including the activities that define and fix cultural and artistic standards of value, fashions, tastes, styles and public opinion. Activities that the curator, as intellectual manager of art's surplus, has been trained to strategically compose, manage and regulate, organising artistic production and by extension activating, managing and expanding productive cooperation. This practice requires the curator to be an 'active subject' in the coordination of the various functions of this 'interface', (including handling information, selecting, organising and decision- making), instead of passively following the capitalist command. In ways like this, and as Lazzarato argues, the new slogan for Western societies is that we should all 'become subjects' within 'participative management' processes that hold a potential technology of power, a technology for 'creating and controlling the subjective processes'. Lazzarato writes:
'a polymorphous self-employed autonomous worker has emerged as the dominant form, a kind of 'intellectual worker' who is him or herself an entrepreneur, inserted within a market that is constantly shifting and within networks that are changeable in time and space'.
Lazzarato, of course, is not naive about the ways in which this information management is always already authoritatively codified, subordinated to the master's desire to know, and subsumed into the 'circulation of information'. He nevertheless believes that an analysis of immaterial labour can lead to defining a radical autonomy of the productive synergies of immaterial labour that he considers as the work of this 'polymorphous self- employed autonomous worker'.
M. Lazzarato, 'Immaterial Labour' in P. Virno & M. Hardt (eds.), *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p. 140.

With an increased understanding of the curatorial as an independent discipline, and as the spheres of independent and autonomous production feed more and more into the information industry, so does the process of production of models of communication and sociability become part of the process of valorisation. If the value of the relational model manages to get subsumed immediately into the forms of curatorial organisation and management of curatorial practice, then we will have moved from a hybrid to a real form of subsumption. Through this process of socialisation, instead of mediation, curatorial practice could eventually by-pass mystification of the social process and instead present it as value-producing creative labour in its own right as determined directly by the rules of equivalence. Here, it directly appropriates the non-value producing labour of relational encounters as a commodity exchange proper and as a result, both culture and creative labour could be thought of as commodities proper. Certainly, both employers-curators and workers-artists already struggle to commodify labour as curators use all their ingenuity and that of their HR management minions, to quantify, measure and homogenise creative labour. Meanwhile, prospective employees-artists, in an anxious attempt to commodify their labour power, write and rewrite CVs in order to portray themselves as purveyors of quantifiable labour units. The problem is therefore that if workers and employers ever succeed in commodifying labour fully, capitalism will perish. Likewise, if curators and artists ever succeed in commodifying creativity fully, art will perish. It would be the end of a system capable of creating and distributing cultural value. Hence, we have capitalism's tendency to cyclically generate crisis, alongside the museum cyclically generating the 'new and emergent practices, reproducing this contradictory system ad infinitum. Andrea Phillips sums it up in the following:

> "Meritocracy removes the contextual and historical basis of any individual or collective emergence. It produces a landscape of individuals whose randomised ascent is based on autonomy."[218]

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

218 ———— A. Phillips, 'Remaking the Arts Centre', in B. Choi, M. Lind, E. Pethick and N. Petrešin-Bachelez (eds.), *Cluster: Dialectionary*, Berlin, Sternberg Press, 2014, pp. 217-18, as cited in C. Cruz, 'Practising Solidarity', *Common Practice*, 2016, http://www.commonpractice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/CommonPractice_PracticingSolidary.pdf, (accessed 31 May 2016).

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

> "The idea that contemporary education is characterised by the move away from authoritarian forms of indoctrination and towards forms of self-directed or autonomous learning is perhaps the most powerful emancipatory ideology in this context' (where failure is nothing but educational failure)."[219]

He continues elsewhere:

> "Lifelong learning" is exemplary. The phrase oscillates between the dream of fulfilling self-transformation beyond the privileges of youth, and the nightmare of indiscriminate de-skilling and re-skilling according to the dictates of a 'flexible' labour market […] 'life long learning' extends 'meritocracy' to the whole of your life. Qualification is a receding horizon; its promise of maturity takes the form of 'infantalisation'."[220]

This lifelong learning carrot becomes more obvious if we think about the increase in the total length of art studies and the number of postgraduate degrees and courses, or the sheer rise in art student numbers and curatorial courses, all indicators of a general tendency for expansion of the realm of formal education in the arts in order to subsume new sectors and qualifications. If we add internships, apprenticeships and vocational qualifications, or even distance learning, online learning, work-based or home-based learning, we can definitely detect the current trend for an emphasis on what Martin refers to as the 'life-long journey' of training and un-training in order to continuously expand one's transferable skills and become the ultimate flexible connoisseur or entrepreneurial manager of relational exchanges.

This is a flexible labourer who has the skills to control, help, learn, link, network, organise, retrieve, share, solve and track knowledge transformation in order to encompass different typologies of knowledge workers as

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219 ——— S. Martin, 'Pedagogy of Human Capital', *Mute,* vol. 2, no. 8, 2008, http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/pedagogy-human-capital, (accessed 21 May 2014).
220 ——— Ibid.

networks and flows. This new knowledge worker, via the artist or curator and her ability to make connections, can analyse information, establish relationships, identify and understand trends, and eventually produces new capabilities for herself by creating and modifying strategies and models of relational sociability. This in turn brings valuable benefits to the institution, serving the expansion of the organisation's knowledge 'assets', eventually contributing to the overall surplus value of its intellectual and cultural capital altogether

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

> "...the condemnation of one part of the working class to enforced idleness by the over-work of the other part, and vice versa, becomes a means of enriching the individual capitalists, and accelerates at the same time the production of the industrial reserve army on a scale corresponding with the progress of social accumulation."[221]

It is also perhaps interesting to acknowledge that according to Marx, contemporary precarious 'cognitariats' are not therefore determined by the variations of the absolute numbers of the working population, but by the varying proportions through which the working class is divided into an active army and a reserve army via the increase or diminution in the relative amount of the surplus population. (by the extent to which it is alternately absorbed and set free). [222]

Individuals who have been educated in the fields of art, design, media and cultural theory have a certain degree of expertise, and by extension, certain avenues of access to the artworks, images, concepts, representations, and histories; in short, the symbolic agencies of what is nowadays encompassed by the term 'culture'. This 'savoir-faire' of the artist is what grounds

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221 ——— K. Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy,* Vol.1, London, Penguin, 1867/1990, p.782-90.

222 ——— Ibid.

our basic assumption of the nature of art institutions and their function.[223] In a way, this privileged access to the screening of culture's signifying chains is then supposed to allow for the entrepreneurial cultural worker to creatively and profitably use it as cultural capital in order to transform the raw material of 'culture' into surplus.

The problem in this new 'struggle for subjection to commodification' does not lie with the individual artists/students/curators and their increasing client-like mentality - which is a consequence of the upsurge in tuitions fees and the general tendency for privatisation and monetisation of arts education for instance - but more with the character of its formal subsumption, and the extent to which this capitalisation and economisation of culture becomes integrated in the student's own condition for commodification.

As the term 'culture' has boundlessly expanded over the past thirty years to encompass each and every symbolic activity of the precarious 'cognitariat', so has industry dispersed into those areas of society traditionally considered outside the economy of the market, turning education into a social process of production at its highest level of abstraction. It is now a social form of co-operation which ceases to lie outside capital and becomes embodied in the development of the accumulated knowledge production process itself. This revolutionises the entire realm of culture and education, as this goal gets inscribed into their concrete structures, determines our methods, and performs our subjection to capital by eventually completing the transition from formal to real subsumption. The extension of this process of expansion, via the 'culturalisation of economy' or 'educationalisation of capital' has become formally integrated into its own commodification, now defining the very context of 'struggles of participation', democracy, autonomy and freedom. The more the margins between autonomy and industry, elitism and populism, official and marginal become blurred, the more our labours are commanded by capitalist

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223 ——— As artists and curators now share the continuum of presentational, processal and interphase skills, they also become more easily employable in cognitive, creative, and technical positions, on a freelance basis and in a variety of different kind of projects, rather than working as a wage labourer, like in older generations, through teaching, painting or decorating, explains John Roberts, concluding that 'art is subsumed under general social techniques as a condition of art's increasing absorption into these new cognitive relations of production'.
J. Roberts, 'The Political Economisation of Art' as cited in G. Sholette and O. Ressler, *It's The Political Economy, Stupid: The Global Financial Crisis in Art and Theory*, London, Pluto Press, 2013, pp. 66-7.

processes. The demands for increased productivity, self-discipline, entrepreneurialism, and 'meritocratic ascendancy' become part of our social and natural life processes.

The real problem with this kind of subjectivisation, when arts education becomes an exclusively private concern, and in terms of its supposedly 'legitimate' social function, is that it loses its relevance to the tasks of its particular epoch. Instead, what we have is a series of repetitions and re-contextualised articulations of abstracted aspirations, concerns, concepts, values, and eventually 'tasks' as they are interpreted by an information manager - via the curator/cultural educator/manager/programmer/entrepreneur - presented in the form of recipes and prescriptions for the individual artist/student/curator to adopt. The latter gradually (at times even without realising the loss) relinquish their criticality and capacity for choice, eventually being expelled from decisions altogether. Students are instead carried along in the wake of change, allowed to perform their own ways of activating the same set of generic mannerisms in the hope of their subjectivities becoming 'transferable' as an 'aesthetic trope' in the latest 'contemporary' turn.[224] The primary goal here is the very demonstrability and ability to perform the 'self' as an adjusted self-educated, self-regu-

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[224] This surge of entrepreneurial self-integration has resulted in the emergence of new terms of political struggle and dispute over capitalism and its limits. Italian autonomists, like Hardt and Negri for example believe that the precarisation of work and the appearance of immaterial labor fulfils the prediction Marx made in the *Grundrisse*, in a famous section on machines. In this section Marx states that with the development of capitalism, less and less capitalist production relies on living labour and more and more on the integration of science, knowledge and technology in the production process as the engines of accumulation. This is, of course, very important for the purposes of organisation of work and struggle. At the same time, I think it is important to keep in mind here that this tremendous leap in technology required by the computerisation of work, for example, or the integration of knowledge, and information control into the work process, has been paid at the cost of a tremendous increase of exploitation at the other end of the process. As Selma James argues the fundamental principle is that capitalist development is always at the same time a process of underdevelopment. Reminding us here that the problems that arise form a conception of the completion of real subsumption in a stage– by–stage manner (and the assumption of a unified 'present' time and space), versus a more dispersed kind of disjunctive synthesis of the present temporality whose relative autonomies function on different levels, and inform each other).
S. James, 'Critique of Precarious Labour', *Variant,* issue 37, Spring/ Summer 2010, http://www.variant.org.uk/37_38texts/Variant37.html#L9, (accessed 27July 2016).

lated individual, ready to become an object, and be an available self-organised 'transferable' identity in real time. The more 'transferable' and inter-disciplinary the learning, the more fluent the student, and thus the more valuable her skills. One need only look at social media's use in this context of self-professionalisation and self-education, where the artist/student is now called upon to perform his continuously available 'curated' self in the name of her continuous culturalisation.[225] As a consequence of this self-transferability, universities seem to have lost their monopoly over their traditional function as knowledge producers, for some even rendering their own existence pointless, unless they are able to question their own functionality. This failure of public institutions - universities and museums alike - to resist their own demise by radically re-evaluating their own functionality eventually lays the groundwork for turning education into a business. Janna Graham argues in 'Between a Pedagogical Turn and a Hard Place: Thinking with Conditions':

> "Paradoxically, these [curatorial and educational] shifts enable art education and research to continue in the form of courses, programmes and exhibitions that question the notion of artistic genius, the assumed authorial status of the artist and the colonial "imperialisms" of the corporation and the nation state. However, they at the same time require art practitioners to hatch new "geniuses", identify and produce more efficient "talent pathways" between creative education and the so called creative industries, consolidate institutional brands, demonstrate better time management (with less resources) and accelerate their output of "knowledge products' of various forms".[226]

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

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225 ——— This process was based on the promise that 'self-organised access to knowledge, can be independent of any further mediation other than that of the medium itself'. See for example: F. Schneider, 'Extended Footnotes on Education', *e-flux*, vol.13, issue 2, 2010, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/extended-footnotes-on-education/, (accessed 05 May 2015).

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

Research

> "An education which would lead men to take a new stance towards their problems - that of intimacy with those problems, one oriented toward research instead of repeating irrelevant principles. An education of "I wonder" instead of merely "I do"."[227]

> – Paulo Freire

In an open letter entitled 'To the Knowledge Producers' (2008), a student from the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna criticised the way the arts, and by implication the education and knowledge they produce, are 'commodified, industrialised, economised and made subject to free trade'.[228] The importance of artistic research and its contribution to knowledge is the key argument in this discourse, where artists' 'know-how' is replaced by a knowledge-based training provided by the university. The curator's unique ways and styles of knowing and operating in this complex and sophisticated sphere of production and her abilities to communicate a more specialised and prestigious account for this relation, are very important. The curator is always involved in this game of culture, as her job, to begin with, is to engage others in this system and to put them at the source of transference as the supposed subject of knowledge. The recent phenomenon of practice-led PhDs, research-based practices, and 'practice-as-research' methodologies, together with the increasing number of art universities that aim to establish the new discipline of the 'curatorial' through interdisciplinary research-as-art programs, hint towards the manner in which art schools are nowadays slowly replaced as sites for research within the university systems. This research in turn is used as a structure for the development of all these newly differentiated sectors of cultural functions within the culture industry.

As Andrea Phillips emphasises in 'Educational Aesthetics', there are two sides to this story where on the one hand the recognition of these kind of practice-based research projects by the European systems of funding allows for 'artworks to be understood on a greater and more profound level across various strata', opening up the terrain for 'people of different orientations to understand and be with each other'.[229] While on the other

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227 ———— P. Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, London, Continuum, 1974/ 2008, p. 32

228 ———— T. Holert, 'Art in the Knowledge Based Polis', *e-flux*, no 3, February 2009, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/art-in-the-knowledge-based-polis/, (accessed 27 July 2016).

229 ———— Phillips reminds us here how the work of artists-researchers within the

hand, practice-based research projects also involve a 'certain scientifica-tion' of creative processes, faced with governmental demands to measure what artists do in terms of 'knowledge production and transfer' bound to the effects of 'governmentalising and instrumentalising procedures'.[230] Phillips then asks; 'What happens when education is co-opted by the gal-lery system both formally and informally, what is delivered and what is rejected? [231]

Tom Holert's famous article, 'Art in The Knowledge Based Polis' (2009), sheds more light on the history of this implementation of practice-led research in Art and Design in Great Britain, and the ways in which regu-latory councils have established criteria for the legitimation of art as research by affirming its new role as a knowledge-based practice.[232] As Holert points out, by 1996 the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) of the Higher Education Founding Council for England (HEFCE) had reached a point where it defined research as:

> "…original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding. It includes work of direct relevance *to the needs of commerce and industry*, as well as to the public and voluntary sec-tors; scholarship; the invention and generation of ideas, images, per-formances and artefacts including design, where these lead to new or substantially improved insights; and the use of exiting knowledge in experimental development to produce new or substantially im-proved materials, devices, *products* and processes, including design and construction."[233]

According to another strategy paper published in 2008, 'artistic research' is now part of EU policy advancing the generation of 'New Knowledge' in a 'Creative Europe'.[234] This includes filling in applications and project pro-

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format of practice-based research becomes invariably 'interesting, complex and highly evolved projects, often incorporating the produc-tion of useful and politically necessary discursive and communicable space for evolving publics'.
A. Phillips, 'Educational Aesthetics' in P. O'Neill and M. Wilson (eds.), *Curating and the Educational Turn*, London, Amsterdam, Open Edi-tions/ de Appel, 2010, pp. 91-2.

230 ——— Phillips, ibid.
231 ——— Phillips, ibid: 93
232 ——— T. Holert, 'Art in the Knowledge Based Polis', *e-flux*, no 3, February 2009, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/art-in-the-knowledge-based-po-lis/, (accessed 27 July 2016).
233 ——— Ibid [my emphases].
234 ——— Ibid.

posals, or even upgrading one's work in order to validate claims for 'genuine knowledge production' by establishing a limiting consensus for accountability and ticking the boxes for the parameters that legitimise new systems of knowledge while still operating at the heart of the system, through university discourse. These are now all part of the artistic/curatorial practice itself, as it gets more bound up with the structures of academic legitimacy.

The point I'm trying to make here, is that even though the professionalisation of arts education and the emergence of new 'niche' disciplines that help the university continue the production of what appears as 'new knowledge', the power relations behind the way this knowledge is structured and produced, are nowadays directly or indirectly linked with the structure of the university itself and its requirement to become a neoliberal institution. It is as if the artist's skills and 'know-how' are now geared towards the production of a new and highly intellectual pursuit that appears to go beyond art as we know it, instead moving towards a more interdisciplinary approach that is linked to a certain 'dematerialised' production 'knowledge economy'.[235] The curator's 'know-how' then lies in the ability to appropriate and subject the artist's skill, refine it, abstract it and universalise it as *reason*, which in the name of *progress* needs to be placed back into the institutions in order to cement the subordination and secure it as knowledge.

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

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235 ———— Dematerialisation was a term used by Lucy Lippard and John Chandler to ascribe certain values to ideas-based practice of the 1960s.
L. Leppard & J. Chandler, 'The Dematerialization of Art', *Art International*, February 1968, vol. 12, issue 2, pp. 31-6.

"When one speaks of knowledge with regards to art however, one needs to take into account how differentiated and nuanced an idea this is, than the usual accounts of this relation...any kind of 'measurability' [of art's surplus value], and shaping [and contextualising] in accordance with its anonymous and distributed intentions', reproduces the power relations and belief systems inherent in the system itself, namely neo-liberalism."[236]

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

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236 —————— Holert, ibid.

CHAPTER 4:
SUBSUMPTION OF ART
INTO UNIVERSITY DISCOURSE

Slogan 'Be realistic, ask for the impossible' (Soyez realistes, demandez l'impossible)

> –'*Who wants to know?*
> – *I want to know.*
> – *What do you want to know?*
> – *I don't know!*' [237]

The political events of May '68 spurred a radical movement with resounding effects on France's cultural and social history for years to come.[238] The students brought the entire public services to a halt, with occupations of universities and factories, street violence and massive general strikes with slogans like '*Soyez réalistes, demandez l'impossible*' ('Be realistic, ask the impossible'). For Jacques Lacan however, the student protests of May '68 offered a clear example of the students' entrapment in the discourse of the Master, a capitalist trap where their 'hysterical demands' merely ended up manifesting the transformation of capitalism into a 'market of knowledge'. Lacan's notoriously ambiguous response to the student revolts was seen by some as a reductive definition of revolution altogether.[239] For Lacan however, May '68 was an act that realised the structural contradictions determining the student's subjectification, demonstrating the link between politics, structure and the unconscious in the streets.[240]

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[237] I. Rogoff, 'FREE', *e-flux*, no. 14, March 2010, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/free/, (accessed 10 June 2016).

[238] For more on this see 'The Beginning of an Era' in *Situationist International,* no. 12, September 1969, http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/beginning.html, (accessed 13 June 2016).

[239] Lacan did not identify with the intellectual current of the time (Jean-Paul Sartre, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari) and the call for a communist revolution. For more on Lacan's relationship with this particular era of French history see:
S. Tomšič, *The Capitalist Unconscious*, London, Verso, 2015.

[240] Commenting after Michel Foucault's lecture 'What is an author?'

Immediately after May '68, Lacan pursued the theorisation of these structural imbalances and the dependancy of the subject on processes of 'discourse', in a materialist way, by producing his famous four discourses theory; the Master's discourse, the Hysteric's discourse, the University discourse and the Analytic discourse.[241] In his seminars on *The Reverse Side of Psychoanalysis (1969/70),* Lacan maintains that the discourse of the analyst is in fact the reverse, or 'the other side' of the master's discourse, attempting to re-position 'the Analyst in terms of a discourse that may contribute to the amelioration of the situation by tackling it from the reverse side'.[242] Lacan's discourses become very useful when analysing the 'polymorphous perversion' of the cultural tendency to integrate and curate relational exchanges and the production of capitalist subjectivities more generally. Lacan's formula of the discourse of the university (U) in particular provides illuminating insights into the status of the artist/student as a subject produced by a 'knowledge society', and the role the curator plays in the circular extraction of surplus value from participation.[243]

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

(1969) Lacan wrote: '...for if the May events demonstrate anything, then [they demonstrate] precisely the descent of structures in the street. The fact that this was written at the very site where this descent took place, simply shows us something that is very often immanent to what we call the act, namely that it misrecognises itself ',
J. Lacan as quoted in S. Tomšič, *The Capitalist Unconscious*, London, Verso, 2015, p. 20.

241 ——— It is important to mention here that the term 'discourse' underwent significant development throughout Lacan's teaching; initially indicating speech and then moving on to interpret Marx's 'mode of production', in order to stress the inter-subjective nature of language and the fact that the speech act (of a speaking body) always already implies another subject that 'listens', an interlocutor. In his analysis in fact each term is sustained in its topological relation with the others, developing a psychoanalytic language with its own lexis and syntax. Tomšič, ibid: 203.

242 ——— G. Cormac, 'Introduction', *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII: Psychoanalysis upside down/The Reverse Side of Psychoanalysis*, 1969-70, unedited from French manuscripts-unofficial non-published version intended for the reading group at St Vincent's University Hospital, Dublin, 2001, p. 3.
Gallagher points out here how this was also a difficult time for Lacan personally as he had been expelled from *École Normale Superieure* and his peers had refused to accept his formulations on psychoanalysis.

243 ——— Jacques Lacan in Cormac, ibid: 4.
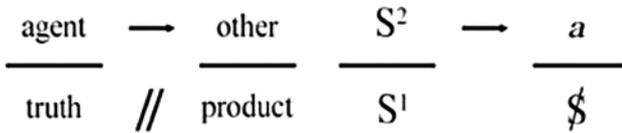
$$\frac{agent}{truth} \longrightarrow \frac{other}{//\ product} \quad \frac{S^2}{S^1} \longrightarrow \frac{a}{\cancel{S}}$$

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

Lacan considers the master signifier to be designated S_1, the 'battery of signifiers', i.e. the 'knowledge' that is always already there, to be designated by the sign S_2 and $\cancel{S}$ as the split or barred subject - in this case the student-artist-protester who wants to know but does not necessarily know what he or she wants to know. Lacan further designates *a* the *objet petit 'a'*, which stands for the surplus enjoyment 'jouissance'.[244] In these formulas (working from left to right) the top left position is the agent that dominates the relationship between the other symbols.

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

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

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244 ———— Ibid: 70.

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

Consequently, subjects soon lose their ability to choose and integrate themselves into their own context, and instead adapt their desires to the master's incessant demand, eventually turning themselves into an object. The adaptation here is perhaps most symptomatic of the subject's level of objectification and 'dehumanisation', to use Paulo Freire's term. In other words, if I lose my ability to desire and make choices and I am subjected to the desires and choices of others, to the extent that my decisions are no longer my own because they result from external prescriptions, then I am no longer integrated. As Paulo Freire proposes; 'Choice is illusory to the degree that it represents the expectations of others.'[245]

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

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

plus value within the university discourse, hiding behind the master's desire to know, subject and capitalise.

Irit Rogoff states the following:

> "And it is the agency of subjectification and its contradictory multiplicity that is at the heart of a preoccupation with knowledge in education, giving in its traction as it were, what Foucault called 'the lived multiplicity of positionings'."[246]

Rogoff argues that this notion of criticality – that limits itself to the production of a surplus within knowledge – seems 'a very narrow one', as it fails to take on 'the problems of subjectification' to begin with.[247] If the split subject cannot be positioned within different terrains. - and is for instance unable to make connections between academic knowledge, research, participation in life and experience, but instead becomes master of transference of surplus jouissance as 'useful' 'social' 'value' producing subject to fit the master (university)'s signifying chain - then the subject never has any control of agency in the first place. In fact, most of the times, the subject is not even aware that such control exists, as she is unable to free the creative potential of her unconscious desire and living labour. It is exactly this unknown agency that manages to control her in the end, as she aims towards the unattainable fantasy of a subjectivity and society 'without negativity', without class struggle, of capital *as* life or as Samo Tomšič contends, 'capital as a specific form of vitalism'.[248]

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

> "The dynamics and adaptability of capital – its capacity to mystify, distort and repress subjective and social antagonisms, assimilating symptomatic or subversive identities and so on – sufficiently indicates that capital should be understood as life without negativity, or more precisely, that the efficiency and the logic of capitalism is supported by a fantasy of such life, subjectivity and society. It is a vitalist fantasy, where Marx's critique of fetishism turns out to be more than a philosophical curiosity, since it targets precisely the hypothesis of the inherent creative potential of the three central capitalist abstractions: commodity, money and capital."[249]

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[246] ———— I. Rogoff, "Free", e-*flux*, no 14, 2010,http://www.e-flux.com/journal/free/, (accessed 10 June 2016)

[247] ———— Ibid.

[248] ———— Tomšič, ibid: 203.

[249] ———— Ibid.
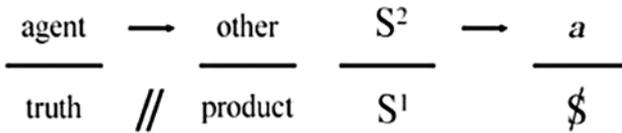
$$\frac{\text{agent}}{\text{truth}} \quad \longrightarrow \quad \frac{\text{other}}{\text{product}} \quad // \quad \frac{S^2}{S^1} \quad \longrightarrow \quad \frac{a}{\$}$$

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

If we revise Lacan's formula with particular attention given to his positioning of *the partial object a. -* as the unknown known of surplus or as the 'other' within the social bond - we will begin to see more clearly perhaps how current problems of subjectification develop. We need to remember however that for Lacan, the unconscious discourse from where speech and language emerge, does not belong to the subject's conscious control in the first place, as this constitutes the discourse of the Other.[250] The Other inscribed here in the symbolic order of universalising discourse, is the discourse of knowledge and self-curatorial mastery. This moves away from Rogoff's reference to Foucault's 'lived multiplicity of positionings' perhaps, and towards a mediated relationship of the latter through the neoliberal university's formalising command over jouissance by organising the discourse of 'contemporaneity'.

In this process, the partial object *a* which drives the student/artist's desire to know beyond established 'knowledge', denotes the object which can never be attained, which as Lacan argues, is the cause of the desire rather than that towards which desire tends. This is why Lacan calls this the 'object cause' of desire, *'le petit objet a'*, as the object which sets desire in motion, which is manifested with those partial objects which define our

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250 —————— According to Dylan Evans' Lacanian dictionary, the distinction between other and Other is fundamental to psychoanalysis. Dylan explains:
'[For Lacan], the little other is the other who is not really other, but a reflection and projection of the Ego. He [autre] is simultaneously the counterpart and the specular image. The little other is thus entirely inscribed in the Imaginary order'. The big Other on the contrary, designates radical alterity, an other-ness which transcends the illusory otherness of the imaginary because it cannot be assimilated through identification. Lacan equates this radical alterity with language and the law, and hence the big Other is inscribed in the order of the symbolic. Indeed, the big Other *is* the symbolic insofar as it is particularised for each subject. The Other is thus both another subject, in his radical alterity and unassimilable uniqueness, and also the symbolic order which mediates the relationship with that other subject'.
D. Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis,* London, Routledge, 1996, p. 135.

drives. Our drives, of course, do not seek to reach the object as a final destination, but circulate around it, so that the circle of desire-drive-desire continues accumulating new surplus, as the irreducible reserve of libido. Accordingly, the artist's surplus jouissance, namely, the *petit a,* becomes both an object of intense anxiety and the final reserve of potential-value producing regulation of desires.[251]

Within the constant exhortation to artists/students surplus, this new 'transferable' knowledge eventually needs to invent new and ever-expanding outlets for itself, as it must also entertain the prevalent belief that it should not only be obliged to seek out alternative sources of knowledge economies, but produce them as well. The curator's managerial position becomes even more crucial here, where by producing the need for a particular type of knowledge, she is also setting up the means of its excavation or invention. This, therefore, becomes a "need-based" culture of always already subsumed knowledges that produces not only the support, but also the market through itself. There is something eerily Marxist in this phenomenon, in that it mirrors Marx's prediction of capitalism's ability to create a surplus of capacity that can subsequently be freely shared without the market forces' brutality, as suggested by Cory Doctorow. Here, he analyses the internally socialistic but externally capitalistic character of most of our institutions today, reflecting the changes in the very character of subsumption itself and the ways in which it is internalised within the mechanisms of subject formation.[252]

Combining the Marxist and psychoanalytic perspective, we can conclude that the art student is both the social embodiment of surplus labour value

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

252 ——— C. Doctorow, 'Chris Anderson's Free adds much to The Long Tail, but falls short', *Guardian,* July 28, 2009, http://www.theguardian.com/technology/blog/2009/jul/28/cory-doctorow-free-chris-anderson, (27 July 2016).
For 19th century psychiatry, alienation was conceived as a mental illness, and a common term in France for the hysteric 'madman' is *aliéné.* The truth of the matter is that for Lacan the subject - student, artist - is fundamentally split, alienated from herself, and there is no escape from this division, no possibility of 'wholeness' or synthesis. Unlike Hegel and Marx then, alienation for Lacan is an essential constitutive feature of the subject, and thus cannot be transcended.
D. Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis,* London, Routledge, 1996, p.33.

and surplus jouissance.[253] Art students are obliged to engage in a format-
ive process, to work on themselves in order to become the subject of value
and enter the 'market of knowledge'. Lacan writes; The credit point, the
little piece of paper that they want to issue you, is precisely this. It is the sign
of what knowledge will progressively become in the market that one calls
the University,' reflecting perhaps the extent to which the commodification
of knowledge has reached today where there is no visible outside.[254]

In today's integrated cultural-economic system of knowledge production,
it seems that the master's own battle for control no longer lies in the desire
to suppress any disruptions. Rather in the desire to know, subject and col-
onise in her efforts to curate and regulate the formal character of the sub-
sumption of our 'desires to know', so that their 'unknown known' surplus
will work in tandem with accumulation economies, towards permanent
self-valorisation.[255] The struggle then is not so much to 'curate' often
uncomfortable or alienating contradictions and their implications, but in
fact to disrupt the conditions of this 'curating' to begin with. Irit Rogoff
suggests that:

> "...the task at hand is not one of liberation from confinement, but
> rather one of undoing the very possibilities of containment', stretch-
> ing the terrain of knowledge beyond the border of what can be con-
> ceptualised in the first place."[256]

In her critical text 'Free', she explains that knowledge:

> "...has its power less in its expansion than in an ultimately centri-
> petal movement, less in a process of penetrating and colonising
> everywhere and everything in the relentless mode of capital, than in
> reaching unexpected entities and then drawing them back, mapping
> them onto the field of perception."[257]

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253 ———— Jacques Lacan in Tomšič, ibid: 213.
254 ———— Ibid.
255 ———— The privatisation of universities has already amounted to the prolifera-
tion of student loans, eventually turning the learning process further
into the reproduction of capitalism with the production of entire pop-
ulations of indebted subjects, 'hysterically' demanding: 'You Are Not a
Loan' during the occupy movements of New York Stock Exchange
(2014).
256 ———— I. Rogoff, "Free", e-*flux*, no 14, 2010,http://www.e-flux.com/journal/
free/, (accessed 10 June 2016)
257 ———— Ibid.

Similarly, Lacan accused major psychoanalytic schools of reducing the practice of psychoanalysis to the Imaginary order, which is nothing other than the field of images and imagination or moreover, the deception of the signifying terrain. Lacan proposed instead the use of the Symbolic Order - the current domain of power, structure, hierarchy and so on - to dislodge the disabling fixation of our Imaginary field of perception by mapping the imaginary onto language. 'The use of the Symbolic', he argued, 'is the only way for the analytic process to cross the plane of identification'.[258] By working on the gaps in the Symbolic order then, the analyst is able to produce or 'cure' changes in the subjective position of the analysand, in this case the participating subject, as a 'cut in the Real'. Where the Real is 'the impossible', the object of anxiety par excellence; the un-subsumable useful but non-value producing surplus. These changes, according to Lacan, produce imaginary effects (because the Imaginary is structured by the Symbolic), whereby in the naming of desire the subject brings forth a new presence in the world.[259] The task at hand then is to curate acts of transference where the participating subject recognises her un-subsumed desire - conscious articulations and unconscious registers - and by doing so, uncovers the hidden truth lurking behind her enjoyment as the master signifier (University/ Capital). The desire that hides behind the split subject as organised truth.[260] The truth of the structural imperative capital hiding behind every private interest.

Let us not forget however that for Lacan, this is possible only if desire is articulated in speech via the presence of another subject or interlocutor; 'It is only once it is formulated, named in the presence of the other, that desire appears in the full sense of the term'.[261] 'For it is a funny business', he says, 'between enjoyment and knowledge'.[262] He continues with the following:

258 ———— Jacques Lacan as quoted in Evans, ibid: 85.

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

260 ———— In his *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan argues that desire is the root of all ethics. Analysis' only promise being the entrance into the I, where the analysand and discovers in its absolute nakedness the truth of his desire. Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII*, New York, London, Routledge, 2008.

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

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

"Enjoyment (jouissance) finally enabling us to show the point of insertion of a systemic discourse. Enabling us to go outside what is authentically involved with knowledge, what is recognisable as knowledge."[263]

This is a very interesting formulation with regards to the way discourse designates the social bond as founded in language, that involves not only the structure of social relations but also a certain kind of 'formalisation' of the mode of jouissance or satisfaction that reflects the truth about the era that produced it. Lacan writes; 'Any social link produces speech which is structured in a particular way and organises the subject at a certain historical moment'.[264] According to this, the master signifier that structures the discourse of relational practices is an essential part of the subject's being.

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

> "The lesson of the double character of commodity reaches beyond the framework of the capitalist problematic and echoes the ancient scandal of sophistry, whose rhetorical techniques demonstrated language is not merely a house of being [Heidegger], but a particular factory that produces within being more being. The shared discovery of Marx and Freud consists in the fact that this production also contains more than being, objects that are irreducible to the opposition of being and no-being, precisely surplus value and surplus jouissance.[265]

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

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263 ———— J. Lacan, 'The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book I', *Freud's Papers on Technique 1953–1954*, New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 1998, p. 3
264 ———— Jacques Lacan quoted in Evans, ibid: 135.
265 ———— Tomšič, ibid: 201.

The latter depends on who grounds Lacan's formulas, throughout the history of art; whether it is the bourgeois master, the master as state, the global market, culture as national heritage, or culture as an inter-discipline, These are the curator's unique ways of knowing and operating in this complex sphere of production alongside her abilities to communicate a more specialised and prestigious account for this relation.[266]

The *curator* could thus be imagined as the subject that is supposed to know in the sense of the supposed knowledge, experience and expertise of the *analyst*, the difference being that the analyst knows that the real knowledge lies only with the subject of the unconscious, the analysand or artist. This is dangerous territory regarding relational aesthetics's implications of the curator as co-producer, always already informed by a position of expertise in a way that implicitly asserts the curator's position of authority. Of course, the analyst too needs to assert her authorial position, as the subject of the cultural or political unconscious that produces some kind of facilitation in this analytical journey. This 'facilitating' however does not involve the subsumption of the analysand's Real, but only a formal communication of it. After all, the purpose of analysis is not to 'bring into their own meaning' the expertise of the analyst's knowledge but to provide the conditions in which the patient must get rid of his or her illusion that there is a subject that is supposed to know in the first place.[267] In this way, the patient abandons a model of compensatory guarantees, and instead is able to negotiate the negation of agency of her own subjectivity.[268]

Mark Hutchinson elaborates on the analogy between analysts and curators, by arguing how this similitude would not really be required if we were to return to a notion of the curatorial as the expert discipline of 'display, reception and interpretation'. It is when curators take the role of a 'master that is supposed to know' however, and adapt it to their institutional role, that they become 'an additional slice of management only by concealing their dependence on the knowledge of others', subsuming their surplus jouissance. Hutchinson goes on to argue:

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[266] The curator is always involved in this game of culture, as her job, to begin with, is to engage one in this system – to put one at the source of transference, as the supposed subject of knowledge.

[267] D. Beech and M. Hutchinson, 'Inconsequential Bayonets' in P. O'Neill (ed.), *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture*, Cambridge, London, MIT Press, 2012, p. 56.

[268] D. Beech and M. Hutchinson, 'Inconsequential Bayonets' in P. O'Neill (ed.), *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture*, Cambridge, London, MIT Press, 2012, p. 56.

> "The political task for curating, in overcoming the de-totalising split inherent within curation, is not to formulate some alternative, positive model of curation. On the contrary if the de-totalising split inherent in curation is the negation of certain experiences and so on (the negation of modes of being), then the uncovering of the concealments, refusals and denials hitherto present in curation is the negation of these negations."[269]

David Beech, in conversation with Hutchinson, attempts to expand this and suggests:

> "Like anti-artists who resisted institutional tramlines of artistic and aesthetic practices, the anti-curator needs to resist the horizon of curation. It is to the outside, the other, the external and the alien that the curator needs to turn, and to turn into."[270]

To put it simply, if the curator wants to occupy different structures as a curator, and without abandoning her role, then the curator would need to transform her 'being' by 'infecting' the curator with what is other to it. We therefore refer ourselves to the limits, to an outside field as such, allowing for the emergence of knowledge as disruption, as counter-subjugation, and as a constant reminder of the hysterics' demand via the riddle that is involved in the function of the surplus. In the end, this point of loss, via entropy, is the only point where we have access to what is involved in jouissance, and how it gets introduced into the being of the subject.[271]

In his recent lecture on *Contemporary Symptoms* at Central St Martins, London (2016), Eric Laurent argued that any mythical imaginary community can become a real body event if the articulation of this plurality occurs through the experience of a 'shared jouissance'.[272] Thinking of jouissance within the realm of symbolism, artistic metaphor and imagery, grounds the unconscious in the Symbolic and its signifying orders. At the same time, contemporary Lacanian psychoanalyst, Marie-Hélène Brousse has tried to re-position art within this circular relationship between ana-

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269 ——— Ibid.
270 ——— Ibid.
271 ——— J. Lacan, *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII: Psychoanalysis upside down/The Reverse Side of Psychoanalysis*, 1969-70 in G. Cormac (ed), unedited from French manuscripts-unofficial non-published version intended for the reading group at St Vincent's University Hospital, Dublin, 2001, p. 14.
272 ——— E. Laurent, *Contemporary Symptoms*, London Graduate School, Central St Martins, London, 2016, http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2016/05/eric-laurent-contemporary-symptoms/, (accessed 18 June 2016).

lyst and master discourses, arguing that art can in fact provide insights into how a master's discourse is organised in the particular eras that produce it, revealing to the split subject the relationship between their object of jouissance and knowledge (directly).[273] In reality, for Brousse, *art itself is a discourse*, not only revealing a truth about its agitation of 'contemporaneity' (historicist quality of art), but most importantly perhaps for our analysis of relational art, it shows the autonomy of the signifier and the dominant relationship of jouissance as an organiser of the discourse of that historical moment. This is otherwise veiled by the functioning of the master signifier, and the knowledge related to the latter.[274] The difference between the discourse of the analyst and the discourse of art, according to Brousse, is that art can directly point to the relationship of an object of jouissance and knowledge, instead of the analyst's usual direction of the object *a* to a divided subject via a mediated relationship).[275]

The problem with contemporaneity however, as Brousse admits, is that we are now in an unconscious epoch which is no longer organised by a 'shared jouissance', arguing instead that current discourse does not operate by a shared principle of universality or metaphor, but instead operates only at the level of the Real.[276] At times when students have ceased to identify with common slogans or mottos, calling for a receding reclining of commons in search of a clear direction, but with a certain commitment towards an occupation of an abstracted commonality, the task at hand then becomes; How can we reclaim an analysis of the unconscious in today's a-social relational experiences?

Through an understanding of relevant discourse and our relationship to the structures that go beyond language, we can perhaps begin to reverse the circular movement of meaning controlled by the abstract master signifier, (capitalist, university etc), and attend to the hysteric's – as students or artists - demands instead. Investigating collectively the role of discourse as a legitimising power and the social processes of constructions of truths, we can start to ask how they are maintained and what power relations they carry with them or what the inexistence of social relations

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273 ——— M. H. Brousse, 'Art, Avant Garde and Psychoanalysis', *Lacanian Compass: Psychoanalytic Journal of Lacanian Orientation*, Volume 1, Issue 11, 2007, p. 7.

274 ——— Ibid.

275 ——— Ibid.

276 ——— M. H. Brousse, 'Art, Avant Garde and Psychoanalysis', *Lacanian Compass: Psychoanalytic Journal of Lacanian Orientation*, Volume 1, Issue 11, 2007, p. 7.

and the material consequences of these spectres are.[277] The ultimate question is how to develop a discursive analytic project without slipping into a set of conditions that lead to a subsumption of surplus by a master's order. It is the attempt to hold the collective on this edge as a hybrid parallel to the mainstream, that facilitates its own impossible discursive context. If one acknowledges the fact that there is no pure outside from the standpoint where judgement on contradictory social processes can be pronounced, one's only hope remains in fleeting opportunities. My research, from this point onwards purposefully attempts to venture out of this maze of contradictions, by continuing with an analysis driven by curiosity itself. For if the fundamental strategy of ruling ideologies is to make themselves appear as natural, maybe a curation driven by asymmetry and nervousness can be its own form of critique.

Interlude: The Hysteric's Demands

It was towards the end of a recent lecture on 'Curating and the Event of Knowledge' at Goldsmiths, University of London in January 2016, and after two eloquent presentations by Julia Morandeira and Doreen Mende of their work on alternative curatorial practices in Costa Rica and the West Bank respectively, that Professor Irit Rogoff asked Morandeira whether she had 'given up on institutions altogether'? It was a rather provocative question of course, given that it came from the founder of the Department of Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths herself, who in effect represents the institution's desire to know and embodies the master of knowledge in person. It was nevertheless a very pertinent question, considering both speaker's insistence on the need for 'curatorial knowledge' to be conceptualised as an expanded understanding of research that is *excluded* from universities by actualising struggles themselves 'as the conditions of production' instead'.[278]

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277 ——— Tomšič, ibid: 203.

278 ——— D. Mendee, 'Curating and The Event of Knowledge', *Permissions: The Way We Work Now, a series of public lectures celebrating the 10 years since the foundation of the Visual Cultures Department* Goldsmiths, University of London, 2016. I should also point out here perhaps how 'curatorial knowledge' is already an MPhil & PhD research program at Goldsmiths. The programme's website describes the relationship between research and knowledge accumulated from experience here: 'The project of curatorial/knowledge is simultaneously a teaching program for post-graduate research and a mechanism for bringing

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

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

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

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together the experiences of working within art institutions and environments with modes of theoretical reflection and analysis being explored within the university. Both forums urgently require a complex mode of dialogue and exchange with one another, one in which experience and reflection can come together, *not as service industries but as interlocutors, disturbing and agitating the surfaces of each other's practice*' [my emphasis].

her submission to an unavoidable new kind of institutionalisation, the curator reflects here perhaps a general symptom of the split subject's inability to produce anything more than her own subsumption to the institution's desire to know, inevitably producing a knowledge that aligns the subject with the terms of the master.

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

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

It is at moments like these, as 'hysteric' researchers, that we need to refuse to be hypnotised by the authoritative master voices that appear to persist in the background of our subjectivisation, when in effect, the subject begins to perceive this as a symbolic interaction. It is exactly in these moments of realisation - where the *'disturbing features'* and *'waste elements'* concealed by language reside - that a hermeneutics of attentive listening can begin to reveal a more radical mode of participation and organisation.[279]

Imagine an analytic-pedagogic practice that produces an analysis of exactly this un-subsumed part via the 'disturbing features' and 'waste elements'. A practice that activates the space and time for this unknown known to be explored. A practice that allows one to suspend the familiar passage of time and the normative continuity and flow of language. A

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

practice that allows one to inhabit a pause between the unfamiliar and familiar, or better the *unfamiliar familiar*, and enter a space where individual 'desires to know' meet the collective as conscious articulations of needs and frustrations. . The desire to understand and make connections is foregrounded instead, as is the unconscious articulations of a desire to listen.

This brings us to the emancipatory effect of participation's analytic pedagogy process, where speaking beings meet their unconscious self-consciousness via the place where their own concept of the subject lives. This is the answer to 'the struggle of subjection to commodification', as an effect of the fetishisation of the social and the lack of experiential political agency for leftist discourse and projects that are displaced from the public arenas to spaces curated by cultural exchanges. As one listens to the domain of assumed knowledge, and subsequently engages by analysing the regimes, formulae and laws that structure this domain, within the individual-meets-the-collective habitat, one starts to make sense of the background noise by bringing to the fore a distinction between desires that are an effect of speech, and those that are 'real'. Lacan suggests that the knowledge that defines the subject is the knowledge that is born by the non-sense of the letter; an agency that directs the subject without it knowing. Moving towards an understanding of art, or the desire for art, as a symptom addressed to the artist-student-subject in the place of the 'other', seeks to produce another signifier - a different S1 that moves beyond that of the master signifier University - in order to construct a different function for art through the aesthetics of emancipatory dialogical interactions.

CHAPTER 5:
ULTRA RED: REVERSING THE
RELATIONAL MODEL

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

> "If we understand organising as the formal practices that build relationships out of which people compose an analysis and strategic actions, how might art contribute to and challenge those very processes? How might those processes already constitute aesthetic forms?"[280]

Founded in 1994 by two AIDS activists, Dont Rhine and Robert Sember, the artist-activist collective Ultra-red conduct acoustic mapping of contested spaces, 'pursuing a fragile but dynamic exchange between art and political organising'.[281] Ultra-red has expanded over the years to include artists, researchers and organisers from different social movements around the world, including the struggles of migration, anti-racism, participatory community development, and the politics of HIV/AIDS.[282] Collectively, the group have produced radio broadcasts, performances, recordings, installations, texts and public space actions.

Exploring acoustic space as enunciative of social relations, Ultra-red take up the acoustic mapping of contested spaces and histories utilising sound-based research that they call 'Militant Sound Investigations', that directly engage the organising and analyses of political struggles. By delinking the symbolic from value, Ultra-red propose instead an understanding of the 'Symbolic' as an inter-subjective web of signifiers by which subjects make meaning and act in the world. The key term here is inter-subjective, (or, in Paulo Freire's term, dialogic): where those who make meaning and act accordingly do so as *incomplete entities,* not entirely

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[280] ——— Ultra-red, *Mission Statement*, 2000, http://www.ultrared.org/mission.html, (accessed 27 July 2016).

[281] ——— Ibid.

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

known to themselves nor to each other. Thus, the symbolic accounting for conscious and unconscious registers of experience and the meaning made of that experience is realised.

Introduction: What did you hear?

> "It was dusk. Do you remember? It was dusk and the evening wind pulled at our banners. Our demand: _____. What did you hear? For two hours the amplified speeches of movement leaders, representatives and those supposed to know better than we echoed through the towers downtown. When they gave the signal, five thousand moved through the avenues, our scripted utterances adhering to earlier statements. Our destination was another amplification system and another program of speeches. In an analysis of the echoes that we occupied, what did you hear?"[283]

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

Based on the observations from the sound walk, and with Freire's methodology in mind, the students were asked to collectively define silence. What is the method? A very heated debate ensued in the process of synthesising the definitions that either confirmed or contradicted Freire'e methodology and his particular understanding of *critical reflection already constituting an action.* As I was part of the cohort of participating students at the time, it seemed as if we were probing, analysing and rewriting John Cage's "4'33" in order to question whether everyday life was as 'excellent' as Cage knew it'.[284] We refocused the silence on the intensities of 'social and cultural structures that precede and lend to the moment of listening'.[285]

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

284 ———— R. Sember, 'We come from your future' [interviewed by M. Fisher], September 2008, *WIRE*, issue 295, pp. 28- 33.

285 ———— B. LaBelle, *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art*, London, Continuum, 2006, p. 51.

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

For the year that followed, I decided to respond to Ultra-red's open call for
their first residency in London, where we formed the 'School of Echoes'
(2009). We worked for months hosted by the newly opened *Raven Row
Gallery* at the time, and we performed a series of protocols based on col-
lective listening sessions, analyses and strategic actions, collectively in-
vestigating different thematics like; 'What is the sound of the conflict you
cannot hear?' or 'What is the sound of regeneration?' Another long term
'Militant Sound Invesitgation' project was an ambitious collaboration on
the theme;: 'What is the sound of radical education today?', which was a
six month residency that led to a two day performance at the ICA in
response to the ICA's 'Calling Out of Context' (2011) series, focusing on the
legacy of Cornelius Cardew's 'Scratch Orchestra'.[286] During these projects

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

and together with a group of artists, activists, community organisers, educators, composers and movement leaders, we performed silence, visited contested spaces, listened together and asked each other what we heard. We used real-time sound processing, field recordings, amplified sound walks and electronic music compositions to construct a space in which to discuss. We considered how composed sound organises our everyday listening, and by listening to each other's listening processes, we deepened our understanding of how the conditions, procedures and arrangements in which we listen advance the processes of reflection, analysis and ultimately action.

In all the 'Militant Sound Investigations', and immediately after playing a sound object, the facilitator would ask: *'What did you hear?'* so that individual participants could speak about their responses or write their responses down on a piece of paper, which was later hung on the walls to form what eventually became the 'score'. This process of listening and asking *'What did you hear?'* was repeated several times, where the question eventually became the primary protocol that choreographed the enquiry. [287] The question *'What did you hear?'* was not used as a formula, but more as 'a persistent reminder of the important dialogue that needs to be maintained between open attentiveness and intentional commitment'.[288] Without that dialectic, listening procedures can fall into rigid formalism or aesthetic experience for its own sake.

The difference from formalism or aesthetic experience is that within this listening practice, and by repeatedly asking the simplest question *'What did you hear?'*, the acoustic space is actualised as inherently social. By integrating the acoustic meaning of various sites with their historic contexts, and utilising our sound-based investigation around London's sites of struggle in the 'here and now' of every collective listening, we eventually managed to challenge the usual understanding of the relationship between cultural analysis and action, at times even coming close to constituting our own aesthetics of organising.

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287 ———— The sound sources were never exactly a 'given' and thus the listening involved a deliberate suspending of a condition of the listening subject. Most of the time, the co-investigators-researchers would begin their analysis with 'acousmatics', a term first used by Pierre Schaeffer and later by Michel Chion, in reference to the use of off-screen sound in film, in an attempt to designate the sounds they hear with something they know.
M. Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2004.

288 ———— Ultra-red, ibid.

The term 'Militant Sound Investigations' (MSI) comes from Ultra-red's own mission statement and their insistence on using sound not as an object of contemplation, but more as 'a tool to enunciate social relations', arguing that *organising* is *a priori aesthetic as* it already constitutes an aesthetic form.[289] That is; the organising of people, the way they come together and the way these connections slip and slide, are all *a priori* aesthetic forms for Ultra-red. Nicolas Bourriaud would call these 'relational forms' perhaps, the difference being however that these relations are not institutionally curated as complete relational entities but self-organised and incomplete.

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

> "Militant research works neither from its own set of knowledges about the world nor from how things ought to be. On the contrary, the only condition for researcher-militants is a difficult one: to remain faithful to their 'not knowing'. As a silent language that allows the circulation of jokes, rituals, and knowledges that form the codes of *resistance,* this counteroffensive works in multiple ways and confronts not only visible enemies, but also those activists and intellectuals that intend to encapsulate the social practices of counter power in pre-established schemes. Therefore, the researcher-militant is distinct from both the academic researcher and political militant, not to mention the NGO (non-governmental organisations) humanitarian, the alternative activist, or the simply well intentioned person."[290]

Having initiated and organised numerous participatory projects myself for many years, both within the context of established cultural institutions- alongside maintaining a practice outside institutions and collaborating with grass roots and community organisers, I have witnessed firsthand how social practices of 'counter-power' can turn into their opposites, with symbolic participation signifying the co-optation of base communities' participation, extracted as value to fit its purpose within 'culture'. In the discourse of socially engaged practice and community development, symbolic participation basically signifies the alignment of the participating subject with the terms of master discourses, producing a series

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289 ———— Ibid.
290 ———— Colectivo Situaciones, 'On the Researcher-Militant', *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies: Transversal Texts*September, 2003, http://eipcp.net/transversal/0406/colectivosituaciones/en, (accessed 20 November 2014).

of identifications with the master's desire to know, to subject and colonise. My argument however, is that if one manages to delink the symbolic from value, one could perhaps understand the symbolic instead to be an inter-subjective web of signifiers by which subjects make meaning and act in the world.

Protocols for Organised Listening

If we look at Ultra-Red's practice of organised listening in more depth, we can perhaps begin to understand better how this de-linking of the symbolic from the 'value form of participation' occurs within the particular circumstances of organised listening sessions. The starting point is that every sound exists in *space* and *time*. And since space and time are the building blocks of all human activity and struggle, sound is an avenue where perception meets action as it is where the body politic encounters the material. Ultra-red's investigations are guided by practices of political listening found in the fields of organising and specific forms of political education. Theories of sound, perception, aesthetics, listening and politics inform their work. The two key theorists that allow us to understand the emancipatory and educational value of their analytic practice further is French sound theorist Pierre Schaeffer, and Brazilian pioneer of emancipatory education Paolo Freire. Schaeffer was a sound theorist, composer, and inventor who rejected the binary separation between listening (active reception) and hearing (passive reception).[291]

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[291] Pierre Schaeffer (1910-1995) coined the term *musique concrete* in 1948 first to describe a genre of music based on pre-recorded sounds. Later the term designated a research approach that prioritised *listening* in the concrete over composing in the abstract. The four practices of listening schematised by Ultra-reds' modifications of Schaerffer's theory, centre around the abstract modes. For Schaeffer, abstract listening served music as end in itself.
P. Schaeffer, *À la Recherche d'une Musique Concrète*, France, Éditions du Seuil, 1952.
A more detailed introduction to Schaeffer's ideas is given by Michel Chion in, M. Chion, *Guide to Sound Objects*, 2009, https://monoskop.org/images/0/01/Chion_Michel_Guide_To_Sound_Objects_Pierre_Schaeffer_and_Musical_Research.pdf, (accessed 27 July 2016).

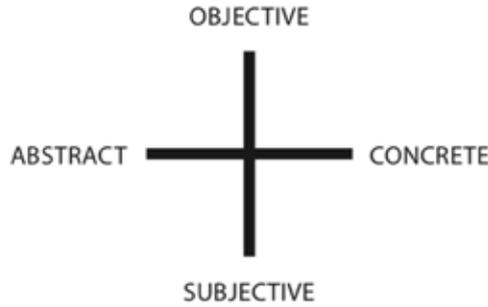Figure 1: Ultra-red's Adaptation of Pierre Schaeffer's theory of organised sounds, (courtesy of Ultra-red).

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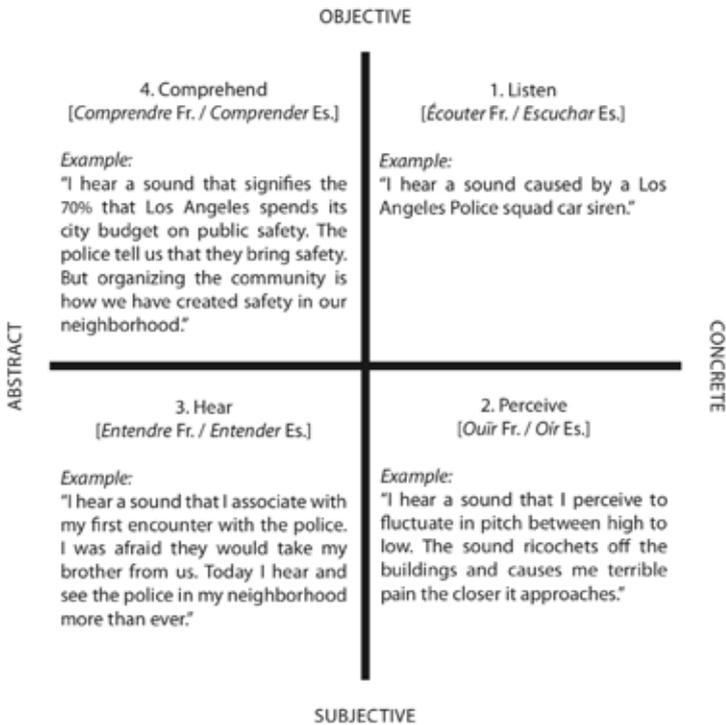

Figure 2: Diagram One (Courtesy of Ultra-red).

OBJECTIVE

	Critical Analysis	Social Structure / Social Action
ABSTRACT	*Example:* "We critically examine our stories and begin to arrive at an analysis of how the police work and their true function in our neighborhoods, particularly in relation to the rising rents and the increasing number of businesses where we cannot afford to shop. Is this gentrification?"	*Example #1:* "We live in a social system that contradictorily claims freedom and, yet, incarcerates more people than any country and our city spends 70% on public safety." *Example #2:* "We test our analysis by reducing dependency on the police. Does the city reduce funding for police?"
	Collective Reflection	Lived Experience
	Example: "We come together to listen and abstract on our experiences into stories. We hear the similarities and differencees in our accounts of police violence. We realize that our experiences of the police are shared and not wholly individual "	*Example:* "We experience as part of everyday life in the barrio, how the police never come when we need them. They only appear to arrest our young people and jail our neighbors who try to make a living as street vendors."

ABSTRACT — CONCRETE

SUBJECTIVE

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

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

Ultra-red explain:

1. 'Listening identifies sounds by the real-world events that cause them.
2. Perceiving reduces sound to its sonorous qualities as we bodily experience them, such as tone, colour, pitch, volume, and the spatial placement of sound'.[292]

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

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[292] ——— Ultra-red, *Practice Sessions Workbook*, no. 9, Berlin, Koenig Books, 2014, p. 25, 27.

3. 'Hearing focuses on subjective associations such as memories
a sound triggers.
4. And, comprehending occurs when the group critically analyse sound
in relation to social meanings'.[293]

It is with regards to this latter point of 'comprehending social meanings' -
where the second reference point in this practice of 'organised listing'
becomes relevant in relation to Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968)
and his insistence on people's 'education for critical consciousness' as sit-
uated within lived experience itself - that the rooting of sounds in time,
context, and action and by extension place, history and experience
becomes prevalent. By coming together as a group to discuss their expe-
riences, the group members externalise their own 'thematics', thereby
making explicit to themselves and the collective their 'real consciousness'
of the world. As they decode, abstract and recount these experiences, the
co-investigators begin to see how they themselves acted while actually
experiencing the situation they are now collectively analysing, and thus
reach a '*perception of their previous perception*' as Freire puts it. Ultimately,
this leads to a building awareness of the dialectic relations between the
two dimensions of reality, the abstract and the concrete, the subjective
and the objective.

This process therefore does not only serve as a catharsis for participants
to open to 'the truth of the affective' but also insinuates the possibility for
the listener-participant that she could well be a member of this high
rational order, the order of the Other so to speak, capable of making sense
of the world in their own terms. This tendency eventually gravitates
towards the area of the 'unheard of', where what limits the self also pro-
vides the key to its liberation; what Freire calls the 'untested feasibility' of
a 'limit situation'.[294] In this process of reflecting on the dynamic exchanges
between subjective and objective, concrete and abstract, participants
begin to analyse their stories in order to understand the world as socially
produced and, therefore, changeable. The dialectical relation between
subjective and objective eventually reminds us that by critically analysing
and acting upon the objective world we also transform our own subjectiv-
ity. According to Freire, subjectivity and objectivity are in constant dialec-
tical relationship. 'To deny the importance of subjectivity in the process of
transforming the world and history is naive and simplistic. It is to admit
the impossible: a world without people' he writes, emphasising the need
to move away from these kind of dichotomies.[295] Like an imaginary dia-

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293 ———— Ibid, [my emphasis].
294 ———— P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, London, Continuum, 1968/ 2005, p. 50.
295 ———— Freire, ibid: 50.

logue between the self and the other, affect and reason, symbolic and real; a kind of analysis of what was so far, but also so near and so dear. Kodwo Eshun describes this process of inhabiting *acousmatics* best by saying:

> "Listening to oneself listening. Listening to emotions, and frictions of emotions. And then one has to decide what those frictions of emotions are. What is the tension they are generating, the rub between them. And then one has to name them - naming the parameters of emotions because you want to get the modulations of emotion. Listening to the act of your own listening, but also how this bounces back from the other, most of the times that's what it's all about."[296]

In this mode of process, one attends to dissonance but also starts foregrounding the other against the background of one's self. Similar to a practice that evokes your fear of noise as your chain of signifiers, the ways of making connections is now threatened from the outside. These other 'jouissances' then come back to transform your unconscious desires, moving from the auditory to the existential. This is the moment when, as Lacan teaches us, the signifiers become 'real' and by extension 'resistant' to the master's desires.[297] Scott Wilson argues in *Stop Making Sense: Music*

Similarly, Marx writes: 'The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men that change circumstances and that the educator himself needs educating.' What Marx criticises here is not subjectivity, but subjectivism and psychologism. To achieve a transformation of reality, the oppressed must confront reality critically, simultaneously objectifying and acting upon that reality.
K. Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach', *Marx & Engels Selected Works*, *Vol. One*, Moscow, London, Progress, Zodiac, 2002, p. 28.

296 ———— K. Eshun, *Interview for Mediatec* [online video], 1999, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RivGWj1LoQ, (accessed 27 February 2015).

297 ———— Steven Connor in 'The Modern Auditory' explains how Didier Anzieu has suggested that there is an auditory equivalent to Lacan's mirror stage: a sonorous envelope or bath of sounds, especially those of the mother's voice, that surrounds the infant, soothing, supporting and stabilising it. This imaginary envelope gives the child a unity from the outside; it can be seen, therefore, as a 'sound mirror or [...] an audiophonic skin'. Azieu's analysis has been carried further by Edith Lecourt who, in turn, argues that this audophonic skin protects the child from the otherwise diffusive and disintegrating conditions of sound itself. These conditions, Lecourt defines as the absence of boundaries in space: 'Sound reaches us from everywhere, it surrounds us, goes through us' and in time: 'there is no respite for sonorous perception, which is active day and night and only stops with death or total deafness, as well as its disturbing lack of concreteness. Sound can never be

from the Perspective of the Real that*:*

> "Lalangue is not Symbolic but Real. Real, because it is made of ones [signifiers] outside the chain and thus outside meaning (the signifier becomes real when it is outside the chain), and of ones that are enigmatically fused with jouissance."[298]

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

> "This means that while the unconscious is an effect of a system of differences, those differential elements do not have to be words. Moreover, their resonances can be all the more affective (and effective in the unconscious) through their repetition – the repetition of an initial dissonance."[299]

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grasped; only its sonorous source can be identified'. All these conditions are summed up, says Lecourt, in sound's quality of 'omnipresent simultaneity'. Despite differences of emphasis, these psychoanalytic works, argues Connor, concur on the question of the defining contrast between threatening and disorganised noise, which is perhaps to be identified with the condition of sound itself, and organised sound, or music. It is suggested in fact that it is in the passage from one to the other that the self is formed, in a process in which power and pleasure are intricately interwoven.
S. Connor, 'The Modern Auditory I' in R. Porter, (ed), *Rewriting the Self: Histories From the Renaissance to the Present*, London, Routledge, 1996, pp. 203-223.
Felix Guattari takes this further when he describes the 'omnipresent simultaneity' of his experiencing of a 'pregnant moment' on a Sao Paolo bridge, corresponding to a re-enactment of the 'emergent self, with its moving feeling of initial discovery of the world, and moreover, with a topical re-organisation of the other modalities of the self'
F. Guattari, 'Space and Corporeity', *Columbia Documents of Architecture*, vol. 2, 1993, p. 142.

[298] Lalangue refers both to language, i.e. the pool of signifiers always already there before we utter speech and 'lallation' from the latin *lallare* that means none other than singing 'la la la'. Wilson refers here to Colette Soler's argument that later in his career Lacan revised his understanding of the unconscious as language, to a notion of the 'real unconscious'– that is an effect of lalangue.
S. Wilson, *Stop Making Sense: Music from the Perspective of the Real*, London, Karnac Books, 2015, p. 22.

[299] Ibid.

Ultra-red as a performative paradigm thus, are not so much about finding correspondences but rather about recognising and mapping the ruptures and movements that are created by them. Here, the act of listening is not just the event, but is also the effect of the work in the material, discursive and affective domains. Instead of analysing from a distance, the architecture that Ultra-red insist on is an 'embodied criticality' that breaks with one's familiar ways of accumulating knowledge and instead permits oneself to enter another state of awareness; one that is not made of answers, but of breaks in the 'knowings'.[300] The problem, of course, is how to recognise these transformations, let alone map their effects. At times, these moments seem inchoate or premature and at other times, the 'I' is too pervasive within the process .

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

– John Lewis [301]

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

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300 ——— The term 'embodied criticality' was first coined by Irit Rogoff in her text on 'Smuggling'.
I. Rogoff, 'Smuggling: An Embodied Criticality', *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies: Transversal Texts*, 2003, http://eipcp.net/transversal/0806/rogoff1/en, (accessed 19 June 2016).

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

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

In an attempt to locate the intensity of these emotions, where they are
coming from and how and why they rub against each, the listening usu-
ally becomes more of a process of collective hermeneutics. The process of
decoding the obscure, in order to make available to consciousness the
undesirables of meaning, or what is experienced, postulated and institu-
tionalised as hidden, is never complete of course. In fact, it is never fully
materialised, always developing, always transforming according to the
context and its transitions, facilitating the ongoing discovery of the way
the parts of the disjoined whole interact with each other.[302]

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[302] ——— Let us not forget here how social relations and relational exchanges
are not conceptualised as a unified temporality of the present 'contem-
poraneity', but instead as a 'disjunctive synthesis' of conflicting and
contradictory temporalities, that are 'distributed unevenly, develop
asynchronously and reciprocally affect one another'.
A. Sáenz de Sicilia, 'Time and Subsumption' *Society for European
Philosophy / Forum for European Philosophy Annual Conference*, Kings-
ton University (UK), September 2013.

Eventually by repeatedly returning to the question *'What did you hear?',* one becomes aware of the variations and contradictions in one's own listening. The most interesting moments during these Militant Sound and other collective-analysis investigations – as guided by Ultra-red's practice – are those awkward moments of silence, where people feel ready to admit a sense of failure. As if what one is studying runs the risk of being reduced to the changing impressions of each listener or co-investigator, making real communication *impossible*. Yet again, failure is not the issue here. Failure, in fact, is part of the group's evolving process as a collective, practising within a habitat, where every individual should not be afraid to give up understanding herself from one moment to the next. The question then becomes how to rediscover, by confronting subjectivities, that which several listenings might agree on. Ultra-red's practice introduces a constantly changing acousmatic intelligence, an inevitable revision based on that listening's peculiarities of our conceptions of how we listened and what mattered to us as a whole. This kind of practice exemplifies a suspension of familiar time as we know it, allowing access to a habitat that is as open as we are willing to imagine. This reminds us that what we do matters, which is where radical potential lies of course. By illuminating the responsibilities and choices we make in order to deal with our personal realities first, we are able to move to universalising forms. By publicising the personal themes that emerge from listening – like anxiety, frustration, contradiction, alienation, fear, love, trust – contemporary struggles are revealed from a new vantage point. In psychoanalytic terms perhaps, the attention of the subject is somehow suspended by an employment of fragmentation and the different positioning of spatiotemporal thresholds via sound. The subject is now, as if for the first time, responsible for making and unmaking sense of the world around her. In the end, it is through estrangement, as Mark Fisher puts it, that Ultra-red's sounds manage to attain 'truth or political efficacy'.[303]

The relation between one's thought processes and felt experience becomes unstable, exposed and in turn open to re-evaluation. By extension, time, space and the body, together with the issues at hand and the way the subject identifies their own subjectivity within their context, are revealed as concepts constructed by culture and are therefore open to revision too. Through this practice, one manages to temporarily break the chain of signifiers, the relationship between them and the system that connects them, all through the activation of the perceiving subject. In a way, excessive audibility now turns into a new kind of inaudibility, where what one element is, is what it is not. It is precisely inside these blurred boundaries

303 ———— M. Fisher, 'We come from your future', *WIRE*, issue 295, September 2008, pp. 28- 33.

where the 'unthought known' resides. Furthermore, it initiates a passage or journeying towards another kind of encounter, beyond art, situated both in the past of memory, and its re-enactment in the here and now. In this journey, what holds all the parts together, , is a habitat of *trust* that shelters them. A habitat that is not made of walls and rules, but people's mode of self-organisation, where time and space are socialised, and thus become 'alive'.

Taking into account the current technological multiplications that penetrate our mundane lives, and how spaces seem to have collapsed into a series of accelerated images where time and space's 'architecture' becomes one of enclosure (and alienation), this practice of socialised time and space becomes a force of resistance to the hegemony of vision. A practice that allows for a re-wiring of the self within its environmental system - an inhabitation, an investigation and a collective re-evaluation of this always already existing sense of cleavage between self and 'other', subject and object - in order to reclaim the connections and disconnections between abstract and real-life arrangements.[304] A composition, where one can speak of 'music' as analogous to the organisation of the collective, and the individual's positioning within it. After all, as Jacques Attali argued in his last chapter on composition in 'Noise: A Critique of Political Economy':

> "...unless one tries to reclaim communication, that is, to tie other people into the meaning one is creating, one will be unable to create one's own relation with the world, and this one will be condemned to silence."[305]

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

[305] J. Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1985, p. 134.

Auditory Subject

> *In order to hear the architecture of the prison system, I had to listen to the places where prisons rose with the stroke of a pen, where racism was manufactured and fostered for private gain, and where one person's gain in the abstract word of finance meant that the state would have more prison beds to fill. To record the prison system, in other words, I only had to walk down my own street, with the tapes rolling.*
>
> – Trevor Paglen [306]

The auditory self that Ultra-red propose is one organised around openness, responsiveness and acknowledgement of the world around us, rather than an alienation from it by discovering oneself in the midst of a collective body, as one takes part in it, rather than taking aim at it. It is important to emphasise the difference between visual and auditory subjectification processes, where instead of 'an eye that focuses, pin-points, abstracts, locating each object in physical space against a background; the ear, favours sounds from any direction'.[307] Ultra-red's sound object itself is an enveloping sphere without fixed boundaries, a dynamic field that is always in flux, creating its own dimensions moment by moment, as people attend to its different arrangements. The subject's inherent being, always already within the midst of the sound world, attends to a sound object that is always already *relational*.

As Brandon LaBelle writes in *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art*, sound in general is intrinsically and undeniably relational as it 'leaves a body and enters others; it binds and unhinges, harmonises and traumatises; it sends the body moving, the mind dreaming, the air oscillating'.[308] Sound's ability to emanate, propagate, vibrate, but also communicate and agitate is crucial if we are to understand sound's enunciative potential as a tool that enounces social relations. Sound's 'relational' potential becomes even more important within this attempt to re-position subjectivity in terms of its phenomenological 'embodied-ness' and non-discriminative nature. As Don Ihde famously put it:

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306 ——— T. Paglen, 'Recording Canceral Landscapes', *Leonardo Music Journal*, Vol 16, 2006, pp. 56-7.

307 ——— P. Rodaway, 'Auditory Geographies', *Sensuous Geographies: Body, Sense and Place*, London, Routledge, 1994, p. 114.

308 ——— B. LaBelle, *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art*, London, Continuum, 2006, p. xi.

"...we cannot listen away, as we can look away', as 'we have no ear lids and, if we did, they could not function as eyelids do, because of the diffuse nature of sound, which radiates and permeates rather than travelling in straight lines."[309]

For Ultra-red, sound is always already there. It is never a private affair but instead is always already a public event. Sound moves from a source and immediately arrives at multiple destinations and it is boundless on the one hand and site-specific on the other. The body occupies this time/space either in the foreground or background, on stage or off. As the sound travels it performs not only the material characteristics of this time/space but also the whole environment in which it is generated, including people's bodies.[310] This renders listening into an amalgam of spatial attributes via 'perception of previous perceptions', personal history, memory and last but not least, cultural values and social behaviours that influence and are in turn influenced by others. Sounds are thus always somehow beyond themselves, dispersed in the room and inside the heads of others. To listen thus here, becomes to hear in more than one head.

In addition, Ultra-red's sound-marks are not completely random. They usually refer to on-going site-specific struggles, the particular community's history, people's long term mobilising around social injustice, shared in the soundscape of a particular social group, no matter how diverse. They are relatively unique sounds or specific to 'a community in transition', and thus they possess qualities which make them special or noticed by people that attend to the community in question. The definition of community and the contested sounds themselves are never predetermined or fixed, neither are they prescribed by previous narrative schemes.

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309 ———— D. Ihde in S. Connor, *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 219.

310 ———— Lard Bang Larsen explains Ultra-red's listening's capacity for empathy further, by analysing sound's elasticity, which he takes to indicate the refinement of hearing and the way it is receptive to the slightest of impressions. Larsen refers to Johann Gottfried Herder (Kalligone,1800) and his idea that through their sound, succession and rhythm, tones are but vibrations of our sensations. This bodily vibration calls the voice of all moving bodies forth, from within themselves, 'announcing loudly' as he claims, or 'softly proclaiming' the excited state of their powers to other harmonic beings. Through the ear's receptivity and the hearing's inert empathetic ability then, this bodily 'nervousness' and reverberation becomes a primary truth that can be felt – *embodied* - and in turn evoked.
L. B. Larssen, 'Elasticity: On Nervousness and Vibration', text from the exhibition guide *Ultra-red, Raven Row Gallery*, 2009, http://www.raven-row.org/texts/15, (accessed 27 July 2016).

Instead, the thematic investigation in question always begins through this nervous moment of transformation of sounds into syntax: *'What did you hear?'* This reflective analysis of the phenomenological impact of sound on the bodies of the collective audio unconscious, ends outside oneself, in the social body, which in turn feeds back into the 'I'.

Participants often tend to identify with others in a variety of ways, such as their class, their national identity, their gender, or their generation, making desperate attempts to position themselves within a given time/space. As the dialogical analysis continues however, the recalling of the past gets invested with new meaning every time, re-activating memories and history in the context of the collective's 'here and now'. As if memories, experiences and histories are no longer found in a fixed database that one can simply return to, but instead practising the inhabitation of the nervousness and elasticity that comes with hearing empathetically, re-investing the 'self' within collective meaning. By implication, if Ultra-red's practice implies reflexivity, insofar as its resonance returns from the outside, then it is 'a reflexivity without a self'.[311]

Mladen Dolar explains in *Voice and Nothing More*, that it is not the same subject that lends his or her memory to a message and gets the sound bounced back, but rather, 'the subject is what emerges in this loop, the result of this course'.[312] Dolar's understanding posits the voice as a resonance that lives in the void of the Other, returning to us from the Other as a pure alterity of what is said. Dollar writes:

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311 ——— *Implicated Theatre* is a group that has formed out of the Serpentine Gallery's acclaimed education programme, and after years of artists and curators working with members of hotel workers unions, domestic workers and youth groups around the neighbourhood of Edgware Road, London. For their *Radio Ballad* performed at the Serpentine's Pavillion (Summer 2016) their manifesto states:
'The role of the Voice is a central theme of our work. Voice exists in an in-between space; neither located purely in the body, the social or the political. It is constantly in motion, resonating through, from and past us. What happens when we try to take ownership of our own Voices? Where are we when we are in silence? What does it mean to 'speak out'? As the logic of capital increasingly governs our lives, how can we imagine and create a space which challenges the pro t-driven motives of the neo-liberal discourses we inhabit and perpetuate? We are implicated, and so are you'.
'Radio Ballad', *Implicated Theatre*, Serpentine Galleries, London, 2011/2016).

312 ——— M. Dolar, 'Freud's Voices', *A Voice and Nothing More,* Cambridge, MIT Press, 2006, p. 160.

"Whatever one says is immediately countered by its alterity, by the voice resounding in the resonance of the void of the other, which comes back to the subject as the answer the moment one spoke."[313]

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

What Ultra-red's practice eventually teaches us, is that to produce and receive sound is not only a matter of *talking or listening,* but in fact, it is to be *involved in connections.* These connections are what make privacy intensely public and public experience distinctly personal, closing the gap between self and other, us and them.[314] It is in moments like these when we reach individual or collective crises and realise that one's knowledge and one's experience are not necessarily complimentary – and unlike 'wisdom' or the master's knowledge, listening becomes instead a state of profound frustration – when the knowledge and insights we have amassed from research and experience seem to do very little to alleviate the state we find ourselves in.

The point is not to reach some form of resolution, but rather a state that allows for *a 'transition from hysteria to* [collective] *analysis'.*[315] Moving beyond that which one already knows, and into the collective (audio) unconscious of desires through a practice that allows for these desires to come into dialogue, listen to ourselves listening, and collectively analyse our fears and limitations. A state of heightened awareness, where our frustrations start resonating with the group's in their own terms, and as we analyse them together we gain access to critical consciousness, eventually reaching the point of action via embodying criticality. This state of heightened awareness or committed attentiveness, involves the activation of a unique phenomenology of time, where a gap is opened in the continuity of the familiar cycles of thought.[316] It is from the practice of

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313 ——— Ibid.

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

315 ——— Ultra-red, '10 Preliminary Theses on Militant Sound Investigation', *Artists & Artists no 5*, New York, Printed Matter, 2008, p. 4.

316 ——— This gap, for Theodor Adorno is a prerequisite for pure thought to

collectively performing this gap between what you hear (*'What did you hear?'*) and what you understand (analysis), that action as performative utterance emerges. As Catherine Clement eloquently puts it, when she describes *syncope* and the philosophy of rupture:

> "This sweet feeling of temporary interruption suspends the subject's consciousness by contradicting time's natural progress. Physical time never stops of course [...] but [syncope] seems to accomplish its miraculous suspension."[317]

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

> "The magic of the work resides in its ability to keep us out while drawing us in. It is much like the frightening thrill of being in a relationship: the quest for total security and intimacy is always countered and subverted by the impossibility of entering a stranger totally. The mystery is what attracts, yet it is clearly what repels and keeps us fearful but wanting more. [...] What is most hauntingly suggested is what is missing."[318]

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occur. It happens rarely when you least expect it, but at the same time it seems like you have always already been preparing or it. In order to attain this pure awareness of the moment, one needs to remain faithful to the suspension of the brain's function between action and reaction. Instead of habitual perception, Ultra-red's practice allows for one to hear only that which one really desires. Listening as if for the first time. T. Adorno, 'Gaps', *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, Verso, New York, London, 2005, p. 80.

317 ——— C. Clement, *Syncope: The Philosophy of Rupture*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1994, p. 5.

318 ——— G. Pollock, 'Old Bones and Cocktail Dresses: Louise Bourgeois and the Question of Age', *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1991, p. 62.
Ultra-red initially act as hybrids running parallel with symbolic partici-

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

> "On one side there is all the symptoms of a vulnerable subjectivity (desire, skepticism, capricious idiosyncrasy), and on the other side there is a stoicism opening up towards the other and in which a non-hierarchical universality can exist. This is the gap between being involved and uninvolved in the events that unfold around you, the process by which your identity drifts in and out of definition.[319]

By listening to the way we confer meaning and by using sound as a medium of reflection, Ultra-red provide a space for 'the public' to interrogate and explore the nervousness of their performing body and the cultural dynamics of their elasticity, as they unfold through the duration of listening. In staging an interactive enquiry into what we hold as near and dear and keeping in mind how nowadays there is a political dimension to all aesthetic practices with the excuse that art is already inherently political, Ultra-red's proposal becomes key: organised listening as a politically serious act, and composing as self-organising. By embeddeding knowledge in the living world of humans and situating it within struggle, Ultra-red give license to an uncanny utopia whose foundation is laid within the self and whose force pours continually out. The more connections slip and slide between objects, the faster our independent thought and imagination will take flight. For Ultra-red, it is not the pure autonomous faculty of audition itself, but the very principle of *'relationality'* that defines the acoustic space and its ability to enhance and re-invent the experience of our every-day frustrations. The utopian element in their practice then, is not like a master plan that analytically organises the social change of the future, but one that describes a determined attitude from people's actions in concrete situations of the present.

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pation processes, and eventually move closer to what in nature we call a 'parasite', which over time –this persisting intruder– inevitably organises a whole new logic altogether, resulting in the invention of a new organism that did not exist before.

319 ——— L.B. Larssen, 'Elasticity: On Nervousness and Vibration', text from the exhibition guide *Ultra-red, Raven Row Gallery*, 2009, http://www.raven-row.org/texts/15, (accessed 27 July 2016).

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

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

CHAPTER 6: TOWARDS A RADICAL CURATORIAL PRACTICE

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

> "We see our proximity to the system as an opportunity to strike it with precision, recognising that the stakes far exceed the discourses and institutions of art as we know them."[320]

In the face of recent claims for a 'turn' to relational forms of pedagogy in artistic practice and curating, and after having foregrounded the ways in which such a turn is constituted and situated in relation to policies and practices of neoliberalism, as well as the kind of effects this has in the ways we produce and distribute art, it is also important to attend to the hysteric's desire to be 'a critical agent' in the arts. A desire to produce honest accounts and effective interventions into the conditions which shape us as curators, students, artists and activists vis-a-vis relations of power, identity and desire.[321] Guided by Ultra-red's political aesthetic project, but also by my own curatorial collaborative-research initiatives, I attempt to theorise here more generally, a radical curatorial practice that can activate pedagogic spaces for alternative modes of knowledge production, imagining a dialogical practice where organising meets art.

My intention is to present ten preliminary theses as 'generative themes' of the present towards a conceptualisation of such an emancipated practice, not just at the intellectual level, but at the level of action.[322] Unlike any claims to wisdom, I attempt to listen to my own frustrations, attending to

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320 ——— G.U.L.F cited in G. Sholette, 'Merciless Aesthetic: Activist art as the Return of Institutional Critique. A Response to Boris Groys', *Field: A Journal of Socially-Engaged Art Criticism*, issue 4, 2014, http://field-journal.com/issue-4/merciless-aesthetic-activist-art-as-the-return-of-institutional-critique-a-response-to-boris-groys, (last accessed 10 October 2015).

321 ——— J. Graham, 'Between a Pedagogical Turn and a Hard Place: Thinking with Conditions' in P. O'Neill & M. Wilson (eds.), *Curating and the Educational Turn*, London/Amsterdam, Open Editions/ de Appel, 2010, p. 130.

322 ——— Paulo Freire refers to the concept of 'generative themes' as a kind of 'thought-language' with which participants refer to reality. The concept of the 'generative theme' is neither an arbitrary invention nor a working hypothesis to be proved here. In fact, for Freire, one needs to verify a theme's objective reality and truth first (in and amongst others) before understanding it in its plurality, its significance, and its compositional and historical transformations.
P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, London, Continuum, 1968/ 2005.

the surplus of knowledge and insights I have accumulated from research and experience, but also to the limitations and inconsistencies between the two. It is important to acknowledge from the very beginning, that these 'theses' are not presented as comprehensive conclusions, or as an accomplished manifesto-like manual for curatorial practices of the future, but more as a way of 'accessing' those gaps in my own thinking, between theory and practice. My purpose is to attend to the most compelling issues and questions related to the cluster of concepts and modes of thinking around the 'art of relational exchange', in light of the contemporary opportunities and challenges of public arts funding more generally. In view of this, and before embarking on a committed means of listening to the gaps in my own 'knowings' around participation, it is important to bear in mind what Ultra-red member, and radical educator, curator and activist Janna Graham reminded me of during a conversation on the unsubsumable part of participation:

> "The ultimate participation that isn't value form, is the participation that challenges capitalism so fundamentally that capitalism ceases to exist. So, I suppose that is the ultimate autonomy: the dismantling of a capitalist framework. But on the road to that, I think there are other ways in which you do resist subsumption. I think when something reaches goals that are not capitalist goals. I think there is something resistant about that..." [323]

If workers and employers ever succeed in commodifying labour fully, capitalism will perish. Likewise, if curators and artists ever succeed in commodifying creativity fully, art will perish. It would be the end of a system capable of creating and distributing 'cultural' value. Capitalism's tendency to generate crisis, and the museum's tendency to cyclically generate the new, can only be grasped if one exposes this as a contradictory system in itself, which of course still remains one of the starting points of engagement with the urgent issues of the day.

This approach however, and for those of us who do not consider ourselves radical theorists but are mostly interested in developing engaged practices, may seem pessimistic, as it is based on the assumptions that radical anti-capitalist politics remain squarely defeated. This chapter therefore also serves as a welcoming of the crisis of autonomy as an opportunity to develop ways in which we can maintain a radical position within the existing one.

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323 ———— Interview with author, 22.07.2016

THESIS 1: Why call it art?

Before we begin working with participatory art's enunciative potentials, we should perhaps ask ourselves why there is a need to frame such practices as 'art' in the first place. When the very nature of these projects calls into question the role of institutional mediators, why bother to self-discipline and re-produce the same discourse we want to escape? Besides, as many community organisers and activists sceptical of artistic intentions argue, why would one want to explain this work to an art historical and critical establishment that has so often treated it with indifference, if not contempt? After all, art has a very specific public, an art public which is predominantly interested in issues that concern art, and not necessarily concerned with an actual organising around struggles.[324]

Chris Jones, a member of Ultra-red and the long-standing community social centre and archive '56a Infoshop' in London's Elephant and Castle area, who has worked for many years outside institutions fighting 'cultural regeneration' for instance, confesses his discomfort in having to work with museums and the compromises this involves, both with regards to the work produced, but also with regards to issues around his own struggles to subjection to the value form.[325] Taking into account how art spaces are taking over self-organised community spaces or how grass roots activists now need to enter museums and gallery spaces for their voices to be heard in the first place, the issue of 'art status' becomes very pertinent in practice. Nestor García Canclini, in his analysis of art practice's expansion into sectors of urban development, design and tourism, argues that art is

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324 ———— I wish to clarify here once again that my critique of contemporary art's potential for political efficacy focuses solely on the fields of art that claim to be political in the first place, i.e. dialogical, relational, socially engaging, participatory etc. By no means do I intend to criticise all art for its political inefficacy, but only art that claims to be political here.

325 ———— Interview with author, 22 July 2016.
In a recent conference on socially engaging arts and institutional 'activisms' (Creative Time 2011), Ultra-red chose to substitute a formal presentation of their work with an open dialogue with the audience, asking instead members of the auditorium: *Why do you do what you do?* Personal motivations and ulterior motives came face to face here with the reality of social practice and its existing frameworks. A more realistic question to ask would be perhaps: *How much are you willing to sacrifice?* For Dror Feiler, an Israeli-Swede pro-Palestinian artist, activist and musician, it all narrows down to this question of self-sacrifice. As for him, and many other artists activists I have encountered throughout this research, it's not a matter of institutional critique and the possibilities therein, but more to do with the actual life sacrifices one is willing to make for the purposes of a particular struggle.
D. Feiler interview with author, *Stockholm Modernat Museet*, Stockholm, Sweden, 2014.

now 'even being asked to take the place once filled by politics by providing collective spaces to deal with intercultural relations'.[326]

In the first instance, the question of whether art is the place for social change may seem as rather disingenuous since many of us are willing to invoke the art status of our work for obvious funding purposes. 'Curatorial solidarity' projects often position themselves in complex and rather precarious labour situations in terms of funding and structural support, repeatedly compromising the effects of the work, due partly to these dependencies.[327] What is at stake here of course, as previously analysed, is the difference between artistic and political autonomy, and the ways in which art spaces can become spaces in which to resist the subject's instrumentalisation in the first place.[328] The deeper implication of the question however, with regards to this dialogue between organising and art, is whether there is anything else to be gained in defining this work in terms of art in the first place.

When art critics come face to face with social practices, they often apply a formalist-based methodology that cannot appreciate, or even recognise, the sharing of non-subsumable surplus jouissances involved in these kind on inter-subjective exchanges. As a result, most of these dialogic works are criticised for being non-pleasurable or are attacked for their lesser quality of aesthetic gratification. The audience gains no sensory pleasure or stimulation or fails to find the work aesthetically engaging, and thus the project is dismissed as 'failed art'. In some cases, this surmounts to questioning the status of the work *as* art in the first place.[329]

326 ———— N. García Canclini, *Art beyond itself: Anthropology for a Society without a Story Line,* Durham, Duke University Press, 2015, p. xi.

327 ———— See for instance my recounting of my experience in curating the 'Democracy and Community' workshops for the TATE galleries and the difficult compromises I had to make in view of TATE''s sponsorship by British Petroleum (BP Art Exchange) (see appendix: practice).

328 ———— For more on this see Chapter 2: Curation of Autonomy, and my in-depth analysis of autonomy versus heteronomy.

329 ———— G. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2004, pp. 10-11
This debate is exemplified by Claire Bishop's text, C. Bishop, 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents', *Artforum*, February 2006, pp. 179-185 and Grant Kester's response to it in the same issue, G. Kester, 'Response to Claire Bishop's paper on Relational Aesthetics', *Circa*, no. 114, Winter 2005, pp. 37-39.

In other cases, theorists consider this work as practically and theoretically indistinguishable from social or political activism, where the transformative power of discourse is reduced to action without reflection. 'Action for action's sake negating the true praxis, and making dialogue impossible'.[330] Other more 'socially engaged' critics are willing to accept the work's identity *as* art but limit their critical engagement to a straightforward calculation of its political efficacy. For example, does the work fail to achieve its stated intention? Is it complicit with some broader, possibly antithetical, political or cultural agenda? How accessible or democratic was its proposed model of participation in the first place?

Within the discussion around the activation of dialogues between politics and art of course, it is important to consider that despite such categorisations, the varied political art experiments of our times are not all equivalent. Nicolas Bourriaud for example, references Rikrit Tiravanijah's performance, *Untitled (Free)* 2006 – in which the artist served pad-thai curry from an ad hoc kitchen in an art gallery – as an ephemeral relational micro-utopia that resists capitalism. Bourriaud's model for 'relationality' distinguishes the much less 'disconcerting situations' - to use Claire Bishop's term - - from the ones orchestrated by Jonas Staal's *New World Academy* for instance*,* as a move away from conviviality and towards a critique of the ideological frameworks that support relational production in the first place.[331] Liberate Tate's activist performance *Gift* (2012), where a wind turbine blade was submitted to the Tate as a 'gift to the nation', in questioning Tate's sponsorship by British Petroleum (BP), is much less 'dialogical' compared to Tania Bruguera's *Immigrant Movement International (2010-5)* and her insistence on organising transversal dialogues between social movements and institutional constituents.[332] Ultra-red in turn, propose a move away from activist art that assumes appropriated aesthetic forms (dialogic, participatory, or socially engaging artivism) and instead insist on an analysis of organising as an *a priori* aesthetic. Instead of political content doing the work of both cultural analysis and cultural action, they argue for a 'political aesthetic' project that reverses this model; where the 'formal practices that build relationships out of which people compose an analysis and strategic actions [...] already constitute aesthetic forms'.[333]

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330 ——— P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, London, Continuum, 1968/ 2005 88.

331 ——— For more on this see Chapter 1: Relational as Form: Situating the Relational in Praxis.

332 ——— Ibid.

333 ——— Ultra-red, *Mission Statement*, 2000, http://www.ultrared.org/mission.html, (accessed 27 July 2016).

Depending on the criteria by which they are assessed, different political art initiatives seem to offer different forms of horizontal encounters between different subjectivities. Others may seek to delimit such inter-subjective exchanges, promoting the transference of a message from one to another instead, as opposed to the creation of dialogue. As boundaries and definitions of art practice dissolve, expand and mutate however, we should also aim to attend to the *permissions* these changes allow for instead. Are these *permissions* 'immanent to the field of study they belong to, for example, or do they get authorised by the urgent issues of the day?' [334] What is the point of taking the claim that these *are* works of art seriously, if not to develop criteria for the further evaluation and expansion of our understanding of these works' effects? How do these works go beyond institutional prescriptions and their discursive schemes in the first place? If by framing alternative 'radical' practices within art historical, relational and other aesthetic discourses, we produce the very subjects of neoliberal production we are fighting against, then what does *dialogical aesthetics* have to offer to counteract such enclosed and alienated subjectivities production?[335]

Interlude: WochenKlausur

'Art lets us think in uncommon ways'.[336]

– WochenKlausur

As announced on their official website since 1993, and on invitation from different art institutions, the Austrian collective WochenKlausur 'develops concrete proposals aimed at small, but nevertheless effective improvements to socio-political deficiencies'.[337] With projects like, *Outdoor School Classes* (Sanabria, Estonia, 2012), *Women-led Workers' Cooperative* (Glas-

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334 ——— *Permissions: The Way We Work Now* is the title of a new series of public lectures at Goldsmiths, University of London, on the subject of curating and the event of knowledge.

335 ——— Dialogical aesthetics is a term coined by Grant Kester in 'Dialogical Aesthetics, A Critical Framework for Littoral Art', *Variant*, issue 9, 2000, http://www.variant.org.uk/9texts/KesterSupplement.html, (accessed 12 January 2014).

336 ——— WochenKlausur, as quoted in Kester (2004), ibid: 101.

337 ——— WochenKlausur's official website, http://www.wochenklausur.at/pro-jwahl.php?lang=en, (accessed 04 July 2016).

gow, UK, 2013), *A Cinema for Immigrants* (Limerick, Ireland, 2006), *Voting Systems* (Stockholm, Sweden, 2002), *School Classroom Design* (Vienna, Austria, 1996) and *Employment of Former Drug Users* (Vienna, Austria, 2003), the collective seems to proceed even further and invariably translate these proposals into action, 'where artistic creativity is no longer seen as a formal act, but as an intervention into society', as they put it.[338]

In response to those who would argue that this is not art but social work or activism the group argues; 'localised between social work and politics, between media work and management, interventions are nonetheless based on ideas from the discourse of art'.[339] Here, the discourse of art itself allows for a capacity to think critically and creatively across disciplinary boundaries. Grant Kester, writing in defence of such discursive practices, argues that the emphasis should be placed on the actual character of the discursive interaction, rather than the physical or formal integrity of a given project, or the artist's experience in producing it. The primary objective of this work is not the creation of an art project or artefact as an exemplary representation - although actual physical objects do play a role in many of these projects - but more on the way people come together and the way they build new relations, organising themselves as they take part in 'exemplary discursive interactions with specific, often non-art, constituencies'.[340] It is important to clarify that the discursive projects Kester refers to here, are all projects that usually take place outside institutions, working quietly with little or no recognition from curators and mainstream art critics. These projects are bound to an instance of creating new forms of collaborative knowledge and interaction outside the gallery or museum spaces, or as WochenKlausur argue; 'outside the hierarchies we are pressed into when we are employed in an institution, a social organisation, or a political party'.[341]

One of the projects that exemplifies this kind of practice is the *Shelter for Drug-Addicted Women,* a project that took place in Zurich for 8 weeks during the winter of 1994 by establishing a shelter for drug-addicted sex workers who needed to get some rest during the day. In 1994, the group was invited by the Shedhalle gallery in Zurich to curate a project involving

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338 ——— Ibid.

339 ——— Ibid.

340 ——— G. Kester, 'The Art of Listening (and of Being Heard): Jay Koh's Discursive Networks', *The Third Text*, issue 49, Summer 1999, http://ifima.net/IFIMA/personal/Art%20of%20Listening.htm, (accessed 27 July 2016).

341 ——— *Intervention to Improve Conditions in Deportation Detention,* WochenKlasusur official website, http://wochenklasusur.to.or.at.projekte/06p_kurz_en.htm, (accessed 27 July 2016).

drug-related issues, so that they would exemplify the art institution's new philosophy, namely; that 'art should no longer be encapsulated from political reality'.[342] At the time, election campaigns were underway in Switzerland, and as the group explains, all the relief organisations assisting drug abusers were being attacked at the time by right-wing parties for 'being counterproductive to narcotics enforcement'.[343] The city's council reacted with a reduction of social services, particularly for women who use sex work in order to support their addictions. From my own experience volunteering for English Collective of Prostitutes in London, but also from other artist-activist experiences during projects in the streets of Athens (Greece), I have learnt how many of these women feel stigmatised by society. At times even subjected to violent attacks and harassment by customers, dealers, and very often the police, unable to find somewhere to sleep during daytime and thus living the risky life of the streets. In fact, for these women the most urgent struggle is their right to work together, protect each other and have a place they can return to to sleep when the homeless centres are closed during the day. How does one facilitate this uncommon dialogue, involving the creative orchestration of collaborative encounters out of which new relations can be built? Is this an issue that belongs to aesthetic discourse to begin with?

WochenKlausur's 'curatorial' strategy was rather unusual, moving beyond the limits of institutional confines. On a warm spring day, a small pleasure boat sets off on a three-hour cruise on Lake Zurich. Seated around a table in the main cabin were an unusual gathering of politicians, journalists, sex workers, and activists, prevention and addiction specialists, attorneys, editors of newspapers, as well as the police chief of the city of Zurich. Their task was simple; to have a conversation around the topic of homelessness of women drug addicts. Over the course of several weeks Wochen-Klausur organised dozens of these floating dialogues involving almost sixty key figures from Zurich's political, journalistic, and activist communities. Of course, it was not easy to get all these VIPs on board, as they testify. In alignment with many of their projects, they decided to use a tricky strategy; inviting the mayor for example and telling him that his colleague, the Socialist party secretary, would also be participating, but only if the mayor committed himself.[344] Flattered in this way the mayor agreed, and half an hour later the same result was achieved with the party secretary.

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342 ——— http://www.wochenklausur.at/projekt.php?lang=en&id=4, (accessed 27 July 2016).

343 ——— Ibid.

344 ——— http://www.wochenklausur.at/projekt.php?lang=en&id=4, (accessed 27 July 2016).

WochenKlausur, *Shelter for Drug-Addicted Women,* Lake Zurich, 2014.

As WochenKlausur explain, many of the participants in these boat talks would normally have taken opposite sides in the highly charged debate over drug addiction and prostitution, attacking and counteracting with statistics and moral incentive.[345] But in the ritualistic context of an art event, and with their statements insulated from direct media scrutiny, they were able to communicate outside the rhetorical demands of their official status. Even more remarkably, they were able to reach a consensus supporting a modest but concrete solution to the problem; the creation of a suitable house for these women to find shelter. With the help of different sponsors, including the City's council and the Federal Health Department, the thirty-bed women's shelter was operated for six years until the City of Zurich withdrew its funding in 2001.

WochenKlauser has been working in this consultive manner for nearly a decade, developing projects all around the world. For the artists the complex process of bringing the women's shelter into existence 'was itself a creative act, a 'concrete intervention' where artist materials are replaced by 'sociopolitical relationships'.[346] The interactions central to these projects require some kind of discursive framework through which various participants can share their thoughts, experiences, knowledge and reactions. Within the context of art however, it seems that the usual social and bureaucratic obstacles can be easily circumvented in order to shock us out of 'perceptual complacency', as Kester puts it, and mobilise people in key political, administrative or media positions to accomplish concrete outcomes.[347] For WochenKlausur, an invitation from an established art institution in fact, 'provides the cultural capital and infrastructural frame-

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[345] ——— http://www.wochenklausur.at/projekt.php?lang=en&id=4, (accessed 27 July 2016)..

[346] ——— WochenKlausur in Kester (2004), ibid: 101.

[347] ——— Kester, ibid: 101

work necessary for a cumulative process of dialogical exchange to materialise. The exhibition space serving more as a studio from which the intervention is constructed'.[348]

THESIS 2: DIALOGUE.

The curator's role, as the facilitator of this dialogical exchange between art and politics, aesthetics and organising, reflection and action, becomes very pertinent, especially as these dichotomies are propagated within popular 'democratisation of culture' policies and their focus on a top-down, and at times even paternalistic 'social action' apparatus. This basically involves the prioritising of the expansion of 'access' and 'inclusion' of the 'general public' to mainly European forms of high culture, as an abstracted 'civilising' where the curator imagines the effect of the work on the consciousness of a hypothetical 'implicated' public.[349]

Paulo Freire refers to this kind of 'civilising' as the 'banking' style of dialogue, a kind of disinterested or alienated engagement, where those who name the world always remain separate from those who change it.

Freire's understanding of the 'banking style' of engagement, the teacher-student (or curator-participant) relationship has a fundamentally narrative character, where the teacher is the narrating subject S and the students are the listening objects O. 'The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalised and predictable'.[350] Or the teacher expands on a topic totally alien to the everyday experiences of the students. 'Words are emptied of their concreteness and become a hollow, alienated and alienating verbosity [...] The outstanding character of this narrative education is the sonority of words, not their transforming power', writes Freire, explaining how instead of communicating, the teacher here 'issues communiqués and makes deposits which the student receives, files and stores as 'banking'.[351] The students are thus turned into receptacle containers, to be filled by the teacher's surplus. Freire elaborates:

> "This is the "banking" concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing,

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348 ——— WochenKlausur as cited in Kester, ibid: 101.

349 ——— F. Matarasso & C. Landry, *Balancing Act: Twenty-One Strategic Dilemmas*, Belgium, Council of Europe, 1999.

350 ——— P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, London, Continuum, 1968/ 2005, pp. 70-2.

351 ——— Freire, Ibid.

and storing the deposits. They do, it is true, have the opportunity to become collectors or cataloguers of the things they store. But in the last analysis, it is the people themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system."[352]

For a 'banking' style curator then, to paraphrase Freire, the question of political content would simply concern a discursive program on 'culture' or 'politics' in relation to her 'subjects.' Her specialist knowledge on dialogue and participation becomes a gift from the sophisticated and emancipated, to those whom the curator considers the subject of ignorance. Negating knowledge and participation as a process of inquiry the curator justifies her existence as the subject of knowledge par excellence, turning dialogue into what Freire calls an 'alienating blah blah'.

For the 'dialogical' curator however, following Freire's concept of dialogue, the program content of educational-curatorial initiatives can be 'neither a gift or an imposition', but more an organised, systematised and developed 're-presentation' to participants of the objects about which *they* want to know more.[353] The first step towards an open-ended analytic process of dialogical engagement is perhaps for one to give up the 'arrogance of projecting ignorance onto others' and start listening to one's own.[354] Freire asks:

> "How can I dialogue if I regard myself as a case apart from others? How can I dialogue if I consider myself a member of the in-group of pure men, the owners of truth and knowledge, for whom all non-members are "these people" of "the great unwashed"? [...] How can I dialogue if I am afraid of being displaced, the mere possibility causing me torment and weakness?[355]

The question of 'cultural democracy' versus 'democratisation of culture', or politicising aesthetics versus the aestheticising of politics, also ought to involve an altogether different understanding of what constitutes dialogue in the first place, and a necessary re-positioning of the curator herself within this analysis as the manager of 'relational models', social exchanges and relationships between analysis and action. Taking into

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352 ——— Freire, ibid: 72
353 ——— Freire, ibid: 87, 93.
354 ——— Freire becomes very specific here in his analysis of 'authentic dialogue' arguing for 'humility', 'mutual trust', 'love', 'hope' and 'critical thinking', as the guiding principles of the 'true' and thus transformative 'word'.
        ibid: 87-92.
355 ——— Freire, ibid: 90.

account how the interest of the 'oppressors', nowadays lie more in 'changing the consciousness of the oppressed, rather than the situation which oppresses them', it is perhaps not so much about art versus activism, politics versus aesthetics, or actions versus words, but instead about an analysis of the constitutive elements of dialogical practices in the first place.[356]

In view of this, it is important to also acknowledge that most of the contradictions of socially engaged practices begin when an 'unauthentic dialogue' occurs, one which is unable to transform reality by being deprived of its dimension of action.[357] Museums and art spaces host amazing dialogical encounters, with very interesting speakers, well - orchestrated panels and sophisticated models of participation for 'difficult conversations to happen'. No matter how interesting, sophisticated or participatory these conversations are however, they will always remain inconsequential if the dialogic participation is based on a dichotomy between reflection and action.

THESIS 3: ACCOUNTABILITY.
Without a direct alliance or connection with the communities whose struggles we are trying to 'represent', dialogical aesthetics remain a closed hermeneutic analysis with nowhere for that learning to go. How can we organise a dialogue if we don't organise a relationship between words and actions, performative utterances and change? The organisation of an emancipatory dialogical practice also needs to include the setting up of an 'authentic dialogue', of transformative 'true words' that include effective analysis *and* action, as informed by the implicated constituencies' desires.

There is a difference of stakes between a curator that works for an institutional or curatorial initiative on social injustice for example, and the constituent members of a community that is directly affected and mobilised around that injustice in the first place. Nonetheless, the point is to acknowledge those differences and build a solidarity project that does not erase them, but grows from them. After all, even if we share the same struggles as the communities we work with, but still remain accountable to the art world as managers of the surplus, how can we claim an authentic dialogue in the first place?

The question of accountability comes as a consequence and in direct connection to the problems that arise when artists and curators claim a 'socially engaged' status for their art, without considering its relationship to social movements and the people that support them. The question of curatorial

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356 ———— Ibid: 74.
357 ———— Ibid: 87

solidarity however, should perhaps extend from ourselves and our recognising and being accountable to the people we are in solidarity with. This involves a shared intention and commitment around the production of change which might not always be experienced in the same way between different constituencies of the art world and grass roots communities. The purpose of accountability to the constituencies we work with however, is not one based on shared stakes necessarily, but rather on a recognition of these differences in experiences, conditions *and* stakes. Being able to talk about these differences by making them apparent is what makes us accountable to the constituencies of the social movements we work with.

If the radical curation of participation has any effect beyond the mere co-optation of base communities' symbolic surplus, it is to contribute precisely to the transformation from an idle verbalism, or as Freire advocates, 'an alienated and alienating blah' to a 'true word' of reflection *and action*.[358] This accountability involves a long-term durational, open-ended process of dialogue between 'those who deny others the right to speak their 'word' and those whose right to speak has been denied them'.[359] Dialogue as an act of creation instead of dialogue as an act of domination purports an organising of collective co-investigations of the relations between our intentions and their realisations, the means and their possibility, or what Duchamp describes in 'The Creative Act' (1957) as 'the unexpressed but intended and the unintentionally expressed'. This represents the extent to which the 'dialogic' curator has control over the surplus of knowledge that can be imparted, and to that part of the surplus that is disseminated and re-instated within the learning experience, life struggles and social change.[360] In this sense the curator's accountability also includes a responsibility towards the obliteration of meaning and the consequences of removing the possibility for its relational elaboration. After all, to elaborate one's own curatorial meaning within a 'banking' discourse, produces nothing more than a series of closed gestures in which the fundamental condition for intersubjective encounters and dialogue are no longer fulfilled. Janna Graham testifies:

> "The "creative" person – if dissociated from their micro and macro-political circumstances of production, in favour of an idealised, or aesthetically separate, condition – is much less likely to acknowledge the conflicts of these circumstances, let alone mobilise to resist or struggle against the sites in which conflicts are experienced." [361]

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358 ———— Ibid: 87
359 ———— Ibid
360 ———— M. Duchamp in R. Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp,* Paragraphic Books, New York, 1959, p.77
361 ———— Graham, ibid: 127.

THESIS 4: SUBJECTIVITY

> "The co-production of critical knowledge generates rebellious bodies. Thinking about rebellious practices gives value and potency to those same practices. Collective thinking engenders common practice. Therefore, the process of knowledge production is inseparable from the process of subject production or subjectification and vice versa. It is of little worth to go around commanding people what they should think, or how they should interpret their own lives and the world. One cannot be certain that this type of transmission of information from consciousness to consciousness might produce something, or liberate in any sense. That form of transmission is too superficial, and holds disdain for the potential of encounter between different singularities and the strength of thinking and enunciating in common. It is from this concern that an interest in an articulation between collective forms of thought and research emerged; the practices of co-research, self-consciousness and transversality all go in this general direction."[362]

Towards the end of his thesis on *Relational Aesthetics*, Bourriaud hints towards some possible expansions of his analysis of the relational as an aesthetic paradigm, for 'the future of art, as an instrument of emancipation, and as a political tool aimed at the liberation of forms of subjectivity'.[363] He refers to Felix Guattari's work on the 'production of subjectivity' and the ways in which Guattari's thinking links with 'the productive machinery with which present-day art is riddled'.[364] He relays Guattari in the following:

> "The important thing is to know whether a work makes effective contributions to a changing production of statement (production d'énonciation) and not to delimit the specific boundaries of this and that utterance." [365]

Guattari was a student of Lacan but also very critical of psychoanalysis, a discipline that he saw as seeking to regulate desire into certain ready-made configurations, 'crystallised into structural complexes' and polarised

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362 ———— M. Malo de Molina, 'Common Notions, Part 2: Institutional Analysis, Participatory Action Research, Militant Research', *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies: Transversal Texts*, 2004, http://eipcp. net/transversal/0707/malo/en, (accessed 18 July 2016).

363 ———— N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, France, Les Presses du Réel, 2002, p. 78.

364 ———— Ibid: 87.

365 ———— F. Guattari cited in Bourriaud, ibid: 127.

by a 'symbolic hermeneutic, entered on childhood'.[366] Expanding on Lacan's conception of subjectivity as de-centred and incomplete, and in particular on his notion of the 'partial object', Guattari puts forward the following definition for producing subjectivity:

> "The ensemble of conditions which render possible the emergence of individual and/or collective instances as self-referential existential territories, adjacent, or in a delimiting relation, to an alterity that is itself subjective'." [367]

Most interestingly for relational discourse is that for Guattari, subjectivity is seen not as a unified or complete autonomous entity, but instead as the ensemble of multiple exchanges between 'individuals-group-machines' beyond the binary opposition of subject and society. Bourriaud explains in fact, that in the Guattari's rendition:

> "..subjectivity as production plays the role of a fulcrum around which forms of knowledge and action can freely pitch in, and soar off in pursuit of the laws of the socius." [368]

Like 'a mobile constellation of modalities' and 'grafts of transference', moving along 'lines of flight' that transverse the human and the nonhuman world, Guattari's vibrant terminology on subjectivity is not a natural order, but instead an individuation still to be won.[369] As Simon O'Sullivan explains, subjectivity for Guattari is therefore 'collective and specifically *relational*'.[370] What is particularly pertinent about Guattari is his foregrounding of art as an ethico-aesthetic instance in the process of subjectivisation:

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366 ——— For Guattari, and his 'machine-like unconscious':
'[…] The individual is fragmented into multiple relationships with a changing environment (technological, biological, cultural, and so on) forming alliances and couplings, which are motored by the energy of a desire that refuses to be curtailed'.
F. Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, Bloomington, Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1995, p. 5.

367 ——— Guattari, ibid: 9.

368 ——— Guattari in Bourriaud, ibid: 88.
Also see G. Watson, 'Response to Claire Bishop', *October,* vol. 110, Fall 2004, pp. 51-79.

369 ——— Ibid.

370 ——— S. O'Sullivan, *On the Production of Subjectivity: Five Diagrams of the Finite-Infinite Relation*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p. 258 [my emphasis].

"According to Bakhtin, in this movement the 'consumer' in some way becomes co-creator; the aesthetic form only achieving this result through the device of an isolating or separating function of such a kind that the expressive material becomes formally creative'." [371]

Subjectivity for Guattari is thus constructed, formulated and developed as it gets deployed in production, theory and frameworks of the general economy and trade. We must therefore learn to 'seize, enhance and reinvent' subjectivity, for otherwise we shall see it encapsulated into pre-established schemes, 'transformed into a rigid collective apparatus at the exclusive service of the powers to be'.[372] These ideas, as utopian as they may seem at first, have, according to Guattari, immediate political effects, namely; the need for the production of a collective subjectivity that is not defined by capitalism, but instead moves towards a 'massive subjective revolution' in the direction of emancipation. Finally, to return to art via Bourriaud's referencing of Guattari; art and the 'aesthetic paradigm' consist of 'a block of percept and affect' that offers a flexible agency capable of operating on several levels and on differing planes of knowledge. In short, Guattari writes that the 'affect is not a question of representation and discursivity, but of existence'.[373] The most advisable attitude to have for Guattari is:

"...to envisage the work of cartography and psychological modelisation in a dialectical relation with the individuals and groups concerned and to move in the direction of co-management, in the production of a polyphonic and heterogeneous subjectivity altogether." [374]

For Guattari, artistic practice provides the terrain for the invention of such 'life possibilities', providing models for human existence. This 'scizoanalytic' world becomes particularly relevant when we try to connect these ideas directly to contemporary discourse on art's emancipatory potential, and in particular the contradictory rather than liberatory possibilities of the artworks referenced by Bourriaud (Philip Parreno's *Made on the 1rst of May* (1995) a 'leisure activity assembly line', Rikrit Tiravanijahs's *One Revolution Per Minute* (1996) or Maurizio Catalan's *Bel Pease* (1994) where the artist feeds rats on cheese). In other words, we try to understand these ideas in a constructive way in terms of positioning the current role of art within the discourse of political subjectivity production.

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371 ———— F. Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, Bloomington, Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1995, p. 14.

372 ———— Guattari in Bourriaud, ibid: 89.

373 ———— Guattari, ibid.

374 ———— Ibid: 6, 11.

Guattari argues for a necessary balance between 'structuralist discoveries - referring here to the quest for hidden truths behind master signifiers - and their pragmatic management, so as to not perpetuate 'social post-modern abandonism'.[375] He then explains how this balance only comes if social relations are investigated at their proper 'temperature', at the heat of inter-subjective relationality and not artificially 'cooled' in order to 'single out the structures'. The latter can occur for instance when we 'cure' the inter-subjective in order to attend to the dissonant resonances between different participants' responses or when we retrospectively reflect on a performative exercise of being singular-plural. For Guattari, the doing away of artificial social bonds that tether 'subjectivity' to a subject as its natural attribute, and the mapping of the transformations of such re-sin-gularisations and their effects is where the liberatory possibilities lie. Instead of analysing from a distance then, this model moves beyond representation, permitting one to enter a state of awareness of the 'self' via a knowledge that is not constructed through answers but fractures in the 'knowings'.[376]

In a world where power has been de-centred and virtual centres of power exist ubiquitously, O'Sullivan explains that the 'virtual [real] centres of power are our own subjectivities, and thus the battle ground against this power, is in some sense ourselves'.[377] Furthermore, O'Sullivan calls for active and creative involvement in different artistic strategies and practices that allow for the production of the self beyond the habitual, in order 'to treat our lives as works of art'.[378] Contemporary artistic practice is seen here as a rich field for social experimentation, for the study of relational activities and the production of models of democratic participation. Accordingly, a focus on subjectivity allows us to unpack abstract concepts such as structural contradictions and curatorial alignments, and focus instead on the nuanced ways in which these are performed. O'Sullivan describes this as a type of training or creative pedagogy that involves the actualisation of different states and temporalities, with 'lines of flight'

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[375] ————— Guattari as cited in Bourriaud, ibid: 90.

[376] ————— Simon O'Sullivan in his book *Art Encounters: Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation*, attempts to map out the affirmative and specifically materialist potential of such artistic encounters, analysing the work of artists that position their practice outside the gallery, and in order to attend to art's political and ethical potentiality.
S. O'Sullivan, *Art Encounters: Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation*, Hampshire, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

[377] ————— S. O'Sullivan, *Academy: The Production of Subjectivity*, 2006, http://www.simonosullivan.net/art-writings/production-of-subjectivities.pdf, (accessed 27 July 2016).

[378] ————— Ibid.

transversing different subjective states that effectively tear down the 'onto-logical curtain between self and other'.[379]

In this manner, relational artworks' transient and ephemeral micro-uto-pias are able to enact temporary inter-subjective encounters holding a promise for one's own transformation with and among others. In this sense, subjectivity becomes constituent of consciousness, which not only defines what it is to be an individual but also shapes the subject's actions as these participatory experiences have a direct impact on how the individual perceives subjective reality, moving recursively from the abstract to the concrete. Marlene Maeckelbergh, expounds this notion and argues for the potential of 'participatory decision-making processes' to 'offer the beginnings of an emerging democratic alternative by placing diversity of people's subjectivities at the heart of decision-making practices'.[380]

The most important conception here is that Guattari's theorising of sub-jectivity as an 'ensemble of multiple exchanges' helps to progress a con-ceptualisation of an emancipatory analytic practice that moves away from representation and towards the direction of *co-management*. If we want to understand where the future potential of this discursive model of relational praxis lies, then we would first need to start conversing about the transversality or horizontality of the inter-subjective relations it pro-duces, and the ways in which these are articulated within 'collective assemblages of enunciation'.

Before we proceed to further analyse such collective enunciations, we also need to bear in mind the emphasis that Bourriaud and other advocates of relational practices, micro-politics and productions of subjectivity dis-course place on the temporality of micro-political utopias and the transi-ent dimension of momentary transformations. Bourriaud writes that:

> "The age of the New Man, future oriented manifestos, and calls for a better world all ready to be walked into and lived in, is well and truly over. These days utopia is being lived on a subjective, everyday basis, in the real time of concrete and intentionally fragmentary experi-ments. The artwork is presented as a social interstice within which these experiments and these new "life possibilities" appear to be

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379 ——— ibid.

380 ——— M. Maeckelbergh as cited in A. Flynn, 'Subjectivity and the Obliteration of Meaning: Contemporary Art, Activism, Social Movement Politics', *Micro-Utopias: anthropological perspectives on art, relationality, and creativity*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2016, https://cadernosaa.revues.org/1035, (accessed 10 June 2016).

possible. It seems more pressing to invent possible relations with our neighbours in the present than to bet on happier tomorrows.[381]

There are those who even argue that such temporary and transient constellations reflect the 'pragmatic' vector of the politics of our time, where a new type of discourse is articulated with regards to the short-lived temporalities of social mobilisation movements such as Occupy, the Indignados, the anti-globalisation movement, the Zapatistas or Brasil's Landless Worker's movement (MST). Alex Flynn writes for instance that:

> "The lack of conviction in *utopian* solutions that characterises relational aesthetics is mirrored in the politics that underpin the subjective turn in social movements more widely." [382]

Flynn hints towards the lack of commitment perhaps from radical practitioners of our times to push this reclaiming of the 'means' of producing subjectivities towards more long-term and broader goals. In the end, and even though participatory practices may offer a framework for 'subjectivity to emerge as a key site of conflict and creativity', there is also a need to differentiate these kind of enclosed and short term subjectivity-making processes of conviviality, or 'subject-making' as an end in itself', from those long-term durational and committed processes of organising.[383] Pushing this ethico-aesthetic model's promises on diversity, horizontality and a 'flattening out of subjectivity' further from a transitive ethic, to a committed and open-ended way of living one's life, is therefore paramount.

After all, it is the long-term engagement processes, sustained social relationships and committed attitudes of challenging subject-making positions, institutional conditions, exploitation and alienation in contemporary social orders, that enable participation and the development of engaging strategies in the first place. Chris Jones explains this in more practical terms in the following:

> "There is always the question of time…In LA [Ultra-red] are committed to years of going through all these painful questions […] If there is no time to maintain relationships, there will be no time to feed that learning into organising. There is no time to set that up." [384]

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381 ———— Bourriaud, ibid: 45.
382 ———— A. Flynn, 'Subjectivity and the Obliteration of Meaning: Contemporary Art, Activism, Social Movement Politics', *Micro-Utopias: anthropological perspectives on art, relationality, and creativity*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2016, https://cadernosaa.revues.org/1035, (accessed 10 June 2016).
383 ———— Ibid.
384 ———— C. Jones in interview with author.

Engaged 'dialogic' curators should therefore immerse themselves in processes of temporising the now, by critically engaging in their own perceptions of reality as life-long, open ended learning processes.

Freire suggests again that:

> "For the naive thinker, the important thing is accommodation to this normalised 'today'. For the critic, the important things is the continuity of transformation of reality, on behalf of the continuing humanisation of men." [385]

Having the benefit of an extended period of time means that the dialogue produces a commonwealth of ideas, intentions, listenings, records, and ideas. More importantly, it produces the collective experiences that come from a shared history of working together through a long period of time, which inevitably brings us to the question of community and the ways subjectivities come together to form a polymorphous ensemble of multiple exchanges.

THESIS 5: COMMUNITY

An analysis of the relations produced by socially engaged, community and emancipated practices must also involve the uneasy task of re-defining community itself. In the discourse of community-development and public art, there is a tendency to fetishise the authenticity of an artist's integral connection to a given community, considering it as either entirely positive or wholly negative.[386] Considering how the concept of community is nowadays profoundly misused in social practice discourse and community development projects, how do we move towards a re-definition of a relatively autonomous community?

Jean-Luc Nancy, in his influential essay 'The Inoperative Community' (1983), which builds on George Bataille's initial conception, states that loss is fundamental to a community, which is thereby defined as engaged in an always unfinished working through of its own identity.[387] This involves an abandonment of one's fixed identity or authorial (curatorial) position as a state of being without. In this way, a community of lack or absence can be defined as the search for a place to keep the time/space of history alive, as

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385 ———— Freire, ibid: 92.
386 ———— G. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2004, pp. 129-30.
387 ———— J.L. Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, Minneapolis, Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 1991, p.15.

imaginary and optimistic, and as a way of leaving individuality behind in order to *re-invent myself with and among others.* As Nancy writes; 'the individual is merely the residue of the experience of the dissolution of community'.[388] Community, after all, is not as grandiose as 'society', with its assumptions about nations, the idea of a people, or even a society of producers, but is articulated rather as temporal, local, non-legal and dispersed.[389] Nancy writes:

> "But these singular beings are themselves constituted by sharing, they are distributed and placed, or rather spaced, by the sharing that makes them others: other for one another, and other, infinitely other for the Subject of their fusion, which is engulfed in the sharing, in the ecstasy of the sharing: 'communicating' by not 'communing'. These 'places of communication' are no longer places of fusion, even though in them one passes from one to the other; they are defined and exposed by their dislocation. Thus, the communication of sharing would be this very dis-location."[390]

For Nancy, the conventional models of community are premised on the concept of centred, self-identical subjects coming into communion through the mutual recognition of a shared essence. In reality however, our identities are always negotiated, always in the process of being formed and re-formed through encounters with others. The anxiety caused by this constant negotiation – this sense of dependence – triggers the aggressive closure of the fascist collective or what Nancy calls, an 'essentialist' community.[391] Most interestingly for Nancy, all participants of a community are not individuals but 'singularities', always already linked to others at a pre-discursive level by virtue of an 'ontological or original sociality' that precedes our very identity as thinking beings. The concept of community therefore, cannot be established through communicative interactions via dialogical or discursive practices, but instead through some form of aggressive derangement as an essential specular intersubjective experience. Here, the phenomenological image of organised listening cannot be carried through shared labour or collaboration as either verbal or physical, - but instead through a type of *syncope* or epiphany, where we are confronted with the image of the 'other' as our identity is suspended by an aggressive sensory derangement.[392]

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388 ———— Ibid.
389 ———— Ibid: 159.
390 ———— J.L. Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, Minneapolis, Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 1991, p.159.
391 ———— Ibid: 154.
392 ———— Ibid.

In relational practices however, such instantaneous epiphanic moments very rarely take place. In the staging of an inter-subjective enquiry into what we attach importance to, we suspend the familiarity of time as we know it, not in order to experience some ecstasy of the pre-discursive level as a pure formalist or aesthetic experience, but in order to interrogate in public the nervousness of our performing bodies. When Ultra-red use sound for instance, they insist on sound's use not as an object of contemplation but more as a tool to enunciate social relations, moving *from hysteria to analysis,* as they put it. Ecstasy is henceforth the manifestation of the consciousness that is never singular, never belonging to the subject as such, but rather a process of being outside yourself and inside the many possibilities of the 'other'. In these participatory collective investigations, the subjects explore the cultural dynamics of their elasticity as incomplete entities, opening towards the 'other' in a ritualistic, process-based, open-ended and durational transformation of their split subjectivities. These transformations are never direct nor complete, but the process instead involves a processual creative analysis, accumulating all partial transformations by always developing into a new collective alterity.

The epiphanic moment of Battalian nature that Nancy refers to, is more an uncanny utopia or process-based solidarity where the foundation is laid within the self and whose force pours continuously out. The utopian element is not an 'aggressive sensory detachment', but more of a determined attitude of the subject to position themselves within the location of the Real. After all, even if this aggressive sensory derangement does happen through the sound/ aesthetic/ phenomenological impact of an object per se, there is no way of analysing it or even turning it into a collective process of analysis and action, unless we eventually transition from epiphany to the organising of connections. The *syncope* is therefore located between the phenomenological impact of sound, the listening process - where the individual-meets-the-collective by listening and analysing the ways we confer meanings together - and the lack of our unknown knowns that attracts our desire to know. Staging an inter-subjective analysis of what we value, exhibits the nervousness and elasticity of our duration.

The invocation of community-specific conditions, does not necessarily involve a shared sense of communal identity based for instance on alliances between ethnicity, gender, religious beliefs, class or political affiliation but more on 'the extent to which identity itself is constructed within a complex discursive field'.[393] Community is therefore not constructed

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[393] ———— Mary Ann Jacob as quoted in M. Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-specific art and locational identity*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press, 2002, p. 112.

in the conventional, commonsensical understanding of people coming together through a sense of heritage, or shared truths and knowledges, but rather as a community where the foundation is laid within the ontological originality of the self whose force pours continually out. It is, in essence, a community re-defining itself from a shared loss and potential re-capturing of its shared jouissance, through an inter-subjective analysis of the un-subsumable meaning that gets re-distributed back to it,.[394] Community is subsequently established not as the result of an existing 'original ontological sociality' necessarily, but instead as a 'living things out' through the activation of a dialogue between original subjection and the analysis of the distribution of its inter-subjective 'jouissance'. It is a call to a collective praxis in the 'here and now' of coming into being, analytically organising a collective subjectivity through polyphonic and 'chaosmic plunges into the materials of sensation'.[395] It is essentially a collective subjectivity based on the splicing and cuts, the segmenting and dismembering of 'the illusory units of psychic life'.

The value of working with communities that have already identified their collective voice in social struggles and the lessons we can learn from people who have been practicing community organising and grass roots activism for years is crucial here. The knowledge they bring of their local culture and politics, their empowering educational strategies, their inspiring dedication and passion, their articulated fears and desires, and their longterm commitment and experience is the lifeblood of any movement. Any attempt for 'participatory', 'socially engaging', 'emancipatory', 'educational', or 'dialogical' practices that does not start from listening to the community's struggles is doomed to fail as a mere representation, based on an 'us and them' separation. This involves a privileging of the definition of oneself through solidarity with others while at the same time recognising the contingent nature of this identification. In each case, com-

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394 ———— Žižek, referencing Hard and Negri, eloquently defines the commons as: 'the shared substance of our social being whose privatisation is a violent act that should be resisted with violent means, the commons of culture the immediately socialised forms of cognitive capital, primary language, our means of communication and education, but also the shared infrastructure of public transport, electricity, post etc; the commons of external nature threatened by pollution and exploitation, the commons of internal nature (biogenetic inheritance of humanity)'. S. Žižek, 'Two events mark the beginning and end of the first decade of the 21rst century: the 9/11 attacks in 2001 and the financial meltdown in 2008' in G. Sholette and O. Ressler, *It's the Political Economy, Stupid: The Global Financial Crisis in Art and Theory*, London, Pluto Press, 2013, pp. 29-30.

395 ———— F. Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1995, p. 90.

munity formation is more accurately viewed as an ongoing process of developing the collective's own critical consciousness, for the cultivation of the coherent collective agency necessary to engage in collective actions in the first place.

In this participatory process, which is always in progress, people do not essentialise some 'pure' identification with a particular characteristic or trait, but instead develop their conscious diversity by processing their own meaning-making composition as incomplete entities, not entirely known to themselves nor to each other. Participants accumulatively analyse the conscious and unconscious registers of their desires and needs so that the practice of producing collective subjectivities involves a dynamic exchange between the concrete and the abstract constitutive elements of reality. Furthermore, the mutations that happen between inter-subjective or dialogic encounters - where the subjective and objective ecology of everyday life comes to meet the existing contradictions of social relations – are all part of this integrated exchange In this process therefore, what limits the investigative community also provides the key to its liberation and as the group develops its own cultural analysis and action, so will it transform completed entities into mutually transforming subjectivities.

THESIS 6: DISSENSUS

> 'The folly of our times is the wish to use consensus to cure the diseases of consensus' [396]

> – Jacques Rancière

Claire Bishop's analysis of the antagonisms inherent in relational practices and in particular her understanding of these antagonisms as essential for democratic participation can shed light on our understanding of a radical practice that produces a polyphonic heterogeneous collective subjectivity. In her essay titled *Art of the Encounter: Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics*, Bishop refers in turn to the political philosophers Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe and their arguments for a the maintenance of a fully functioning democratic society where antagonisms have not fully disappeared, but instead where new political terrains are constantly being drawn and brought into the discursive framework. To put it simply, a democratic society is one in which relations of conflict are sustained, not erased. Bishop writes that:

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396 ———— J. Rancière, *On the Shore of Politics*, London, Verso, 2006, p. 106

"Without antagonism there is only the imposed consensus of author-
itarian order – a total suppression of debate and discussion which is
inimical to democracy." [397]

Bishop also embarks on an analysis of Laclau and Mouffe's understanding
of antagonism as founded in a Lacanian theory of subjectivity, where the
subject is not 'self-transparent, rational and pure, but is irremediably
de-centered and incomplete'.[398] This reminds us of our 'failed structural
identity' which makes us 'dependent on identification in order to pro-
ceed'.[399] Subjectification, according to Lacan, is a process of identification
after all, and that is exactly what makes us all incomplete entities, with a
partial object *a* always as surplus. According to this understanding of sub-
jectivity, antagonism is what emerges from the split subject, the divided
subject of incomplete entities. Instead of a micro utopian situation that
produces a community whose members identify with each other, Bishop
argues for work that produces unease and ambivalence rather than
belonging, sustaining a tension between viewers, participants and con-
text similar to Guattari's individual-group-machines. She concludes that
all art has the potential to destabilise and de-centre our thoughts from
the predominant and pre-existing consensus.[400] For Bishop:

> "This relational antagonism would be predicated not on social har-
> mony, but on exposure of that which is repressed in contriving the
> semblance of this harmony, and thereby would provide a more con-
> crete and polemical grounds for rethinking our relationship to the
> world and to each other.[401]

Politics, as Jacques Rancière argues in *Politics, Identification, Subjectivisa-
tion*, is not 'an enactment of a principle, the self of a community' but in-
stead, the very concept of emancipation stems from a heterology of the self
via. 'the politics of the self as other'.[402] For in order to enact emancipation,

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397 ——— C. Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', *October,* vol. 110,
Fall 2004, p. 66.

398 ——— In *Hegemony and Social Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*
(1985), the political philosophers Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe
argue that a fully functioning democratic society is not one in which
antagonisms have disappeared, but one in which new political frontiers
are constantly being drawn and brought into debate.
E. Laclau, & C. Mouffe, *Hegemony and Social Strategy: Towards a Radical
Democratic Politics*, London, Verso, 1985.

399 ——— Bishop, ibid.

400 ——— Ibid.

401 ——— Ibid: 35.

402 ——— J. Rancière, *Politics, Identification, Subjectivisation*, as cited in John
Rajchman, *The Identity in Question*, London, Routledge, 1995, p. 65.

one needs to verify 'the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being, and that is exactly what an injured community is seeking; the name of anyone'.[403] The place of emancipatory truth is thus not in some grand ideal, but is instead the very argumentative plot of subjectivisation itself, whose universality involves its discursive and practical enactment, collective investigation, analysis *and* action. It is also not a demonstration of values specific to the group, as pure and essential for the group. Nor is it the moment of identification of the group, but more about collective analysing and acting upon the assumptions, antagonisms, contradictions, gaps and unfamiliar familiarities within the ongoing process of our subjectivisation both as social and critical agents. Rancière writes that 'It is the formation of a one that is not a self but is the relation of a self to an other'.[404] This network of collective subjectivities enacting politics as a 'crossing of identities of no name or group or class', for Rancière 'always involves an impossible identification, an identification that cannot be embodied by he or she who utters it'.[405] To quote Rancière again:

> "Policy is about "right" names, names that pin people down to their place and work. Politics is about "wrong" names–misnomers that articulate a gap and connect with a wrong." [406]

Furthermore, Rancière states that:

> "The process of equality is a process of difference. But difference does not mean the assumption of a different identity or the plain confrontation of two identities. The place of the working out of difference is not the 'self' or the culture of a group. It is the topos of an argument. And the place for such an argument is an interval. The place of a political subject is an interval or a gap: being together to the extent that we are in-between–between names, identities, cultures, and so on." [407]

This is an uncomfortable position to inhabit of course, but it is this discomfort that gives way to the urgency of struggles and the shared sense of dissonance to begin with. If this is translated to the language of policy, subsuming the partial 'object *a*' into the discourse of interpretive metapolitics, then of course the gap is closed, and politics is 'no more' as it

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403 ———— Ibid.
404 ———— J. Rancière, *Politics, Identification, Subjectivisation*, as cited in John
                Rajchman, *The Identity in Question*, London, Routledge, 1995, p. 66.
405 ———— Ibid.
406 ———— Ibid: 67.
407 ———— ibid: 68.

renders all differences as relations of subordination. However, if there is no overarching common ground between conflicting utterances, but instead a genuine articulation of the way needs and desires 'slip and slide', then there is no way to subsume them under a universal objectivity which would supposedly reveal its 'pure' and 'true' essence. We always need to examine and acknowledge the different stakes between those who are directly impacted and those whose solidarity relates solely to a hypothetical identification, an artificial community, or a community without struggle. In fact, if there is anything true or pure about this transversal inter-relational network of collective subjectivity, it is to be gained through its anti-essentialist framework, in which the subject is constituted by the 'non-crystallised grafts of transference' between different subject identifications in a non-fixed, open system of differences.

Against 'postmodernism's refusal to construct a 'we' of pure and true essence thus', and the problem of producing 'a series of equivalences' without ever establishing a common ground, one could perhaps argue here for the establishing of an open-ended, process-based, long-term commonality. A commonality that does not erase differences, or an individual collectivism for 'a pluralist democracy', but as Chantal Mouffe proposes an 'agonistic pluralism', that recognises conflict and argument as the condition for democracy in the first place.[408]

THESIS 7: TRANSVERSALITY

In view of my own desire for an emancipated practice and following Guattari's own life and work as a philosopher-psychoanalyst and political activist, I found Guattari's understanding of 'transversality' and his work with the La Borde clinic very useful as a way of connecting theory and practice, intentions and their realisations. After many years of working within the field, and through a series of collaborations with grass roots and community organisers, educators and activists, sex workers and feminists, teenagers and black sisters, I am willing to risk sounding dogmatic; for a practice to move beyond representations and into actual relations, it needs to work transversally across social movements, cultural institutions and pedagogic spaces. For the producers of micro utopian situations who seek to find resonance by belonging to a specific community or a future community to come, a comfortable togetherness can perhaps allow for such identifications. As I have explained throughout this publication however, these identifications get actualised through the mediation of a system of master discourses, re-enforcing a commitment to a predetermined

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[408]   C. Mouffe, 'Democratic Politics and the Question of Identity' in J. Ranchman (ed), *The Identity in Question*, London, Routledge, 1995, pp. 33-47.

belonging, without recognising their own accommodation of the neoliberal globalisation of a subject to be colonised. In addition, practices that do not consider the means and possibility of articulating one's subjectivity in one's own terms, and the ways through which this reflection and analysis always already constitutes an action, will simply produce what Freire calls an 'alienating blah blah'.

Janna Graham, in a conversation around the educational value of participation and the re-distribution of the un-subsumable part of participation across the different constituencies that Ultra-red work with, argued for a need to move away from artificial connections and abstract situations - the hierarchical situation of a school classroom for instance - and towards a collective investigation of 'what this shared stakes might be...'.[409] She explains that:

> "If we produce a really closed hermeneutic community for consciousness raising or for becoming conscious, and if we have nowhere for that to go, I think that's really problematic. [...] There's a real danger of opening up a whole set of questions with nowhere for that to go. Furthering the alienation or producing reactionary positions.[410]

The task at hand is not only in organising a participatory process of learning and consciousness raising as after all, there is always something to learn and become aware of even in the artificial community environment of a classroom, but moreover how we can feed that back into the constituencies we are in direct alliance with. In the desire to be a critical agent, one needs to acknowledge the inevitable crisis that necessarily emerges from occupying such ambiguous positions, as a split subject of agency. It is important to acknowledge that throughout my thirteen year involvement in the radical education and artistic community of London, most of the 'radical' projects I have been a part of and perhaps the vast majority of 'visible' contemporary socially engaging art practices around the world, have some kind of affiliation with a cultural institution, a private sponsor, a university or some kind of systemic economic power structure. And while I am happy to defend the genuinely radical pursuit of a modest agenda for criticising a system that I am still a part of, I shall not pretend to be enthusiastic about it. It is almost impossible for some of us to even consider sustaining a life if we were to abandon institutions completely. This however, does not require one to identify with the institution's values, institutional brands and management protocols.

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409 ———— J. Graham in conversation with author.
410 ———— Ibid.

An analysis of the contradictions we embody within our 'contemporary' subjectivity, working against modes of standardisation, serialisation, repetitions of tasks, desires and roles inscribed by the institution, could perhaps move towards a 'transversal' mode of curating where accountability is directly towards the constituents of the community instead. This would allow the orchestration of moments of crisis, of simultaneous rupture and access that cannot be 'managed' by information control. Furthermore, investigating collectively, without distinctions but instead as co-researchers - that part of knowledge that remains outside numerical evaluations and economic projections– could subsequently be foregrounded. In essence, it allows moving towards curating a dialogue between *participation, action* and *research* that investigates the fetish of the un-subsumable part of use value, and activates the lack of the 'unknown known' that needs to be shared within the relational form.

If Ultra-red's performative paradigm teaches us anything in this respect, it is precisely how to move beyond such contradictory conjunctives of usual binary oppositions between autonomous art and 'culture', subject and object, 'researchers' and 'researched', and towards an organisation of a co-investigation, where educators, facilitators, arts intellectuals and community organisers and 'students', become co- researchers with and as 'hysterics. Abandoning their master's 'desire to know' and moving on to an 'embodied criticality' of the conditions of their own subject production. For those practitioners that are trying to create such habitats of embodied criticality whose relational content is in direct dialogue with social consequences, and who reject the elitist understanding of the curator or arts intellectual as an 'autonomous' cultural producer, the question then becomes how to connect struggles outside of institutions with the fields usually occupied by artists and curators. Additionally, how can one avoid such practices' enclosure by the hierarchical value systems of the art gallery, institution and university, by disseminating the surplus more recursively towards the communities that create it in the first place?

Another important question is how can our curatorial, pedagogic, and research work expand beyond established networks by giving access to those we don't hear or see, and thus those 'others' that are most vulnerable? Asking these questions will open up the discussion beyond institutionally inscribed agencies, at times even bringing the critical agents into crisis within their institution. The question is therefore also how can we can go beyond institutionally inscribed agencies and find ways of moving away from the 'critically impoverished trend to produce exhibitions, publications and conferences, steeped in the valorisation of individual authorship and celebrity', and towards a commitment to struggles that helps

everyone to move beyond knowledge production and into disruption.[411] In this way we are utilising our role as educators, curators, artists and cultural producers to challenge those very processes that govern our subjectivities.

If we were to imagine social practice not as an arena of exchange for the accumulation of 'culture' but instead as a way out of this paradox as a whole, we would also need to develop a habitat for the 'art world' to meet with the social agents of change, eventually reclaiming the public spaces as spaces for dialogue, analysis *and* action and not as places of 'culture', as defined by institutional actors. Apart from 'curatorial solidarity', this also involves curatorial resilience in order to find ways to move beyond the usual small scale interventions within well-established circles and expand our practices into hybrid populations. As Janna Graham explains in 'Thinking with Conditions', many artists and curators have recently turned away from short-term, spectacular modes of presentation to longer term projects, experimenting with 'impossible' curatorial formulations of what a radical or participatory project of 'militant research' could be. Moving away from a position of authorship and towards a mode of curating that mobilises the sophisticated grammar of intelligent productions, participatory formats, and relational models of exchange towards a reflective analysis *and* action.[412] Graham, for instance, has been guided by the idea of 'possible study', as 'the study that is not yet constituted and emerges through relations between artists and transversal constituents', where social processes of identification and emancipatory education are situated 'within the context of relations across the divisions of the creative class and its others, de-centring the artist researcher as the author and propellant'.[413]

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411 ——— J. Graham, 'Between a Pedagogical Turn and a Hard Place: Thinking with Conditions' in O'Neill, P. and Wilson, M. (eds.), *Curating and the Educational Turn*, London/Amsterdam, Open Editions/ de Appel, 2010, p. 139.

412 ——— J. Graham, 'Between a Pedagogical Turn and a Hard Place: Thinking with Conditions' in O'Neill, P. and Wilson, M. (eds.), *Curating and the Educational Turn*, London/Amsterdam, Open Editions/ de Appel, 2010, p. 139.

413 ——— Ibid.
Janna Graham is an acclaimed engaged curator, educator, activist and artist, founding member of Ultra-red, but also founder of 'The Centre for Possible Studies', sponsored by Serpentine Gallery and growing out of the gallery's long-term work on Edgware Road. The idea of 'possible study' in fact has been explored by transversal group of artists, residents, shop owners, students and other workers in the neighbourhood of Edgware Road in London. A typical example of this kind of work is their project *Re: Assembly*, and in particular The School and the Neighbour-

THESIS 8: MILITANT RESEARCH

It is in the precedence of resistances that grounds the figure of the "researcher-militant", whose quest is to carry out theoretical and practical work oriented to co-produce the knowledges and modes of an alternative sociability, beginning with power (potencia) of those subaltern knowledges.

– Colectivo Situaciones [414]

Within this direction, curatorial research can be seen as the organising of relationships with 'others' in order to generate common thought-actions that move beyond the 'us' of established groups and towards a collective construction and dissemination of processes of mobilisation. Two movements that have emerged out of the traditions of militant research practices - as a reaction to 'Research and Development' policies - in a departure from curatorial authorship towards a collectivising of research-actions are 'Participatory Action Research' (PAR) and the practice of 'Insti-

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hood: A Subverted Curriculum, a curriculum to be used by teachers and students to 'bring their schools into conversation with their local area', part of the centre's Studies on a Road, series, based on knowledge produced during the Edgware Road Project at St Marylebone CE School. The project was a four-year residency that took place between 2009-2013, in which the art collective Ultra-red worked in the context of the school and the neighbourhood, involving teachers, administrators, students and local activists to address the question of what it means to be a pupil in the current policy-driven overdrive for vocation and career. They also worked through questions around migration, citizenship, and regeneration through curriculum-based investigative processes of using sound and collective listening.

For more on Ultra-red's 'Re: Assembly', http://www.serpentinegalleries.org/exhibitions-events/ultra-reds-reassembly, (accessed 18 July 2016. Implicated Theatre is another long term collective project that has come out of the Centre for Possible Studies, instigated by artists from no.w.here and with the help of theatre director Francis Rifkin. These experimental theatre-based participatory workshops have been running since 2001, exploring the relationship between political speech and action, the self and the collective, voice and silence. 'Forming close relationships with migrants' rights groups and unions, Implicated Theatre creates theatrical interventions inspired by real-life struggle, and highlighting issues of social justice'.

For more on Implicate Theatre, and the Centre for Possible Studies, https://centreforpossiblestudies.wordpress.com (accessed 18 July 2016).

414 ——— Colectivo Situaciones, 'On the Researcher-Militant', *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies: Transversal Texts* September, 2003, http://eipcp.net/transversal/0406/colectivosituaciones/en, (accessed 20 November 2014).

tutional Analysis'. Both these practices align with *Colectivo Situaciones'* call for research working 'neither from its own set of knowledges about the world nor from how things ought to be'.[415]

'Participatory Action Research' has come as a result of a confluence between critical schools of social research and Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968) in an attempt to bring research and social intervention in dialogue with local communities, their fears and desires, and also people's know-hows and experience. It includes three equally important moments; 'Participation' in life and society, 'Research' that involves growth of knowledge and soundness in thinking, and 'Action', via the engagement with experience and history. The truth that lies behind these knowledges is generated through the degree to which they are collectively produced through intersubjective dialogical analysis of the 'unknown knowns', as participants move recursively between concrete realities and the abstract elements of that reality. A key element in this inter-subjective research practice is its rupture of traditional distinctions between student and teacher, researcher and researched, subject and object. Freire argues that the subject that comes from outside of the community, as facilitator or curator, is now considered a co-investigator, relating to his or her fellow co-researchers with absolute transparency and without determining the research outcome. Like an exercise from Freire's understanding of 'critical reflection always constituting an action', every 'object' and result of study - which normally involves knowledge that comes from the outside - is now transformed into social praxis that contributes to the collective transformation of a certain reality. Subsequently, this reality becomes incomplete and open to discussion. The process of situating the relational with the materialist and experiential components of a collective investigation (proceeding from the concrete to the abstract and back) eventually leads to a transformative interpretation of reality altogether, where action, experience and practice become the primary results of the research experience itself.

'Institutional Analysis' is the second development in militant research practices that could be useful in 'curatorial solidarity' efforts by curators to become 'transversal' critical agents of struggle. 'Institutional Analysis' came as a consequence of spaces that opened up by the crisis of institutional critique practices in the 1960s and as an attempt to overcome institutionalised pedagogy and psychotherapy. It constitutes an analysis of the institution's material basis, its history and that of its members, as well as its structural relationships and the expansion of these relationships with

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415 ——— Ibid.

an 'associated sector'. The term was developed by Felix Guattari around 1964, during a session of a study group that focused on institutional psychotherapy as a way to distance analysis from its increased specialisation that gave exclusive responsibility to an 'expert' person or group.[416] Guattari suggested instead a mode of research and pedagogy that he described as the organising of an 'associative sector' that is:

> "an association based neither in the state nor in private capital, nor in small collective practices, but in the combination of those committed to work transversally across social institutions, social movements and artistic strategies, against the forces attempting to link creativity to the production of alienated and exploited subjectivities, no matter whether these were located."[417]

One of the first acknowledgements in this process of analysis is the recognition of the 'false neutrality' of the psychoanalyst or pedagogue - as the curator or artist in this instance - and the fact that any educational or analytic project implies an intervention. For Guattari:

> "Neutrality is a trap: one is always compromised. It is more important to be aware of this in order for our interventions to be the least alienating as possible. Instead of conducting a politics of subjection, identification, normalisation, social control, semiotic management of the people with whom we relate, it is possible to do the opposite. It is possible to choose a micro-politics that consists in pressuring, despite the fact that we've been conferred little strength, in favour of a process of de-alienation, a liberation of expression, using 'exits', or rather 'lines of flight', with regards to social stratifications'. Also, 'In order to develop an authentic analysis [..] the main problem would not be interpretation, but intervention. 'What can you do to change this?" [418]

Even though Guattari's language may seem at times too abstract, the work of this movement involved very concrete actions most vividly realised in the LaBorde Clinic where Guattari was based. Despite its origins in pedagogy and psychotherapy, 'Institutional Analysis' considered discovering

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416 ———— Ibid.

417 ———— Graham, ibid: 128.

418 ———— J. Beillerot, 'Entrevista a Felix Guattari' in F. Guattari, *La Intervención institucional* [Institutional Intervention], 1981 as cited in M. Malo de Molina, 'Common Notions, Part 2: Institutional Analysis, Participatory Action Research, Militant Research', *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies: Transversal Texts*, 2004, http://eipcp.net/transversal/0707/malo/en, (accessed 18 July 2016).

or analysing impossible encounters with the institution, as informed by confrontations and experiences of action in everyday life. Guattari managed to bring together a hybrid population ranging from local residents, teachers from the Freinet movement, students, architects, sociologists, service workers and administrators to psychiatry groups and members of the Parisian cultural scene. He implemented this in order to 'unblock false problems of identification', doing 'research on research', learning from their 're-arrangements' and the theoretical and practical tensions produced in their own forms of subject-making. Guattari also considered:

> "...the fact that researchers cannot comprehend their object except under the condition that they themselves are organised, and that they question themselves about things that on the surface have nothing to do with their object of study."[419]

This is a reminder of how the university's demand for transferable skills and the curator's call for 'positive social impact' might be altogether redirected towards more critical outcomes than those made by cultural policies like 'social inclusion', 'cohesion' and 'community regeneration' and towards a collective refusal of established subjectivities. The question is whether the curator-researcher is willing to take the role of 'militant' in the first place. English conceptual artist, Liam Gillick, in his text *Maybe it would be better if we worked in groups of three?*, seems rather optimistic when he writes that:

> "Recently we have seen the rise of a new group of people who have studied art history but have resisted or found no place within the standard systems of curating. This new 'non-group' has not been completely identified, manipulated or intsrumentalised by the dominant culture, yet. They appear to be deeply embedded within hierarchical academic structures, but also do not deal with the merging of voices that constitutes a symbiotic alliance between the discursive and the curatorial. They have studied art history but do not all want to be curators—or traditional critics, either."[420]

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419 ——— Ibid: 96.

420 ——— L. Gillick, 'Maybe it would be better if we worked in groups of three? Part 1', *e-flux*, vol. 2, 2009, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/maybe-it-would-be-better-if-we-worked-in-groups-of-three-part-1-of-2-the-discursive/, (accessed 13 July 2016).
Similarly, Gregory Sholette refers to the concept of 'dark matter' as the dark energy of art and artists who wish to remain in the 'shadows of the art world', 'invisible primarily to those who claim to be the managers and interpreters of culture -the critics, art collectors, dealers, museums, curators and arts administrators'. Just like 'the astrophysi-

THESIS 9: CURATOR- ANALYST

In traditional curatorial thinking, there is a prevailing tendency to let ourselves be determined by a system of knowledge centered around language. 'Saying without listening', as a mechanism, has spread 'to finally constitute itself as a generalised form of domination and control'.[421] In spite of having risen to sophisticated levels of cognitive awareness, we have little familiarity with what it means to listen. As Gemma Corrodi Fiumara argues in *The Other Side of language: A Philosophy of Listening* via her critique of Western thought and its logocentric system of knowledge; 'perhaps there is no justifiable reason why we should have to 'keep repeating' and could not decide, instead, to listen'.[422] Listening after all has not acquired a remunerative surplus value in the dominant culture of relational exchange. But how are we to listen without translating or analysing our own interpreting? This would involve a gradual transformation of how we position ourselves within the 'here and now', developing the habit of 'paying heed' to formally unheard-of messages and voices, in order to allow the 'waste elements' or 'disturbing features' of symbolic processes. This in turn would allow a shift in our attention from logical or moral visions of a situation by changing our understanding of the 'Real'.

The idea of inhabiting a problem instead of critically analysing it without falling back to an opposition between abstract and concrete experiences, returns to Lacan's understanding of the unconscious as the concretisation of linguistic autonomy. Here, the body is a site of discursive production that contains the construction of both subjectivity and jouissance.[423] In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan assists us in understanding the distinction between the knowledge produced by the curated rituals of participation and the knowledge produced in the organisation of a collective investigation through his distinction between Symbolic and Imaginary forms of knowledge. Lacan argues that the Symbolic order consists of the signifier based on difference and the discourse of the Other, all internalised as the unconscious domain of culture. By working

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cal universe is dependent on its matter' he writes, 'so too is the art world dependent on its dark energy'.
G. Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture*, London, Pluto Press, 2013, p. 2.

421 ——— G. Corrodi-Fiumara, *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening*, London, Routledge, 1990, p. 7.

422 ——— Ibid.

423 ——— S. Tomšič, *The Capitalist Unconscious*, London, Verso, 2015, p. 19. This production gives the unconscious a structural causality, where language is given a material and effective existence; language has real consequences only as a disclosed system of negativities - via signifiers as pure difference - concretised in speech where these negativities are inscribed in and on the living body.

on the symbolic, the curator *as* analyst is able to produce changes within the participant's inter-subjective position, eventually dislodging the disabling fixations of the Imaginary because the Imaginary is essentially structured by the Symbolic. 'The use of the Symbolic, is the only way for the analytic process to cross the plane of identification', writes Lacan.[424]

Conversely for Lacan, the Real is 'the impossible' itself, as it is impossible to imagine and thus impossible to integrate into the Symbolic. The Real is always in the 'here and now' of coming into being. Unlike the Symbolic, which is a set of differentiated elements as signifiers, the Real in itself is undifferentiated as it bears no fissure. The Real, according to Lacan, is what exists outside of language and that which resists symbolisation absolutely. It is precisely this impossibility to attain the Real and its resistance to symbolisation that also lends to it its traumatic quality. Lacan writes that it is; 'the essential object which is not an object any longer, but this something faced with which all words cease and all categories fail, the object of anxiety par excellence'.[425] The Real is thus not the ordered reality we experience as subjects of ideology, but the place where the social and cultural structures of representation and reproduction resist their full inscription into the master's terms. The truth that emerges in the Real is therefore not the relational and adequate truth of cognition, but the conflictual truth of social relations as experienced in the 'here and now' of coming into being, and therefore one could argue, a political truth.[426] To summarise, it equates to how we position ourselves in the 'here and now' of coming into being by inhabiting the structural Real with

424 ———— J. Lacan in D. Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis,* London, Routledge, 1996, p. 85.

425 ———— J. Lacan, 'The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis: 1954-55', in J. Miller (ed) *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan, Book II*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 164.

426 ———— In developing his thesis on ideology and its function, Slavoj Žižek argues that this confusion is actually fundamental to consciousness itself, which is illustrated by the fact that although 'biological psychology' might one day be able to completely model a person's brain, there would still be something left over that could not be explained. For Žižek, the Real names points within the fabric of hegemonic systems of representation that resist their 'full inscription' into the master's terms and thus hold the potential to 'generate sites of active political resistance'.
S. Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, London, Verso, 1989.
Also see, S. Žižek, 'Marx and Lacan: Surplus-Enjoyment, Surplus-Value, Surplus-Knowledge', *Toronto International Film Festival 2016,* Toronto, 2016, http://mariborchan.si/text/articles/slavoj-zizek/marx-and-lacan-surplus-enjoyment-surplus-value-surplus-knowledge/, (accessed 27 July 2016).

our political unconscious oriented towards the social symptom of a specific 'truth formation'.

For the Lacanian psychoanalyst, what defines the analyst is not that she is the subject of knowledge, but more that she knows that the subject that is supposed to know doesn't know.[427] Instead of imparting with the analyst's knowledge, the curator could be providing the conditions in which the hysteric unalienates herself from the order of the Other and becomes capable of making sense of the world in her own terms as if for the first time. This process does not only serve as a kind of catharsis, as the participants open up to the 'truth in the affective', but also insulates the possibility to attain what Freire calls the 'true word'. Besides the ritualistic solicitations of the hopes and fears of 'target populations' that constitute the sophisticated grammar that brings 'feeling' into compliance with the systems of administration and control, a curatorial 'banking' of the symbolic emerges so that it can be managed on behalf of an ideological truth formation. Similarly, within university discourse, art's symbolic value gets subsumed as knowledge that aligns the subject with the truth unsaid; 'the master signifier masquerading behind the agency of knowledge'.[428]

The organiser of a collective investigation – the 'dialogic' curator - that does not seek to 'curate' the hysteric's demands, but works as the facilitator-analyst for the subject's own transition from hysteria to analysis in their own terms, uses this desire as agent. The split subject in turn interrogates any complete identifications and claims of significations by questioning and acting upon the master signifier (Am I who you say I am?). This collective investigating of meaning and action, where the subjects come together to analyse their meaning and act as incomplete entities, eventually produces an analysis of the participating subjects' conscious and unconscious needs, alongside the 'invisible remainder' of the surplus of their desire that guides participation in the first place. This intersubjective web of signifiers returns to transform one's unconscious desires through a practice of collective analysis, reflection *and* action, consequently hold-

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427 ——— In their analysis of the curator as a potential 'subject that is supposed to know, and the artist as analysand, David Beech, in response to Mark Hutchinson, takes this further and argues; 'It is not a question of discovering what is already internal to the curator or of abandoning the curator altogether; it is a question of transforming the curator by infecting the curator with that which is other to the curator'.
D. Beech and M. Hutchinson, 'Inconsequential Bayonets' in P. O'Neill (ed.), *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture*, Cambridge, London, MIT Press, 2012, p. 56.

428 ——— Ultra-red, '10 Preliminary Theses on Militant Sound Investigation', *Artists & Artists no 5*, New York, Printed Matter, 2008, p. 4.

ing the potential for an emancipatory reorganising of hopes and fears, where signifiers become real and thus resistant to the master's desire. Tomšič outlines it eloquently in the following:

> "Various forms of subjectivity can certainly be thought, but there is one form caused by the autonomy of the discursive relations. It is on this basis that the given order determines the thinking and action, and it is also here that the subject comes to think and act against the established regime." [429]

In this struggle to develop a new vocabulary towards an analysis of our own interpreting, there is often a tendency to gather around a concept in the hope of building that concept into a subculture. This is akin to a group therapy session where the participants bond through a certain analysis of an idea, and curatorial researchers, artists and activists alike also bond through a certain theoretical consistency in the process of metabolising ideas and concepts as attitudes. Kodwo Eshun's calling for the development of such 'interpretive communities' comes to mind here, as a project

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429 ———— Tomšič, ibid: 21.

One of the functions of a relatively autonomous field after all is to account for what Pierre Bourdieu calls 'the space of possibilities.' In a given space of fixed position-taking, the dialogic curator needs to bring the 'curatorial' into dialogue with what is outside itself, realising that 'no cultural product exists by itself'. Besides, and as I hope to have so far demonstrated, it is actually impossible nowadays to assume the cultural order as a autonomous, transcendent sphere capable of developing in accordance with its own laws, and outside of capital. In his attempt to break with the naive vision of an individual creator (curator), Bourdieu explains:

'When we speak of a field of position-takings, we are insisting that, what can be constituted as a *system* for the sake of analysis is not the product of a coherence-seeking intention or an objective consensus (even if it presupposes unconscious agreement on common principles) but the product and prize of a permanent conflict; or, to put it another way, that the generative, unifying principle of this 'system' is the struggle, with all the contradictions it engenders (so that participation in the struggle –which may be indicated objectively by, for example, the attacks that are suffered– can be used as the criterion establishing that a work belongs to the field of position-takings and its author to the field of positions)'. Curation seen here as the result of the co-organised activities of a transversal cooperation between different constituents that takes into account the social conditions of the production of the very field of social agents (including museums, galleries, and universities).

P. Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, Cambridge, Polity press, 1993. p. 34, 29- 28.

of building that attitude 'through a culture of dissatisfaction, a yearning and a target'. He says that:

> "Such a project tends to attract students who belong to but tend to be at odds with their subject. Who are in a struggle with the capacity of the discipline to discipline. [Such a project] appeals to graduates who are unable to reconcile themselves to their postgraduate existence. It appeals to freelancing individuals, autodidacts, disaffected people. [...] They are not floating. They are not polysemous, but they are not wholly fixed yet. They are open to interpretation. They operate by disagreements that open up a field of meanings barged over by people that affiliate themselves with them. They are not so much "terms" as they are "wars" of interpretation whose aim is to intervene in culture. They are new forms of cultural politics fashioned to articulate discontent and to ferment theories to live by. Theories that are inhabited. Theories that are embodied. Theories that are rigorous and delirious."[430]

THESIS 10: EMBODIMENT

Karl Marx argues that:

> "Man must prove the truth, i.e. the reality and power, the this-sideness of his thinking in practice.... All social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mystics, find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice.... The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it." [431]

Paulo Freire also warns us that:

> "It is not enough for people to come together in dialogue in order to gain knowledge of their social reality. They must act together upon their environment in order to critically reflect upon their reality and so transform it through further action and critical reflection' [...] To speak a true word is to transform the word." [432]

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[430] ——— K. Eshun in *Public Assets Conference* (2015), Goldsmiths University of London, 2015.

[431] ——— K. Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach', *Marx & Engels Selected Works*, *Vol. One*, Moscow, London, Progress, Zodiac, 2002, pp. 13-5.

[432] ——— P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, London, Continuum, 1968/ 2005, p. 87.

Finally, Marta Malo Malino explains that:

> "It is no longer that we have been interpreting the world for a long time and now is the time to change it, but rather that the very interpretation of the world is always linked to some kind of action or practice. The question will be then, what kind of action: one that conserves the *status quo* or produces a new reality." [433]

'Inquiry and co-research'. 'Collective analysis, self-valorisation, transversality'. 'Micro-politics and the economy of desire'. 'The militants of care'. 'Action-research'. 'The personal is political'. All of these concept-tools have reappeared in contemporary initiatives that are seeking to articulate research and action, theory and praxis. As Marta Malo de Molina notes, who has written extensively on the history of militant research methodologies, the current terrain into which such militant research concepts are utilised is 'mobile, changing, dispersed and atomised'.[434] The common element that connects such practices of 'transversality', co-research and analytic subjectivity production with old materialist anti-ideological notions, is an insistence on starting from concrete reality.

Instead of relying on established knowledge and discourse – or as Freire would say, from the 'myths' of the past – one needs to move recursively from the concrete and abstract to transform the concrete. Working towards a collectivisation of research and knowledge involves critical reflection and action methodologies that allow for a reconstructing and reorganising of experience. It involves the development of a critical awareness of one's social reality through reflection *and* action. It requires one to elaborate and interrogate reality, challenge emotional doubts, collectively analyse

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433 ———— As Malo de Molina explains, Participation Action Research (PAR) emerged as a strong trend in the mid-sixties, originally rooted in popular education and grass roots activism in Latin America. Upon its introduction to the global North during the eighties however, PAR was soon co-opted by governments as a formalised process of consensual making, and as a tool to make the so far 'silent majorities' speak in order to better govern them. Nevertheless, it is certain that many elements of PAR, as Malo de Molina identifies with current tendencies to re-articulate PAR, still constitute a source of inspiration to make research a tool for transformation, especially when the participation of local communities are not 'by invitation by state institutions', but out of the 'irruption' of local communities.
M. Malo de Molina, 'Common Notions, Part 2: Institutional Analysis, Participatory Action Research, Militant Research', *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies: Transversal Texts*, 2004, http://eipcp. net/transversal/0707/malo/en, (accessed 18 July 2016).

434 ———— Ibid.

and act upon the symbolic by delinking it from value and proceeding towards a dissemination of its surplus stemming from the community that produced it. If there is no movement from explanation into a processing of experiences on a deeper level, the learning will not be inscribed anywhere.

Analysing these concrete elements of reality, as well as intervening in them, also involves that 'sensitive machine we know as the body, a surface where the inscription of a subjectivity, that lives and acts in a concrete social reality occurs'.[435] Without the body, theory remains disembodied, speaking from a position of false neutrality by pretending to 'speak from a neutral place of enunciation from where everything can be seen'.[436] This process therefore involves a sustaining of processes of dialogue and collaboration across different constituencies, to uncover real problems and actual needs. In this process, critical agents embody the action themselves, and reflect the way they embody theory and participation in their own subjections. It is a question of accountability, and the embodying of such a positioning: with whom does the curator stand with for example? Does the curator stand with the struggles of local communities, self-organised groups and the 'hysterics' demands? with women and with children? with workers and hysterics? Or with like -minded people of their field who all work to keep the illusory character of the 'unknown' as their field's fetish?

Irit Rogoff, in her essay 'Smuggling' (2006), writes about a different kind of critical and by extension relational analysis, that moves beyond critiquing from a distance and towards a curatorial embodiment of agency for change'[437] She writes that:

> "It seems to me that within the space of a relatively short period we have been able to move from criticism to critique to criticality - from finding fault, to examining the underlying assumptions that might allow something to appear as a convincing logic, to operating from an uncertain ground which while building on critique wants nevertheless to inhabit culture in a relation other than one of critical analysis; other than one of illuminating flaws, locating elisions, allocating blames." [438]

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435 ——— Ibid.

436 ——— Ibid.

437 ——— I. Rogoff, 'Smuggling: An Embodied Criticality', *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies: Transversal Texts*, 2003, http://eipcp.net/transversal/0806/rogoff1/en, (accessed 19 July 2016).

438 ——— Ibid.

As we increasingly engage with the performative nature of culture, where the production of meaning takes place as events unfold, Rogoff argues for a need to also move away from notions of immanent meanings that can be investigated, exposed and made obvious. According to Rogoff, whilst being able to exercise critical judgement is important, it does not actualise 'people's inherent and often intuitive notions of how to produce criticality through inhabiting a problem rather than analysing it.' [439] It is precisely by inhabiting a problem, through an organising of a co-investigative and reflective analysis and action, where the heterogeneous elements of knowledge are practised. Rogoff explains that:

> "The term 'smuggling' here extends far beyond a series of adventurous gambits. It reflects the search for a practice that goes beyond conjunctives such as those that bring together 'art *and* politics' or 'theory *and* practice' or 'analysis *and* action." [440]

In such a practice, we aspire to experience the relations between the two as a form of embodiment which cannot be separated into their independent components. In the context of a question regarding what a practice of such organising might be, and in order to introduce questions and uncertainties in those places where there has so far been some theoretical consensus, avant-garde curators of today find themselves drifting away from material productions and towards a production of 'possible studies'. As the former pragmatics of separate fields servicing each other have given way to a mutual governing of the conditions of production, artists and curators alike have also started recognising their own role within this mutation and the ways in which their acts perform such validating processes.[441] Instead, we see an eroding of the old boundaries between theory and practice, historicising and displaying, criticising and affirming, and a call for alternative modes of knowledge production as informed by grass roots and community organising strategies by working transversally between their field of knowledge, social movements and activism. Practising out a public interrogation of the knowledges in which we thought we were immersed and de-legitimising the very paradigms we thought we inhabited.

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439 ——— Ibid.

440 ——— Ibid [my emphasis].

441 ——— This last thesis is inspired by Irit Rogoff's text 'From Criticism to Critique to Criticality', *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies: Transversal Texts*, 2015, http://eipcp.net/transversal/0806/rogoff1/en, (accessed 19 July 2016).

In my own particular case, this was a journey from the disciplines of art history and critical theory, via militant sound investigations and radical education pathways to the place of curatorial research and pedagogic activism. After many years of navigating the interstices between different theoretical paradigms, and in my attempt to expand the possibilities within my field, I started collaborating with different 'militant researchers' concerned with the urgent issues of our times - such as regeneration, racism, austerity, AIDS activism, democracy, education - in an effort to attend to the gaps of my hitherto theoretical knowledge. I also started a series of curatorial initiatives that attempted the co-investigation of possible intersections between Participation Action Research (PAR) methodologies, organised listening and dialogical aesthetics. I explored the possibilities for participatory practices to enunciate alternative social forms, all bound to an attempt to eventually formulate my long-term project on 'curated autonomies'. In a self-reflexive shift from the purely analytical to the performative function of participation, I eventually moved to what Rogoff calls 'the uncertain ground of actual embededness', attending to meaning as it takes place in the present. I recognise the importance of theoretical knowledge and the need for critical analysis of the terms and conditions of my field, but also the necessity to attend to the living out of the very conditions I have been trying to analyse and come to terms with.

This journey now spans almost thirteen years, including encounters with disciplines that move beyond my original field of study, like psychoanalysis, political economy and sociology, and also with dynamic members of different 'communities' and their allegiances - from artists and curators to educators, cultural agents, art therapists, and activists, including those from the Radical Education, LGBQT and women's rights communities in London. In the beginning of this journey I felt lost between who I was, what I did and the world I inhabited, but most of all, I was frustrated by the fact that I seemed to produce more contradictions than real effects. My claims for 'embodied criticality' was therefore not passing through my own body, as my research did not feel situated or implicated. As my collaborations developed into long term and committed relationships however, and through an insistence on bringing theoretical research into dialogue with participation in life, academy and society through reflective collective actions, my engagement eventually seemed to move from a dynamics of accumulation towards the sharing of a hysteric's habitat for the study of the impossible.

As the work of an educator-researcher-curator-organiser, this publication is not without contradiction, given that it represents an attempt to understand my chosen practice. Therefore, and even though I have attempted to

maintain a certain degree of critical distance throughout this research process, my own position can never be value-free, due to its investment in the field of inquiry. At the same time, critical distance and abstraction seem to do very little to alleviate the contradiction of individual self-re-flexivity. Practical experiences of embodying critical agencies and resistances to the status quo, as well as collective analysis and situational interpretations of 'established knowledges', are how situationally relevant knowledges are produced, by developing a transformative effect in action. This state of inhabiting the space between master narratives and emergent 'minority' ones, between knowing and unknowing, being empowered and confused is a state of 'profound frustration in which the knowledge and insights we have amassed do very little to alleviate the conditions we live through'.[442] For those who are embedded in those struggles for subjection however, there is no other choice.

Rogoff finally wonders what the point of it all is if one needs to embody this state of duality as a frustration without resolution. She concludes in the following way:

> "Well, I would answer, the point of any form of critical, theoretical activity was never resolution but rather heightened awareness and the point of criticality is not to find an answer but rather to access a different mode of inhabitation. Philosophically we might say that it is a form of ontology that is being advocated, a 'living things out' which has a hugely transformative power as opposed to pronouncing on them. In the duration of this activity, in the actual inhabitation, a shift might occur that we generate through the modalities of that occupation rather than through a judgement upon it. That is what I am trying to intimate by 'embodied criticality'." [443]

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442 ——— Ibid.
443 ——— Ibid.

CONCLUSION

In the beginning of this research I tried to demonstrate how Nicolas Bourriaud's conclusions for relational art's enunciative dialogic potential do not logically flow on from his assumptions on 'free' participation. Current discourse on relational practices does not take into account the contradictions internal to the 'art of social exchange' and the real-life processes through which relational art forms can resist subjection to the value form. Any claims for an art of 'free relational exchange' that does not recognise that this exchange is based on a contradictory political economic system, and does not engage in the dialectic conception of 'relationality', eventually contributes to the paradox of commodification, and the fetishisation of the social itself. In the discourse of socially engaging practice and community development, symbolic participation signifies the alignment of the participating subject with the terms of master discourses, producing a series of identifications with the master's desire to know, to subject and colonise, where the value form of participation is extracted as surplus value to fit its purpose within 'culture'. By rethinking relational models of exchange within a dialectical conception of art, and by recognising relational art's double character however, this debate can be transformed.

One of the notions that can destabilise and genuinely challenge already established thinking is the demonstration of the internal inconsistency of its own models. It was for this reason that in the very beginning of this research, I chose to delve into contemporary relational theory's contradictions. When analysing subsumption in the art world, I had no alternative but to fall back on the Marxist dialectic tradition. Luckily enough, from my first steps of thinking as a researcher to this very day, it occurred to me that Marx had made a discovery that must remain at the heart of any useful analysis of contemporary institutional critique. It was the discovery of another binary opposition deep within human labour and between labour's two quite different natures as; i) labour as a value-creating activity that can never be quantified in advance and is therefore impossible to commodify, and ii) labour as a quantity that is for sale and comes at a price. This is what distinguishes human labour from the other productive inputs of the culture industry, for example, its twin, contradictory, nature.

One of the main conclusions from these first chapters of my analysis, was that any insistence on a strict stage-by-stage transitional understanding of the process of subsumption does not necessarily apply for those non-immediate ways of subordination. Hence, for relational art, it is important to situate these contradictions within the dialectic of commodification. Capitalism's tendency to generate crisis, and the museum's tendency to cyclically generate the new, can only be grasped if one exposes this as a

contradictory system in and of itself. One of the main tasks today, if we want to reveal relational art's radical potentials, is this immanent critique of the political economy of contemporary art and an in-depth analysis of its effects.

Considering how current autonomous art and the culture industry are two faces of the same currency, the curator's role as the 'journeyman' that brings them into relation, becomes more important than ever. Curators are the managers of the relational within the value form of participation, and thus hold the potential to redistribute that surplus of knowledge via the 'individual-meets-collective' jouissance back to the community that produced it. Curators hold a key role in organising modes of participation that allow collective investigations of meaning and action, enabling a move away from individual authorship and institutional demands and towards a means of organising 'in the name of the people'. Solidarity after all extends from yourself, your recognising and listening to the people you are in solidarity with. If Ultra-red's organised *listening* practice teaches us anything in this regard, it is the need to attend to dissonance by fore-grounding the 'other' against the background of the self, essentially enunciating a new political subjectivity to come. Organised listening practices constitute one of the first steps towards a knowledge praxis that is not made of answers but breaks in the 'knowings'. By extension, curating is therefore re-conceptualised as the enunciating of a dialogical exchange between self and the world, theory and practice or as Freire argues, as a practice where reflective analysis always already constitutes an action.

'For the idealists of the dialectic, who are at the same time the realists of politics' however, the 'true word' of action has a 'radical presentness in common', which on the one hand is distilled in history and experience while on the other constitutes an 'actualisation of desire no longer relegated to a future liberation, but demanded here, immediately' in the current situation we live in through our bodies.[444] Accordingly, and in view of the inevitable contradictions involved within the alienating nature of Nicolas Bourriaud's relational interstices, it was worth going back to Irit Rogoff's point about 'embodied criticality' and her insistence on a move away from immanent critiques and towards people's inherent and intuiting actualisation of critical analysis through an inhabitation of a problem. As a result of this insistence on performative critique, I argued for transversal practices of curating that work in direct alliance or in direct connection with social movements and grass roots organising, affording their accountability to those constituencies they work with, instead of the art

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444 ———— J. Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production*, St. Louis, Telos Press, 1975, pp. 164-5.

world. Instead of analysing from a distance then, I argue for a curatorial model that moves beyond representation, permitting one to enter a state of critical consciousness of the self with and among others.

One of the most profound moments as a researcher in fact, and perhaps the most significant with regards to 'radical' curatorial research practices more generally, was an in depth understanding of what this instance of embodiment actually means. Without a direct alliance or a direct connection to the constituency work, it is quite difficult to redistribute the surplus of participation back to the social movements and communities of struggle, and thus one might end up producing a series of immanent critiques or banal contradictions instead. One of the most important conclusions of this research project, is the need to think of curatorial and educational processes in tandem with social movement processes. The fact still remains that contemporary representations of curatorial solidarity projects seem to do very little to resist the co-optation of the base communities' symbolic value. But maybe resistance is not the right word here to begin with. As Ultra-red member Michael Roberson insists: 'I don't do resistance. I do resilience'.[445] If the fundamental strategy of ruling ideologies is to make themselves appear as natural, maybe a curation driven by resilient asymmetry can be its own form of critique. Lacan ultimately urges us that; 'Now in fact, it should not be a matter of eliding the impossible, but of being its agent'.[446]

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[445] ———— M. Roberson in interview with author 22.07.2016, see enclosed.

[446] ———— J. Lacan, *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII: Psychoanalysis upside down/The Reverse Side of Psychoanalysis*, 1969-70 in G. Cormac (ed), unedited from French manuscripts-unofficial non-published version intended for the reading group at St Vincent's University Hospital, Dublin, 2001, p. 17.

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This publication provides a dialectical conception of Relational Aesthetics (Nicolas Bourriaud, 2002), by focusing on the 'value form of participation' and the ways in which this gets subsumed into capitalist circuits to fit its purpose within culture. One of the original contributions of this research project within the field of political art, or art that aims to be political, is its in-depth critique of relational art's political economy from the perspective of an engaged practice. The publication also provides insights into the role of the curator as the interlocutor of this exchange. By combining Marxist and Lacanian perspectives, Kontopoulou conceptualises the artist-student as the subject or social embodiment of surplus value and surplus jouissance. Her research interest is guided by her own position as a 'transversal' practitioner and by her desire to 'curate' a relative kind of autonomy that manages to de-link the symbolic from value and redistribute the surplus of participation back to social movements and the communities that support them.

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