THE SOCIAL TURN: ARTISTIC LEGITIMACY AND THE ORIGINS OF POLITICISATION

Christos Asomatos
M.A. (Hons), M.Litt. (Distinction)

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of History of Art

School of Cultural and Creative Arts
College of Arts
University of Glasgow

June 2020

ABSTRACT

Over the last three decades, art production has seen an international proliferation of collaborative and socially engaged artistic tendencies. By departing from the realm of aesthetics, these practices draw their material from political categories, modes of social co-existence and activism. The social reorientation of art practice problematises the distinction between the artistic and the political, presenting thus new challenges for art history and criticism. This thesis examines the historical logic and implications of this new societalisation of art and proposes a framework for its interpretation within the category of art.

The origins of the "social turn" in contemporary art practice are explored in the crises of artistic production in modernity, catalysed by the transition of art economies to the regime of the market. The two historical developments in art practice I focus on are the politicisation of the early twentieth century avant-garde artwork, and the sublimation of the aesthetics of genius into a model of democratic authorship in Marcel Duchamp's readymade practice. By advancing an interpretation of politicisation and societalisation as artistic responses to cultural-economic phenomena, the political implications of contemporary practices are posited as the new material of art discourse. Engaging with the propositions of Nicholas Bourriaud, Grant H. Kester, and Claire Bishop I explore the "social turn's" artistic negotiations of artistic labour and materiality, artistic and social antagonism, as well as its conceptualisations of community. The politicisation of contemporary socially engaged practice is interpreted in the context of the search for artistic legitimacy which nonetheless carries significant political ramifications, as it exposes art to the heteronomy of neoliberalisation.

My thesis adopts a materialist approach based on Marxist analysis of economic and political phenomena. To prevent, however, the complete absorption of artistic propositions by economic pressures, I synthesise my materialist approach with an understanding of the workings within the cultural sphere in relative autonomy, as outlined by Max Weber and Pierre Bourdieu.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

PREFACE

As an art historian I have always been intrigued by practices which appear to deny their association with art. This negation, implicit or explicit in varying degrees, revitalises the discipline as it forces it to address its existential questions. How can we separate art from non-art in the post-aesthetic era, what is the social role of the artist, what is the relation between artistic and political practices; the "social turn" unfolding since the 1990s has forcefully posed these questions to art historians and artists. To be sure, these are not newly emerging problems but issues that art has been wrestling for over a century. To the extent, however, that they force analysis out of its self-referential cul-de-sac and its, at times superfluous, particularisms, they represent welcome repetitions.

I started exploring the issue of art's social reorientation around the time that Athens was announced as the co-host city for *documenta 14*. Granted, I was already interested in the debates around relational aesthetics, activist art practices and so on, but I had a rather binary perception of the art practices involved. In my mind these were either reduced to renditions of the 1960s retreat of the artisanal or understood as entirely political phenomena. However, coming personally from Greece and having an experiential knowledge of its peripheral status and minimal contribution to the international scene of contemporary art, there was no other way to interpret the *documenta* decision if not on account of the country's long economic and political crisis. What this decision therefore suggested was that contemporary art might be consciously gravitating toward the political as a way to derive legitimacy. This has also been the premise of this thesis.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people who have made this thesis possible. I am sincerely thankful and fully cognisant of the fact that I could have never made it without you.

First of all, I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr Dominic Paterson and Dr Deborah Lewer. I am immensely grateful for the thought-provoking discussions we have had during this long, and demanding process. I could not have made it without your support and guidance over these years.

I would also like to thank the wonderful teachers I have had during my studies at the University of Glasgow. It was thanks to them that I discovered my genuine interest in art history.

I am extremely thankful to the University of Glasgow College of Arts for the generous and essential funding they provided. It allowed me to work free from distractions and stress, making thus this thesis possible.

To Celia, I cannot describe my gratitude in words. Thank you for everything; for your considerate and positive nature. Thank you for tolerating me and offering me something good to think of during the difficult times of this process. I have been very fortunate you were next to me.

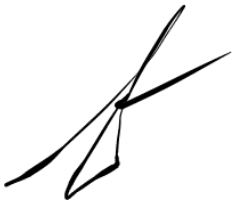
I am immensely grateful to my family, Emilia, Panagiotis, Arezina and Alexandros. Thank you for your endless psychological and material support all these years.

Finally, to my friends in Glasgow and Athens, who I will not venture to name out of fear OF forgetting someone, thank you.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Christos Asomatos



INTRODUCTION

In 1996 Jean Baudrillard was denouncing the "comedy" of art. Art had not merely become the ad nauseam recycling of itself. Nor the anticipation of its judgement, its flattening and ironic inversion into self-indulgent proposition, in an endless, cynical performance of the absence of meaning.

That was not the problem with art— or rather, that was simply one part of it. It was the entire world that had become "art" that was the problem. It was the entire world that had become a maze of transparent surfaces, completely open and empty: "transaesthetic."[1] Art was performing meaninglessness in a world already devoid of meaning. "Hyperrealist, cool, transparent, marketable."[2] A world without depth, a bottomless world, the world of "relentless visibility." A world reduced to a dictatorship of images.[3]

What was art supposed to do? For Baudrillard, every answer had become a non-sequitur. Art was not the helpless victim of a flattened world; it was a co-conspirator in that world's creation. Like an ideological front business for a global racket, art was tasked with producing the unapologetic and expedient mimesis of the world's emptiness and unreality, to the point that this world's characteristics become too outrageous to mistake for true. After all, a lie this big cannot possibly be a lie; there has to be something more underneath. For Baudrillard, what the contemporary condition of art spelled out was the definite and irrevocable suspension of any belief in its productive relationship to its publics. Art reproduced itself like a superstition, a mode of self-perpetuating through the systematic manipulation of public illusion— like all governing disciplines of capitalism. What Baudrillard confronted in "The Conspiracy of Art" was the naked reality of an artworld at the historical moment when the production of belief that sustains it has completely abandoned all pretences to involve anyone but those already invested in its reproduction: art's insiders. Cynically weaponising the absence of legitimating belief into an artistic event, the artworld was rehearsing an age-old strategy of deflection and subterfuge according to which the defiant confession of wrongdoing evinces an underlying world of innocence.

Parallel to Baudrillard's apocalyptic artworld of ruthless "insider trading" there was gradually emerging a new conception of art; a move seemingly away from the marketability of Neo-expressionism, or the cynicism of the Young British generation. Seeking to reinvent

[1] Jean Baudrillard, *The Conspiracy of Art* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2005), 25
[2] Ibid., 26.
[3] Ibid., 25.

meaning through revivifying its entanglement with the social world, this new model of art practice embraced audience participation and aspirations of social transformation as its guiding principles. In 1991 Suzanne Lacy coined the term "New Genre Public Art" to describe a lineage of artists and collectives working with audiences on issues "directly relevant to their lives."[4] In 1993 Culture in Action, a large-scale exhibition in Chicago, moved directly to neighbourhoods to engage and produce art from within inner city communities. A few years later, Nicholas Bourriaud entered the scene with exhibitions such as "Traffic" (CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, 1996), and the breakthrough that followed the publication of "Relational Aesthetics" in 1998, and more importantly its English translation of 2002.[5]

Gradually, similar ideas about art's openness and social responsibility were not only widely acknowledged by the institutions of contemporary art but became the very material that undergirded the programming of large international exhibitions. The evolution of *documenta* during the last two decades is illustrative of this social reorientation. Starting with *documenta 11* in 2001-2002, Okwui Enwezor divided the exhibition in five platforms—most of which took place away from Europe, away from the cultural imperial centre. These platforms became workshops for the exploration of democracy, colonialism and globalisation.[6] This sense of centrifugality also underpinned the "migration of forms" of *documenta 12*. There, Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack attempted to de-europeanise the institution's outlook on contemporary aesthetic and political culture by drawing connections between Western and non-Western artists and artforms. In line with this emerging tradition, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev decentralised *documenta 13* (2012) through relocating acts in Kabul and Alexandria, two places undoubtedly embodying a certain "realness" of the political— the former still suffering the unhealed wounds of the Western invasion of 2001, and the latter experiencing the aftermath of the Arab Spring. Finally, a few years later Athens appeared on the global map of contemporary art— and that on the basis of a seemingly endless economic crisis. As Adam Szymczyk, the artistic director of *documenta 14*, asserted,

---

[4] Suzanne Lacy, "Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys," in Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art, ed. Suzanne Lacy (Seattle; Washington: Bay Press, 1995), 19.

[5] "Traffic" featured the majority of artists around who Bourriaud developed the ideas elaborated in Relational Aesthetics.
Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2002)

[6] The first platform, 'Democracy Unrealized,' took place in Vienna in March 2001 and continued in Berlin. Platform 2, 'Experiments with Truth: Transitional Justice and the Processes of Truth and Reconciliation,' took place in New Delhi. The third Platform, 'Creolit and Creolization,' was held on the West Indian island of St Lucia in the Caribbean. Platform 4, "Under Siege: Four African Cities, Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, and Lagos" took place in Lagos. Finally, Platform 5 comprised the art exhibition in Kassel, Germany

underlying the decision to stage the international exhibition in Athens *and* Kassel was the "necessity to act in real time and in the real world."[7] Implicit in Szymczyk's statement is the conviction that the contemporary artist can no longer operate in idyllic homelands; Kassel separates art from the real world, and crisis emerges as a currency of contemporary art.

Claire Bishop has concisely described these tendencies as constituting a certain "social turn" of art,[8] counter-mirroring in a way the "cultural turn" in politics and social sciences during the 1970s. For Nicholas Bourriaud the practices falling under this "social turn" constitute the latest and current stage in a history of art that saw art move from the mediation of the relationship between mankind and god to that between mankind and object, to finally arrive at the sphere of inter-human relations.[9] The intensity with which this phenomenon unfolded has been reflected in the proliferating nomenclature aiming to register and describe aspects of it since the 1990s. New Genre Public Art, socially-engaged art, relational and post-relational, dialogical aesthetics, Arte Útil— if the multiplicity of terms emerging in recent decades signals anything, it is this growing interest in an art which does not merely thematise but draws its possibility in social engagement, responsibility, collaboration.

The 1990s have been acknowledged as the crucial decade for this turn. As Grant H. Kester has pointed out, while socially extraverted art practices have existed for decades, they have historically been relegated to the margins of the artworld, as an undercurrent very often artistically and commercially unrecognised. In the 1980s, Kester notes, the artists and artist groups pioneering practices of social engagement, collectivity and activism existed rather separately from the "serious," or commercially successful, art of contemporary art's institutions. The social and artistic interventionism of ACT UP, Group Material and others formed thus a stark contrast with the "authenticity" of the return to painting and the various neo-expressionist tendencies of the era, as well the appropriative strategies— critical or self-indulgent— of postmodernism. This schism has only appeared to be closing since the 1990s: Rirkrit Tiravanija, Thomas Hirschhorn, Santiago Sierra, artists who nowadays enjoy considerable institutional recognition, have moved to the public— organic or reconstructed in varying degrees— space, addressing audiences which are also directly involved in the

[7] Adam Szymczyk, "Iterability and Otherness— Learning and Working from Athens," in *The documenta 14 Reader*, eds. Quinn Latimer, Adam Szymczyk (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2017): 17-43, 26.
[8] Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents." *Artforum.* (February 2006): 178-183. Erik Hagoort has employed the term "art of the encounter" to describe the social reorientation of art practices since 1990, citing thus Bourriaud's use of the term in "Relational Aesthetics," a term adapted by Louis Althusser's "materialism of the encounter."
Erik Hagoort, *Good Intentions: Judging the Art of the Encounter* (Amsterdam: Foundation for Visual Arts, Design and Architecture, 2005)
[9] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 112.

production of the work.[10] Since the 1990s socially engaged, participatory art practices are no longer isolated, underground tendencies relegated to development outside or in parallel with contemporary art's institutions but "growing and ubiquitous."[11]

This turn has also been clearly captured in a radical reorientation of the discourses of contemporary art. Writing in 2006 Claire Bishop observed that it was not just the character of the artwork that was undergoing a process of societalisation, it was also the language used for its description that was under revaluation. Indeed, in the modern era artists have been experimenting with social contexts for over a century. Never before, however, did the language of the critic change so drastically to reflect that. Works might have been described as obscene, shocking, transcendental, or pointless. They were not ethical, solidaristic, effective or socially responsible. They were not considered or assessed in terms of their social impact or the moral-social intentions of the artist; or, at least, these did not constitute the priorities of the critic. That the reorientation of contemporary art's subjects and methods has been unfolding in sync with the emergence of a new critical language signifies changes comprehensive and far-reaching.

DEPOLITICISATION IN LIBERAL DEMOCRACY AND NEOLIBERALISM

Before I start outlining the key propositions and questions that structure the framework of my study, it would be necessary to briefly explain my nomenclature. As already suggested, the proliferation of the collaborative, intersubjective, politicised practices since the 1990s which comprise the focus of the present discussion was naturally accompanied by the emergence and popularisation of a variety of terms for their description. As these terms originate in the writings of theorists, the decisions of curators and the methods of artists, they gradually become attached to practices that express different motivations and ideas about the artistic and the social and their models of interaction. For instance, relational art has come to designate a specific type of practices: more often than not institutional, thematising the socio-communicative and often convivial elements of social life. Dialogical aesthetics on the other hand, as it emerges from a more activist tradition of art production, comes to refer to direct and non-hierarchical engagement with non-artist communities with emphasis on art's potential for intersubjective and social transformation. The abundance of terms and their often nuanced distinctions complicate therefore the practices' effective, concise and unambiguous codification. In this work I have consistently and consciously

[10] Grant H. Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Durham; London: Duke University Press), 8.
[11] Nato Thompson, "Living as Form," in *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2001,* ed. Nato Thompson (Cambridge; Mass: MIT Press, 2012), 19.

shown preference for the terms "social turn" and "socially engaged practices." Both terms are adequately general— yet not obfuscatory— and unassociated with a specific model of practice. Although Bishop first employed the term "social turn" to critically reference the broader phenomenon of the substitution of aesthetic for social and ethical criteria in contemporary art discourse, my use is less charged and simply aims to describe these practices in terms of a historical tendency.

The primary objective of my work has been to advance an analysis of socially engaged practices not merely as products of a broader relativisation of the iconographic pursuits and methodologies of artistic practice in recent decades— that is, not merely as outcomes of contemporary art's regime of pluralism— but as legitimate artistic *and* political phenomena. As a descriptive term, "legitimate" has a triple meaning here: firstly, that practices are not arbitrary but can be understood through the examination of specific transformations in the history of artistic production; secondly, that they are practices which aim at artistic legitimacy rather than the destruction of art as an institution; thirdly, that the adjectives "artistic" and "political" have historically evolved and operate in a continuum. These three propositions will be expanded on below.

The discussions that comprise the body of my work do not lay claim to a universal character; my work is specifically focused on European and North American art examples of this process of societalisation in contemporary art production. As a consequence, these practices are contextualised in relation to the institutional history of fine art as well the characteristics of Western-type liberal democracy. This does not mean that the "social turn" is a phenomenon unique to the socio-cultural characteristics of those nations generally classified as advanced capitalist democracies. In fact, Anthony Gardner's "Politically Unbecoming: Postsocialist Art against Democracy" of 2015 proposes that after the Fall of the Iron Curtain and the eventual dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1989 and 1991 respectively, there has been a global expansion of an aesthetic of "democratisation" in art production. Nevertheless, this "democratic" aesthetic has not been interpreted uniformly across different cultures. For instance, Gardner identifies a certain scepticism toward Western professed democratic ideals among Central and Eastern European artists, whose artistic subjectivity was formed in actually existing socialism— or in the shadow of its disintegration— compared to the more unambiguous celebrations of democratic life found, for example, in relational art practices.[12] Overlooking such context-dependent

[12] Gardner traces this ambiguity toward liberal democracy in the work of Ilya Kabakov and Thomas Hirschhorn among others, whereas the examples of Alexander Brener, Oleg Kulik extend this ambiguity to open hostility.

differentiations in artistic responses and strategies would further totalise an, admittedly, already totalising project. To therefore contextualise Western European and North American practices we would need to explore the specific political, economic and cultural contexts they are embedded in.

Even though the literature on neoliberalism is vast— neoliberalism represents a new "nexus rerum" of political discourse— and far exceeds the scope of the present study, we could attempt a compact description of its economic characteristics as comprising the regime of deregulation, financialisation and anti-inflationary monetary policy which gradually corroded and ultimately overturned the postwar Western Keynesian consensus in recent decades. Foucault's seminal analysis presented in his lectures at the Collége de France between 1978-9 extended this analysis of neoliberalism beyond a simple economic framing to its interpretation as a comprehensive economic, political and moral system of government; in other words, a new governmental rationality.[13] Following and building on Foucault's analysis, Wendy Brown's "Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution" of 2015 centres neoliberalism on the absolute domination of the "homo economicus" over the "homo politicus;" neoliberalism presents "the vanquishing of liberal democracy's already anemic *homo politicus*," in a process with devastating consequences for democratic institutions and subjectivities.[14] Neoliberalism constitutes thus a "hollowing out" of liberal democracy and a "turning inside out" of the liberal democratic social contract— processes which are not enforced strictly hierarchically but abetted by the intensification of competition as the governing logic of inner and outer life.[15]

There is certainly no denying that the bracketing off of popular political participation through neoliberalism's enshrining of power in globalised financial structures, combined with a systematic production of eager, self-governing subjects render most references to democracy almost euphemistic. Those problems notwithstanding, Brown's description of the default state of the political determination of the individual in liberal democracy as anemic— that is, anemic already before its neoliberal dismantling— carries significant implications about the possibility of the political in liberal democracy to begin with. While Brown refuses to drive these implications to their logical conclusion— that neoliberalism extends and intensifies liberal democracy's depoliticising logic— Antonio Y. Vázquez-

Anthony Gardner, *Politically Unbecoming: Postsocialist Art Against Democracy* (Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: MIT Press, 2015)

[13] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008)

[14] Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015), 35.

[15] Ibid., 18.

Arroyo has instead argued that liberal democracy and neoliberalism do not represent contradictory political philosophies. This does not mean that there are no quantitative and qualitative distinctions between the two political concepts but that liberal democracy has historically paved the way for neoliberalism by virtue of its fundamentally depoliticised framework. Liberal democracy's propensity toward depoliticisation is not accidental but structural— it inheres in the autonomisation of the political and economic sphere in capitalism. The autonomisation of the two spheres does not necessarily entail their complete separation but should be understood in a more Weberian sense, as the establishment of different "principles of action and norms" proper to each.[16] Once domains of technically equal importance— yet disunited in terms of governing logic— collide, there is only one historical law that can predict how their conflict is resolved: "between equal rights, force decides."[17]

The framing of liberal democracy and neoliberalism as a continuum of intensifying depoliticisation runs of course contrary to the Foucauldian genealogy of neoliberalism. That is, for Foucault and by extension Brown, neoliberalism asserts itself as a new governmentality through the displacement of exchange by competition as the basis of private and social life. And this is no longer competition in descriptive but normative terms: the economisation of life permeates all aspects of inner and outer life to the point where individuals can only represent themselves through capital: as human embodiments of capital. For Foucault and Brown, this comprehensive process of human capitalisation in neoliberalism signifies a perversion of liberal prehistory; a premise which, as it becomes evident in Brown's work, threatens to collapse analysis into a defence of liberal democracy against its perversion.

This is, however, denying the problem of the "already anemic homo politicus" of liberal democracy which Carl Schmitt had already in the first decades of the twentieth century underlined as the fundamental condition of liberal democracy— a position that I will discuss in detail in Chapter 4. Approached from the perspective of depoliticisation, neoliberalism is revealed as the intensification and catalysation of economic and political ideas that emerge out of the autonomisation of the economic and the political in capitalism, which is in turn schematised in the internal contradictions of liberal democracy as "the doctrine of individual freedom and popular sovereignty."[18] To be clear, this does not

[16] Antonio Y. Vázquez-Arroyo, "Liberal Democracy and Neoliberalism: A Critical Juxtaposition," *New Political Science*, 30:2 (2008): 127-159, 134.
[17] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1990), 344.
[18] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and The Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 42.

invalidate the important insights that Foucault and Brown offer. The incisive observations on the "entrepreneur of the self" as well as neoliberalism's moral-political processes of devolution and responsibilisation, which are discussed in Chapters 3 and 5, are productive in their own right— regardless of grand genealogical claims— and operative in my analysis of liberal democracy as an *antipolitical* form.

ON ARTISTIC AND POLITICAL LEGITIMACY

What is then the significance of socially engaged practices as legitimate artistic and political phenomena? It would be helpful to start unwrapping this proposition by first clarifying its second term, the "political." As will be shown, this will eventually unlock the second term, the "artistic;" echoing in a sense their relationship of seeming inextricability during the "social turn." This relationship should be approached at two levels. The first one is the politicisation of artistic activity in relation to competition within the artistic field: the starting premise for my analysis, therefore, is the nature of artistic struggle as always unfolding in relation to the "whole economy," as Pierre Bourdieu has highlighted.[19] This proposition does not seek to reconstruct a variation of a vague Rancièrean "politics of aesthetics" but to underline that, fundamentally, artistic struggles are always struggles between holders of quantitatively and qualitatively different capital. Axiomatically then, the present discussion sets as a precondition of all analysis the sociological insight that artistic positions are always informed by the pursuit of recognition in the artistic field, the possibilities of which are in turn always related to the historical conditions of the artist. The codification of the artist's political agency as the re-inscription of political and economic antagonisms into the field of artistic production, which in turn mobilises artistic propositions, politicises art while at the same time prevents its collapse into political action. After all, artists interact, negotiate or subvert political structures, yet for their activities to be recognised as art, they need to be addressing positions occupied inside the shared symbolic space they compete over— that is, artists evoke, challenge and deconstruct ideas and methodologies that are recognised as competing over the status of art. To give an obvious example, when Andy Warhol presented silkscreens of Campbell soup cans in 1962, it was not the soup but painting itself that was under attack.

These are the basic conditions which underpin my analysis of the historical avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century, discussed in detail in Chapter 1. The

[19] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods," in Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Literature and Art,* ed. Randal Johnson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 82.

historical avant-garde as a category of relevance to contemporary socially engaged practices has in fact been severely overlooked among the "primary" writers of the "social turn." Kester's focus on art's non-exploitative relations with its non-artistic co-producers leads him to discard the avant-garde as a useful category and disavow any possible connections to his model of "dialogical aesthetics." In Kester's writings, modernist autonomy and the historical avant-garde do not simply lack a working distinction, ignoring thus the contribution of Peter Bürger's seminal "Theory of the Avant-Garde" of 1974, but in reality converge in their shared enmity toward the non-artist— be that spectator or participant.[20] Bourriaud's attitude is, on the other hand, slightly more ambiguous: the avant-garde vacillates between noble but outdated idea and totalitarian system of thought. Although relational aesthetics are still theoretically positioned within a general project of social change— restoring the social bond from its state of "standardised artefact"[21] in his own words— Bourriaud delimits relational art practices in the realm of "microtopias," unlike the "imaginary and utopian realities" of the avant-garde.[22] Finally, Bishop cites Futurist serate, Soviet Proletkult and Parisian Dada urban explorations, that is, experiments in avant-garde performance, as the prehistory of the "social turn," which is a position I will return to in Chapter 2, but references the avant-garde more symbolically than as a system with specific implications for the institution of art.

Contrary to these, dismissive or vague, underutilisations of the category of the avant-garde, writers such as John Roberts have attempted to reconstruct its contemporary radical potential. This nonetheless lies, according to Roberts, in a "suspensive" status after its suppression by the National Socialist and Stalinist reaction.[23] Through an antihistoricist construction of the category as "research project" rather than as a category delimited by its original historical conditions, Roberts proposes that avant-garde revolutionary potential still theoretically persists in certain contemporary political practices insofar as they entail the liberatory promise of a Hegelian first *and* second negation; that is, the new possibilities created through the sublation of art's autopoietic, commodity status and the negation thereof in the artwork's entanglement with historical struggle. Even though my discussion borrows, admittedly stripped of its radical political potentialities, a key insight that Roberts provides—

[20] Grant Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context*, 11.
[21] Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 9.
[22] Ibid., 13.
[23] Roberts's notion of the avant-garde as "suspensive" and "counter-revolutionary" category was first touched upon in "Revolutionary Pathos, Negation, and the Suspensive Avant-Garde" of 2010, and was expanded in "Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde" of 2015.
John Roberts, "Revolutionary Pathos, Negation, and the Suspensive Avant-Garde," *New Literary History* 41, no. 4 (2010): 717-30.
John Roberts, *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde* (London; New York: Verso, 2015)

that of the avant-garde reconfiguration of "autonomy as the critique of autonomy"[24]— the avant-garde does not figure as a revolutionary category in this discussion. Instead, my attention to the avant-garde takes the form of its theorisation as a crucial historical formulation of a new politicising energy concentrated in the avant-garde artwork. This politicising energy is, most importantly, produced through the tension between artistic recognition and the desire for the overcoming of those conditions which appear to foreclose it. As will be discussed in Chapter 1, in the history after the avant-garde this energy contributes to the reorientation of critical artistic practice toward the analysis and politicisation of the relations it is embedded in.

Arguably, my ambiguity toward a revolutionary reading of the avant-garde's (post)existence can be partly attributed to a conscious bias for its Central and Western European movements, compared to the Soviet avant-gardes of Constructivism and Productivism. This might appear to be a controversial decision as Constructivism, on the one hand, enjoys a certain prominence in Peter Bürger's work, while Roberts describes the neo-avant-garde expansion of artistic activity to "environmental technique and socially interventionist practice" as a "secondary Productivism."[25] Nevertheless, this is a decision ultimately dictated by my focus on socially engaged practices in Western Europe and America. As such, it has been crucial to consider the crisis of the modern artist and its relevance to the advance of artistic and political propositions in a sociohistorical context not wildly dissimilar in terms of art's production and distribution relations.

Western and Soviet avant-garde artists operated in vastly different professional fields, occupied different positions vis-à-vis political power, and ultimately faced entirely different challenges, as Boris Groys has pointed out. Firstly, in comparison with the avant-garde artists of the capitalist West who were wrestling with specific crises endemic to the transformation of the artistic field into an impersonal market economy, Soviet avant-gardists

---

[24] Roberts arrives at this formulation adopting Stewart Martin's dialectical reading of Adorno's Aesthetic Theory, with Adorno's famous dictum "the absolute artwork converges with the absolute commodity" being its point of departure. Through the concept of the "commodity" and its, at once generative and destructive, relationship toward art's autonomy, as alluded to by Adorno, Martin presents an analysis of autonomy in art as "an immanent contradiction of the commodity form." This position allows the significance and relevance of autonomy to be extended beyond its customary connection with art's modernist morphology— a connection which would otherwise herald autonomy as a dead category— and into the examination of new art practices, and thus new forms and contradictions of commodification.
Stewart Martin, "The Absolute Artwork Meets the Absolute Commodity," *Radical Philosophy*, no. 146 (Nov/Dec 2007): 15-25. 23-24.

[25] John Roberts, "Productivism and Its Contradictions," *Third Text* 23:5 (2009): 527-536, 533.
"Revolutionary Pathos, Negation, and the Suspensive Avant-Garde" narrows "secondary Productivism" further down to refer to the resurgence of a distinctly interdisciplinary approach in certain strands of post-object, primarily digital practices, reminiscent of Boris Arvatov's call for the merging of art, science and technology.
John Roberts, "Revolutionary Pathos, Negation, and the Suspensive Avant-Garde," 720.

were only minimally exposed to the pressures of the market, and that as a consequence of New Economic Policy's relaxation of central planning between 1922-1928.[26] Secondly, unlike their Central and Western European counterparts, the late 1910s and 1920s Soviet avant-gardes were post-revolutionary and politically affirmative phenomena. Even though Soviet avant-gardists had to navigate a political-cultural environment that was rife with competing visions for Soviet post-revolutionary culture, and often exhibited a certain distrust toward new forms and ideas— a distrust which ultimately culminated in their total marginalisation with the prescription of Socialist Realism as the official style in 1934— they were programmatically aligned with the project of the construction of the communist state.[27] In that sense, the Soviet avant-gardists were *on* the side of political power, broadly defined.[28] This puts them at odds with their European counterparts whose work was a reaction against the political environments they operated in, but was also, very importantly, made possible primarily thanks to the relative neutralisation of political relations of power— also known as toleration— characterising bourgeois democracy; this is, of course, a consequence of liberal democracy's political framework of depoliticisation that was discussed earlier. Without accounting for the dimension of political toleration and its role in the eventual standardisation of critique as a central characteristic of cultural production, it becomes difficult to parse the (self)critical advance of art since modernity.

Bourdieu, in his sociological analysis of this history starting in mid-late nineteenth century, has compellingly argued that the influx of new professional artists, the decline of the state-academic system, and the increasing marketisation of art economies led to the intensification of the antagonistic relations between the classes of consecrated and unrecognised artists. As the former appeared to largely retain their privileges inside the "market of symbolic goods" during the transition to high and late capitalism,[29] the latter, Bourdieu points out, were incentivised to develop aesthetic propositions and competing systems of recognition based precisely on the inversion of the predominant economic logic. In Bourdieu's analysis, this is schematised into a turn to a model of "restricted" production, as opposed to capitalist "large-scale" production. The modelling of artistic production after

[26] Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, trans. Charles Rougle (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), 23-24.
[27] This tension was often, at least partly, the result of the recodification of pre-existing political competitions into the field of culture. Indicatively, the antipathy between Alexander Bogdanov, the leading theorist of Proletkult, and Lenin can be traced back to their rivalry for the leadership of the Bolshevik party.
[28] Boris Groys, "The Russian Avant Garde Revisited," in *The Idea of the Avant Garde: and What it Means Today*, ed. Marc James Léger (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 168-173.
[29] Here I am relying on Werner Sombart's periodisation of capitalism according to which the nineteenth century was the era of high capitalism, while Western societies entered the stage of late capitalism after World War I.

the abstraction of the "restricted" meant that the marginalised or dissident artist of modernity asserted a claim to legitimacy through the production of art that did not target a wide audience, sacrificed temporal for eternal rewards by bracketing off superficial economic concerns, and advanced through the strategic accentuation of difference.[30] What is important in Bourdieu's analysis is the formulation of artistic modernism as emerging through a crisis precipitated by the violation of the "numerus clausus" that formerly safeguarded the rarity of the artistic profession.[31]

Since the 1960s, the comprehensive integration of the arts in the national economies of Western capitalist nations, and the professionalisation of artistic education and practice which followed art's "industrialisation" have gradually created, as Gregory Scholette has extensively argued, "an oversupply of artistic labour" so vast and sidelined that could be understood as comprising a second art economy.[32] Scholette cites staggering numbers: the 2005 US census found two million Americans declaring "artist" as their main profession while another 300,000 listed "artist" as their second job. Meanwhile, European Union numbers in 2004 showed 5.8 million fine artists, employment in the arts increased by 150,000 in the United Kingdom between 1993-2003, the German cultural sector showed growth of 3.4% between 1995-2003— a period in which the growth of the general workforce remained stagnant— while surveys in Canada projected the number of artists growing at a triple rate compared to the national workforce between 1991-2000.[33] The demographic explosion of artists during recent decades, whose puny opportunity for institutional access has been further compounded by the relativisation of art's own rules— as reflected by the transition to the post-medium, post-aesthetic era— paints a picture in fact surprisingly reminiscent of Bourdieu's modernism. In both eras we have a similar violation of a "numerus clausus" related to the transition to a different regime of accumulation— industrial capitalism and post-Fordism respectively— and a similar crisis of cultural legitimacy: the decline of the state-academic authority on the one hand, and the post-Duchampian deepening of the move from a normative to a descriptive-institutional regime of art.

Perhaps then, the "social turn" could similarly be understood as occurring along a second historical artistic inversion of the *perceived* order of economic logic. If, as Baudrillard suggested earlier, the 1990s reveal with blinding clarity the inscription of contemporary art's relentless visibility in finance, in a regime wherein the reach and leverage

---

[30] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Market of Symbolic Goods," in Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (Polity Press, 1993), 111-141, 115-120.
[31] Pierre Bourdieu, The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed, ibid., 30-73, 43.
[32] Gregory Scholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (London; New York: Pluto Press, 2006), 6.
[33] Ibid., 126-127.

of the art dealer come to overshadow art's toxic historical irrelevance— its ad nauseam repetition of life's eternal present— then the societalisation of art in recent decades could be understood as an attempt to rediscover art's legitimacy in what contends to symbolically inverse this order. The departure from object production, the democratic utility, and the ethical, communal characteristics of the "social turn," discussed in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 respectively, represent then an artistic imagining of the inversion of art's quantifiability and investibility, the contestation of its fetishistic disavowal of all social function, and a protest against the ruthlessness and moral disinterestedness of commercial exchange. Unlike, however, Bourdieu's historical inversion, the "social turn" presents now the paradox of a "restricted production" through art's societalisation. The reasons for that become intelligible insofar as we recognise neoliberal "large-scale" production as encompassing profoundly alienating and atomising social processes, which, nonetheless, depart from the undifferentiated subject of Fordism and reproduce themselves through an attentiveness to the creative and affective world of the individual. In that sense then, the "social turn" could signify *an inversion of the inversion*.

Nevertheless, Bourdieu's inversion is always an attempt to protect artistic production from the heteronomy of the fields enveloping it— the fields of power and class relations; that is to say, the governing political and economic pressures artistic production is subject to. In this light therefore, the "social turn" could be understood in the context of art's new forms of autonomy, advancing further the avant-garde heritage according to which art can be considered advanced only insofar as it entails the examination of the matrix of relations it is embedded in. There lies the usefulness of Roberts's formulation of "autonomy as the critique of autonomy."

What this underlines is that the politicisation of art is not only a political but also an artistic decision. The evocation and use, therefore, of political categories constitutes a claim to artistic legitimacy as it always is, on the one hand, underpinned by specific antagonisms in the artistic field and, on the other, generative of new artistic propositions: the form of the socially engaged artwork is the specific configuration of its politicisation. This has profound consequences on art's discourses as it formalises that ultimately the political critique of art's outcomes in relation to the wider socio-economic structures it interacts with is also an artistic critique. That the judgement of art is spoken in political and moral terms is primarily a reflection of the specific characteristics of this new claim to legitimacy, and not the insidious aftereffect of postmodern aesthetic deflation or a pathology of contemporary art criticism.[34]

[34] Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October* 110 (2004): 51-79, 77.

MEDIUM UNSPECIFICITY AND FRAMEWORK

As my proposition for a reading of the "social turn" as a legitimate artistic phenomenon—explainable by the political recodification of pressures and antagonisms in the field of artistic production— will have made evident, my analysis approaches the practices of the "social turn" as phenomena that can be mapped in the history of fine art. This separates my discussion from other important contributions to the field which approach contemporary socially engaged and participatory practices primarily from the perspective of their cross-pollination with theatre and performance, such as Shannon Jackson's "Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics" and Jen Harvie's "Fair Play: Art, Performance and Neoliberalism."[35] This distinction by no means seeks to undermine the validity of different approaches; after all, as Jackson herself underlines, the multiple pathways to the analysis of contemporary socially engaged practice is a reflection of its own "medium-unspecificity." This means that the types of engagement that audiences develop when exposed to a work of socially engaged art and the frameworks deployed for its interpretation are largely dependent on one's educational background, or even cultural preferences.[36]

For a researcher, the variance in responses accommodated by the multidisciplinary and post-medium character of these works has serious impact, as it effectively determines the directions that research will take. In that regard, my historical contextualisation of the "social turn" largely in relation to the history of fine art and especially painting has led me to different questions than, for instance, Jackson's framing of social practices in the trajectory of a cultural-philosophical mistrust of art's infrastructures would. However, as painting has been the exemplary artistic discipline upon which the system of art's autonomy has been based— something already reflected by the painters' early exit from the guild system during the Renaissance— it is in painting where the tensions between ideas of the artist as autonomous or heteronomous producer can be recognised for all their intensity. In my historical discussion therefore, the mapping of the stylistic and social evolution of art practice— always in relation to the historical transformations of the social role of the artist— has been premised primarily on painting, and in following Thierry de Duve's position, on the emergence of the readymade as its continuation and abandonment.[37]

---

[35] Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (New York; London: Routledge, 2011)
Jen Harvie, *Fair Play: Art, Performance and Neoliberalism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)
[36] Jackson, 18.
[37] Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism: On Marcel Duchamp's. Passage from Painting to the Readymade*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis; Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1991)

The truth is that establishing a framework is an inherently subtractive process. Once the original premise has been put forward, analysis enters a spiral of exclusions. This process often sidelines important aspects that deserve their own place in a critical discussion; my own study is certainly guilty in this regard by extending a problem whose foundations were already laid in the "primary" texts of the "social turn" since the 1990s. This problem consists in a certain indifference toward the sexed dimensions of socially engaged art's intersubjective and affective dimensions. As Helena Reckitt points out, this indifference is prevalent in Bourriaud's contributions, but also evident in the critical responses that followed the popularisation of the discourse. Bourriaud's relational artist is in fact a "universal figure, unmarked by sex, race or class," a conceptualisation which is subsequently projected onto relational practices themselves by attempting to erase any non-universalising overtones. Such is the case of Christine Hill, as Reckitt remarks, whose emulation of female service roles is stripped of any critical implications and abstracted into a gesture of generosity. Likewise, Reckitt argues, Bishop's 2004 critique of Bourriaud's consensual and convivial model, which I discuss in Chapter 4, does not recognise the gendered overtones of Bourriaud's erasure of antagonism; that is, the relation of conviviality with the stereotyping of femininity along the binary of agreeableness and disagreeableness.[38] In a sense then, that my work employs these debates as starting points for analysis means that, corresponding to their framing, it also incontrovertibly shares and reproduces some of their flaws.

There is, however, another reason, significantly more impactful for this omission, and it relates directly to the specific historicisation I propose. Exploring the origins of art's societalisation in the political, economic and cultural transformations of the nineteenth century and their inscription in the field of artistic production, the politicisation of artistic practice out of this predicament in the movements of the historical avant-garde, and the connections between Charles Baudelaire and Marcel Duchamp as the teleology of "man of the world," means that ultimately my history is one steeped in a world of male artists and a world whose material, political and cultural economies are ultimately governed by men. It is undoubtedly hard to imagine what Rirkrit Tiravanija's series of cooking and serving Thai curry would have been without precedents such as Alison Knowles's *Make a Salad* (ICA, London, 1962). But *Make a Salad*— or Food for that matter, run by Carol Gooden, Gordon Matta Clark and Tina Girouard between 1971-4— are made historically possible by the collapse of the binary of interiority and exteriority that follows the readymade and liberates

[38] Helena Reckitt, "Forgotten Relations: Feminist Artists and Relational Aesthetics," in *Politics in a Glass Case: Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions*, eds. Angela Dimitrakaki, Lara Perry (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 131-156, 138-140.

artists from their historically demarcated roles and identities. This historical transformation results in what Roberts has described as art's "adisciplinarity;" namely, the regime of art production that, after the abandonment of art's historical craft-specific and disciplinary constraints, empowered the artist to navigate a range of different socioeconomic categories and roles which, most importantly, are institutionally *intelligible* as artistic propositions. This by no means implies that in the integration and performance of these various social roles and positions, the classed and gendered aspects of the artist disappear or have no impact on artistic intention and interpretation. What it means is that my analysis is mostly focused on the institutionalisation of non-artistic labour and its origins which ultimately open up the way for the inscription of affective, intersubjective and gendered forms of labour into the Bourdieusian "space of possibles;" that is, open up the way for their recognition within the horizon of possible strategies that correspond to the available positions in the artistic field.[39] Knowles's extensive engagement with the readymade throughout her career as well as her collaboration with Duchamp in 1967— a collaboration which poetically produced Duchamp's last readymade by accident— are indicative in that regard.[40]

CHAPTER ANALYSIS

My thesis is conceptually divided in two parts: a historical and a contemporary one. To outline the structure of my work in broad terms, the historical discussions presented here aim to foreground the conditions that have made the wider "social turn" possible as a set of artistic phenomena, while the contemporary ones highlight and examine its social, economic, and political implications; as explained above, these two dimensions are intertwined in the artistic-political continuum of socially engaged practice. Fully aware of the vast numbers of questions that contemporary socially engaged practices involve and problematise, and consequently the impossibility of their conclusive treatment, I have attempted to schematise my work through the selection of five topics, each of which corresponds to a chapter. Every chapter foregrounds a specific debate, artist, or writer, who in turn serve as a platform for the exploration of the wider implications of art's entanglement in capitalism, modern and contemporary. In this final part of my introduction I will briefly lay out the thematics of each chapter and outline the main questions that I have attempted to address.

[39] Bourdieu, The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed, 30.
[40] In 1967 Knowles collaborated with Duchamp on a new silkscreen of his *Cœurs Volants* (1936/1961). One of the colour swatches which Knowles proposed ended up being signed by Duchamp himself.

The first chapter, titled "Avant-garde, and the Origins of Politicisation," provides a historical framework for my work by engaging with the position of the modern artist in the bourgeois society of Western capitalism. I explore the formation of artistic identity in relation to two major and interrelated antagonisms which emerge out of the passage to liberalism as the predominant Western economic and cultural worldview after the eighteenth century. These are the clash between the ideologies of genius and liberal conformity, and the tension between artist and market, which can in turn be translated into a tension between artist and audience. The central question here is how do these conditions figure in the politicisation of the avant-garde artist of modernity? Could politicisation be understood as an immanent phenomenon of the contractual and unexceptional liberal worldview and the highly competitive environment of the market? If that is the case, what insights can this provide with regard to the persistence of forms of politicisation of art practice throughout the century? Could the heritage of the historical avant-garde also entail a specific politics of artistic recognition?

The second chapter, titled "The Birth of the Democratic Artist: From Baudelaire to Duchamp," starts off as a response to Claire Bishop's framing of the prehistory of art's contemporary societalisation in experiments in avant-garde performance, as opposed to the history of painting and the readymade.[41] This is claim that I contest, demonstrating instead that the fundamental conditions for this reorientation unfolding throughout the twentieth century and leading up to our times are emerging already in the nineteenth century. As evidenced in Baudelaire's writings, the nineteenth century had already posed the central question that all critical art since then is forced to grapple with: how can artistic activity navigate the interdependency of the social role of the artistic subject and the socio-technical conditions of the work once modernity reveals the volatile relationship thereof? This is a question that Duchamp as the teleology of the "man of the world" attempts to answer.

Following next, "Delegation and Dematerialisation" is the first chapter where the practices of the "social turn" are directly engaged. There are two main questions addressed here. The first one concerns, in more general terms, the manipulation of artistic and non-artistic labour with reference to the expansion of the authorial character of the artwork throughout the twentieth century. The second question emerges from the intersubjective character of socially engaged art, which inevitably directs the discussion of artistic labour and its delegation to the question of immateriality as an artistic and political gesture. By examining Nicholas Bourriaud's framing of immateriality as a strategy of resistance in

[41] Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 41.

"Relational Aesthetics" I attempt to highlight its renewed significance when examined against neoliberalism's dissolution of the distinction between production and social reproduction, and the promise of universal creativity.

Chapter 4, titled "The Democratic Life of Antagonism," extends the problematisation of the implications of socially engaged practice by engaging with the opposition to Bourriad's convivial and consensual model. Following Bishop's polemical essay "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics" of 2004, which juxtaposed an ideal of radical democracy, as articulated by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, to liberal consensus politics, I turn my attention to the examination of antagonism as an artistic and political strategy, using the case of Santiago Sierra as a point of reference. For antagonism to be dislodged from the banality of its everyday evocation and revealed for all its implications, we need to engage with its seminal political articulation in the work of Carl Schmitt. Schmitt's insights seriously complicate antagonism's facile conscription in any democratic project and perhaps allude to a more productive interpretation of the gambit of the antagonistic artist.

While Chapters 3 and 4 were mainly focused on practices that take place in the spaces of art's institutions, my research for the final chapter, titled "The Moral Community," turns toward community-oriented social practices. To navigate those, I foreground Grant Kester's model of "dialogical aesthetics" and his concept of the "politically coherent community."[42] Kester's framework of theory and practice helps illuminate the moral and ethical dimensions of artistic conceptualisations of community, underlining thus the observable rupture between aesthetic ideas of practice and art's reclaiming of social responsibility. This inevitably raises the question of the relation between moral and aesthetic value systems and their often conflictual articulation in socially engaged practices. If we accept that the moral disinterestedness of aesthetic art sustains the dominion of artist over audience, then the non-hierarchical, collaborative ethics of Kester's proposition makes possible the empowerment of the audience; empowerment, however, to what ends, and under what conditions?

[42] Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2004), 147-151.

CHAPTER 1

AVANT-GARDE, AND THE ORIGINS OF POLITICISATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter sets itself the task of outlining the historical conditions under which art in modernity became concomitant with a language of sociopolitical critique. In this examination of the relationship between art and the political, I locate the origins of the contemporary conception of art as social intervention and activism in the historical politicisation of artistic activity by the avant-gardes of the early twentieth century. The origins of this transformation are explored in the constitutive contradictions of a bourgeois artistic field, formed in parallel with the liberalisation of Western societies from the late eighteenth century onward. In my analysis I identify two particularly impactful changes beginning to take shape during that era. Firstly, the tension between artist and audience during the displacement of the traditional systems of legitimation through patronage by the art market. Secondly, the intellectual shift toward rationalisation and conformity which corresponded to modes of social organisation based on the separation of powers, the rule of law, and the division of labour. These are the conditions that underlie the modern artist's crisis of recognition, negotiated in the acceleration of stylistic evolution. The dimension that I set out to explore is how different conceptions of art can emerge in response to changes in the self-image of artists, and the ways that the bourgeoification of art and life in nineteenth century liberal societies affected the formation of artistic self-image.

The discussion of liberalism I present here is inevitably reductive and incomplete. The reason for that is that I approach liberalism from the perspective of its effects on Western capitalist societies. In that context liberalism is presented as the political morality which established a legal and intellectual framework of protections against the unregulated power of central authority. In its rationalisation of the discourse of natural rights, roughly described by John Locke's trinity of "life, liberty, and estate,"[43] it instituted a modicum of formal equality; absolute power and heredity become harder to justify once a consensus on certain inalienable rights has been established. Even though at times the liberal moral conviction for legitimate and impartial authority went as far as Jean-Jacques Rousseau's separation of sovereignty, which included the entire population, from executive government,[44] liberalism

[43] John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government, and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. Ian Shapiro (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2003), 136.
[44] It should be noted, however, that the majoritarian character of Rousseau's "general will" can easily devolve into totalitarian political formulations.

was not monolithically emancipatory. The freedoms it established were in reality far from universal and were fully enjoyed but by a relatively small subset of the urban populations of Western societies.[45] Other times the universalisation of its principles was instrumentalised toward the justification of extremely asymmetrical and oppressive systems of government in the name of universal improvement.[46] Domenico Losurdo has in fact argued that the history of liberalism coincided in many ways with the rigidification of relations of subjugation; colonialism and racial slavery were phenomena which flourished in parallel with the development of liberal thought. In light of these contradictions, Losurdo proposed that liberalism be understood as a dialectic of "emancipation and dis-emancipation," rather than an unequivocally liberatory project.[47] The middle classes, whose ascendance to power liberalism accompanied and legitimised, included groups of people whose prosperity hinged historically on the dehumanisation of entire populations. Accumulation always presupposes a delimitation between a class of exploiters and exploited which, in the case of slavery and colonialism, was essentialised.[48]

My intention is not, therefore, to contribute to the mythologisation of liberal thought. If there were truly *historically* progressive characteristics in liberalism these actually lay in the secularisation, and thus neutralisation, of the non-negotiable powers of Church and Crown. It was only through this process of sublimation of authority that the eventual judgement of power through a moral-rational prism became possible. Liberalism, as a worldview synergistic with capitalism, established margins to be colonised but at the same time paved the way for the critique of its justificatory mechanisms, as these were no longer drawn directly from theology. As Karl Marx eloquently described this process of secularisation of the bourgeois worldview: "Locke supplanted Habbakuk."[49] On that account, liberalism, as it manifested in Western capitalism, coincided with the expansion of economic, political and cultural participation, as well as the flattening of certain, previously intransigent, hierarchies.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Political Economy and The Social Contract*, trans. Christopher Betts (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994)

[45] See for instance John Locke's duplicitous rationalisation of chattel slavery in America on the theory of "just war."
James Farr, "Locke, Natural Law, and New World Slavery," *Political Theory*, vol. 36, no. 4 (Aug. 2008): 495–522.

[46] After all, John Stuart Mill was a defender of imperialism and colonialism as a civilising means.
Duncan Bell, "John Stuart Mill on Colonies," *Political Theory*, vol. 38, no. 1(Feb. 2010): 34–64.

[47] Domenico Losurdo, *Liberalism: a Counterhistory*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London; New York: Verso Books, 2011) 301.

[48] Ibid.,50.

[49] Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), 11.

At the same time, the impersonal, conformist and commodified nature of nineteenth century bourgeois societies produced a disenchanting and highly competitive environment which quickly became a source for artistic differentiation; a cultural environment the identity of the modernist artist was formed in opposition to. This was the basis for the creation of the self-critical dispositions of modernism as they were expressed in the acceleration of stylistic change during the second half of the century. I look at the stylistic evolution of modernist art as a diagram of differentiation which reflects the pressure for recognition under conditions of increased awareness of historicity. This is a predominantly sociological approach, largely indebted to the work of Pierre Bourdieu, which examines the internal politics of the artistic field, and how artists' search for a distinct social position impacted the history of style.[50] The important contribution of Bourdieu's cultural theory is its codification of artistic propositions and manoeuvres ("position-takings" in Bourdieu's terms) in relation to the internal and external pressures that artists are subject to as participants in a professional field rather than as self-sufficient, independent carriers of (aesthetic) ideologies. It is these pressures and artists' responses to them that ultimately concretise artistic propositions. This relationality of the artist becomes particularly salient with the passage of art economies to market regimes during the second half of the nineteenth century, as that unfolded in step with the collapse of centralised legitimation mechanisms for cultural production. Under these conditions which Bourdieu has brilliantly summarised as the "institutionalisation of anomie,"[51] modern artists become competitors in a fierce game with no security or straightforward path to recognition and consecration.

The creeping crisis of legitimation that Bourdieu outlines as the generative condition of artistic modernism became a fertile ground for the modern permutations of artistic "thymos." This is a concept that I borrow from Francis Fukuyama's Neo-Hegelian history of liberalism, which is arguably a rather unusual source for a discussion on the avant-garde. Thymos originally presented one of the components of the psyche in Plato's tripartite construction, but in Fukuyama's writing it came to represent an all-too-human, universal desire for recognition. Fukuyama based his exploration of recognition on Alexandre Kojève's interpretation of the Hegelian Master-Slave dialectic. In Kojève's reading, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's parable from the "Phenomenology of Spirit" symbolised the

[50] More specifically, Bourdieu's writings on the formation of the modern cultural and artistic in:
Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Literature and Art,* trans. and ed. Randal Johnson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993)
Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996)
[51] See Bourdieu, Manet and the Institutionalisation of Anomie, in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Literature and Art,* 238-253.

essence of history as the struggle for recognition. Kojève then proceeded to argue that the history of humankind can be understood as the struggle of the slave to bridge the gap with the master— that is, to be recognised as equal: "the historical dialectic is the dialectic of Master and Slave."[52] With the new liberal order inaugurated by the Napoleonic state and the institutionalization of formal equality, Kojève, and by extension Fukuyama, announced that history entered its final stage.

It should be nevertheless highlighted that my employment of the concept of "thymos" does not carry such extraordinary and far-reaching implications; it is instrumental rather than ontological. It neither describes a metaphysics of identity formation and action on the basis of an abstract desire for recognition, disembedded from material or psychological motivations,[53] nor a Geist-like undercurrent of human history; my perspective remains fundamentally materialist. Here thymos comes to describe the response of the modern artist to that moment of crisis when the relative incongruity between material and non-material capital acquisition became impossible to reconcile: the historical moment when cultural ideas of prestige could not be recodified into material gain, and material gain came to contradict established ideas of prestige and recognition. In my analysis this moment occurred when the pre-democratic constitution of the artist collapsed into the disenchanted, contractual bourgeois worldview. Thymos is therefore a metonymy for the alienation of the artist in nineteenth century liberal societies.

From that perspective, thymos contributes to the "decynicising" of the Bourdieusian artist type of modernity as it reintroduces alienation into what would otherwise be an overarchingly mechanistic or calculating struggle for recognition and prestige. And in that regard, it helps reinstate the political motivations of artists in an account which tends to relegate those to marginal significance. At this point, it is important to underline that the suppression of artists' political intentions is the other side of Bourdieu's de-idealising sociology of art,[54] and is therefore a problem that needs to be addressed for any analysis of the avant-garde to avoid collapsing into a diagram of mere intensifying claims to distinction, dictated simply by a knowledge of the field or personal interest.

This is not, however, a problem that is unique to sociological approaches. In reality, the discontinuity between the avant-garde as a history of stylistic experiment and a

[52] Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to The Reading of Hegel: Lectures On The Phenomenology of Spirit*, ed. Alan Bloom, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1980), .9.
[53] Fukuyama maintained Plato's distinction of thymos from the other two parts of the soul— self-interest, and desire.
Fukuyama, 177-182.
[54] This is also reflected in Bourdieu's refusal to draw a line between artistic modernism at large and the early twentieth century avant-garde.

programme of political action is at the heart of various art-historical (or literary) approaches. Famous examples include Clement Greenberg's interpretation of the avant-garde as an introspective process of self-definition according to the formal predicates unique to each art, embracing thus an emphatically apolitical avant-garde,[55] or Renato Poggioli's emphasis on the cult of novelty, rhetorically positioned against bourgeois civilisation yet in a symbiotic relationship with it.[56] On the one hand, therefore, we are faced with the identification of modernism and avant-garde through the exclusion of the political turn of the early twentieth century, and on the other, with the production of an artistic-political avant-garde that is qualitatively a more advanced stage of nineteenth century alienation. This amounts to a failure to produce a unified theory that can account for the transition from the aesthetic introspection of the nineteenth century to the political extraversion of the early twentieth.

This is a problem that Peter Bürger's seminal "Theory of the Avant-Garde" of 1974 successfully overcame. Bürger's avant-garde posited the aesthetic self-referentiality of the late nineteenth century (the regime in art that Bourdieu has defined on the basis of *how* a form is represented rather than *what* the form is) as a critical mediation of art's autonomous status in bourgeois society, and therefore as a necessary step before the avant-garde assault on this autonomous status. The deepening of political dissociation of the nineteenth century became then the precondition for its eventual negation in Dadaism, Surrealism and Constructivism.[57] Bürger's theory evidently tied the avant-garde to specific radical political commitments— in effect, its success, judged on the basis of Bürger's criteria, would amount to the overcoming of class society. Nevertheless, as the urgency of the political overrode all issues of recognition as crucial parameters in the process of politicisation, his theory collapsed into the opposition-collusion dialectic: the post-World War II rediscovery of early twentieth-century radicalism has nothing to offer but an affirmation of capitalism's propensity for co-option and neutralisation.

Yet, there is a lesson to be found in the politics of the avant-garde that is not limited to its political efficacy, and is still salient today. I want to argue instead, that by incorporating the problem of recognition and social position in modernity in the anti-institutional practices of early twentieth century avant-garde practices— by synthesising therefore Bourdieu's and

---

[55] Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 3-21.
Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," in Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 4: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 85-93.
[56] Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of The Avant-Garde*, trans. Gerald Fitzgerald (Cambridge; London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968)
[57] Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 1984)

Bürger's perspectives— we can arrive at a conception of politicisation that is not limited to the temporary or permanent, opportunistic or genuine allegiance to a political cause. That is, we can arrive at a conception of politicisation as an integral aspect of art practice that was crystalised by the historical avant-garde and corresponds to a greater problem of artistic legitimation in modernity. When the artist of the avant-garde politicises artistic activity, they are rebelling against society but also devising a new role for themselves. This is the model that the artist of contemporary socially engaged art also implicitly follows**.**

1.2 THE FORMATIVE ANTAGONISMS OF MODERN ART

1.2.1 THE PROBLEM OF GENIUS IN LIBERALISM

Friedrich Schiller's "Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man" of 1794 constitutes not only one of the earliest associations of the fields of politics and aesthetics in the modern era but a comprehensive inquiry on the socio-politically transformative character of art. In a most lucid passage, the philosopher declared: "the most perfect of all works of art—the building up of true political freedom."[58] Naturally, Schiller's conception of art as a political entity is not commensurate with the transparent politicisation most familiar to the reader of modern or contemporary art. Its political character does not correspond to the praxis of a militant, politically engaged artist-activist. According to Schiller, art instead comprises the realm wherein the antithetical drives of sense and form— that is, sensuousness and reason— are unified: art in its highest form brings harmony to the two fundamental conflicting impulses of humanity. This synthesis activates art's fundamentally utopian character: Schiller imagined art as constituting the sphere of moral, social and political utopia. Even though Schiller's ideal is rather removed from a fully defined and realisable macroscopic social reality, it still manifests a new conception of creativity— free, not subdued by need or practicality, always in search for beauty— that has an intrinsically transformative socio-political nature.[59] With Schiller, inner and aesthetic harmony are projected onto the political:

> That we must indeed, if we are to solve that political problem in practice, follow the path of aesthetics, since it is through beauty that we arrive at freedom.[60]

The maturation of bourgeois culture in the West in the nineteenth century, followed by the expansion of liberal ideals, complicated the social role of artists beyond the abstractly pedagogic and socially ameliorative position outlined by Schiller. The crux of the problem lay in the new socio-political and economic conditions that artists were forced to navigate in the ascendant bourgeois societies of the century. With the gradual marketisation of art, the financial survival of the modern artist was no longer dependent on the aristocratic patron or

---

[58] Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. Reginald Snell (New York: Dover Publications, 2004), 25.
[59] Ibid., 139-140
[60] Ibid., 27.
This is also the moment of the birth of Rancièrean "aesthetic regime of art." As the "aesthetic regime" Jacques Rancière referred to a modern experience of art as something categorically different from life. Being free from considerations of purpose and utility, art in the "aesthetic regime" becomes the promise of utopia, which automatically assigns political meaning to art's autonomy. The question of the "aesthetic regime" will be explored in more detail in Chapter 5.
Jacques Rancière, "The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes," in *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. Steven Corcoran (London; New York: Continuum, 2010), 115-133.

the church. Instead, the legitimisation of the modern artist hinged upon individual recognition under conditions of a relatively anonymous market. As a result, the established social position of the artist in proximity to the representatives of institutional power of the ancien régime became increasingly uncertain. The nineteenth century saw the gradual formation of a new artistic field that rendered artists' self-identification with an aristocratic elite no longer tenable. This did not simply result in extensive economic uncertainty but also to the loss of a recognisable and exceptional social position. This new predicament was exacerbated by the salience of the foundational myth of artistic genius; leading up to the nineteenth century, the primary source of artistic legitimacy had evolved in relation to a concept structured on fundamentally non-democratic ideas.

As Arnold Hauser has shown, the centrality of genius in the judgement of artistic excellence began to take hold in the late fifteenth century Renaissance art discourse. The concept of artistic genius posited art as the creation of a distinct, exceptional and autonomous personality that channels creative forces irreducible to tradition and rules. Liberated from the collective practice of the medieval guild tradition, the new artist of genius was the active host and beneficiary of a God-endowed talent which is instantiated, yet not fully expressed, in the artwork. The Renaissance conception of the artist highlighted the dichotomy between the old, collaborative model of craft to the highly individualistic art of genius.[61] With this transition, artistic self-actualisation shifted from the performance of transferrable skills to the expression of innate, exclusive characteristics that could neither be possessed broadly nor imitated. Even historical figures who pioneered a model of the artist as a man of research and experiment adopted the rhetoric of genius fully: Leonardo da Vinci, the Renaissance embodiment of art's allegiance with natural philosophy, once famously declared that painting "cannot be taught to those not endowed by nature."[62] The logic of genius predicated art as the expression of a unique biological basis. The entrance into modernity was thus marked by the elevation of genius as the necessary infrastructure of the "genuine" artist; this artist-type was the construct of a firmly pre-democratic culture.

The affinity of genius and art had been well established in the discourse of art by the mid-eighteenth century. Denis Diderot acknowledged the possibility of genius in other spheres as well, such as language and philosophy, but it was predominantly art that provided

[61] Hauser interestingly associates the birth of the "genius" artist with the emergence of the idea of intellectual property during the Italian Renaissance.
Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art, Vol.II: Renaissance, Mannerism and Baroque* (London: Routledge, 1962),.61-63.
[62] Moshe Barasch, *Theories of Art: 1. From Plato to Winckelmann* (Routledge, 2000), 182.

the model for his exploration of the concept.[63] With Immanuel Kant, however, art became the exclusive domain of genius. In the "Critique of Judgement" of 1790 Kant proposed that the presence of genius is not simply an indicator or intensifier of art's quality— something desirable but not essential to its production— but the foundation of its very existence. His propositions leave absolutely no doubt: "fine arts must necessarily be considered arts of genius,"[64] and "fine art is possible only as the product of genius."[65]

In Kant's aesthetics, genius is thus elevated as the precondition and source of fine art. At the same time, (fine) art comprises the products of human activity that cannot be governed by any "determinate rule;" it cannot come to existence simply through a process of learning or imitation, both of which characterise the development of technical skill or scientific method.[66] If genius constitutes the basis of fine art, and works of fine art are instantiations of an innate talent which cannot be taught or transferred through conventional epistemic methods, fine art becomes a talent for originality.[67] Kantian aesthetics entrenched genius specifically within the sphere of art,[68] and highlighted originality as one of its quintessential qualities.

The centrality of the aesthetic of genius as a unique talent for originality reflected a distinctly modern interest in the new: it reflected the formation of a "regime of novelty," as

---

[63] Herbert Dieckmann, "Diderot's Conception of Genius," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 2, no. 2 (1941): 151-82, 176-178.

[64] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indiana; Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 175.

The use of "fine art" in this passage coincides with the general use of "art" in the rest of my analysis, but is a reference to Immanuel Kant's typology developed in the Critique of Judgement of 1790. The history explored in the present analysis is in fact a history of "fine art" in Kantian terms. Kant divided art into "mechanical" and "aesthetic." Mechanical art comprises the rule-based processes which produce objects that correspond fully and can be subsumed definitively under the concept of a purpose. Mechanical art, therefore, performs the steps necessary for the production of an object that can accurately and adequately correspond to our cognition thereof. On the other hand, aesthetic art escapes such clearly delineated purposes and instead aims at the production of pleasure. This type of art was subsequently divided by Kant into "agreeable" and "fine." The former consists in these activities that employ talent in the production of sensuous pleasure alone, while the latter produces pleasure by activating the viewer's cognitive associations with the object of representation. As a consequence, fine art, although free from specific purpose, contributes to the cultivation of the individual's mental strengths.

Ibid., 172-173.

[65] Ibid., 175.

[66] Ibid.

[67] It has to be noted that Kant warned against the blanket conflation of genius and originality. In his words: "nonsense too can be original." In Kant's aesthetic philosophy originality is, therefore, a necessary yet not sufficient condition for the judgement of genius. Great works of art are always based on a technical foundation which allows them to become exemplary and, consequently, serve as models for future generations of artists.

Ibid.

[68] Unlike earlier formulations, such as Alexander Gerard's: "Genius is properly the faculty of *invention*; by means of which a man is qualified for making new discoveries in science, or for producing original works in art

Alexander Gerard, *An Essay on Genius*, (London, 1774), 8.

Cited in Andreas Reckwitz, *The Invention of Creativity*, trans. Steven Black (Polity Press, 2017), p.38

Andreas Reckwitz has described it, where the artwork could no longer exist as a soulless manifestation of technical expertise, but now had to embody certain innovative, progressive qualities.[69] At the same time, the theorisation of genius— and by extension, originality— on the basis of innate, non-transferrable talents was profoundly at odds with the political, economic and cultural restructuring of the nineteenth century. Liberal societies of the time were moving toward a more socially-conditioned conception of ability; one that did not enclose ability in strict heredity, but acknowledged the impact of "habit, custom, and education."[70] This idea was also reinforced by the extensive social organisation of industrialised societies on the social division of labour where specialisation made work far less expressive: entering modernity, there can be observed a certain tension between the adulation of genius in aesthetics and conceptions of human ability in broader socio-economic thought.

With the gradual decline of the institutions which entrenched the idea of excellence into a privilege of birth, and the expansion of individual rights and civil liberties, the societies of the nineteenth century became the social space where equality and excellence had to confront each other. Liberal thought, moving away from the permanence of the older order, embraced the dynamism of intellectual, moral and economic improvement at a personal, as well as societal or national level. What the inscription of individual and social life in the possibility of improvement led to was the de-essentialising of prestige and economic power; these could no longer be justified as the exclusive property of a specific caste but were theoretically attainable broadly through industriousness and virtue. The notion that accomplishment is predestined—the exclusive privilege of certain unique biological characteristics— was undercut by the unravelling of the hereditary boundaries between social classes.[71] The co-presence of the aristocratic belief in the ascriptive nature of excellence and the *de jure* egalitarianism of the bourgeois worldview was not merely a paradox that the modern artist had to grapple with, but a dissonance absolutely formative of the modern identity.

---

[69] Reckwitz, 37-44.

[70] Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations, vol.1:Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith*, (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1981), 29.

[71] Liberal socio-economic thought arguably signified a turn towards a relatively de-essentialised conception of merit. Adam Smith's assertion that actual observable differences in talent and intellectual ability across society are not so much biologically determined, but reflections of socio-economic stratification for the most part was especially radical. A similar thesis was also held by David Hume who believed that up to a certain age most people are in possession of similar talents. Nevertheless, the idea of natural equality was still a minority position; after all, a complete decoupling of ability and biology is rather controversial even to this day.
Ibid., 28.

1.2.2 MODERN ARTIST AND AUDIENCE

The tension between the principles of singularity and equality was exacerbated as the material conditions behind the emergence of the tension itself reconfigured the social edifice. The ascendance of the bourgeoisie as the new ruling social class in the nineteenth century entailed the decline of the traditional aristocratic patronage system and its gradual replacement by the market.[72] What this meant was that the value of the modern artist was now increasingly dependent on the judgement of the new bourgeois art audience. Certainly, it must be noted here that the academic exhibition of art was still the predominant avenue for recognition well into the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, and especially in France, the spectacular character of these exhibitions gradually corroded the exclusivity of judgement enjoyed only by an artistic aristocracy. To offer some perspective: from the years 1830 to 1848 the annual visitors at the Paris Salon were more than one million.[73] With this level of exposure to a burgeoning new audience, art's judgement was no longer the non-negotiable, exclusive prerogative of a cultural-political elite, and became over time a matter that involved an audience of journalists, art dealers, collectors, and even laypersons. By the turn of the century this process had been completed; the Salon had splintered into competing organisations with the academic artistic aristocracy having lost most of its leverage.[74]

The crisis of the Salon, and the consequent displacement of a strict academic peer selection system, meant that the judgement of artistic genius now constituted the space wherein formerly inscrutable qualities were increasingly subjected to the scrutiny of an empowered public. Reckwitz has described this phenomenon as materialising in the opposition between the "logic of the producer" and the "logic of the audience:" a climate of "permanent controversy within the bourgeois artistic field over who is the legitimate judge of an artwork's novelty value."[75] The coveted prize was, of course, who gets to have the definitive say over the quality of the artwork. This created a double bind for artists. On the one hand, the modern artist was forced to produce something that meets or creates market

---

[72] According to Peter Bürger this shift started in the late eighteenth century and signified the replacement of courtly-representative culture by bourgeois culture.

[73] William Hauptmann, "Juries, Protests, and Counter-Exhibitions before 1850," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (March 1985): 95-109, 95-96.
Cited in Delacour, Hélène, Leca, Bernard, The Decline and Fall of the Paris Salon: a Study of the Deinstitutionalization Process of a Field Configuring Event in the Cultural Activities, *M@n@gement*, vol. 14, no. 1, (2011): 436-466, 440.
https://www.cairn.info/revue-management-2011-1-page-436.htm (Accessed: 05/04/2018)

[74] Indicatively, in 1910 Daniel-Henri Kahnweiler recommended that the artists he was representing bypass the Salon altogether, as it was no longer thought to offer important benefits.
Gérard Monnier, *L'Art et ses Institutions en France: De La Révolution à Nos Jours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995)
Cited in Delacour, Leca, 441.

[75] Reckwitz, 44-45.

demand; in market conditions production for a bourgeois audience is obviously inescapable. On the other, openly acknowledging or, even worse, capitulating to the audience's taste signalled the utter degradation of an artist's work as it signified that the privilege of judgement has been irrevocably surrendered. Operating inside an impersonal, competitive and expanding market, modern artists were caught up in a dynamic of continuous innovation over the judgement of which they maintained increasingly less control.

The porosity of the surface separating art and audience had been observed already from the mid-late eighteenth century; for Johann Wolfgang Goethe and Friedrich Schiller, it was an unfortunate consequence of the expanded bourgeois participation in cultural life. Improved literacy and economic ability had led to an unprecedented expansion of the social base of cultural production and consumption, to the point where significant parts of urban populations were actively fashioning themselves as artists or critics. The explosion of dilettantism was thus a uniquely bourgeois phenomenon, and for both philosophers, it posed an existential threat to the purported eternal ideals of art. The new proximity between art and bourgeois social life was a process of contamination and degeneration to mediocrity; this is how the "average" artist, as opposed to the artist of genius, was born. Schiller, in his essay entitled "On the Necessary Limits in the Use of Beautiful Forms" of 1795, attempted to produce a typology of this new relation. He thus postulated that the "genuine" artist embodies genius *and* mastery; the "genuine" artist produces aesthetic representations, always balanced by the pursuit of truth. On the other hand, the dilettante embarks on endeavours that lack a moral quality: the dilettante's pursuits are driven exclusively by a self-interested, superficial striving for beauty alone.[76]

Nevertheless, the philosophers' correspondence reveals a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon and its implications.[77] Rather than being treated as atypical or as a mere sign of cultural decline, these exchanges embed dilettantism in a specific historical dialectic:

> Dilettantes are of little use to themselves, to the artist, and to art. Indeed, they cause a lot of damage. And yet man, the artist, and art cannot do without an enjoying, insightful, and to a certain extent practical participation.[78]

---

[76] Friedrich Schiller, On the Necessary Limits in the Use of Beautiful Forms, in Friedrich Schiller, *Schiller's Complete Works Vol II*, trans. Charles J. Hempel (Philadelphia: I. Kohler, 1861) (ebook) 540-549, 546.

[77] The two philosophers' correspondence concerned the collaborative production of a philosophical treatise on dilettantism, which was ultimately never completed.

[78] Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke, Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche I/18*, ed. Dieter Borchmeyer et al. (Frankfurt a. M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985) 782–83.
Cited in Paul Fleming, *Exemplarity and Mediocrity: The Art of the Average from Bourgeois Tragedy to Realism*, (Stanford; California: Stanford University Press, 2009), 81

As Paul Fleming points out, Goethe recognised that in that specific historical moment, dilettantism— the artistic activity of non-artists— had effectively become integral to art; its grounding in a vibrant, energetic socio-cultural environment propelled it forward.[79] At the same time, however, as larger parts of the new, educated urban populations were crossing the line between art enthusiast and self-identified artist, the distinction between genius and mediocrity became almost impossible. Goethe, therefore, appears to have been appreciative of the social expansion of art as a potential creative force, but extremely cautious regarding the shallowness of its products; dilettantism was, in a sense, manifesting as the negative mirror of modern art's vitality. The dangers that it presented extended beyond the simple deterioration of the standards of artistic production; as the societalisation of art disrupted the clear hierarchies necessary for the formulation of universal, top-down aesthetic programmes, the threat of dilettantism was, in fact, becoming existential.[80]

Moreover, as Goethe and Schiller observed, the movement between artist and dilettante was not unilinear; the effects of dilettantism were not limited to the reinvention of non-critics as critics, and non-artists as artists. In reality, the two spheres were locked in a process of interpenetration: the expansion of the culturally productive demographic base in bourgeois societies risked transforming everyone into a dilettante. Flattening hierarchies of taste, dilettantism was normalising unregulated and superficial engagement with art.[81] The friction between amateur and professional— and by extension, between audience and artist— should not, therefore, be understood as the struggle between two extreme, entrenched positions but dialectically. The result of this process was not the rigidification of artist and audience in defence of doctrinaire aesthetic-ethical positions but their gradual osmosis. Over the course of the nineteenth century, this antagonism engendered a variety of hybridised formulations on the educational and sociological grounding of the modern artist. And by the time we arrive at Baudelaire's time, dilettantism had assumed the characteristics of an aristocratic resistance to the colonisation of creativity by moralism and purposiveness.[82]

---

[79] Goethe's observation captures, of course, a broader cultural shift— one that would completely reshape the face of art over the course of the next two centuries.

[80] Fleming, 81.

[81] "When the *Meister* follows false taste in art, then the dilettante believes all the quicker to be at the level of art."
Goethe, 779. Cited in Fleming, 83.

[82] Baudelaire's position on the modern artist as "man of the world," and art as "the beauty of manner and sketch of circumstances" is indicative of the modern hybridisation of the spheres of art and non-art. Baudelaire envisioned the modern artist as an energetic yet detached participant in modern life, equipped with exceptional acuity and imagination, yet unfettered by academic protocols. By salvaging elements of exceptionality in an art that was already becoming a social activity, Baudelaire highlighted the osmotic relationship between the world of artist and audience, and attempted to produce a viable model for art's resistance against it. We will revisit the case of Baudelaire in the following chapter.

The modern artistic field was, therefore, fundamentally antagonistic. On the one hand, the expansion and empowerment of the bourgeois art audience delegitimised the universality of aesthetic authority; taste no longer embodied the statute of a central authority, the cultural preferences of an elite or the deliberations of an exclusive professional community. On the other hand, the inability of historical institutions to withstand the steep increase in the numbers of practicing artists created a fiercely competitive and uncertain environment.[83] Operating in a system based on the public sale of art, the community of artists were subject to the particularly onerous realities of the artistic profession: they were exposed to the insecurity and risks associated with conventional forms of labour, while lacking the means to mitigate those. Navigating an environment of shifting tastes within a system driven less and less by direct patronage, artists had now no guarantee that their, unquantifiable and lacking use-value, work would satisfy any needs and, thus, be absorbed by the market.[84] In other words, the bourgeois stage of art threw into sharp relief modern artists' position as "hybrid" labourers: neither fully autonomous, as they were reliant on the market, nor heteronomous, as they were positionally unable to enjoy the benefits of production tied to the satisfaction of concrete or pre-established demand.[85] This fundamentally alienating contradiction lay at the heart of the bourgeois institution of art; the very same economic conditions underpinning the development of art as an autonomous institution were now summarily deconstructing its foundational myths. In the bourgeois artistic field the promise of art as "purposiveness without purpose," and artistic labour as "play" were gradually revealing themselves as untenable illusions.

1.2.3 THE SEARCH FOR RECOGNITION

As a major consequence of the new material conditions of art, the ideas safeguarding the stability of artistic identity were severely contested. For the modern artist the tensions written into the bourgeois artistic field disrupted the continuity between self-image and social position. The heart of the problem lay in the firmly pre-democratic character of the ideas and values constitutive of the artist. These ideas and values were now violently

Richard Hibbitt, *Dilettantism and its Values: From Weimar Classicism to the fin de siècle* (London: Legenda, 2006), 80–83.

[83] According to Hauptmann, in 1843 there were more than two thousand individuals listed as painters in Paris alone.
Hauptmann, 105. Cited in Delacour, Leca, 444.

[84] Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of The Avant-Garde* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968), 113.

[85] Boris Groys's theorisation of modern art as the production of "paradox objects" is a direct consequence of the hybridity of artistic labour. According to Groys, artistic labour produces neither artworks nor commodities but objects constituted by the contradiction of the two categories.
Boris Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge, Mass; London, England: MIT Press, 2008), 3.

subjected to a process of bourgeoification, and its conformist imperatives of productivity, efficiency and rationality. Under these conditions, the recodification of pre-existing cultural ideas of prestige into material gain became increasingly difficult. The predicament of the identity of the modern artist was therefore symptomatic of a wider socio-cultural shift. The dissociation of artist and cultural-political authority, as well as the creeping democratisation of art into a market economy led to the dissolution of those specific conditions that fostered the exceptional nature of artistic identity. This shift— the social and cultural institution of egalitarianism— has of course been one of the hallmarks of Western liberal modernity.

Francis Fukuyama provides an interesting perspective here: the rationalisation of social and economic life in liberal societies advanced in step with the suppression of the thymotic components of human identity. What this means is that the standardised, contractual nature of social life in bourgeois societies was largely incompatible with social and cultural formulations rooted in the desire for recognition as exceptional or superior: these were instead the ideas that describe "megalothymia." In Fukuyama's analysis of the modern politics of recognition, bourgeois hostility towards megalothymia was not merely the product of vague resentment. On the contrary, its political origins lay incontrovertibly in megalothymia's centrality to the existential legitimisation of the older aristocratic order. Unlike the bourgeoisie, the aristocratic reproduction of class had historically evolved on the basis of a variety of unproductive, arbitrary and seemingly useless protocols: prevalent among them the ability for war and military conquest.[86] The bourgeois logic dictated that this antiquated, irrational and ultimately parasitical claim to power could not withstand the rise of the efficient, wealth-producing middle classes. And indeed, the socio-political and economic structures of late mercantile and industrial capitalism did not outgrow feudalism simply in material terms. That is, the historical transition to capitalism was not limited to what Marx described as the emergence of a new social order out of the maturation of specific productive forces bound to destroy the old.[87] Capitalist modernity also entailed the gradual elimination of the moral dispositions that sustained what was now increasingly perceived as

[86] Indicative of the liberal banishment of war as irrational, unproductive and anachronistic, but also of the liberal tendency toward the rationalisation of life at large, Norman Angell's "The Great Illusion" main thesis (originally written in 1909) was that free trade and economic cooperation among advanced capitalist nations rendered war economically inefficient. Similarly, and contrary to Lenin's famous association of capitalism and imperialism, in 1919 Joseph Schumpeter argued that the salience of militarism in the modern world was not a consequence of capitalist development but a sign of the persistence of pre-capitalist (feudal) structures.
Norman Angell, *The Great Illusion*(Cosimo Classics, 2007)
Joseph Alois Schumpeter, The Sociology of Imperialisms (1919), in *Imperialism and Social Classes: Two Essays by Joseph Schumpeter*, trans. Heinz Norden, (Meridian Books, 1951), 2-98, 64-65.
[87] Karl Marx, 'Preface' to 'A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy' [1859], *Marxists Internet Archive* (1999): http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critiquepol-economy/preface.htm

the decadent and inefficient, aristocratic worldview.[88] In the process of liberalisation of the West, the secularisation of natural law, the separation of powers, and the transubstantiation of fundamental antagonisms into economic competition produced a juridical-political framework designed to domesticate megalothymia: to denude the desire for recognition of its pre-democratic and existential dimensions.[89] With its suppression, formally egalitarian liberal societies were able to achieve a degree of order and stability on the basis of assumed mutually beneficial socio-economic activity.[90]

1.2.4 LOSER WINS: SELF-OTHERING, REJECTION AND AESTHETIC INNOVATION

The incongruity between the pre-democratic logic of artistic legitimation and bourgeois conformity inscribed the formation of identity in a process of self-othering—socially and aesthetically. As Nathalie Heinich has argued, this fundamental contradiction was integral to the creation of a unique identity in the history of Western culture: one which, rejecting bourgeois norms as symbols of mediocrity and stagnation, now sought excellence in social and cultural margins.[91] This, simultaneously marginal and elitist, social identity marked the passage into what Heinich has described as "singularity realm." The "singularity realm" was the modern aesthetic paradigm which centred abnormality, originality, and individuality as its prominent values. With the articulation of excellence on these rather subcultural characteristics, singularity eventually became synonymous with eccentricity, marginality and anti-conformism.[92] Because the post-Renaissance history of art dictated that great art has to be based on the revision and refinement of older models and produce similarly universalisable works, beauty in nineteenth century academic art became "the ideal of regular features,"[93] collapsing ideal beauty into the stereotypical. For the artist of the "singularity realm" this beauty came to symbolise a distinctly modern form of ugliness, in stark contrast with the atypical, the new, and the transgressive; in stark contrast with the

[88] This does not imply that sociological phenomena correspond exclusively and fully to specific historical stages, or that certain moral dispositions are reducible to specific types of social organisation. For example, Thorstein Veblen in 1899 famously traced a plethora of seemingly modern, capitalist behaviours, such as conspicuous consumption and consumerism, to distinctly pre-modern social institutions and customs. Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of The Leisure Class*, ed. Martha Banta (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)

[89] Fukuyama, 333.

[90] Ibid., 181-191.

[91] Nathalie Heinich, Singularity and Excellence, in *Genealogies of Genius*, eds. Joyce E. Chaplin, Darrin M. McMahon (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 31.
For Heinich, this new identity is epitomised in the formation of the sociological characteristics of the bohemian type.

[92] Ibid., p.36.

[93] Bourdieu, 250.

antinormativity of the modern.[94] The entry into the singularity realm intensified the rate of aesthetic experimentation in modernity, bolstering, thus, a nascent culture of constant revaluation, revision, and change.[95]

As artistic individuation began to draw from the imaginary of rejection, the recuperation of artistic authority came to be mediated by the magnification of the non-conformist characteristics of artistic identity. In this process of self-othering, modern artists entrenched themselves into the position of socio-cultural outsiders: aesthetically impenetrable and unyielding to social imperatives. With the formation of an artistic identity in opposition to bourgeois social and aesthetic norms, modern artists allowed or even facilitated their own reflexive rejection by the general public; that is, in the realm of singularity, the modern artist has to be the subject *and* the object of rejection. Rather than seek reconciliation with the new bourgeois art public, the radical artist of modernity sought to magnify the principles underlying their original rejection by cultivating a socio-psychological and aesthetic identity precisely based on those. The controversies surrounding the histories of Gustave Courbet, Édouard Manet, Vincent van Gogh, and Paul Gauguin underline the salience of the "misunderstood" or "maligned genius" artist-type of the nineteenth century. These histories embed the navigation of modern crisis in a mythology of rejection, scandal and self-marginalisation. The prehistory of the avant-garde can be therefore reframed as the history of the assertion of individuality and the expediency thereof. By the early twentieth century, the dialectic of alienation and rejection had become so important that it was now seen as integral to the formation of artistic identity.[96]

This development— the progression of artistic positions on the basis of rejection— is encapsulated by Bourdieu as the institution of a logic of "loser wins" among modernist

---

[94] Poggioli,.81-82.

[95] The number of artistic "isms" appearing from mid-19th century to the First World War was not coincidental. The development of a culture of self-perpetuating change mirrored the chaotic pace of the era. In fact, to describe the combination of metropolitan expansion and rapid technological development in transport and communication technologies (railways, telephone, telegraphy) David Harvey employed the term "time-space compression." This acceleration of history, which was perceived as a break in its continuity, had inevitable impact on artistic practices: the now accelerated and mystified sense of history ushered in systematic attempts at rediscovering the historicity of the present which were expressed by a proliferation of artistic movements and methodologies. For a more comprehensive discussion:
David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge; Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 1990), 260-283.
Jon May, Nigel Thrift, "Introduction," in *Timespace: Geographies of Temporality*, eds. Jon May, Nigel Thrift (Routledge, 2003), 1-46, 7.

[96] Robert Jensen, *Marketing Modernism in fin-de-siècle Europe*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 10.
Expressionism, introspective and dramatic as it was, offers the most characteristic examples of the self-fashioning of an alienated identity. In a sense, Oskar Kokoschka's emblematic self-portrait as criminal and Christ for the cover of Der Sturm in 1910 distils the essence of that spirit in its projection of an identity enmeshed in self-pathologisation and martyrdom.

artists.[97] The host of changes and transformations during the second half of the nineteenth century that we have already touched upon— with the most critical among them being the "democratisation" of the profession leading to an influx of new professional artists, the decline of centralised cultural legitimation through a state-academic system, and the expansion of the grip of market economies on artistic production— revealed the extreme stratification that governed the artistic field and crystalised the oppositional relations between artistic elites and underclasses. As the former were either still institutionally secure or even in a position to benefit from the socio-economic conditions of capitalist "large-scale" production, the latter were compelled to develop systems of recognition and prestige based on the inversion of the predominant economic logic. This compelled specific sections of unrecognised, dissident or marginalised artists to adopt a logic of "restricted" production— that is, production of art that does not target a wide audience, is not primarily motivated by superficial economic concerns, and advances through the production of difference. The very same self-styling of modern artists in opposition to the predominant social and artistic conventions that exacerbated their vulnerability to economic failure uniquely positioned them at the same time as prime candidates for the recognition— that is, the acquisition of symbolic capital— from their peers.

Interestingly, Thierry de Duve takes this "loser wins" logic even further: the strategic employment of rejection was not simply woven into the historical development of the avant-garde, but, effectively, of explanatory importance historically. As he writes, in the early days of modernism behind every meaningful advance lay a careful interrogation of two questions: what to reject, and why to be rejected. This was the mechanism that activated "the historical law of painting:" the notion that the art of tomorrow is the art rejected today.[98] Scandal and derision constituted then the preparatory stages of vindication in the annals of history: "[w]hat is today laughed at we see tomorrow as astonishing and admirable."[99] In this advance of history through the activation of a mechanism of rejection, art's significance gradually came to be identified with the direction and magnitude of its innovative qualities. As adherence to convention could no longer suffice in the expanded and precarious bourgeois artistic field, the exigency of recognition propelled a series of successive fundamental stylistic changes— of "abandonments." The trajectory that this history of "abandonments"

[97] Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 39.
[98] Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism: On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade*, trans. Dana Polan, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 27.
[99] Max Liebermann, "Rede zur Eroffnung der Ausstellung der Berliner Secession" (spring 1900), reprinted in Die Phantasie in der Malerei, ed. G. Busch (Frankfurt, 1978), 170-1.
Cited in Robert Jensen, "A Matter of Professionalism: Marketing Identity in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna," *Austrian History Yearbook* 28 (1997): 247-68, 52.

spanned over is now well-established. Within a few decades the foundational principles of art's centuries-long post-Renaissance history had been dismantled: from chiaroscuro to linear perspective, Euclidean space to figuration.[100]

It needs to be underlined here, that the modern notion of rejection was not abstract or allegorical anymore— it was not a mere reiteration of older Romantic tropes according to which a genuine and meaningful experience of art can be attained through the transgression of norms and boundaries. For many modern artists it had taken the form of a concrete, substantive philosophy of history; one wherein failure prefigured ultimate recognition. So pervasive were these ideas that some modern artists even attempted to ritually invoke their own failure, to stage their defeat as a means of accelerating this economy of rejection. For instance, Robert Jensen suggests that the triumphant reception of Paul Cézanne by the Viennese Secessionists in 1903 was, at least partially, motivated by this narrative. By receiving Cézanne, the precursor of Cubism and pioneer of a style that clearly undermined the economic Jugendstil of the Viennese Secession, with honours that far surpassed his own recognition in France, the Secessionists were consciously creating a metaphor of their own failure and rejection.[101] Yet, it has to be highlighted that these ideas did not spring from an absurd, quasi-religious faith in some force of providence over the shunned, mistreated artist of modernity: by the end of the nineteenth century there was already in place an infrastructure that could support, or at times even encourage experimentation— commercial galleries often relied on the promotion of novelty, while the various Central European Secessions allowed progressive artists to develop marketable group identities. The attention that these spaces generated helped legitimise the progressive connotations of rejection. In France, however, the accommodation of the unorthodox— and thus new– artistic tendencies was not limited within the sphere of activities of an upstanding, enlightened citizenry or artistic elite, but was in fact mandated by the state itself: the patron of the Salon des Refusés was no other than Napoleon III.

The legitimating presence of Napoleon III had far-reaching implications. With the Salon des Refusés, the dissemination of radical modern art ceased being a private endeavour of limited reach but was now under the aegis of the universal character of the state. The Salon des Refusés was in that regard a de facto and de jure normalisation of artistic

[100]John Rajchman, Foreword to *Pictorial Nominalism: On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade*, by Thierry de Duve, translated by Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), ix.
Thierry de Duve's thesis is that these successive abandonments paved the way for the transition from the original question of painting to the question of art itself- a question that was ultimately posed by Marcel Duchamp's readymade.
[101] Jensen, "A Matter of Professionalism: Marketing Identity in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna," p.253.

innovation; rejection by the older generation of the official Salon now amounted to recognition by the modern artist's contemporaries. The Salon des Refusés, however, did not simply provide the social space for a symbolic affirmation of said link, but the space of its activation in the present. The vindication of novelty was no longer a mere promise deferred to a vague posterity: the moments of rejection and recognition began to converge.[102] This opened up a parallel progressive institutional history that modern artists could become part of if they were willing to test its limits. It created a heritage that artists could participate in only insofar as they were committed to challenging its fixity.

As Jensen points out, until the early years of the twentieth century modernist practices were indeed understood as belonging to a history paralleling, and opposed to, official Salon culture. More specifically, they were implicitly associated with the Impressionist tradition and were, thus, classified as subsets thereof. In the first decade of the twentieth century, however, this continuity was disrupted; the various semi-official and alternative salons that had recently been established, such as the Salon des Indépendants and Salon d'Automne, shifted the discourse of novelty from continuity to disruption. Postimpressionism— represented by the work of artists such as Paul Cézanne, Georges Seurat, Paul Gauguin and Vincent van Gogh— was presented not as a continuation of Impressionism, but as its critique: a departure from it.

As Jensen correctly underlines, the reception of Postimpressionism, separated and in opposition to Impressionism, signified the transition from a synthesising understanding of modern art's historicity to a narrative of exclusion— one defined by the competition between various factions, not as a means of admission into a progressive "canon," but as an attempt to monopolise and redefine it in their own image.[103] This was arguably a consequence of the expansion of de Duve's parallel history of "abandonments" in an increasingly commercialised environment— that is, under conditions which incentivised aesthetic, and sometimes ideological, autonomisation. By the time Filippo Tommaso Marinetti penned the Futurist Manifesto in 1909, the progression of art practice was no longer perceived as the struggle between vaguely progressive and academic or bourgeois artists— the very declaration of Futurist revolt came with the emphatic affirmation of its own ultimate radical negation and overcoming, "[f]or art can be nought but violence, cruelty and injustice."[104]

---

[102] De Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism: On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade*, 27.
[103] Robert Jensen, "The Avant-Garde and the Trade in Art," *Art Journal,* vol. 47, no. 4, (1988): 360–367, 361.
[104] Marinetti's prediction was impressively specific: "[t]he oldest of us is thirty: so we have at least a decade for finishing our work. When we are forty, other younger and stronger men will probably throw us in the wastebasket like useless manuscripts— we want it to happen!"
Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism," in *Marinetti's Selected Writings*, trans. R.W. Flint, (London, 1971), 39-44.

Meanwhile, for the artists of Berlin Dada the rhetoric accompanying the vehement repudiation of Expressionism was often more caustic even than that employed against the various platitudes and failures of mainstream culture. The self-determination of Berlin Dada was grounded equally in the war against the prevalent, "philistine" bourgeois culture and a complacent, domesticated modernism; in fact, Dadaist critique often treated these two as indistinguishable.[105]

1.3 THE POLITICS OF THE AVANT-GARDE

1.3.1 THE DOUBLE CHARACTER OF AVANT-GARDE CRITIQUE

For Peter Bürger, the acceleration of stylistic change evident in the modernist preoccupation with form of the late nineteenth century reflected an internalisation of oppositionality; the sublimation of opposition into a refusal to engage with social realities outside art. The self-referential focus on art's own formal laws during that era was therefore only superficially the result of liberated, subjective stylistic decisions; most importantly, it was a symptom of the social organisation of art in bourgeois society. Art's distanciation from social relevance in favour of an inward turn toward form reflected the deeper reality of its separation from social or moral usefulness in bourgeois society. In the inward containment of critique, Bürger recognised a transformative process that had begun earlier in history— its earliest manifestation being the erosion of the pedagogic elements of the neoclassical tradition[106]— and eventually found its apogee in the anchoritism of Aestheticism.

Unlike its earlier historical stages, art in bourgeois societies lacked a concrete social function; it was no longer sacral or in the service of aristocratic power.[107] Art's separation from other social structures formed the basis of its autonomy; bourgeois art became its own

---

Cited in *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, (Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 146-149, 149.

[105] Indicatively, Richard Huelsenbeck, First German Dada Manifesto, trans. Ralph Mannheim, in *The Dada Painters and Poets*, ed. Robert Motherwell (New York, 1951), 242-6.
Cited in Harrison, Wood, 257-259.
Raoul Hausmann, "The German Philistine Gets Upset", in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, ed. Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, Edward Dimendberg (University of California Press, 1994), pp.482-483.
For an account of the antagonistic relationship between Dadaism and Expressionism, see:
J. C. Middleton, "Dada Versus Expressionism, Or the Red King's Dream," in *German Life and Letters, Volume 15*, Issue 1: 37-52.

[106] See for instance, Sir Joshua Reynolds's "universal republic of taste" (the use of art for the construction of civic identity) and "customary community of art" (the use of art for the construction of national identity) as ideals to be achieved through art.
John Barrell, "Sir Joshua Reynolds and the Englishness of English Art," in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London; New York, Routledge, 1990), 154-176.

[107] Bürger, 47-48.

individual institution, separated from the "praxis of life."[108] Artificially isolated from broader socio-historical realities, the bourgeois institution of art served as a source of reprieve from the depersonalisation of capitalism: a space where ideas ostracised by capitalist instrumental rationality could survive as aesthetic representations, unable to effect any meaningful change.[109] This was according to Bürger the historical basis of the self-critical, introspective turn of modernism. At the heart of its unsociability lay the disenchanting realisation that, in conditions of bourgeois autonomy, art was structurally cut off from any meaningful interaction with broader socio-political life. The self-critical development of its own formal and historical laws crystalised thus the conditions of its bourgeois autonomy and highlighted the limits of a possible critique from within institutional parameters. With Aestheticism these limits— in essence, art's political inconsequentiality— became art's own content.[110]

As much a historical failure as a way out of an impasse, Aestheticism ironically paved the way for the historical avant-garde of the early twentieth century. By demonstrating that the inward containment of oppositionality failed to free artist and art from the new tensions that their commodified degradation in capitalism thrusted them onto, but instead contributed to a self-replicating crisis, it created the conditions for a new radical critique— this time directed against art's institutional enframing. The new, liberated forms of avant-garde creativity would then form the basis for a comprehensive and radical renegotiation of art and life. In the historical avant-garde Bürger identified the completion and negation of the socio-politically ineffective introspection of the nineteenth century. However, for Bürger, the ultimate goal of the historical avant-garde was not to simply deconstruct the bourgeois ideologies that entrenched art as an autonomous category and condemned it to the production and consumption of socially irrelevant aesthetic representations, but to produce a sweeping critique of life in capitalism. And, by doing so, to carve out a path out of it through a new life praxis. Therefore, it was not just the origins of the alienation of the modern artist that were political; at the heart of Bürger's theorisation lies the notion that the historical avant-garde was fundamentally a wide-reaching political project.

The critique of art's autonomous status as the symbolic and material destruction of the relations of production in capitalism introduces, however, certain problems as it produces an inevitably underdetermined, politically, avant-garde history. As has already been discussed

---

[108] Ibid., 47.

[109] This is bourgeois art's "affirmative character," a concept that Bürger draws from Herbert Marcuse. By providing a space for those ideas to be expressed, it helped erect an artificial vision of capitalism with humane characteristics, defusing at the same time those tensions that would lead to its contestation.
Ibid., 50.
Herbert Marcuse, "The Affirmative Character of Culture," in Herbert Marcuse, *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory,* trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (London: Mayfly Books, 2009), pp.65-98.

[110] Bürger, 27.

in this chapter, the socioeconomic and cultural alienation of the modern artist can indeed be traced in material changes that took place during the bourgeoification of art. This does not however necessarily entail that artistic anti-institutional activity was fully determined by coherent ideological motivations. Having registered the tangible problems that modern artists were faced with— the transformation of the art system to a market economy and its oversaturation, followed by the degradation of the social position of the artist through the decline in the rarity of the artistic product— the priority that Bürger assigns to the ideological and political origins of the avant-garde appears rather overstated. Ironically, this approach tends to subsume the material basis of alienation of the nineteenth century under a critique of capitalism writ large. It is therefore a perspective that overlooks how the socio-cultural realignment of modernity impacted on the traditional avenues of economic survival and recognition in favour of the rather abstract possibility of revolutionary change through art. As a consequence, it does not consider the discrepancy between the ideas and values that artists were thought to embody in the past, and the new characteristics of the bourgeois artistic field as a particularly impactful factor.

These shortcomings, however, reflect broader epistemic questions regarding our understanding of the relation between the artistic and the political; that is, the field wherein artists operate and its interaction with other social structures and forces. Bürger's prioritisation of the ideological motivations of the avant-garde essentially hinges on the presupposition that avant-garde artists operated primarily in the political— that they were principally agents of political action, rather than professionals in a field with specific characteristics. By suppressing all movement within the field through the lens of political radicalism, the artist of the avant-garde becomes then hyper-ideological; the power of the new is the power of a new politics, severed from the already salient dialectic of novelty and rejection as an artistic politics of recognition. The sphere of the aesthetic and the political become thus coterminous; a political gesture within the sphere of the aesthetic collapses into a political declaration in the arena of politics.

In reality, however, among the movements that Bürger classifies under the historical avant-garde only Russian Constructivism presented instances where that line was truthfully traversed; undoubtedly, to no small extent due to its development inside revolutionary conditions and to the fact that the identification of the artist with a specific political position happened under the aegis of the post-revolutionary state. On the other hand, the Dadaist playful alignment with communism declared in "What is Dadaism and What Does It Want

in Germany" of 1919 was repudiated by the "Manifesto of Proletarian Art" five years later.[111] Finally, the entire history of the André Breton-led Surrealist group could be re-narrated as a series of implosions and excommunications that followed the various unsuccessful attempts to coerce its members into ceding their relative autonomy as artists. Bürger, by underdetermining the historical avant-garde on the basis of its proclaimed political programmes, collapses the homology between the position of the avant-garde artist and the revolutionary historical subject as a relation of identity. Nevertheless, the affinity between avant-garde artist and political actor has historically been fraught in tension: it has been incomplete, unstable and often circumstantial— a relationship between roles at times intersecting but never resulting in the internalisation of political utility as the primary object of art. This is a problem that even the 1920s Soviet avant-gardes eventually had to reckon with. Boris Arvatov recognised in 1926 the signs of a dead-end in Productivism's alliance with the factory system of production in socialism:[112] a realisation which highlights the uneasy relationship of advanced artistic and political project and foreshadowed avant-garde's ultimate devaluation and fall out of favour under Stalin's rule.[113]

The logic underlying Bürger's perspective is thrown into relief in his attempt to hierarchise the political and artistic derivations of avant-garde history: "Dadaism, the most radical movement within the European avant-garde, no longer criticizes schools that preceded it, but criticizes art as an institution, and the course its development took in bourgeois society."[114] While Bürger correctly identified that the nature of Dadaist critique was evidently not monolithically aesthetic but broadly cultural and political, this broader critique could not be articulated outside specific disputes with older or concurrent rival art movements. To downplay, or outright deny, this oppositional relationship is to suppress one of the most salient and effective mechanisms that the struggle for dominance within a field employs. In fact, the Dadaists most definitely singled out artists and movements as enemies

---

[111] Richard Huelsenbeck, Raoul Hausmann, "What is Dadaism and What Does it Want in Germany?" in *The Dada Painters and Poets*, ed. Robert Motherwell (New York, 1951), 41-42.
Cited in *Art In Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, (Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 259-260.
Manifest Proletkunst, *Merz*, no. 2 (April 1923)
Cited in Marius Hentea, *TaTa Dada: The Real Life and Celestial Adventures of Tristan Tzara* (Cambridge; MA: London; England: MIT Press, 2014), 235.

[112] Boris Arvatov, *Art and Production*, eds. John Roberts and Alexei Penzin, trans. Shushan Avangyan (London: Pluto Press, 2017)
John Roberts presents a useful overview of the uneasy relationship between Soviet Productivism and industrial production in the wake of the New Economic Policy and the early years of Stalin's rule in:
John Roberts, "Productivism and Its Contradictions," *Third Text*, no.5 (2009): 527-536

[113] The resistance that avant-garde artists have expressed toward conceding all autonomy in favour of political mobilisation should not be necessarily understood as lack of commitment but as a necessary strategy for survival. Politics exists in the realm of utility and this is a realm where art is ultimately at a disadvantage.

[114] Bürger, p.22.

to be ridiculed and attacked ferociously; the difference being that Dadaist critique interpreted them in relative continuity with a decadent and stagnant bourgeois culture, adding thus gravity to their various polemical declarations.[115] And Dadaist artists did, in fact, understand their work in relation to specific artists and movements whose work they perceived as exemplary of broader cultural and political decline. It was only through the attack on the particular that the Dadaist critique of the general— of the cultural and political structures of the capitalist machine— could be concretised.

Acknowledging, however, the banal material or thymotic reality underlying the avant-garde adversarial ethos should not be interpreted as an attempt to denude it of all possible ideological motivations and political functions. Otherwise a simple reiteration of Poggioli's thesis wherein the avant-garde artist is embedded in a rather symbiotic relationship with the development of Western liberal democracy would suffice.[116] While Poggioli's approach enables a demythologised reading of the avant-garde— not as the emancipatory praxis of a heroic modern artist anymore— it also leads to the erasure of its professed programmatic intentions. In short, demythologisation comes at the cost of depoliticisation. What this results in is a vision of the avant-garde as a relatively continuous history instantiating the cult of novelty in varying degrees. This is, however, a framework that is reductive even in strictly aesthetic terms: Poggioli offers no historical law with explanatory value that can account for the aesthetic chasm between movements such as Impressionism and Dadaism— let alone, explain the derivation of their vastly different conceptions on the nature and social role of art.

The challenge, therefore, consists in formulating a theory that retains Bürger's historicising rigour but grounds it in the dynamics of the bourgeois artistic field; to propose a framework that admits the political derivations and motivations of the historical avant-garde but filters those through the conditions of artistic recognition in modernity. Rather than being driven by art's inability to interpret life and, thus, catalyse social change, I would then like to suggest that the radicalism of the historical avant-garde was born from the impossibility of change *in* the artistic field *outside* of a broader socio-political transformation. The double character of the avant-garde critique— against bourgeois art, and the conditions of its social separation— was embodied in the demand for the restoration of the modern artist to a distinct, socio-historical position *through* the overcoming of the bourgeois institution of art. The revolt against art's loss of a social function occurred because

[115] The Dadaist association of Expressionism with a shallow and anachronistic bourgeois culture is evident in the "First German Dada Manifesto" of 1918 and "The German Philistine Gets Upset" of 1921.
[116] Poggioli, 11-12.

this loss was symptomatic of the modern crisis of the artist herself. This had been anticipated several decades earlier when Olinde Rodrigues, Henri de Saint-Simon's disciple, linked the restoration of modern artists' dignity with the prospect of broad transformative social change— with the prospect of revolution:

> And if today we seem to play no role or at best a very secondary one, that has been the result of the arts' lacking a common drive and a general idea, which are essential to their energy and success.[117]

1.3.2 THE DEATH OF THE AVANT-GARDE?

The historical avant-garde as a project of revolutionary political-cultural change failed— about that there is very little room for doubt in Bürger's account. If there was any success to it at all, that lay in its exposing the structure and function of the bourgeois institution of art. With the material conditions of capitalism remaining intact, the avant-garde was gradually absorbed into the institutional apparatus it had originally set out to destroy, recalling the truism according to which capitalism, unlike Illiberal cultures which tend to eliminate threats, incorporates the new and survives through its critiques. As Frederic Jameson has presciently remarked, assimilation, after all, is "an immanent rhythm of capitalism."[118] For Bürger, the institutionalisation of the avant-garde was an act of cultural rehabilitation; an elimination, albeit "false," of the distance between art and life.[119] It was consequently avant-garde's effective death, followed by its reanimation in standardised, imitative and devitalised formulations: radical only in name, and performed inside the commercial environments of a hypertrophic Culture Industry. Given the explanatory value that Bürger assigned to the attack on autonomy as avant-garde's operative mechanism, we are led to its central aporia: the impossibility to effectively demarcate the point after which the attack against art's autonomy ceased to constitute an act of revolt against the artificiality of its enshrined status in capitalism, and became a symptom of its capitulation to market forces.

---

[117] Henri de Saint-Simon, "L'Artiste, le Savant et l'Industriel. Dialogue," in *Opinions littéraires, philosophiques et industrielles* (Paris: Galérie de Bossange Père, 1825), 331ff.
Cited in Matei Călinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism Avant-Garde Decadence Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 102.

[118] Fredric Jameson, Foreword to *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, by Jean-Francois Lyotard, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xvi.

[119] Bürger,54.

Bürger's conception of the avant-garde is given thus a particularly unsatisfactory closure, one marked by repetition and complicity. Bürger's conclusion is the almost inevitable outcome of its premises; the avant-garde could have never succeeded outside a deep and comprehensive transformation of production relations, as the critique of the bourgeois institution of art was just one aspect of the critique of capitalist social and productive relations. This overdiagnosis of political radicalism in historical avant-garde formulations as a central criterion for avant-garde's legitimacy allows no other path than the dismissal of the various neo-avant-gardes of the second half of the twentieth century— and therefore, the dismissal of subsequent practices that draw their condition of possibility from the contestation of the art's autonomy— as tokenised and defanged reiterations of a radical, yet ill-fated idea. The weakness of Bürger's conclusion is not merely its foundation on a historicist conception of the avant-garde, essentially collapsing the category itself with its historical conditions as John Robert has pointed out,[120] but, that the very same historical conditions which supersede the category are in fact sustained by the negation of the relative autonomy of the artistic field. That is, the framing itself, historicist or not, has already eschewed the impact that the struggle for recognition has had on any movement inside the artistic field. This is why the assessment of the historical impact of the avant-garde on the basis of the political connotations of its postwar institutionalisation should not be allowed to overshadow its contemporary relevance: its enduring new conception of art based on the diffusion of the political as the object itself of art— a phenomenon outside which we cannot grasp the character of contemporary experiments in socially engaged art.

If the historical avant-garde emerged as the culmination and negative resolution of nineteenth century struggles over art's autonomy— in the wake of the defeated strategy of socio-political resignation as suggested in Bürger's account, and the ensuing new energies seeking to carve out a historical role for the artist beyond a system of generalised commodification— we have to confront then the possibility that the ultimate and perhaps most critical impact of the historical avant-garde lies not in the alleged disclosure of autonomy's historical obsolescence but, in fact, in its reconstruction *as the critique of autonomy*, as John Roberts has argued.[121] This is in reality the other side of Bürger's narrative of avant-garde's institutional recuperation: there is no other way to interpret avant-garde's "false" sublation of art and life in postwar, neo-avant-garde practices if not as a definite autonomisation of the avant-gardist critique of art's autonomy.

---

[120] John Roberts, "Revolutionary Pathos, Negation, and the Suspensive Avant-Garde," *New Literary History* 41, no. 4 (2010): 717-30, 717
www.jstor.org/stable/23012703 (Accessed 04/10/2019)
[121] John Roberts, *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde* (London; New York: Verso, 2015)

Beyond, however, the understanding of autonomy-as-the-critique-of-autonomy as a manifestation of defeat and institutional recuperation I would like to suggest an interpretation of the postexistence of the historical avant-garde as a process akin to routinisation, to use Max Weber's term. Routinisation for Weber constitutes the necessary and inevitable process that every revolution is subject to if it is to exist beyond accident and thus avoid historical dissolution: it is the process that every successful disruption needs to undergo in order for it to exist beyond the realm of exception.[122] It is not therefore the humiliating subordination under the old structure but the means by which the new can survive, producing a stable order beyond its originating moment.

The avant-garde was originally founded on the interpenetration of the sphere of the political and the artistic. On the one hand, it radicalised the old adage that art can participate in broad historical change. On the other, it proclaimed that the artistic field can be transformed through the change of the relations of production and consumption. With the material conditions of capitalism in place and, therefore, the categories of artist and artwork persisting in some form, avant-gardism survives in a conception of art wherein the exploration of the social position of artist and audience has become art's object. The recuperated avant-garde position becomes then: art creates the conditions for the negotiation of the social position of artist and audience in relation to the work. After the avant-garde we can have no important art that is not an interrogation of the social identity of the artist and its imprint on the artwork; art that does not acknowledge the political nature of its structure. This is the dialectic that produces meaning and valorises the avant-garde artwork. The abandonment of this commitment constitutes a cacophonous disruption of this historical logic. And whenever this critically new horizon that establishes the coordinates for the position of artist vis-à-vis audience and society has been ignored, and art hints at a return to

[122] For a discussion of Weber's analysis of routinisation and its dialectical relationship with the historical exception (as embodied by the charismatic authority) see:
Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans. A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons, ed. Talcott Parsons (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1947), 363-385.
Routinisation/banalisation is also the process that Bourdieu alludes to in his periodisation of avant-garde movements on the basis of the emergence of new artistic positions through returns to past styles over the course of the twentieth century. Bourdieu's analysis of this process of recurrence-through-difference, specifically once per generation, as the prominent logic of the artistic field after the avant-garde opens up an interesting conversation with Hal Foster's psychoanalytically grounded "Nachträglichkeit" (deferred action) as the link between the historical avant-garde and later neo-avant-garde iterations. These two theories are in fact more similar than would superficially be understood. While Bourdieu interprets such returns as occurring after the historical intervals necessary for the formation of an art public which is equipped to "read" the avant-garde work, Foster's theory stresses the traumatic character of the historical avant-garde which re-emerges and can ultimately be negotiated only from the safety of historical distance.
See Bourdieu, The Production of Belief," in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Literature and Art*, 74-111, 109.
Hal Foster, "Who is Afraid of the Neo-Avant-Garde," in Hal Foster, *The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 1996), 1-33.

the practice of the integral, free (as opposed to employed) and expressive artist, it cannot but be opposed as a banal, anachronistic attempt at depoliticisation.[123] After the avant-garde, art is political because its object is, with varying intensity, the interrogation of the social relations of the artist to the institutions of art. The political character of art consists in the politicisation of the relation of the artwork to a specific socio-political cause, and the sometimes less visible politicisation of the matrix of relations that the artwork is embedded in. If the historical conclusion of the avant-garde presented the defeat of the former, the latter persists and permeates every decision of contemporary socially engaged practices: the flattening of hierarchies between media, the waning presence of the author, the use of humble materials—or even, the complete devaluation thereof.

As artistic practices and their meaning are always ultimately situated in and delimited by a "space of possibles" within the artistic field, outside of which they cannot be recognised as legitimate artistic propositions, during the institution's figuring as the indisputable site of the battle for artistic legitimation, it was within its spaces where the artistic programmes of the critique of autonomy could unfold. The post-avant-garde reframing of the artwork's political critique as the critique of the relations that the artwork is embedded in created therefore an expanded "formalism" wherein the artwork's subject encompasses the relations between artist, artwork and audience. After the 1960s, this delicate equilibrium starts to crack under the greater social expansion of artistic activity as well as the unterritorial expansion of the institution itself; under these conditions, the critique of the artwork's relations begins to intersect with the production of relations beyond those fostered and reproduced institutionally. Consider, for example, how Hans Haacke's exploration of systems moves from the re-enactment of water's status changes in the various renditions of

[123] This is an issue that emerges with a new urgency in the resurgence of the grand, authentic and personal gesture in German and Italian Neo-expressionism in the late 1970s, a development that Benjamin H. D. Buchloh saw as echoing a cyclical repetition of regression throughout the century. Similarly, Hal Foster argued that the reinvention of subjectivity in Neo-expressionism amounted to nothing but a reiteration of the "self versus society," and "high versus low culture" struggles. And by being historically oblivious, it in fact served to conceal real contemporary crises: its anachronistic, reactionary sense of subjectivity completely ignored the radical transformation of the individual into the Foucauldian "entrepreneur of the self." (For a more comprehensive discussion on the entrepreneur of the self and the new conditions of subjectivity formation see chapter "Delegation and Dematerialisation"). Foster's critique of Neo-expressionist subjectivity echoes in a sense Georg Lukács's attack on its historical antecedent decades earlier. There, as Lukács pointed out, Expressionism was characterised, if not by a propensity, certainly by a vulnerability or even compatibility with reactionary turn of European politics. Lukács identified this tendency toward reaction in Expressionism's depoliticising prioritisation of individual psychological states over a material critique of society as a totality.
Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return of Representation in European Painting," *October*, vol. 16 (1981): 39–68.
Hal Foster, Recodings: *Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1985), 75.
Georg Lukács, Expressionism: Its Significance and Decline, in Rodney Livingstone (ed.), *Essays on Realism*, trans. David Fernbach (Cambridge; Mass: The MIT Press, 1980), 76-113.

Condensation Cube (Fig.1) between 1963-5 to the observation of a system that binds art institution, oligarchic politics, imperialism and voter behaviour in MoMA Poll (Fig.2) of 1970. Or how the critique of the museum becomes a critique of the exclusion of the female artist through the critique of the gendered work, to ultimately extend to the unacknowledged, denigrated labour that sustains collective life in Mierle Laderman Ukeles' move from the "maintenance" performances (Fig.3) of the early 1970s to the *Touch Sanitation* performances (Fig.4) of 1979-1980.

Figure 1 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Figure 1 Hans Haacke, Condensation Cube, 1965/2006

Figure 2 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Figure 2 Hans Haacke, MoMA Poll, 1970

Figure 3 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Figure 3 Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Hartford Wash: Washing, Tracks, Maintenance: Outside, 193.

Figure 4 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions

Figure 4 Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Touch Sanitation, 1979-80

THE BIRTH OF THE DEMOCRATIC ARTIST: FROM BAUDELAIRE TO DUCHAMP

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In her 2012 study entitled "Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship," Claire Bishop explored the historical origins of the contemporary societalisation of art in three moments of the early twentieth century avant-garde: Futurist public performance, Soviet 1920s Proletkult and mass spectacle, and finally the turn from the cabaret to the open public during the Dada Season of 1921. These three historical precedents constitute, according to the writer, the prehistory of contemporary socially engaged practice; contesting therefore its lineage in the history of painting and the readymade, Bishop's analysis inscribes contemporary socially engaged practice in the evolution of avant-garde performance.[124] Although the distinction between painting-readymade and performance might initially appear inconsequential, especially given the "medium-unspecificity" of contemporary practices, this is a framing that needs to be addressed as it conceals the deeper historical causes of the societalisation of art and more importantly, how these were specifically inscribed in the field of artistic production. That is to say, what new artistic strategies and directions they made possible and how they relate to the historical self-understanding of the modern artist as social subject. While the previous chapter analysed these changes in relation to their crystalisation in the political subjectivity of the avant-garde artist, this chapter seeks to highlight the redefinition of artistic technique and authorship in modernity. These two dimensions will be explored in the writings of Charles Baudelaire and the practice of Marcel Duchamp.

The limited explanatory ability of Bishop's framing becomes evident already in her discussion of Futurism. There, Bishop's attention is focused on the polemical and notoriously disruptive character of Futurist public performance and specifically on the famously riotous audience responses it was designed and managed to elicit. Futurist performances quickly became outlets for broad— inter-class even— and enthusiastic participation in violence and outrage, attracting hecklers of all kinds, armed with eggs and vegetables, car horns and whistles. Without a doubt, in its advance of an interpretation of art spectatorship as participation in chaos and destruction, Futurist public performance can

[124] Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 41.

indeed be considered among the earliest historical examples of art production and display that incorporated and, to an important extent, relied on the active participation of an audience.

What a historicisation on that basis however ignores is the dimension of the audience's own eagerness to "play the game" of disruption, and what this might signify about the social character of artistic activity and, consequently, the social identity of the artist. That is, does performance procure an activation of the audience that is reducible to the characteristics of performance per se? Or does it capture a level of empowerment that was already present. As Bishop herself highlights, Wassily Kandinsky's recollections of furious audiences, spitting and destroying his works in 1910-11,[125] and Albert Gleizes's description of moblike audiences fighting, protesting, shouting, and laughing at the Cubist section of the Salon d'Automne of 1911 are rather illuminating.[126] Perhaps then the energetic reactions of the audience of Futurist performance were not unique to the activities of the Italian provocateurs but essentially in line with the predominant type of audience response to unconventional art practices of the time.

Incidents like the above highlight two things. Firstly, that the aggressive self-assertiveness of modern art's publics which lies at the heart of audience participation preceded and was rather independent of developments in avant-garde performance. If early twentieth century audiences are recorded to have exhibited similar behaviours when confronted with the intentionally incendiary and chaotic Futurist performance as well as the unpronounced, unemotive and rather self-enclosed exhibition of abstract or Cubist works, then any changes in the dispositions of modern audiences cannot be reduced to specific developments in performance. Secondly, and most importantly, these incidents demonstrate that the early years of the twentieth century already point to a reconfiguration of the relationship between artist, artwork and audience. This chapter therefore explores this reconfiguration— the relationship of osmotic opposition between artist and audience as was described in the first chapter— and how it was renegotiated into the waning distinction between artist and non-artist in Baudelaire's writings on modern art and Duchamp's practice. To arrive at the historical archetype of the non-idealistic identity of the contemporary artist it is necessary to outline the transition toward a new conception of art characterised by the waning of technique and the decoupling of authorial identity from the model of the unitary creator.

---

[125] Wassily Kandinsky, 'Franz Marc,' cited in Cohen, *Movement, Manifesto, Melée: The Modernist Group 1910-1914* (Lanham; Maryland: Lexington Books, 2004), 137
Quoted in *Artificial Hells,* 46
[126] Ibid.

By entrenching the discussion of art's historical purpose distinctly in the present, Baudelaire's essays "The Salon of 1846" and especially "The Painter of Modern Life" are among the earlier texts to reflect the historical inevitability of the modern and the need for artists to abandon the futile adulation of the past. Echoing this necessity, Baudelaire envisioned— and at the same time willed into being— a new socio-cultural identity in the place of the historical artist-type: the "man of the world." The "man of the world" embodied for Baudelaire the affirmation of the inner and outer realities of modernity— the tragic beauty of a disenchanted world, the dangers hiding underneath its glossy surfaces, its overwhelming pace. Recognising the new social and psychological types at the time emerging in the social formations of bourgeois society, Baudelaire advocated for a departure from the academisation of artistic activity and outlined a new conception of artist and art attuned with the complexity, ephemerality and multiplicity of modern representations.

My decision to discuss Duchamp in relation to Baudelaire expands upon a connection suggested by Konstantinos Vassiliou; that is, Duchamp's role as the completion of Baudelairean history.[127] In my analysis, therefore, Baudelaire's "man of the world" is examined as a Duchampian typology. Aside from the question of a direct connection between the two men,[128] the implications of Baudelaire's category carry significant implications for the development of a model of artistic identity and technique in modernity which reorient the prehistory of the "social turn" away from the history of avant-garde performance— contra, thus, Bishop's claim— and toward the history of painting and the readymade.

If Baudelaire's mid-late nineteenth century critiques stress the urgency for a revaluation of the relationship between artistic act and experience of the modern— professing an early acknowledgment of the artwork's social derivation and consequent existence as the negotiation of modern experience and representation— the Duchampian

[127]Original text in Greek language: "Όταν ο κόσμος είχε εξέλθει από αυτό το δίλημμα με τον πιο οδυνηρό τρόπο, με την ισοπέδωση και τα αδιέξοδα του Α΄ Παγκόσμιου Πολέμου, ο Marcel Duchamp κατάφερε να συνθέσει με τον πιο επιδραστικό τρόπο ό,τι ο Baudelaire είχε αποκαλέσει «ξέφτισμα της τεχνικής» και «κοσμικό άνθρωπο». Τα readymade, δηλαδή, απλά αντικείμενα όπως ουρητήρια και τροχοί, που ο Duchamp τα έχρηζε κυριολεκτικά έργα τέχνης, αποτελούσαν την απαλοιφή κάθε τεχνικής, δοσμένα από κάποιον που ομοιάζει περισσότερο με ένα δανδή της τέχνης παρά με έναν «καλλιτέχνη»."
Konstantinos Vassiliou, *Προς την Τεχνολογία της Τέχνης: Από τη Μοντέρνα στη Σύγχρονη Τέχνη* [Toward the Technology of Art: From Modern to Contemporary Art] (Athens: Plethron Press, 2012), 34.

[128] The degree to which Baudelaire might have been a direct source of inspiration for Duchamp is unclear as Duchamp never acknowledged it openly. Jerrold Seigel suggests that there might be good reason to suspect a connection between the two. Baudelaire was certainly a figure of interest for Marcel's brother, Raymond, who in 1911 sculpted a portrait of the poet. Moreover, the title of Marcel's large glass echoes Baudelaire's unfinished transcripts published in 1887 with the title "Mon Coeur Mis à Nu" (My Heart Laid Bare). Finally, Duchamp had acknowledged the influence of Jules Laforgue who was a known admirer of Baudelaire.
Jerrold Seigel, *The Private Worlds of Marcel Duchamp: Desire, Liberation, and the Self in Modern Culture* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1997), .99.

readymade collapses the artwork into the most naked signs of modernity— into the by-products of a commercial civilisation increasingly emptied of expressive content. This collapse is, of course, more readily evident in Duchamp's unassisted readymade works; unfettered as they are by extensive intervention on the part of the artist, Duchamp's unassisted readymades dispel any doubts about the ultimate ramifications of his proposition. At the same time, while readymades actualise the dissociation of the artwork from expressiveness— the repudiation of the artist's personal expressive touch— they open up a new horizon for the interrogation of the meaning and form of artistic technique, carrying out its transposition onto the conceptual realm. This double movement toward social technique and conceptualisation that Duchamp articulates has had momentous impact on our understanding of the identity of artist and artwork over the course of modernity and beyond.

Around the time of the scandal of the readymade, in a manner almost too characteristic of his renowned sense of wit and irony, Duchamp compounded his challenge to established preconceptions of authorship even further with the invention of a female artistic alter ego in Rrose Sélavy. In this discussion, Rrose Sélavy is not approached from the perspective of a performance of femininity in its own right; her invention and recurring authorial presence interests me instead in relation to the issues of authorship that she raises. Rrose Sélavy does not, therefore, figure as a pretext for the examination of androgyny and femininity, or in terms of her possible misogynist or gender-deconstructive dimensions.[129] To argue broadly about the historical marginalisation of women appears to me a bit pleonastic and beside the point of this discussion. It is the intersection of authorship and femininity as authorship's other that is of importance here. Rrose Sélavy is consequently not examined as the reflection of a specific ideological or psychological disposition but as an authorial strategy. I argue that Duchamp's Rrose Sélavy persona points, on the one hand, to the broader societalisation of artistic identity in modernity— paralleling in that sense the readymade's societalisation of

[129] Taking into account that Rrose Sélavy's photographic appearance happened amid intense debates on female emancipation and equality, it was inevitably invested with a very specific social significance. Amelia Jones has broadly described Rrose Sélavy as one of Duchamp's "aggressive dislocations of categories of traditional masculinity and femininity." The connotations of femininity in Sélavy are certainly ambiguous. Her ambiguity led Jones to propose that Duchamp's move could be interpreted as a strategy of self-presentation in relation to a "devalued feminine other," as well as a contestation of the "phallocentric scenarios that constitute subjectivity in the West." On the other hand, Barbara Zabel has highlighted that Duchamp's persona was inextricable from the configurations of femininity in his own, as well as Francis Picabia's machinic works, which, she argued, collectively expressed "an obvious undercurrent of misogyny... suggesting some dread of the New Woman of the postwar years."
Amelia Jones, *Postmodernism and the En-gendering of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 151-152, 204.
Barbara Zabel, "The Machine and New York Dada," in *Making Mischief: Dada Invades New York*, eds. Francis M. Naumann and Beth Venn, (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996), 283.
Cited in Amelia Jones, *Irrational Modernism: a Neurasthenic History of New York Dada*, (Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: MIT Press, 2004), 124.

artistic labour— but also, importantly, to the decoupling of authorship from a conception of a singular and permanent subjectivity. Rrose Sélavy presents a model by which the broader diffusion of artistic activity is mirrored and internalised by the non-singular character of the author. The two main problematics I therefore explore in this chapter are the evolution of the idea of art as direct engagement with the non-artistic aspects of modern life, and the history of "authorial renunciation."[130]

[130] Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents," 181.

2.2 CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

2.2.1 THE MAN OF THE WORLD

Even though Charles Baudelaire's "man of the world" is closely associated with Constantin Guys, its implications reach far beyond him. A key concept in Baudelaire's series of essays published under the title "The Painter of Modern Life" in 1863, the "man of the world" heralded a new model for artistic activity and a new sociopsychological artistic identity. Standing in stark contrast with the specialist artist of the Salon— denounced by Baudelaire as narrow-minded, ignorant and solipsistic— the "man of the world" signified a departure from the social isolation of the academic artist, and art's entrenchment in the suffocating conventions of a sphere bracketed from the bustling world of modernity.[131] Indeed, roughly fifteen years before "The Painter of Modern Life," in his review of the Salon of 1846 Baudelaire was already calling for a new artistic sensibility— for the modernisation of the themes and imagery of art. Modernity had, Baudelaire declared, like all eras which preceded it its very own sense of beauty and heroism, reflected in the new conditions of urban life: the spaces and human-types of the modern world, and the new behaviours and attitudes it nurtured.[132] What must be highlighted here is that Baudelaire, with the conscious embrace of the experience of the urban metropolis as the source for artistic creativity, did not simply propose a thematic shift for art. Becoming modern was not limited to a mere modernisation of the pool of representations that provided material to the artist but also rethinking the processes through which subject matter becomes art.

As has been discussed in the previous chapter, the bourgeois artistic field of the nineteenth century was the domain of genius. Genius was the precondition of art and great art necessarily involved the channelling of this natural talent. Nevertheless— and Kant's formulation becomes important here— genius alone was not enough. The rules of art since the Renaissance stressed the importance of the observation of established models and rules.[133] As the deeper purpose of art was its existence in posterity, the artwork had to, on

---

[131] Ibid., 7.

[132] "But to return to our principle and essential problem, which is to discover whether we possess a specific beauty, intrinsic to our new emotions…The pageant of fashionable life and the thousands of floating existences— criminals and kept women— which drift about in the underworld of the great city; the Gazette des Tribunaux and the Moniteur all prove to us that we have only to open our eyes to recognize our heroism. For the heroes of the Iliad are but pigmies compared to you— who dared not publicly declaim your sorrows in the funeral and tortured frock coat which we all wear today!—you the most heroic, the most extraordinary, the most romantic and the most poetic of all the characters that you have produced from your womb!" Charles Baudelaire, "The Salon of 1846: On the Heroism of Modern Life," in *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Francis Frascina, Charles Harrison, Deirdre Paul, (SAGE, 1982), 17-23, 17-18.

[133] Kant, 174-178.

the one hand, attempt to embody the beautiful, and, on the other, serve as a model for future generations of artists. Even with the emergence of a new audience of art consumers among the literate, cultured middle classes, and the concomitant increase of demand for novelty since the mid-eighteenth century, the process of art-making was still heavily reliant on the studious refinement of style and technique through the study of old masterpieces. In contrast to this, the creative act of the "man of the world" lay in the curious engagement with external life; for Baudelaire, modern "genius" unfolded in a state of engagement resembling the spirit of childlike curiosity, it unfolded in a creative fascination with the world.[134] This was not an arbitrary prescription on Baudelaire's part, a judgement made in a vacuum. This new conception of the creative act was ingrained in the sociohistorical conditions of modernity: the essence of the modern world itself could not be reconciled with the static, disconnected nature of the academic process. It could only be captured through spontaneous, unrestricted flows of creativity. Baudelaire understood that it was the sensitivity toward the conditions of modernity that redefined the historical role of the modern artist. No masterpieces of the past based on the detached refinement of academic skill could capture the experience of modern life truthfully. After all, as his now iconic adage on modernity revealed,[135] there was beauty waiting to be discovered— to be distilled from the new urban environment— and this presupposed a new kind of historical awareness, a new kind of attentiveness toward the complexity of modern experience.[136]

2.2.2. TECHNIQUE

Drawing on the creative process of Guys, Baudelaire attempted to outline a new conception of artistic technique. Already evident in Gustave Courbet's and Édouard Manet's engagement with the realities of modern life, the focus of the modern artist had begun to shift from the single-minded, introspective study of the paradigms of the past. It was ultimately inevitable that technique itself be reassessed in order to parallel this modern art's iconographical reorientation. Observing Guys's preoccupation with the conflict between the rendering of contour and detail, Baudelaire realised that the painter was already cognisant of

[134] Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," in *The Painter of Modern Life and other Essays,* ed. Jonathan Mayne, (Phaidon Press, 1995), 1-41, 7-8.
[135] "By 'modernity' I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable."
Ibid., 12.
[136] Mirroring this awareness of being in the present, after Romanticism styles are no longer categorised as schools but as movements. While the description of artistic production inside "schools" suggests the systematisation of artistic activity according to the precepts of an authority, and a specific method for attaining knowledge, movements define themselves by their dissociation or even repudiation of the past. Robert W. Corrigan, "The Transformation of the Avant Garde," *Michigan Quarterly Review,* Vol. 13, (no.1): 31-48, 33-34.

the need for a creative process that could capture the fluidity and complexity of the modern environment and allowed the quick and accurate transposition of the creative idea on the medium of painting.[137] In other words, the very temporal nature of modern subject matter led to the modification— or even the outright elimination— of a number of conventional preparatory stages central to the historical development of the craft.[138]

The discontinuity between the generative idea and its execution was, of course, neither a new problem nor one peculiar to painting— it is a problem rather hardcoded in every performance that involves the translation of intuition into action. As Baudelaire himself acknowledged, it was in fact a problem that had plagued the entire history of painting,[139] and yet a problem whose impact was ineluctably exacerbated during modern art's shift to the interrogation of the hectic nature of urban modernity. That is to say, the unique characteristics of the modern experience magnified the dissonance between idea and execution and revealed the futility of recourse to successful models of the past. With older models gradually losing their relevance, modern artists were now bereft of certainties and conventions they could rely on: the diminished utility of older models exposed technique as a particularly unstable and precarious component of the artistic process. Baudelaire captured this uniquely modern predicament with precision; for him, technique takes the form of a set of methods employed to essentially minimise the use of technique itself. As such, it retains its importance for the modern artist insofar as it provides a solution to an innate problem of art that is magnified under the conditions of modernity. Baudelaire reframed technique as the control of technique: as the reduction of the variables that distort the modern artwork, and, thus, prevent it from embodying the "the beauty of circumstances and the sketch of manners."[140]

Baudelaire's commentary on technique should obviously not be looked at through the prism of a contemporary iconoclasm we are now well acquainted with. To interpret his commentary as a call for artistic technique's total abolition or as the announcement of its obsolescene would be utterly anachronistic. In fact, Baudelaire insisted that a certain mastery

[137] "The more beauty that the artist can put into it, the more valuable will be his work; but in trivial life, in the daily metamorphosis of external things, there is a rapidity of movement which calls for an equal speed of execution from the artist."
Baudelaire Op.cit,.4.
[138] Baudelaire description of Guys's creative method reveals a rather systematic process: "Monsieur G. starts with a few slight indications in pencil, which hardly do more than mark the position which objects are to occupy in space. The principal planes are then sketched in tinted wash, vaguely and lightly coloured masses to start with, but taken again later and successively charged with a great intensity of colour. At the last minute the contour of the objects is once and for all outlined in ink."
Ibid., 17.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid., 1.

of diverse expressive means remained the sign of great artists, as this allowed the quick, unhesitating response to ideas before they were surrendered to the disunity of mind and hand.[141] Neither was the "man of the world" a creative automaton that produced images indiscriminately and without inner moderation. Baudelaire's modern genius was that of "childhood recovered at will;" the naiveté and spontaneity of the modern artist had to be tempered through reason— through the employment of analytic and conceptual faculties.[142] Nevertheless, Baudelaire did highlight that the existence of art as the object of an entrenched, self-enclosed performance of virtuosity was no longer sufficient to its historical role in modernity. Baudelaire's typology of the modern did not merely signal the temporalisation of the creative process, as that was reflected in the selection of subject matter appropriate to modern experience, or the revaluation of the social and psychological characteristics of the modern artist. Baudelaire also recognised, most interestingly, that the modernisation of art coincided with a scepticism toward established styles, and the movement toward a novel, centrifugal approach to artistic technique. In Baudelaire's writings, iconography, talent and the psychological character of the modern artist become inextricable from the problem of technique.

The movement that Baudelaire registered already in the middle of the nineteenth century underlined the interdependence between the art-life dialectic and art's contravention of form. The thematic and technical responsibilities of the artwork can be seen to change in step with the displacement of the specialist artist for the "man of the world," while the artist cannot become truly modern without the transformation of technical means and procedures. Nevertheless, Baudelaire's observations were clearly not describing a fully-fledged cultural phenomenon in mid-nineteenth century Paris; in fact, only through a very generous assessment of Guys's work could we conclude that it can measure up to the almost world-historical dimensions that Baudelaire assigned to it. What is important about Baudelaire's writings on art is that they identified the early stages of a rupture in the historical continuity of artistic practice. That is, the value of his observations does not so much lie in the precise articulation of the conditions of his time as in the anticipation of changes that would unfold in the decades to follow. As Boris Groys has pointed out, Baudelaire's criticism was not "topographic;" it should not be understood as a mapping of his own era. It was, in fact, rather

[141] Baudelaire wrote characteristically: "[i]t is the fear of not going fast enough, of letting the phantom escape before the synthesis has been extracted and pinned down; it is that terrible fear which takes possession of all great artists and gives them such a passionate desire to become masters of every means of expression so that the orders of the brain may never be perverted by the hesitations of the hand and that finally execution, ideal execution, may become unconscious and spontaneous as is digestion for a healthy man after dinner." Ibid., 17.

[142] Ibid.,8.

prefigurative, and, in that sense, contributed to the emergence of the future that it described.[143]

To properly illustrate Baudelaire's implications in their full scale we need then to turn to the work of Marcel Duchamp. As will be argued, the proposition of the readymade,[144] and the invention of Rrose Sélavy do not simply constitute two interrelated explorations of the characteristics that Baudelaire outlined in the nineteenth century, but in fact complete Baudelaire's system: Duchamp embodies, on that account, the teleology of the system outlined by Baudelaire. And by doing so, he crystalises its inner contradictions.

2.3. MARCEL DUCHAMP

2.3.1 THE READYMADE AND TECHNIQUE

It is not clear whether Duchamp could have ever anticipated the world-historical implications that his pseudonymous submission of the *Fountain* in 1917 (Fig.5) would have. Or that a rejected work could irretrievably change the face of art. One thing was clear, however. This time, unlike his rejection of 1912, he was prepared to respond.[145] "The Richard Mutt Case" was to become his retaliation against the decision of the Society of Independent Artists, who in their bewilderment at the sight of the porcelain urinal, were forced to violate the "no jury, no prizes" policy of the open exhibition of 1917. Published in the second issue of the Blind Man in May 1917, "The Richard Mutt Case" also presented a sardonic, yet articulate testimonial of his pseudonymous alter ego's artistic merit through a defence of the *Fountain*'s status as an artwork. Duchamp's rationale was clear:

> "Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under a new title and point of view – created a new thought for that object."[146]

---

[143] Groys, *Art Power*, 118.

[144] My decision to associate Duchamp's readymade with Baudelaire's propositions on painting is based on Thierry de Duve's interpretation of the readymade as an "abandonment of painting." During a period of experimentation with Post-impressionist, Cubist and Cubofuturist styles that lasted until 1913, Duchamp recognised that, even though all possible avenues for the development of painting appeared to have been exhausted, painting was still unable to respond to the crisis of pictorial practice in industrial society. The readymade, therefore, registered a moment in which painting is no longer possible.
De Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism: On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade*, vii, x-xi.

[145] I am referring here to the rejection of "Nude Descending a Staircase, No.2" submitted to the 1912 Salon of the Société des Artistes Indépendants.

[146] The Richard Mutt Case, *The Blind Man*, issue 2 (May, 1917)

André Breton and Paul Eluard's "Dictionnaire Abrégé du Surréalisme" of 1938 features a slightly more succinct yet similar definition of the readymade. The readymade is "an ordinary object elevated to the dignity of a work of art by the mere choice of an artist."[147] Both accounts are consistent— the readymade is the artistic proposition based on the decontextualization of found material or commodities and their recodification as art objects. In its manipulation of objects

Figure 5 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions

Figure 5 Marcel Duchamp, Fountain, 1917.

taken directly from the sphere of everyday life, it stands as the first fully formulated rejection of art's categorical separateness as an autonomous symbolic space. The *Fountain* was in fact not Duchamp's sole or even first experiment with this new form— this would be the *Bicycle Wheel* of 1913, made only briefly after his decision to abandon painting. Over the years Duchamp would produce a series of readymade works which can be roughly divided in two groups: unassisted and assisted. The former type describes objects used without any modification by the artist which consequently bear no visual sings of artistic intervention. The latter involves readymades produced either through the modification of their components or the transformative combination of two or more readymade objects in a new one.

The creative process that Duchamp established for the production of unassisted readymades (such as *Bottle Rack*, 1914, *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, 1916, and *Fountain*, 1917) was tripartite: selection, titling, and signing the object. Acutely aware of the profound implications of modern art's elevation of modern representation as art's object, Duchamp played with the hypothesis that any human work could potentially exist as a work of art. In 1913, he posed the question: "[c]an one make works which are not works of art?"[148] The title of the object was now the necessary step toward infusing it with a "new thought," that is, imbue it with new intellectual insights which, distancing it from the world of the mundane, introduce it into a context of art.[149] Finally, the artist's signature completes the act of transubstantiation as the affirmation of the intentionality of the action.

[147] Hector Obalk, "The Unfindable Readymade," tout-fait 1 (2000) http://www.toutfait.com/issues/issue_2/Articles/obalk.html (Accessed: 15/04/2016)
[148]André Gervais, "Connections: Of Art and Arrhe", in *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Thierry de Duve, (Cambridge, MA; London: The MIT Press, 1991), 401.
[149] Dawn Ades, Neil Cox, David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 128.

In line with his theorisation of the avant-garde as a systematic attack on the institution of art, Peter Bürger interpreted the readymade as a direct challenge to one of bourgeois art's foundational myths: the perception of the artwork as the product of individual creativity.[150] Indeed, the readymade was by definition premised on the artwork's negation of a singular authorial source. It advanced a conception of art no longer reducible to personal creative endeavour, and therefore pointed to the fact that art has always existed through labour extrinsic to the core activity of the artist.[151] By declaring itself a product of alienated work, the readymade revealed that artworks cannot be separated from their technical, non-artistic components, and thus brought attention to the social construction of art broadly. Nevertheless, as Roberts has proposed, the readymade should not be understood simply as a comment on the suppressed social character of art's production. Its true novelty lay not in acknowledging the presence of technical or executive work in the art-making process, but in the synchronous movement between this recognition and the eclipsing of the artwork's artisanal character. In Duchamp's unassisted readymades the domination of the non-artistic was made possible only through the simultaneous retreat of the artisanal— with the only remaining visual trace of the artisanal being the artist's signature.[152]

At the same time, the suppression of the artisanal elided the site of the most persistent historical aporia of art. By relinquishing the space of the artisanal, the readymade allowed the artist to circumvent the conflict between what is crucial for the existence of the artwork and what is not: to circumvent the conflict between the artwork's essential idea and the execution of disorientating details that detracted from it. Since the readymade was premised on the elimination of this distortion, its selection became a paradox form of pure artistic vision. Yet, with the suspension of the disunity between idea and execution— between "intention and realisation" in Duchamp's own terms[153]— the artwork managed to attain to a kind of objectivity only possible in the non-artistic form, in the form of the commodity. As the paradigmatic modern artform, the readymade presented a subversive literalisation of Baudelaire's art as attitude toward modern representations, and thus drove it to its logical conclusion: the commodity was now reinstated as the embodiment of pure artistic vision. Duchamp appears to have been aware of this contradiction emblematic of the entanglement of artwork and commodity in modernity— the convergence of the commodity and the

[150] Bürger, 51.
[151] For a comprehensive discussion on the production of art through systems of artistic and extra-artistic actors see Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2008)
[152] John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art after the Readymade* (London: Verso, 2007), 2.
[153] Marcel Duchamp, "The Creative Act," in *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Michel Sanouillet, Elmer Peterson (London; Thames & Hudson, 1975), 138-140, 139.

absolute artistic form in Theodor Adorno's famous formulation— already from his years as a painter. When describing his painting process, Duchamp suggested that the industrial manufacturing of paint-tubes had deposed colour as the material for painting; the act of selecting the appropriate paint-tubes *as found objects* was in fact not principally different from the selection of the found object in the readymade. As he acknowledged in 1961:

> "Since the tubes of paint used by the artists are manufactured and ready-made products, we must conclude that all paintings in the world are 'readymades aided' and also works of assemblage."[154]

2.3.2 THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE READYMADE

The disappearance of the artisanal base of the artwork— the process of deskilling[155]— through the adoption of the form of the commodity is inevitably accompanied by the retreat of the presence of the historically-signified artist. Nevertheless, as Roberts has underlined, unless the essence of artistic activity is as shallow as to reside exclusively in "the execution of forms of expressive mimeticism," this entails neither a loss of artistic sensuousness nor the disappearance of the artist.[156] Instead, after its displacement from its historical responsibilities, artistic skill survives repurposed in "the demonstration of conceptual acuity."[157] With the dissociation of artistic skill from its mimetic or expressive correlates, artistic activity is transformed into a process of selection and presentation. If the value of the work of the modern artist lay in the ingenuity of the "translation of external life,"[158] which was inevitably distorted by the reliance on the artisanal, Duchamp invented the ultimate technique of abbreviation: the transposition of the process of translation of "intention" to "its realisation" onto the realm of the conceptual.[159] In doing so, his work confronted the

---

[154] This is the main reason behind Thierry de Duve's decision to interpret the readymade as emerging from the history of painting. De Duve therefore follows Duchamp's implication that his paintings were assisted readymades— that the logic of the readymade stems from the impact of paint tubes.
Marcel Duchamp, "Apropos of Readymades," in *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Michel Sanouillet, Elmer Peterson (London; Thames & Hudson, 1975), 141-142, 142.
De Duve Op.cit., 176.

[155] John Roberts parallels this obsolescence of handcraft, traceable or not, in artistic production with the prevalent late capitalist tendency of "deskilling." Deskilling according to Roberts's analysis takes two forms: the incorporation of science and technology in the labour process, and the managerial organization of workers, resulting in turn in the increase in overall productivity through the structural decline of the prerequisite character of individual skill. This transition is traced in two aspects of art production: the creation of art through the delegation of activities to non-artists, and the removal of the normative character of artistic skill in art production.
Roberts, 85.

[156] Ibid., 3.

[157] Ibid.,

[158] Baudelaire, 16.

[159] Marcel Duchamp, *The Creative Act*, 139.

inevitable "historical irresolution of technique and art"[160] and pointed to a way out of it. The readymade, therefore, stands for the utopian sublation of the dichotomy between art and technique with the inscription of both into the realm of concept. In a fashion reminiscent of the proverbial decision to sever rather than untie the Gordian knot, the readymade responded to technique's distortion of creative vision by dislodging technique from the domain of craft.

Through the unassisted readymade, authorship appears hardly associated with conventional notions of creativity based on expressiveness anymore. It emerges reliant on executive skills and intellectual acuity, signifying thus a separation "between the man who suffers and the mind which creates."[161] When in 1957 Duchamp made this reference to T. S. Eliot's essay "Tradition and Individual Talent" of 1919 he was alluding to a text calling for a revitalisation of tradition— a call for tradition to move beyond its misconception as a term of "censure" over some notion of cultural lagging, and the inability to be one with the world.[162] And thus for tradition to become what it truly is: an entity wherein all history exists simultaneously, the "simultaneous order" that constitutes contamporaneity.[163] This was T.S. Eliot's antidote to modern infatuation with shallow difference and individuality; to become the conduit of contamporaneity, one had to erase oneself, and only through this act of kenosis could one lay genuine claim to being one with the present.

According to one of Theodor Adorno's most salient observations, art in modernity was characterised by a marked tendency toward the dissolution of all perceivable distance between the artwork and the life of the spectator. This was a two-directional, dialectical process: modern art was caught at the crossroads of "deartification" and "the mimesis of the hard and alienated."[164] On the one hand, art was subject to the pressures of a fledging Culture Industry seeking to subsume all creative activity under the total administration of capitalism.

---

[160] De Duve, xi-xii.

[161] T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in T.S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1953), 13-22, 18.

[162] Ibid., 13.

[163] Ibid., 14.

[164] In "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" Adorno and Horkheimer presented an interpretation of "deartification" or "deastheticisation" (original: "Entkunstung") as a consequence of the advancing industrialisation of cultural consumption in capitalism and the consolidation of a totalising cultural apparatus. Art under the domination of the "Culture Industry" is steadily subsumed by the general economy and artistic production is thus subject to the imperatives of standardisation and profitability that govern industrial production. This strips art of its unique qualities and degrades it into entertainment. "Aesthetic Theory" on the other hand, presents a more nuanced analysis of "deartification" as a phenomenon ingrained in the historical advance of modern art. Modern art, as a revolutionising historical force, is engaged in a constant renegotiation of its techniques, contents and boundaries. Deartification signifies therefore a more dialectical phenomenon— the predicament of art in capitalism and in a sense its historical inevitability.
See Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. Gunzelin Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 94-136.
Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, (London: Athlone Press, 1997)

On the other, art was constantly revolutionising itself by delving into the elements of the modern world, repurposing them toward the repudiation of its claims to objectivity. The readymade's representation of the collapse between art and life exemplified thus Adorno's central aporia. Nevertheless, by virtue of eliminating the expressive aspects that historically characterised art, the readymade created art objects aesthetically impenetrable which virtually concealed the inner world of the artist. In a sense, the readymade marks the point where art as attitude towards modern representations becomes anterior to the subject which brings it to life: there is no Duchamp that derives his stability as an artistic subjectivity from the expressive unity of eye and hand.[165] Duchamp-as-artist exists *in spite of* the readymade.

The obstruction of the artist's presence in works utterly saturated in the representations of the external world is resolved by the concurrent reorientation the audience's attention to two new directions: the context of the artwork's display, and the life itself of the artist. The important point here is that both follow from the logic of the readymade. The former, even though originating in the non-aesthetic constitution of the readymade, becomes more visible in the second half of the twentieth century with the neo-avant-garde expansion of art's domain to the exhibition in Pop Art, Minimalism and Conceptual art practices; this is an observation that we will return to in the next chapter. The latter, however— the reinscription of authorship back into the sphere of the artist's life that follows the impasse of the readymade— is more paradoxical: the defamiliarising impact of the bareness of the readymade is recodified in the self-invention of the artistic subject as "pure personality."

I should then clarify my claim. The inscrutability— or even superficial pointlessness— of the readymade needs to be accounted for, insofar as it is to be recognised as a work of art. In the absence of intelligibility in traditional terms there are two potential outcomes: to either attribute the conferral of the artwork-status to an illegitimate system of signification that is subsequently rejected, or to account for it by recourse to certain non-visible dimensions of the artist's own world, that is, the life of the artist, and especially those elements that an audience is barred from ever fully knowing— the intent, the intellectual and psychological motivations underlying the work. Following this "crash test," the successful artist is bound to re-emerge imbued with a renewed sense of mystique: to resolve the contradiction between the crowning of the readymade as the apogee of the creative process and its uniquely non-artistic qualities, the audience is compelled to the unassailable conviction that it is the artist's personality that legitimises the work as art. This is a premise exceptionally close to the hypothesis that it is the artist's personality that is the true, hidden work. Yet, unlike the

[165] Roberts, 101.

historical idealisation of genius followed by the turn to individual life as a hermeneutics of uncompromising vision and aesthetic innovation, in the case of Duchamp the turn to life happens precisely because these expressive elements are eminently absent in the gesture of the readymade. The readymade facilitates therefore a move of utmost disinterestedness, which, as Bourdieu would comment, signifies the highest gambit for the avant-garde artist, and thus the most authentic and potentially rewarding claim to prestige.

Not at all surprisingly then, this led to an early implosion of the medium: meaning can no longer be found in the now diminished aesthetic construction of the work and has to be discovered outside of it, in life.[166] The impact of this defamiliarising gesture on the delimitation of artistic activity cannot be overstated— its implications transcend the discussion on the aestheticisation of everyday life; there lies the impossibility of categorising Dadaist events and Surrealist explorations of the urban setting as something ontologically separate from the groups' artistic output. The affinity between art and life eventually leads to another change; art ceases to exist as art-as-object and becomes art-as-event. This shift does not only underline the new socio-technical framework of art's production and distribution but also constitutes a pivotal moment wherein a majority of corollaries associated with the aesthetic existence of art are called into question.[167]

2.4 RROSE SELAVY

2.4.1 FEMININITY AND MASS CULTURE

After an initial flirtation with the idea of a Jewish persona, Duchamp arrived at Rrose Sélavy in 1920 as a "much simpler" project, as he explained decades later with characteristic nonchalance.[168] Incarnated by Duchamp in drag, Man Ray's now iconic photographs have often overshadowed her role in Duchamp's oeuvre. Yet, besides her existence as photographic image, her name would also appear behind a series of works throughout the years, including Duchamp's *Fresh Widow* of 1920 (Fig.6), *Belle Haleine: Eau de Voilette* of 1921 (Fig.7), *Monte Carlo Bond* of 1924, Francis Picabia's *L'Oeil Cacodylate* of 1921,

[166] As Calvin Tomkins has pointed out, even from the 1950s critics and audience turned to the investigation of Duchamp's own life for the interpretation of his work, both of which they understood as existing in a continuum: "Every move, every gesture, every word from the master was seen to take its place in the overall pattern of the fabulous masterpiece that Duchamp's life now came to be considered in these quarters." Calvin Tomkins, *The Bride and the Bachelors: Five Masters of the Avant-Garde* (Penguin Books, 1976), 15.
[167] Krzysztof Ziarek, The Work of Art in the Age of its Electronic Mutability, in Andrew Benjamin (ed.), *Walter Benjamin and Art*, (London: Continuum, 2005), 209-225, 221.
[168] Ades, Cox, Hopkins, 134.

Robert Desnos's aphorisms. It is this less acknowledged dimension of Rrose Sélavy as artist that needs to be explored in relation to Duchamp's strategies of authorship.

Figure 6 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions

Figure 6 Marcel Duchamp, Fresh Widow, 1920 (replica 1964)

Amelia Jones has highlighted that Man Ray's portraits of Rrose Sélavy strongly resemble female celebrity photographs featured in popular magazines of the time;[169] in that sense, it was probably not a coincidence that Man Ray's pictures were taken around the time he entered the world of fashion photography— a field where he would have a successful career over the next two decades. Man Ray's conscious emphasis on the artificial, glamorous aspects of Rrose Sélavy, underpinning thus her intimacy with popular culture, inflects her conception with clear implications. By the time of Rrose Sélavy's emergence as a figure immersed in vanity and mystique there had been a long history wherein femininity, consumption and mass culture formed a negative triad— a history which allows us to contextualise Rrose Sélavy's symbolic significance in relation to the twentieth century world of consumerism.

Figure 7 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Figure 7 Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, Belle Haleine, Eau de Voilette, 1920-1921.

The modern origins of the parallelism between femininity and mass culture can in fact be traced back to the eighteenth century. The ascendance of the European bourgeoisie during that time and its displacement of heredity for economic productivity paint an already turbulent post-feudal landscape, exacerbated by fears of a complete overhauling of social and cultural life on the basis of financial exchange and consumption. Among certain literary and artistic circles these aspects of bourgeois society were interpreted as signs of moral and cultural degradation and thus triggered anxieties of civilisational decline. Paul Mattick Jr. connected these fears with pervasive ideas of "degeneracy," according to which periods of moral and cultural prosperity were inevitably succeeded by decline. Similar conceptions of time's cyclical alternation between rise and decline were shared by David Hume, Johann Joachim Winckelmann, and Denis Diderot among others, and were so impactful that would

[169] Jones, *Postmodernism and the En-gendering of Marcel Duchamp*, 147.

lead Sir Joshua Reynolds to lament that "that the Art has been in a gradual state of decline, from the Age of Michelangelo to the present, must be acknowledged."[170] Jean Jacques Rousseau, on the other hand, would outright associate the prevalence of the market and the idealisation of consumption with the feminisation of taste. Rousseau was of course expressing the then popular notion of women as irrational beings guided by passion instead of reason or duty: their inscription in a context of excess and superficial pleasure-seeking was rooted in similar patriarchal notions.[171] Femininity was therefore demonised as a proxy for consumption and complacency, which in turn were rooted in the bourgeois commercialisation of life.[172]

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Andreas Huyssen observed that femininity had become inextricable from the idea of mass society. Partly responsible for this conflation was the historical coincidence between struggles for female emancipation and social movements agitating for political change, improved participation in political power and recognition of rights as expressed by the Revolutions of 1848 and the Paris Commune of 1870.[173] Gustave Le Bon's "The Crowd" carved this association in relief: "[c]rowds are everywhere distinguished by feminine characteristics."[174] In this context, femininity came to symbolise the disorderly characteristics of the mass, which were now penetrating the established political order and notions of "real, authentic culture," clearly conceived as the realm of men.[175] The extent to which the negative association of womanhood and mass culture-as-disorder influenced modernist culture is debateable, but the psychoanalytic construction of femininity certainly did not alleviate any concerns. In the first decades of the twentieth century Freud depicted women as essentially incomplete men, subjects with

---

[170] Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. R. R. Wark (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), p. 280.
Cited in Paul Mattick Jr., *Art in Its Time: Theories and Practices of Modern Aesthetics* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), 26-28, 27.

[171] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse of the Sciences and Arts*, in *The First and Second Discourses*, ed. and trans. R. D. Masters (New York: St. Martin's, 1964), 52-53.
Cited in Mattick, 32.

[172] This paints a picture reminiscent of the "Alexandrianism" that Clement Greenberg criticised in his influential writings on modernist art. The Greenbergian tradition saw abstraction as the antidote to all these civilisational problems. In fact, Thomas Crow has argued for the clear connection between Greenbergian elitism and eighteenth century fears of bourgeois decadence: the perfectly abstract object as the expression of a "universal republic of taste."
Thomas Crow, "The Birth and Death of the Viewer: On the Public Function of Art," in *Discussions in Contemporary Culture, vol. 1*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1987), 1-8.

[173] Andreas Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other," in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), 44-62, 52.

[174] Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd* (Harmondworth; New York: Penguin, 1981), 39.
Cited in Huyssen, 52.

[175] Huyssen, 47.

limited creativity, and for the most part, passive recipients.[176] It should, therefore, come as no surprise that Adorno shortly after the end of World War II would categorically oppose the prospect of reorganising society based on the values of femininity. The feminine psyche in capitalism was, according to Adorno, passive, superficial and universally conformist. By being enforced and reproduced through the most oppressive and totalising mechanisms of capitalist interpellation it represented capitalism's most debased characteristics: femininity was "the effect of the whip" and "the negative imprint of domination."[177]

Rrose Sélavy becomes therefore one of the gestures by means of which Duchamp severed all ties with the tradition and the privileged status of the male, author of high art, and rather assumed its opposite. Her association with mass culture goes even further than the stylisation of her photographic representation. With the appearance of her photographic image in Duchamp's perfume bottle readymade *Belle Haleine: Eau de Voilette* in 1921 she becomes directly and unquestionably inscribed in a context of female consumption. Her association with the banal, the everyday and the world of consumption is further underlined by the use of the same perfume bottle for the New York Dada cover (April, 1921) where her image accompanies Tristan Tzara's mock editorial that presented Dadaism exclusively in commodity terms with women composing its target audience.[178]

2.4.2 THE ARTIST AS ARRANGER

Rrose Sélavy's first appropriation of authorship was the *Fresh Widow* of 1920.[179] In this work Marcel Duchamp's signature has been replaced by the industrial inscription: "Fresh Widow Copyright Rose Sélavy 1920," alluding thus clearly to the replacement of the artwork by a patented item of industrial design. The implications of this gesture are relatively self-explanatory and certainly consistent with the narrative of femininity as consumption and mass culture. What interests me here, however, has less to do with the transgression of the boundary separating "high" and "low" culture per se, and more to do with the substitution of the identity of the artist for another professional in a process mediated by Rrose Sélavy.

[176]Sigmund Freud, "Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 19*, (London: The Hogart Press, 1974), 243-258.
[177] Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London; New York: Verso, 2005), 95.
[178] Francis M. Naumann, "*Belle Haleine: Eau de Voilette (Beautiful Breath: Veil Water), 1921*" https://www.toutfait.com/belle-haleine-eau-de-voilette-beautiful-breath-veil-water-1921/ (Accessed: 04/01/2019)
[179] Jones, *Postmodernism and the En-gendering of Marcel Duchamp*, 156.

Fresh Widow was not the only time that Duchamp/Sélavy would assume an identity beyond that of the artist. From the industrial manufacturer of domesticities in the *Fresh Widow*, Duchamp/Sélavy would reinvent themselves as gambling entrepreneurs with the *Monte Carlo Bond* in 1924,[180] and eventually become art archivists-curators with the *Boîte-en-Valise* of 1941 (Fig.8). This variation between multiple professional identities— or rather, the hybridisation of artistic identity with other forms of work reflected a new direction for twentieth century art practices. As the precondition for this new freedom, the production of art had to be disembedded from the performance of artisanal skills, something which became possible only after the readymade; the dislodged artisanal elements could now be replaced by other types of work. What the readymade enabled, therefore, was not simply the substitution of artisanal skills for conceptual ones, but the liberation of artists from their historically prescribed role.

As Duchamp's early readymades reveal, the new skillsets at work were borrowed from the industrial-commercial world. The role of the industrial-commercial world was also salient in the emulation of extra-artistic professional identities during the 1960s, in the performance of what Caroline A. Jones has described as the "technological sublime." During that era, Andy Warhol, Frank Stella, and Robert Smithson reinvented themselves as artists in relation to the world of bureaucracy and industry that framed the historical horizon of the decade.[181] The phenomenon described here is not, however, limited to a specific era or direction; it is not exhausted in Warhol's industrial division of labour or Stella's performance of the executive. It is instead the preparatory stage toward a wider transformation of the character of the artist from creator of original works to "arranger" of pre-existing forms, signs, procedures and identities.[182] As Victor Burgin described this change: "[t]he artist is apt to see himself not as the creator of new material forms but rather as a coordinator of existing forms."[183]

---

[180] This was a share that Duchamp/Sélavy offered for sale in 1924 to provide part-ownership in a gambling scheme.
Ibid., 159-160.

[181] Caroline A. Jones's employment of the "technological sublime" is a direct reference to Leo Marx's "*Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*," a study in which Marx explored the tension between pastoralism and technologisation in nineteenth century American literature.
Caroline A. Jones, *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist* (Chicago; London : University of Chicago Press, 1996)
Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964)

[182] Reckwitz,73.

[183] Victor Burgin, Situationala, in *Situational Aesthetics: Selected Writings by Victor Burgin*, ed. Alexander Streitberger (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2010), 7-14, 9.
Cited in Reckwitz, 73.

Figure 8 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Figure 8 Marcel Duchamp, Boîte-en-valise (de ou par Marcel Duchamp ou Sélavy), 1935-41.

There are two major implications in the passage from the artist-as-creator to arranger. Firstly, the artwork after the manipulation of pre-existing forms becomes "non-organic," and consequently reveals the untruth of the organic form which had been the predominant ideology for the entirety of art's history since the Renaissance. The incorporation of symbols and forms of productive labour from a variety of contexts outside art denies the organic nature of the artwork, and as such, dispels the illusion of its construction as an autonomous product of "unconscious organic labour."[184] With the artwork revealing itself as the product of discontinuous elements manipulated in specific configurations, the illusion that it corresponds to an objective, unified reality collapses. By deconstructing ideologies of organicity, art can no longer obscure the historical conditions of its social construction by laying claim to a transcendental aesthetic order.

Secondly, the advent of artforms that refuse to reconcile their parts into totalising systems of meaning, Adorno argued, effectively revealed the deception of "genius aesthetics." The cult of genius— and its profound untruth— has been historically predicated upon the myth of the artist as "creator" and of art as an act of "creation."[185] This has served as the veneer of transcendental ideologies of originality and authenticity, and has been at the same time the underlying cause of uniformity and subordination. If the work of the artist of genius is allowed to present itself as a visual universe in its own right— an all-too-personal creation in spite of society— its quasi-religious derivation can then only enforce standardisation: it produces style. Yet, great art for Adorno has always been the self-negation of this illusory, asocial self-sufficiency of style.[186] The artist as arranger is the definitive repudiation of "genius aesthetics;" no longer an "original" creator of "original" creations but works that by definition acknowledge the social character of art.[187]

For Hal Foster, the modern role of the artist as a "manipulator of signs" did not only transform the artistic subject, but also had profound impact on art's audiences. Confronted with work that has shed its pretensions of a universal character, the viewer is forced to become an "active reader of messages" rather than passive consumer engulfed in the totality of an organic aesthetic proposition.[188] The idea that Foster expresses here is clearly indebted

[184] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 37.
[185] Ibid., 170.
[186] Adorno, Horkheimer, *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception*, 103-104.
[187] Adorno Op.cit., 170.
[188] Foster, 100.

to Walter Benjamin's seminal essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" of 1936. Benjamin's position is certainly well-known: the use of the new technical means of art's production— technologies of reproducibility such as photography and film— helped deconstruct the "auratic" existence of the artwork, with "aura" describing the mystique of originality and singular existence of the work of art. The origins of the concept of aura were, according to Benjamin, premodern: aura was, in fact, a remnant of the sacral status of art, Benjamin argued, and its existence in the bourgeois artwork had utterly mystifying effects. Contrary to the auratic existence of art, reproducibility was premised on the negation of such absolute authentic status— it was premised precisely on disenchantment— allowing thus modern audiences to experience the work from a critical distance and not as an embodiment of a continuous, universal order.[189]

The transition to a model of artist-as-arranger has had tremendous impact on the development of art, artist and audience in the twentieth century. After the readymade, artistic identity can be freely configured according to art's content and the type of labour artists perform or emulate. The tactical adoption of skills, procedures and attitudes characteristic of non-artistic professional identities has changed established ideas surrounding the essence of the artistic personality dramatically. The identity of the artist becomes fluid, contextual but also fundamentally performative— the essence of the artwork resides often in the performance and manipulation of the signs of the adopted professional identity. This change helps illuminate the various hybrids forms of artistic identity which emerge throughout the twentieth century (for example, Andy Warhol as an industrialist, Ed Ruscha as a topographer, Joseph Beuys as an educator) but also underlies what Roberts has described as contemporary art's "adisciplinarity;" that is, artists' tactical investigation and adoption of methodological frameworks outside art without entailing the reducibility of art practice to these fields.

---

[189] The influences of Bertolt Brecht's "Verfremdungseffekt" are more than evident here.
Walter Benjamin, The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry John (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 217-251.
Benjamin's technological optimism was a point of contention between him and Adorno. Despite his insistence on autonomy, Adorno agreed on principle with the critique of aura; he recognised that it was the "intolerance of the innocuous" that disentangled modern art from the artificiality of its auratic existence. Nevertheless, Adorno protested Benjamin's homology between the development of technological means and art's critical potency. In their correspondence Adorno argued that Benjamin was in effect replacing "the bourgeois idealism of the conservation of personality" with "an anarchistic romanticism of blind faith in the spontaneous power of the proletariat in the historical process- a proletariat which is itself a product of bourgeois society." In short, Adorno believed that it was naive to equate the loss of aura with the assumption that the new mass cultural apparatus could be of any value for the project of social liberation.
Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 21.
Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht, Georg Lukács, *Aesthetics and Politics* (London; New York: Verso, 2007), 123.

2.4.3 THE ARTIST RROSE SELAVY

Even though Rrose Sélavy was conceived as a new identity, Duchamp did not appear to diversify his approach to accommodate her as an individual artist. Rrose Sélavy was in a sense a new identity denied of a unique personal style; the works attributed to her lacked the distinct character that could separate them from Duchamp's own. In reality, the distinction between the two authors is made possible only through recourse to their different signatures. As Duchamp admitted, her authorship resulted from "the difference between the style and the unexpected name for the experts."[190] Her relative indeterminacy was also reflected in Duchamp's decision to include both signatures in *La Boîte-en-alise* of 1941: "de ou par Marcel Duchamp ou Rrose Sélavy" (from or by Marcel Duchamp or Rrose Sélavy).

There is an interesting history of artists, pseudonyms and alter egos that Rrose Sélavy intersects with. Pseudonyms have been in use by writers for a very long time. In classical antiquity pseudonyms were often selected deliberately to evoke a famous figure of the past, while other times they were the result of pseudepigraphy. In more recent times, the use of pseudonyms helped liberate personal expression from the fear of repercussions.[191] The production of the pseudonymous author therefore tends to be continuous with the real identity behind the pseudonymous work. The invented identity of the pseudonym is in a sense rather shallow— it is identity only in name. Rrose Sélavy, fleshed out and performed by Duchamp in Man Ray's photographs, was not simply a name though. She was given flesh and bones— she was conceived with specific characteristics: female, vain, mysterious, and temporal. In fact, Rrose Sélavy should be interpreted as a "heteronym" rather than as a pseudonym.[192] A "heteronym," albeit one lacking a distinctly personal voice.

Rrose Sélavy's continuity with Duchamp's own approach— her lack of authorial individualisation— suggests that Duchamp did not consider the assumption of a new identity to be so radical a gesture as to necessitate the fashioning of a different artistic approach. From that perspective, Rrose Sélavy could then be reframed as the medium through which Duchamp proceeded to undercut ideologies of individuality and originality: Rrose Sélavy signifies an emphatic understatement of the "unique self" of the artist. The decision to flatten

[190] Jones, *Postmodernism and the En-gendering of Marcel Duchamp*, 155.

[191] For instance, the disputes between Federalists and Anti-Federalists in the wake of the successful American War of Independence were famously waged through pseudonyms.

[192] "Heteronym" was the term that the Portuguese writer and poet Fernando Pessoa used to describe the alter egos he created. Pessoa has been one of the most curious examples of a modern inventor of parallel identities as he crafted an entire universe of personas that came from different backgrounds, had distinct personalities and interests, and often interacted with each other in writing.

individuality between Duchamp and Rrose Sélavy parallels in many ways the problematisation of originality evoked by the readymade. Rrose Sélavy, in fact, mirrors its function; she mirrors the function of an object that bears no signs pointing to a unique creative identity.[193] Through Rrose Sélavy, Duchamp is underlining that art does not stem from an expressive creative self; in reality, Rrose Sélavy, in her conception as the continuation of the already impersonal work of Duchamp through a (in)different persona, constitutes a double negation of the notion of the unique artistic personality. Because Duchamp's work could have been made by himself, by Rrose Sélavy, or perhaps by someone else entirely, the understatement of the "unique self" as author obviates the necessity of a strong authorial presence as a source of legitimation for the work. This de-emphasising of the exceptional characteristics of artistic personality appears to have been conscious and was corroborated by Duchamp himself when in 1966 he confided in Pierre Cabanne:

> ...I don't believe in the creative function of the artist. He's a man like any other. It's his job to do certain things but the businessman does certain things, you understand?[194]

Perhaps then, Rrose Sélavy's role in this process of disassociation of self and work exceeds the level of authorial deflection; her "de-autobiographising" function does not simply separate Duchamp from his work.[195] It does not simply refute the origination of the work out of a stable, consistent identity, but also the notion that this identity is the product of a process of individuation which imbues it with specific exceptional characteristics.

Duchamp's decoupling of artwork and author therefore challenges the belief in an inner consistency responsible for authorial difference. The artist is instead conceived as a "mediumistic" being:"[196] the site wherein the discrepancy between the intention behind the artwork and its final material form is produced. The unique contribution of the author during this process, the imprint of the authorial personality on the work, parallels thus the "art coefficient;" the variable that Duchamp described as "an arithmetical relation between the unexpressed but intended and the unintentionally expressed."[197] Yet, if we construe the artist

---

[193] Even Sélavy's very identity appears to have been born out of the same indifference which guided Duchamp's selection of readymade objects— a process that Duchamp had described with the following words: "[y]ou have to approach something with an indifference, as if you had no aesthetic emotion. The choice of readymade is always based on visual indifference and, at the same time, on the total absence of good or bad taste."
Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (New York: Da Capo Press, 1987), 48.
[194] Ibid., 16.
[195] Carol P. James, "An Original Revolutionary Messagerie Rrose, or What Became of Readymades," inThierry De Duve (ed.), *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, (Cambridge, MA; London, England: The MIT Press, 1991), 278.
[196] Duchamp, *The Creative Act*, 138.
[197] Ibid., p.139.

as the source of an intention that is betrayed and left incomplete through the process of art-making, the artwork still has to be completed somehow. This is where the audience comes in, because it is the audience that is responsible for the completion of the creative process by bringing the artwork in "contact with the external world." There is a certain ambiguity in Duchamp's formulation; the audience is determining "the weight of the work on the esthetic [*sic*] scale" but also "deciphering and interpreting its inner qualification."[198] That is, on the one hand, the audience evaluates and judges, but on the other, it is also presumed to be productively contributing to the creative act by assigning meaning to the work— meaning that was either integral to the original intention and was lost during the production of the art object, or new meaning that supersedes the original formulation. The artist is therefore "only the mother of the work;" the artwork is always completed by the audience— an assertion that not only engenders authorship in feminine terms, but also stands to underline the relativity of the artist as the agent of artistic activity.[199]

Emerging out of the limited authorship of the artist, and being signified by the audience, Duchamp's work becomes principally open-ended, unstable and participatory. The work of art is free to have its own life, separated from that of the artist after its enunciation; its openness and multivalence become inexorable, reproblematising in turn the stability of the artistic subject. The artist, abandoning the security provided by the assumption of a standpoint adhering to the illusion of a singular expressive identity in the modern world, gives birth to an artwork that reflects and reproduces the flux of their own identity, acquiring thus a separate yet cognate significance. Duchamp does not only announce the separation of the artisanal and the artistic: he announces the separation of artwork and author *and* the separation of the author from a permanent and exceptional self. And despite, or rather *because of* these negations, he still manages to establish himself as an inimitable artistic personality and authorial presence.

Rrose Sélavy, being an agent granted with authorial power, is a metonymy for Duchamp-as-artist. At the same time, she is an invention. By being represented as an image

---

Interestingly enough, if we follow the "artist-as-medium" proposition to its logical conclusion we are faced with a reframing of the artist-as-subject into a problem of technique, a problem reminiscent of what Baudelaire described transpires during the translation of the idea into its execution. This fundamentally blurs the distinction between artist as the source of a performance and artist as the site wherein a performance is carried out. Seigel has highlighted this contradiction in the formulation of the conception of the artist-as-medium and the concept of the "art coefficient." The existence of the artist-as-medium presupposes that the artist is subject to an agency or intention that comes from without. Nevertheless, the personal nature of the "art coefficient," which Duchamp linked to the "subjective mechanism which produces art in a raw state," implies that the intention ultimately originates in the subject.
Seigel, p.222.

[198] Duchamp Op.cit., 139-140.

[199] Jones Op.cit., 146.

to be looked at, she becomes a work of art herself. She is, therefore, conceived as a dual nature: that of the artistic subject and object.[200] Her objectification elevates Duchamp to the place of the artist. Her subjectification elevates him— his life— to the place of art. Through the recognition of the intricacies underlying her creation and performance, Duchamp establishes himself as the object of scrutiny: we are compelled to try to comprehend him through her. It is not, therefore, merely the epistemologies of authorship— the distinction between subject and object— that Rrose Sélavy confounds through the infinite play between the two. She also questions art from an ontological perspective: by conferring artistic candidacy to the life of the artist. By obscuring a transparent reading of the relationship between the productive subject and the produced work, the two eventually overlap and become interchangeable. And with that we come to the realization that every complication Duchamp posed to the conventions of what an authorial subject consists in are ultimately redirected to him and become quintessentially Duchampian; in that process, Rrose Sélavy appears to have fulfilled an intermediary role. Duchamp defies the conventional ideas surrounding the artist by assuming the anti-artistic, and mystifies the limits of authorship by disassociating it from a unitary identity only to see it reinstated with new rigor, empowering thus his claims to uniqueness and announcing the new paradigm of the detached author as the artist par excellence.[201]

2.5 THE BIRTH OF DEMOCRATIC AUTHORSHIP

When Baudelaire mapped out the cultural transformations unfolding in modernity, he recognised the danger of a future bereft of meaning and distinction. He recognised the danger inherent in the levelling of difference; the liquidation of all beauty and individuality, overseen by a tyrannous moral majority.[202] Implicit in his writings was the conviction that the dawn of democracy would sweep away all the conditions of life that made it tolerable.

---

[200] Interestingly, Man Ray's 1923 portrait of Rrose Sélavy presents her in double drag— as Rrose impersonating Duchamp; that is, inverting authorial and authored identity.

[201] By no means do I suggest that these moves were motivated by cynical speculation. After all, there is enough biographical evidence to suggest that Duchamp's involvement with Sélavy was sincere: "[m]y intention was always to get away from myself, though I knew perfectly well that I was using myself. Call it a little game between 'I' and 'me'."
Ibid., 154.

[202] In 1852 Baudelaire had written about the social and cultural ostracism that Edgar Allan Poe suffered at the hands of the American democratic society: "[w]hat a pitiless dictatorship is that of opinion in a democratic society! Ask of it neither charity nor indulgence, nor any sort of flexibility in the application of its laws to the multiple and complex issues of the moral life. You might think that the impious love of liberty had given birth to a new tyranny, a *bestial* tyranny, or zoocracy whose savage insensibility recalls the idol of Juggernaut."
Charles Baudelaire, "Edgar Poe, His Life and Works" in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays,* 70-92, 71.

There were three impulses worthy of respect for Baudelaire— "to know, to kill and to create"— and none of them could survive in the uniformity of democratic life.[203] In this era, surrendered to decadence and a prevailing sense of "spleen," the figure of the dandy emerged as the "last spark of heroism."[204] Or as Walter Benjamin reframed it: the hero in "his last incarnation."[205] The dandy is a figure of crisis and loss, emerging in the decline of the aristocratic order and a democratic present that has not fully arrived yet: in the axiological void separating aristocracy's fall and democracy's ascent. In this period of transition, when no normative system holds sway over social and cultural life, the dandy embodies the endless possibilities no longer possible; "the malady of infinite aspiration" after the loss of a definitive rule of life.[206]

These are the sociohistorical conditions that frame the birth of the dandy. Preoccupied with materiality, he sought to rescue a sense of self in conditions under which the possibility of distinction was increasingly waning. Dandyism thus attempted to establish "a new kind of aristocracy"— one based on spirit; outside its old reproduction on the basis of money and power, so that it could endure the democratic levelling of life.[207] For Baudelaire the real stakes in the existence of the dandy was the loss of individuality: the dandy was animated by "the burning need to create for oneself a personal originality, bounded only by the limits of the properties."[208]

Baudelaire's thought reveals the strong belief that under conditions of democratic levelling of difference, art needs to find a way to preserve its status as the site wherein a sense of individuality can survive. And he commanded the "man of the world" to discover it in the life of the urban metropolis. Yet Duchamp's embodiment of the "man of world" denies that possibility. His response to the questions centred by Baudelaire— the abbreviation of technique and destabilisation of artistic identity— appears to imply that the

---

[203] "There is no form of rational and assured government save an aristocracy. A monarchy or a republic, based upon democracy, are equally absurd and feeble. The immense nausea of advertisements. There are but three beings worthy of respect: the priest, the warrior and the poet. To know, to kill and to create. The rest of mankind may be taxed and drudged, they are born for the stable, that is to say, to practise what they call professions."
Charles Baudelaire, *Intimate Journals*, trans. Christopher Isherwood (New York: Dover Publications, 2006), 74-75.

[204] Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, p.28.

[205] Walter Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," in *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Baudelaire*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, trans. Howard Eiland, Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingston and Harry Zohn (Cambridge, Mass; London: The Bellknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 46-133, 124.

[206] Emil Durkheim, *Moral Education: A Study in the Theory and Application of the Society of Education*, ed. Everett K. Wilson, trans. Everett K. Wilson and Herman Schnurer (London; New York, The Free Press, 1973), 40.

[207] Baudelaire Op.cit.,28.

[208] Ibid., 27.

inner life of the modern artist cannot, and probably should not, survive its saturation in the premises that Baudelaire's interpretation of modernity was founded on.

Nevertheless, this did not eliminate the possibilities for new types of authorship. While the political and cultural institutions of democratic life are designed to reproduce equality, to encourage modes of subjectivity and relating conducive to its frictionless reproduction, Duchamp realises an authorial voice through the repudiation of an exceptional personality. By reversing the expectation of the artworld for the performance of individuality, he, in fact, declares his unwavering confidence in his strength as an authorial presence. Abandoning the anachronistic desire to prove a mythical, hypertrophic ego, he transforms the denouncement of exception into a form of sublimated megalothymia. As T.S. Eliot asserted:

> Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things."[209]

Duchamp's description of his inner motivations appears to echo this sentiment: "I've always felt this need to escape myself."[210] But to escape oneself, the self needs to exist, and to feel compelled to do so is to escape its overpowering presence.

The true modern artist becomes then the one who understates or denies access to their own personal world. Impersonality reveals itself not as the negation of the self through the personal overidentification with the characteristics of the conformist crowd of democratic life, but as a way out of it. Unlike Baudelaire's dandy, who is a symptom emerging out of the slow death of the old and the refusal of the new to be born,[211] Duchamp's "aristocratism" derives from his status as the pioneer of the apathetic embrace of the new. Duchamp accepts the transition from the old aristocratic order to mass democratic existence and no longer needs to reconstruct an exceptional identity based on a detached enjoyment of vanity and beauty. His proposition subverts the aristocratic origins of Baudelaire's exceptionalism; Duchamp's construction of a singular identity is based on its paradoxical negation while remaining firmly inside its generative context, the context of art. His paradigm is one of unexceptional exception in a socio-cultural environment that has yet to fully confront the reality of its impossibility; an impossibility fully realised in the impersonal, aesthetically

[209] Eliot., 21.
[210] Cabanne, 31.
[211] This is of course a liberal adaptation of the famous observation by Antonio Gramsci: "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear."
Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 276.

deflated practices of the American 1960s. And in that way, he becomes a prophet of a new era: Duchamp maps out the predominant model of authorship in conditions of mass democracy.

Under this light, Duchamp's repudiation of personality anticipates art's new need to address the commonality of democratic life. His selection of objects drawn directly from the representations of the everyday, his conscious decision to suppress the impulse of artisanal intervention, and his playful identification with the subject of mass culture are impersonal only insofar as the artist-as-author is concerned. As his work and identity are liberated from the individuality of the artist, his impersonality becomes a mode of an interpersonal production and experience of art; his work is the nascent form of an art of the audience. Yet, when an artwork allows itself to become the conduit of an active audience, it is the invisible curator of this interaction who is primarily valorised as a creative subject. In this new paradigm of authorship, the democratising impulse inherent in the understatement of individuality cannot be separated from the production of exception through the performance of equality.

CHAPTER 3

DELEGATION AND DEMATERIALISATION

3.1 INTRODUCTION

One of the major challenges that any analysis of socially engaged art practice has to face lies in its inextricability from forms of activity that originate outside of art's conventional framework. This proximity is thematic as well as structural: thematic in the irreducibility of social practice's themes and outcomes to what is proper or useful to art, and structural in the incorporation of processes that are by no means peculiar to art. In fact, one of the defining characteristics of socially engaged practice is that the forms of labour integral to its performance and realisation are often firmly non-artistic. This relation of proximity gives rise to the two main problems I set out to explore in this chapter: delegation and commodification. The first half of the chapter lays out a necessary framework of practices and explores their historical evolution as strategies of delegation, while the second half explores the problem of commodification and immateriality in Nicholas Bourriaud's influential "Relational Aesthetics" of 1998.

Art practices whose object is the mobilisation of collective action, the enactment of forms of social interaction, or the analysis of social and political systems do not simply signify clear departures from the older aesthetic-contemplative character of art, but also appear largely disinterested even in the aporetic function of the historical avant-garde. Socially engaged art no longer attempts to blur the boundary between the practices that merit the privilege of the museum and those that do not. In other words, the centrality of the non-artistic in contemporary socially engaged art practices is not an extension or attempt to revive the avant-garde iconoclastic tradition— the tradition that disabused art of the notion of an indispensable aesthetic core. When the blurring of the boundaries between art and non-art became so confounding as to demonstrate the futility of normative definitions, the artworld decisively restructured itself on the absorption of the latter. This is a score that has been resolutely settled in the twentieth century; only naiveté or cynicism could interpret contemporary art as the re-enactment of the avant-gardist struggle over the status of the art object, and the domains of art and non-art. As John Roberts has pointed out, the readymade and reproducibility— the two main critiques of the status of the art object in modernity— are "no longer 'parasitic' on art, living on the margins of painterly modernist subjectivity,

but are constitutive of the technical relations of art's production."[212] This is the axiomatic position from which socially engaged practice begins.

The readymade remains, nevertheless, the prehistory of contemporary experiments in art's societalisation. Firstly, the readymade is the first artform which implies that the work of the non-artist might in fact be the object of the artwork; the timidity of my formulation at this point reflects the fact that the readymade exists in the history of the crisis of the artwork and was not its resolution. On that account, the readymade is productive insofar as it generates new value and meaning through the appropriation of the embodied labour of the non-artist. Inevitably, however, this act of appropriation and recontextualisation institutes an artwork that is socially constructed: no longer the possession of a singular author but constituted through forms of work that inhere outside of the traditionally understood personal universe of the artist. The readymade, therefore, intersects with the dimension of "openness" in art. Umberto Eco arrived at the concept of the "open work" through the observation of examples of modern artworks which did not seal off their performance or interpretation possibilities; such works included, for example, Pierre Boulez's aleatoric *Third Piano Sonata* (1955-1957), composed of pieces of music that were not defined in linear succession and could thus be rearranged by the performer.[213] Subsequently, in his exploration of the concept, Eco proposed that the evolution of modern art was in fact inscribed in a movement toward openness; openness as a heuristic was consequently inverted and found to correspond to a more implicit detachment of the modern artwork's content from a singular, fixed meaning. The openness of social practice lies in its enactment through the literal enactment of the work necessary for its production by a group of people. Openness in socially engaged art practice becomes then the dimension of its collective construction through processes of delegation.

In my discussion, delegation acquires a broader meaning— it is not limited to the direct assignment of productive duties to third parties of the kind that Andy Warhol or Sol LeWitt popularised. Following John Roberts' employment of the term, delegation signifies here the construction of a work of art through a necessary collective diffusion and ownership of authorial duties. This means that delegation can be more or less hierarchical, preconceived, or can even evolve organically through the coordination of a group; in contemporary art, the forms of collaboration it corresponds to are flexible and can range from explicit top-down chains of command to emphatically open-ended forms of contributed labour. Naturally, this

[212] Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form Skill and Deskilling in Art after the Readymade*, 166.
[213] Umberto Eco, "The Poetics of the Open Work," in Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Cancogni (Cambridge; Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989), 1-23, 2.

emancipation can be understood to correspond to contemporary art's pluralist character, yet this is not the only reason for its flexibility. In fact, the freedom to choose from a range of approaches to delegation reflects the waning importance of the art object itself in contemporary socially engaged art. To clarify: for as long as the inevitable destination of the artistic process was the production of the art object, delegation needed to be governed by a system that could safely lead to a specific objective outcome. Once artistic production becomes immaterial however, it opens up a variety of paths that an authorial group can follow for the completion of a project.

My insistence on the use of delegation instead of participation is conscious. The reason for that is that the latter dilutes the systematicity of the artwork or art project. The artwork or art project will always be the product of specific forms of labour and contingent upon their distribution. Participation as a signifier with strong voluntarist connotations obfuscates that. In fact, the ubiquity of participation discourses in contemporary art must be treated with suspicion as it distorts the systematicity of the artwork into vague expressions of democratic isothymia. The danger of reframing socially engaged practices in terms of participation becomes all-too-evident once this systematicity is obscured by the abolition of the material constitution of the work: once the object is replaced by the social relation. There, I explore Nicholas Bourriaud's conflation of the openness of relating in relational practices with a resistance to commodification; one of the most characteristic misconstruals of that kind. In "Relational Aesthetics" of 1998, Bourriaud suggested that relational practices' irreducibility to portable, self-enclosed art objects, and their enactment in the "interstitial" environment of the contemporary art exhibition separate them from the relations that govern the general economy.[214]

There are two ideas that need to be interrogated here. The first one is the conception of the exhibition as a "social interstice." This term, borrowed from Marx, describes in Bourriaud's text "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."[215] To deal with this problem I return to the source of Bourriaud's employed term, Marx's "Capital" and "Grundrisse," and explore its meaning in the original context. There, "interstice" has a wholly different meaning than what Bourriaud purports; it does not designate a zone free from the alienating conditions of commodity production that may point to new modes of social and economic organisation. On the contrary, it represents temporary social formations subject to laws of domination just as oppressive— if not more—

[214] Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics,* 16, 42.
[215] Ibid., 16.

which do not coexist harmoniously at all with the prevalent economic models based on commodity production. Naturally, the point here is not to attempt to invalidate Bourriaud's position through a textualist return to the source; rather, what I demonstrate is that Bourriaud's quasi-Marxian perspective is founded on a misconception, which is then projected onto the role of the contemporary art exhibition in capitalism. If the contemporary art exhibition can exist within capitalism without being totalised by the pressures of its productive relations, it is because it is at some level exempted from those and not because relational practices evade them.

Which ultimately leads to the second point: Bourriaud's formulation of relational art's commodity character, or even the implied lack thereof, is based on a reluctance to recognise that Marx's analysis of commodification is not limited to object-commodities. What creates the commodity is instead the commodification of labour. The fact, however, that Bourriaud's relational practices are produced in an environment where participation is voluntary and liberating, and still produces suplus-value without calling attention to it— silencing it even— draws an inevitable parallel between delegation in relational practices and the modes of subjectivation in neoliberalism.

There are two main directions for a critical reading of neoliberalism. The first one, exemplified by writers such as David Harvey, follows the Marxian tradition and posits neoliberalism primarily as a class project which creates hegemonic discourses to legitimise the rolling back of the state and the domination of social life by market economics.[216] The second one regards neoliberalism as an issue of government, or rather self-government, on the basis of competition and interest. This is the perspective of Michel Foucault, as articulated in the 1978-1979 lectures at the Collège de France and specifically in his analysis of the theory of "human capital."[217] The main difference between the two approaches is the exteriority of neoliberal discourse; in Harvey's account neoliberalism is an ideology propagated and imposed from specific centres of interest, while for Foucault neoliberalism is a "general style of thought, analysis, and imagination"[218] that is self-reproducing; just as dominating as it is self-reflexive. On that account, Foucault's analysis has been attentive to neoliberalism's utopian pretensions which maintain and mobilise its "technologies of self."[219] Foucault's account, therefore, produces a neoliberalism insidious and totalising, one

[216] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005)
[217] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979,* ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008)
[218]Ibid., 219.
[219] Foucault's attentiveness to the nuances of the theoretical propositions of neoliberal thinkers such as Friedrich von Hayek, Gary Becker and Theodore Schultz has even been interpreted as expressing sympathy to the neoliberal project. See for instance Daniel Zamora's and Michael Behrent's publication of 2015 where

which, as Thomas Lemke remarks, "endeavours to create a social reality that it suggests it already exists."[220] It is not merely a political project responsible for the gradual upending of the embedded liberalism of the postwar era, but a cemented system of depoliticisation— a system of suppression of conflict across all aspects of socioeconomic life, including individual dispositions toward work. On that account, even without subscribing to the absolute genealogy of Foucault as I have already analysed, his neoliberalism can be a very useful tool in the analysis of the breakdown between Marxian social reproduction and production in neoliberalism— in the analysis of a world of work without end, where the private has been economised and the economic has become a matter of personal expression; of style. It is these transformative effects that need to be considered in the examination of art practices that draw their material from social life, as the layers of mystification which envelop the art space separate it from the site of mere ideological catechism and present the image of reconstructed life.

Foucault's approach to neoliberalism is examined from the perspective of his endorsement of its self-governing, anti-statist principles.
Daniel Zamora, Michael C. Behrent (eds), *Foucault and Neoliberalism* (Polity Press, 2015)

[220] Thomas Lemke, *Foucault, Governmentality and Critique* (London; New York: Routledge, 2012), 6.

3.2 DELEGATION AND SHARED AUTHORSHIP

3.2.1 AUTONOMOUS AND HETERONOMOUS LABOUR

The question of what forms and structures of labour art is produced through is inextricable from the problem of creativity. For as long as art was the object of ritual, the concept of creativity was either inchoate or of theological character. The Greek language lacked a word to describe this artistic creativity altogether: with the exception of poetry, art was a matter of "τέχνη" (techne) and thus derived from natural laws, observed and applied to the artistic object.[221] A similar disconnect can be found in the Romans: for them, creator signified "father" or "founder."[222] Consistent with the conception of art as craft, notions of creativity were thoroughly unrelated to art during the Middle Ages; the act of creating reflected theological ideas instead, as evidenced in the creation of the cosmos as a "*creatio ex nihilo*."

Creativity as a concept associated with art emerged tentatively during the Italian Renaissance where it came to reflect the emerging individualism of the era. In Vasari's writing the practice of painting was defined through the acts of imitation (imitazione) and invention (invezione). With the notion of invention now underlying the artistic process, creativity came to signify the Renaissance painter's nascent independence, as that was tested in the struggle to create something greater than nature.[223] At the same time, creativity also addressed the artist's eccentric characteristics; Paolo Veronese's assertion that painters share the liberties of poets and madmen reveals the proximity between ideas of artistic greatness and eccentricity— or even pathology— already existent from the Renaissance period.[224] Eighteenth-century Enlightenment thought was still relatively cautious with regard to the adoption of the term, which now appeared mainly associated with imagination. The main reasons for that scepticism were two: the theological origin of the concept, and the conception of art as adherence to rules.[225] As evidenced in Kant's emphasis on a necessary delineation between originality and genius, art was still understood as a studious and

---

[221] In ancient Greek culture, the exception was poetry. Poetry was "ποίησις"(poíesis) and was an act of making: "ποιείν" (poiein). It goes without saying that this was also the culture that birthed the most enduring denouncement of the creative character of the Western artist in history- its relegation to "imitator" by Plato. Władysław Tatarkiewicz, *A History of Six Ideas: An Essay in Aesthetics*, trans. Christopher Kasparek, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1980), 244.
Plato, *The Republic* (Book X, 595a-599a), trans. Allan Bloom (Basic Books, 1991), 277-282.
[222] Tatarkiewicz, 250.
[223] This was, for instance, one of the qualities that Vasari acknowledged in his celebration of Raphael. Liana del Girolami Cheney, "Giorgio Vasari: Artist, Designer, Collector," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Giorgio Vasari*, ed. David J.Cast (London; New York: Routledge, 2016), 42-76, 57.
Patricia Lee Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari: Art and History* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1995), 332.
[224] Tatarkiewicz, 247.
[225] Ibid.,249.

systematic endeavour that could not be judged on the merits of imagination alone.[226] Denis Diderot, on the other hand, went even further to state in his critique of Claude-Joseph Vernet in the Salon of 1767: "imagination creates nothing."[227]

The nineteenth century did not simply mark the elevation of creativity to a prestigious status in artistic activity, but in fact, its near exclusivity in the work of artists. There were various interconnected factors which contributed to this change. Janet Wolff identified that the monopolisation of creativity by artistic work was essentially a consequence of the social isolation of the artist in nineteenth century capitalist societies. The enshrinement of creativity within the realm of the artist followed therefore from a conception of art as separated from, and often in opposition to, social life in industrial capitalism. This is the era when the development of the autonomous institution of art entrenched the work of the artist as a reflection of creativity— and both as opposites to heteronomous labour.[228] This environment magnified the contradictions between artistic and productive economic activity, and art came to be delimited as an autonomous, *theoretically* self-governing sphere.[229] This underlines the fundamental ambiguity of art's autonomy: on the one hand, autonomy was a consequence of the colonisation of modern life by economic transaction, while on the other, it served as a means to defend the status of the artist in the new professionally uncertain environment.[230] Therefore, the monopolisation of creativity as a characteristic of the autonomous activity of the artist was both a consequence of nineteenth century economic organisation and an ineffective, as it was proven, means to mitigate its consequences.

---

[226] Kant Op.cit., 175.

[227] Tatarkiewicz, 249.
Original text from Diderot's review of in the Salon of 1767: "l'imagination ne crée rien, elle imite, elle compose,combine, exagère,agrandit, rapetisse."
Denis Diderot, "Le Salon de 1767," in *Oeuvres de Denis Diderot, Tome Quinzieme,* (Paris: Chez Deterville, Libraire, rue du Battoir No 16), p.210

[228] Here I am relying on André Gorz's definitions of heteronomous and autonomous labour. Heteronomous labour is "work that is subject to social division of labour, specialised and professionalised with a view to commodity exchange." (p.166) On the other hand, autonomous labour describes those activities which are "themselves their own end." Autonomous activities "are valued for and in themselves not because they have no other objective than the satisfaction and pleasure they procure, but because *the action which achieves the goal is as much a source of satisfaction as the achievement of the goal itself*." [emphasis in the original]
André Gorz, *Critique of Economic Reason* (New York; London: Verso, 1989), 165-167.

[229] The theoretical character of the art's autonomy needs to be underlined. As was discussed in the Chapter 1, the centrality of the market precluded any true sense of autonomy. In fact, this contradiction was at the heart of modernist alienation.

[230]Janet Wolff, *The Social Production of Art* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 11.
David Harvey has made a similar argument about the positively commercial impact of autonomy. Harvey has pointed out that the late-nineteenth century rhetoric of autonomy had been to an extent a means of differentiation of cultural from commodity production, while at the same time enhanced the commerciality of the artwork under conditions of increased professional competition.
David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Blackwell Publishers, 1990), 22.

For the artist of the historical avant-garde, the bourgeois proposition that creativity was what unfolds inside the ossified hierarchies of a socially isolated art institution was an absurd one. In fact, the life-forms developing outside the institution were much more vibrant, dynamic, overwhelming, and far exceeded the representational traditions of academic and bourgeois taste. When Tristan Tzara stated in 1922 that "life is far more interesting than art,"[231] art had long ceased being cherished as the sanctuary for what is creative and liberating: the avant-garde artist saw bourgeois art for all its insufficiency. Not only was art inadequate to reflect the dynamism of the modern world; even the avant-garde— for all its new and radical methods— was often unable measure up to it. As Man Ray wrote to Tzara in 1921:

> Cher Tzara— dada cannot live in New York. All New York is dada and will not tolerate a rival— will not notice dada.[232]

In the avant-garde project of the unification of art and life we can, therefore, discern the attempt to synchronise artmaking with the forms of creativity unfolding outside of it. The analytic function of the avant-garde lay in the dismantling of the art-creativity dyad: in the extraction of the "beautiful" and the "extraordinary" from their field of signification. To accomplish that, the artists of the avant-garde invented new artforms immersed in modern representations. The end result of this process was the disruption of the fixity of categories as mediators of relations between individuals and objects: the dissociation of the concept of "genius" from artmaking, and the transformation of art into creative activity freely unfolding in one's everyday life experience.[233] With the attack against art's autonomous status, creativity could now become something that exists unconstrained, penetrating potentially every aspect of life. The first step for the diffusion of creativity into life was, therefore, its decentring. If creativity could exist freely outside art however, then the labour of art could conversely be non-artistic.

The avant-garde incorporation and acknowledgement of extra-artistic labour processes in the construction of the artwork was thus integral to the project of de-essentialising the hierarchical arrangement between art and non-art. The readymade, as the paradigmatic avant-garde artform crystalised the indispensability of heteronomous labour

---

[231] Tristan Tzara stated in 1922: "Art is not the most precious manifestation of life... Life is far more interesting."
Tristan Tzara, *Lecture on Dada*, 1922.
Quoted in Anna Dezeuze, "'Neo-dada,' 'Junk Aesthetic' and Spectator Participation," in*Neo-Avant-Grade*, ed. David Hopkins, (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2006), 49-71, 65.
[232] Jennifer Mundy (ed.), *Man Ray: Writings on Art* (Getty Publications. 2016), 65.
[233] Panagiotis Kondylis, "*Η Παρακμή του Αστικού Πολιτισμού: Από τη Μοντέρνα στη Μεταμοντέρνα Εποχή και από τον Φιλελευθερισμό στη Μαζική Δημοκρατία*" [The Decline of Bourgeois Thought- and Life- Forms: The Liberal Modern and the Mass-democratic Post-modern], (Athens; Θεμέλιο, 1991), 112.

for the existence of the artwork, instrumentalising the social division of labour through the employment of extra-artistic technical skills. While liberating, the expansion of the acceptable forms of art's labour signified at the same time art's entrance into the realm of general economy; this is a side-effect of the avant-garde project well established by now. In its synchronisation with the technological world of capitalism, the avant-garde artwork underwent a gradual elimination of its artisanal base, which was compensated either through activities performed by non-artists or through the performance of technical but non-artisanal skills by the artists themselves, mirroring thus the processes of deskilling in capitalism.[234] While early twentieth century avant-garde practices relied on non-artistic labour extensively, this was normally in the form of alienated labour as a substitute for artistic work. In montage and readymade-based artworks the non-artistic productive procedures embodied in the found material were acknowledged but rarely performed by the artist; it was selection and decontextualisation that formed the first stages of the artist's intervention. Later in the century, post-readymade practices proceeded to acknowledge the composite character of authorship officially, as an internal stage of the productive procedure, in strategies that Roberts describes as "surrogate authorship."[235]

Throughout the twentieth century delegation became a popular strategy across multiple movements and artists, and was employed for the expression of a variety of aesthetic and political motivations. Delegation was just as important a strategy for the "workerist" constructivist experiments of Moholy-Nagy as it was for Warhol's "Taylorist" revision of the Renaissance workshop. One of the earliest examples of formally delegated work in art production was when in 1922, five years after Duchamp's *Fountain*, Moholy-Nagy famously commissioned over the phone five steel paintings covered in porcelain enamel. The artistic labour that Moholy-Nagy contributed was purely immaterial and simply consisted in dialling the factory telephone number and giving the necessary instructions.[236] The embrace of delegation by Conceptual artists later in the century underlined its reversely proportional relationship with art's artisanal conception— techne. As Sol LeWitt asserted, once the idea is established as the essence of the artwork, execution becomes a "perfunctory affair"— something secondary that can be executed by someone other than the artist or even not executed at all.[237] Finally, in Andy Warhol's extensive

[234] Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form*, 87.
[235] Ibid., 139-160.
[236] Ibid., 149.
[237] "When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art... It is usually free from the dependence on the skill of the artist as a craftsman."
Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art (1967)," in *Sol LeWitt,* ed.Alicia Legg (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1978), 166-167, 166.

system of collaboration and delegation his assistants were assigned with those tasks that did not interfere with his signature style; this would regularly make their labour indistinguishable from his own.[238] Warhol's reliance on external work was so thorough that it would at times exceed the tasks strictly related to the material production of the artwork and even involved aesthetic decision-making. According to the famous anecdotal history of the Coca Cola bottle, Warhol's own trademark detached approach was based on Emile de Antonio's recommendation to abandon his early expressive style in favour for a clean-cut, commercial one, while the idea for the *Campbell Soup Cans* of 1962 was allegedly purchased from his friend, Muriel Latow, for the price of fifty dollars.[239]

3.2.2 THE OPEN WORK

The extensive use of delegated work in art production invariably foregrounded the issue of "openness" in art. In his seminal treatise of 1962, Umberto Eco identified two different layers along which we can examine the openness of an artwork. The first would be what we conventionally understand as the elements of subjectivity that reorganise the artwork and its interpretation during its reception. The process by which this type of openness materialises is contingent on the reaction that a work provokes in the audience that it addresses. Reception is naturally not monolithic; the form of a work can be perceived in several different ways and evoke a variety of different responses. The important element that defines a work of art in the Western tradition is that the co-presence of a range of possible interpretations does not invalidate the work's status; the artwork retains its status as art, not in spite of the potentially multiple perspectives from which it can be looked at, but precisely because of them. Even though an artistic proposition might be presented as a completed formal entity, with beginning, middle, and end expressing a specific artistic intention, an element of openness is incontrovertibly inscribed in its reception.[240] When Western art exited its sacral phase and entered the field of aesthetic representation, every work of art became to some degree intrinsically open; unlike signs and objects of utility that cease existing in their intended form and particular meaning when they are removed from a specific context, works of art are generally open to different interpretations without slipping through categories.[241]

Nevertheless, and this is a crucial contribution of Eco's theory, openness is not limited to the types of "interpretation and performance" integral to the reception of art. Modern art

[238] Marco Livingstone, *Pop Art: A Continuing History*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), 78
[239] Martha Buskirk, *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge, Mass; London: The MIT Press, 2003), 76.
[240] Eco, 3-4.
[241] Ibid.

moved on to a relative externalisation of openness— it externalised the freedom of subjective association of interpretation into forms of action that a performer is invited to undertake for the "completion" of the work.[242] The modern artwork is thus premised on a field of possibilities rather than a definite form that produces predetermined performances and elicits fixed meanings. The openness of modern art creates the conditions for external participation beyond the stage of interpretation: "the author offers the interpreter, the performer, the addressee a work *to be completed*."[243] The work of art however, as Eco pointed out, is always governed by a logical organisation which ultimately redirects authorship back to the author. For it to exist, it needs to maintain a stable centre— a modicum of organisation the parameters of which are set by the author: an element of systematicity. These parameters define the extent of external participation: the dimension of openness is not commensurate with an "amorphous invitation to indiscriminate participation."[244]

Not all artworks produce the same conditions for audience intervention in qualitative and quantitative terms. Anna Dezeuze identifies the variance in openness in the dialectic of "extending" and "abolishing the frame of the artwork."[245] The comparison between Robert Rauschenberg's *Black Market* of 1961 (Fig.9) and George Brecht's *Suitcase* of 1959 (Fig.10) highlights how different politics of participation produce different degrees of openness. Rauchenberg's *Black Market* invited viewers to remove one of four numbered objects from a case and replace it with another of their choice. Having done so, they were then instructed to register the new object in one of correspondingly numbered notepads on the canvas, by drawing it in the place of the replaced one. Contrary to Rauschenberg's instructions, Brecht's *Suitcase* was premised simply on the removal of any of the objects from the exhibited case and its subsequent use "in ways appropriate to their nature."[246] While Rauschenberg's clearly laid out instructions limited the artwork within certain parameters articulated and emphasised by the artist, Brecht opened it up by allowing the unrestricted removal and reappropriation of the originally provided items. A similarly different sensitivity between the two artists is highlighted in the juxtaposition of Rauschenberg's *Pilgrim* of 1960 and

[242] Eco traces the historical origins of "openness" in art to a far-reaching cultural and scientific paradigm shift dating back to the Baroque period. This shift, undergirded by the falsification of geocentricity by Copernican astronomy, and the abandonment of Aristotelian essentialism in favour of more empiricist approaches, eventually produced a less static, definite and controlled view of the cosmos.
Ibid., 13-14.
[243] [Emphasis in the original]
Ibid., 19.
[244] Ibid.
[245] Dezeuze Op.cit., 58.
[246] George Brecht, "Announcement for the Exhibition Toward Events, 42" in George Brecht Events: A Heterospective,ed. Alfred Fischer (Cologne: Ludwig Museum, 2005)
Cited in ibid.

Brecht's *Three Chairs Event* of 1961. Rauschenberg's use of the chair saw it attached to a painted canvas; through this gesture Rauschenberg foreclosed it from audience use. Even if an audience member violated Rauschenberg's intention and used the chair, their action would compromise the experience of the work as it would ultimately involve turning their back on the canvas. On the other hand, Brecht envisioned a discreet and seamless incorporation of the chairs in the gallery space, resulting in the audience's inability to distinguish them from their everyday counterparts, unaware of their special status.[247]

Figure 9 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Figure 9 Robert Rauschenberg, Black Market, 1961.

Figure 10 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Figure 10 George Brecht, Suitcase, 1959.

There is, however, an interesting contradiction that needs to be addressed here. When the readymade-based work is not inserted into an explicitly participatory context, its intersection with openness becomes rather aporetic. The reason for this is that, while on the one hand, the readymade's expansion of art's productive base appears to fully encapsulate the logic of openness at a structural level, on the other, its social construction closes it off formally. To clarify: the work of art as a product of acknowledged collaboration abandons the claim to a unitary creative personality and attests to its production through processes that necessarily involve more people than the artist. In industrial capitalism, however, the social construction of the readymade-based artwork is at the same time the source of the very processes that suppress its formal openness. Because the logic of the readymade is the immersion of the artwork in the productive procedures of the general economy, it inevitably borrows— critically or not— its characteristics. The rigidity of industrial design, the commercial finish of the manufactured object and its seriality are simultaneously integral elements of the artwork's collective construction *and* the elements that seal its formal closure. This is an issue that can be observed in the "coldness" of the Minimalist object: theoretically open yet formally closed off.

Ironically, it was Michael Fried's scathing critique of Minimalism in 1967 that explained in detail how these object-based practices retained their openness; this was precisely the reason for Fried's very negative assessment, after all. Minimalist works, by

[247] Ibid., 60-61.

erasing the distance between the medium and the object, became works actualised through their experience by the viewer; they became works based on the modality of viewer experience— essentially "theatrical" and thus relying on a "*stage* presence."[248] Therefore, in their alleged collapse of the inexpressive object and art, openness re-emerged not as a visual quality but as a way of relating. This is an important dimension that characterises much of contemporary art, including of course, socially engaged practices: the retreat of the expressive characteristics of the object— with the disappearance of the object altogether as its logical conclusion— makes exhibition the medium of art. When the internal relational character of the composition is suppressed, it is sublimated into the spatial relating between viewer and work.

3.3 FROM OPENNESS TO ACTION: THREE MODELS OF DELEGATION

Contemporary socially engaged art incorporates these lessons and turns the experiential relation with the work in space into a direct intervention into its formal characteristics. This is accomplished by tying the experience of the audience into the active participation in the production of the work. Unlike the experience of the modern art exhibition, wherein the audience fulfils a productive role only insofar as the artist has conceived their work in the dialectic of the "coefficient of art"— that is, only insofar as the artist expects something to be contributed by the audience either in the form of revealing or producing meaning, as has already been discussed in Chapter 2— socially engaged art practices literalise and perform this relation in space. With the experience of the socially engaged artwork becoming, therefore, inextricable from the labour that the participants provide toward the performance of the work, the experience of the work through participation takes the form of— implicitly or explicitly— delegated labour. The collaborative processes of socially engaged art do not simply commentate on the social character of the production of art but rather literalise it, as they enact the social processes of their production as the mode by which artwork are experienced.

The framing of contemporary socially engaged art in the vague terms of participation is however insufficient. The forms of labour written in the various contemporary articulations derive from different conceptions of delegation, and unlike the original early twentieth century incorporation of non-artistic hands, the expansion of authorship in recent

[248] [Emphasis in original]
Fried, subscribing to Greenberg's theory of modernism, considered the modernist artwork as an autonomous entity which exists irrespective of the viewer; it is therefore defined by its resistance to the theatrical effect. Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 148-172, 155.

decades is not limited to the integration of specialist technical workers. In that respect, we could classify contemporary socially engaged art practices in three categories. The first one is composed of practices that involve expanded authorship but require the use of technical skills by the participants/collaborators, or by the audience more broadly. The second category does not dematerialise the contributing labour of the audience but renders the existence of a shared modicum of technical skills rather inessential. Finally, the last group consists of participatory practices that, without necessarily obviating all types of virtuoso activity among participants, lift the technical barrier of entry completely. The last category of works actualise themselves as nexuses of human interaction and sociality and tend to align participation with its socio-communicative characteristics.

Works such as Rirkrit Tiravanija's *Untitled 2008-2011* (*the map of the land of feeling) I-III* (Fig.11) belong to the first category. The work— an enormously ambitious collaborative print spanning over 3 feet high and 84 feet long, composed of a montage of inkjet printing, lithography and screenprinting[249]— required the work of an entire team of highly specialised workers, among which "several master printers, shop managers and (at least) 40 students worked on the project at one time or another."[250] The work was overseen by Thomas Vu while Tiravanija's involvement consisted mainly in coordinating, often through his assistant, and providing direction.[251]

Figure 11 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Figure 11 Rirkrit Tiravanija, Untitled 2008–2011 (the map of the land of feeling) I–III. 2008-11.

Tiravanija assumed, therefore, a more managerial role as the bulk of the production was taken up by specialist collaborators and volunteers. In contrast with Tiravanija's example, Tobias Rehberger, despite relying on delegated heteronomous labour extensively, employs strategies that attempt to disrupt the one-on-one correspondence between delegation and execution. In 1994 during a visit to Cameroon, Rehberger commissioned the production of chairs based on the classical modernist designs of Gerrit Rietveld, Alvar Aalto, and Marcel Breuer to local craftsmen. The twist he introduced to the task was that he provided the craftsmen with crude drawings of the designs only, resulting thus in products vastly different from their European counterparts. Similarly, beginning in 1999, Rehberger has produced a series of iconic sports cars such as Porsche and McLaren F1 in collaboration with car

[249] Faye Hirsch, "Multiplicity: Passport, Please," *Art in America, no. 6* (June/July 2011): 79-83, 79-80.
[250] Ibid., 80.
[251] Ibid.

manufacturers in Thailand who have had to work off his incomplete plans. Since the plans were by no means sufficient for the production of accurate versions of the originals, Rehberger forced the manufacturers to directly enter the creative process.[252]

Carlos Amorales's *Flames Maquiladora* (2001-2003) (Fig.12) provides an example of the second category. In *Flames Maquiladora*, Amorales transformed over the period of three years gallery spaces into impromptu sweatshops. For this project, Amorales invited audiences to offer their unremunerated labour for the production of traditional Mexican wrestling shoes; that is, to emulate the productive labour that disenfranchised Mexican workers may find themselves forced to. Nevertheless, even though the premise of the project corresponded to a typically technical task, the project was not organised in a way that could filter the participants based on their experience or technical expertise: Amorales did not seek to recruit an audience with shoemaking skills. The success of the project itself was separated from the successful completion of the technical task at hand, and in fact, the goal of Amorales appears to have been rather the opposite: not to actualise Western audiences through the fulfilling employment of technical skills and talents, but to demonstrate that beneath the exotic surface of a cultural curiosity lies a machinery of very real dehumanisation. The drudgery of work in *Flames Maquiladora* becomes, therefore, a microcosm that reflects the depersonalising futility the survival of the global periphery relies on; Amorales employs a relational strategy in order to ridicule the naivety of the claim for emancipation through participation.[253] Quite fittingly then, by the time the project completed its three year cycle not a single shoe had been produced.[254]

Figure 12 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions

Figure 12 Carlos Amorales, Flames Maquiladora, 2003.

Finally, the third category is composed of practices that rely on rather immaterial forms of audience participation. Unlike the previous two groups of social practice, artworks here utilise strategies of delegation that revolve either around the interactions between the participating members of the audience or between the audience and elements— animate or inanimate– of the environment that the artist is responsible for. Even though these practices

[252] Tobias Rehberger, "Sleeping on a Van Gogh: Interview with Antony Spira," in *Tobias Rehberger: Private Matters*, ed. Antony Spira (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2004), 11-22.
[253] Cuauhtémoc Medina, "Gallery Exploits," in *We are the World* (exhibition catalogue for the Dutch Pavillion, 50th Biennale di Venezia, Italy) (Amsterdam: Artimo, 2003)
Cited in Carlos Amorales, *Work Documentation 1996-2015* (Mexico City, 2015), 47.
[254] Ibid., 41.

tend to be generally aligned with, or understood within, Bourriaud's relational framework or Kester's dialogical aesthetics, these terms cannot by any means encompass the entire range of artworks based on these types of extra-artistic work.

Returning to Rirkrit Tiravanija, his signature works are characteristic examples of this last category. His original project *Untitled (Free)* of 1992 (Fig.13), which subsequently spawned a series of emblematic recreations, was built on a disarmingly simple premise. Tiravanija decided to turn the gallery space into a space for free and convivial exchange between people around the unifying experience of culinary pleasure. His work consisted therefore in the transformation of the gallery space into a makeshift restaurant where the members of the audience were offered the traditional Thai curry the artist had prepared. A similarly idealised, unassuming, and technically undemanding vision of social interaction lies at the heart of works such as *Exchange of Mental, Physical and Un-detected Substances of Known and Un-known Matter During a Period of Four Nights*, (1996) (Fig.14) by Carl Michael von Hausswolff, Andrew M. McKenzie and Ulf Bilting for the collective exhibition "Interpol" (Färgfabriken Stockholm, 1996). For this project the artists used the gallery to organise a sleep-in during the first days of the exhibition, inviting the audience to join.[255]

Figure 13 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Figure 13 Rirkrit Tiravanija, Untitled (Free), 303 Gallery, New York, 1992.

Figure 14 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Figure 14 Carl Michael von Hausswolff, Andrew M. McKennie and Ulf Bilting, Exchange of Mental, Physical and Undetected Substances of Know and Unknown Matter During a Period of Four Nights, 1996.

Santiago Sierra, on the other hand, offers a disruptive and antagonistic vision of collective art production. Many of his works are premised on hiring socio-economically marginalised people to perform highly demeaning tasks for negligible money. Sierra outsources the employment of these people to recruitment agencies, does not develop any kind of personal relationship with them, and always emphasises the transactional character of their involvement in the work— a gesture which, as Claire Bishop points out, intensifies the alienating character of his projects.[256] In his work "*Workers Who Cannot Be Paid,*

[255] Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London; New York: Verso, 2012), 211.
[256] Bishop, 223.

Remunerated to Remain inside Carton Boxes" presented in Kunstwerke Berlin in 2000 (Fig.15), Santiago Sierra employed 6 Chechen asylum seekers to stand inside carton boxes for four hours a day over six weeks. Being prohibited from employment due to their legal status, the workers were forced to remain in anonymity for their own safety.[257] Hiring the undocumented refugees to perform this purposeless and dehumanising task for which they were paid disproportionally less in comparison to his own financial gain, Sierra drew a clear parallel between collaboration and extraction of surplus value, reframing the space of art as a space of exploitation and accumulation. This is a topic consistently tackled in the artist's work— in *Person Saying a Phrase* of 2002 Sierra hired a beggar to be recorded saying: "My participation in this work could generate £72,000 profit. I am paid £5."[258] In the self-explanatorily titled *160 cm Line Tattooed on 4 People* (Salamanca, Spain. December 2000) (Fig.16) what was alluded in the carton boxes works— that the ownership of one's body is under constant negotiation in capitalism— becomes the clear object of the action. Four heroin-addicted sex workers were hired for the price of one shot of heroin in exchange for a tattooed line on their backs.[259] Sierra's decentering of authorship takes, therefore, the form of an absolute surrender of the last vestiges of autonomy by people who can no longer afford the illusion of choice. His collaborators are beings bereft of agency, bought and sold, and denied even the most basic dignity.[260]

Figure 15 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Figure 15 Santiago Sierra, Workers Who Cannot Be Paid, Remunerated to Remain Inside Carton Boxes. Kunstwerke Berlin, Germany, September 2000.

Figure 16 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Figure 16 Santiago Sierra, 160 cm Line Tattooed on 4 People. El Gallo Arte Contamporaneo, Salamanca, Spain. December 2000.

---

[257] Before Berlin, Sierra had exhibited the project in Guatemala. Because of the specific German laws which prevent asylum seekers from employment Sierra adapted the title to underline that their involvement did not have the legal character of work.
Viktoria Schmidt-Lisenhoff, On and Beyond the Colour Line: Afterimages of Old and New Slavery in Contemporary Art Since 1990, in *Slavery inArt and Literature: Approaches to Trauma, Memory and Visuality*, eds. Birgit Haehnel, Melanie Ulz (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2010), 59-91, 84.
[258] Santiago Sierra, *Person Saying a Phrase* (New Street, Birmingham, United Kingdom, 2002) http://www.santiago-sierra.com/200202_1024.php (Accessed: 19/03/2015)
[259] Santiago Sierra, *160 cm Line Tattooed on 4 People* (El Gallo Arte Contemporáneo, Salamanca, Spain. December 2000)
http://www.santiago-sierra.com/200014_1024.php (Accessed: 20/03/2015)
[260] Tiravanija and Sierra form one of the "iconic" opposites in social practice; not least due to Claire Bishop's influential essay of 2004, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," where she directly contrasted Tiravanija's "convivial" approach to Sierra's "antagonistic." This is a discussion I will return to in Chapter 5.

3.3.1 THE BANISHMENT OF THE ART OBJECT

Despite the striking differences between the practices of Tiravanija's *Untitled (free)* and Sierra's *Workers Who Cannot Be Paid, Remunerated to Remain inside Carton Boxes*, both artists' works converge in one important aspect: these projects produce no lasting artistic object. Even though there are clear indications that both artists conceive the bodies of their participants as artistic media in varying degrees— Sierra through enactments of exploitation and abuse, and Tiravanija through their presence and reciprocation of openness— neither produces quantifiable, self-enclosed aesthetic objects that can exist beyond the lifespan of the project. The focus of the work lies instead in the production of social relations— however intimate, enjoyable, cathartic or agonising these may be. For both artists the site of meaning production no longer lies in stable artistic forms but in the exploration of tensions and commonalities— in elements of intersubjectivity, or the lack thereof. And although the participants retain their materiality after the end of the action, and might even carry the scars of their participation, they cease to exist as anything but aspects of documentation once the work completes its cycle.

This is, of course, not a characteristic unique to these two artists; the art of the "social turn" in general exhibits a tendency toward the departure from the production of art objects. Its intersubjective orientation, reflected in the move away from a definition of artistic labour as the production of *quantifiable* material outcomes, raises thus the issue of immateriality in artistic and general economy. The dematerialisation of the artistic products of socially engaged practices— their resistance to the production of clearly representable, quantifiable and marketable art objects— is in fact a direction toward which the activist and relational tendencies of the "social turn" converge.

As activist forms of socially engaged art are by definition disembedded from a limiting conception of art practice as the production of art objects, their analysis does not present too many significant complications. The premise of these practices tends to be relatively straightforward; it always involves a cause, abstract or specific in varying degrees, an initiative that inspires a primary form of mobilisation, the planning out of the procedures necessary for the materialisation of the work, and, finally, the implementation of forms of action that have been decided through processes of interaction between the artist(s) and a group of participants or collaborators. The end-result of these activist practices consists of material outcomes that could be examined through the prism of art but cannot be reduced to art-commodity forms. Let us then consider two examples of this "tradition."

Figure 17 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Figure 17 Joseph Beuys, 7,000 Oak Trees, 1982. Kassel, Germany.

When Joseph Beuys was invited by Documenta to produce and exhibit a work for the exhibition of 1982 (*documenta 7*), he decided that instead of a sculptural piece he would direct his energy to a large-scale project of environmental regeneration; an idea that led to the *7,000 Oak Trees* (Fig.17) which was eventually completed a year after his death in 1986. In line with his ecological concerns as well as his, admittedly, highly idealistic belief in art's "evolutionary-revolutionary" potential for a universal transformation of life,[261] *7,000 Oak Trees* took the form of a major intervention in the urban and ecological planning of Kassel. The project was based on collective action, deliberation with local authorities and collaboration with communities toward consensual solutions and their implementation. It is noteworthy that Beuys did not conceive the project as mere public service but in rather aestheticised terms; the tree planting process was tied to the management of 7,000 large basalt stones that had been piled up outside the main hub of the Documenta organisation, the Fridericanum museum in Kassel. The mechanism for the activation of the work was the following: for every tree planted, a stone would be removed, incentivising, therefore, the progression of the project and at the same time transforming it into a piece on ephemerality, movement, and rebirth. *7,000 Tree Oaks* was as much a project of ecological activism as it was a conceptual-land art piece.

Park Fiction (Fig.18), on the other hand, has a very different origin story. Park Fiction was born out of the collective reaction against the redevelopment of the waterfront area of Hamburg. When in 1994 Hamburg city authorities decided to repurpose a piece of public land for the construction of high-rise buildings that would wall off the residents of the Hafenstraße neighbourhood from the city waterfront, local activists, artists, and social workers formed an activist group in protest.[262] This was the platform that spawned the Park Fiction project, originally conceived by the Hamburg-based artists Christoph Schäfer and Cathy Skene.[263] Park Fiction gradually evolved into a large-scale social project that

[261] "Only on condition of a radical widening of definition will it be possible for art and activities related to art to provide evidence that art is now the only evolutionary-revolutionary power. Only art is capable of dismantling the repressive effects of a senile social system that continues to totter along the deathline: to dismantle in order to build A SOCIAL ORGANISM AS A WORK OF ART."
Joseph Beuys, "I am Searching for Field Character" (1973), in *Participation*, ed. Claire Bishop (London; Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006), 123-125, 125.
[262] The name of the group was "Hafenrandferein" (Harbour Edge Association).
Kester, *The One and the Many*, 202.
[263] Ibid.

combined activism, urban planning and art. Its programmatic goal was the recuperation of the land designated for gentrification and the revitalisation of the public space into a park envisioned, built, and enjoyed collectively. This led to a long process of collective work, negotiation and artistic activity. The planning process was gamified in order to attract the participation of local populations in processes aimed at the actualisation of aesthetic and practical desires into an open political intervention in the commons. The efforts of the project were eventually fruitful; within a decade of its inception the project had successfully prevented the original plans and managed to construct the largest parts of the park, which was officially inaugurated in 2005. Park Fiction has since attracted the attention of major art institutions and was for the first time incorporated in installation form in Platform 5 of *documenta 11* in 2002. There, a Park Fiction delegation installed seven constructivist-inspired benches containing important material documenting the history, activities and processes of the project (Fig.19).[264]

Figure 18 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Figure 18 Park Fiction, Hamburg, Germany.

Figure 19 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Figure 19 Park Fiction, Documenta 11, 2002.

In the more relational-oriented practices, Felix Gonzalez-Torres's series of "stacks" works underline that even when the artwork has a more demarcated material existence— approximating the more conventional notion of an object-based practice or installation— it is often contingent or intentionally understated. The 'stacks' works may indeed be understood from the perspective of a minimalist practice on seriality and repetition. *Untitled (Death by Gun)* of 1990 (Fig.20) reflected these formal concerns through the specific modes by which the sheets of paper were configured on the gallery floor. Similarly, in *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* of 1991, the rectangle formed by boiled sweets had a distinct sculptural quality, while its leaning at the intersection of the gallery walls placed it within a context of minimalist spatial exploration. Nevertheless, the works' essence was by no means confined to the aesthetic considerations that governed the arrangement of the multiple objects. Torres's artworks were centred around the interaction of the audience members with the offered objects and among themselves, as they were confronted with a

[264] Park Fiction Installation, Documenta11, 2002
http://park-fiction.net/park-fiction-documenta11/ (Accessed 12/11/2017)

gesture of generosity and were thus compelled to negotiate issues of freedom and responsibility. The audience, by picking up and keeping the pieces of the works that were at its disposal, affected its form and ultimately threatened— at least symbolically— its continuity.[265] Ultimately, it was only through the audience's interactions that Torres's object configurations were signified and transformed into what they truly were: meditations on permanence and loss, with materiality forming the pretext that set this dialogue in motion.

Finally, in Olafur Eliasson's *The Weather Project* of 2003 (Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, London) (Fig.21) the giant orange globe that represented the sun, composed of hundreds of tiny lamps, the dry ice effects that created an impression of mist, and the giant mirror on the ceiling reflecting the movement of bodies in space, were not the components of a work that could exist by virtue of its own materiality.[266] Their use was instead directly related to the creation of a specific atmosphere that audiences could navigate; they were simply instruments for the creation of an environment that allowed the transformation of a banal theme of everyday interaction into an apocalyptic collective spectacle. *The Weather Project* attempted therefore to transform the proverbial instances of socialising around discussions about the weather into an exploration of the contingent nature of sociality.[267]

Figure 20 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Figure 20 Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Untitled (Death by Gun), 1990.

Figure 21 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Figure 21 Olafur Eliasson, The Weather Project., 2003. Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, London.

[265] Shannon Jackson underlines the symbolic character of precarity in Torres's *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* of 1991: the sweets were in fact replenished regularly during the display of the work.
Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (London: Routledge, 2011), 46.
[266] Janet Kraynak, "Therapeutic Participation: On the Legacy of Bruce Nauman's Yellow Room (Triangular) and Other Works," in *Practicable: From Participation to Interaction in Contemporary Art*, eds. Samuel Bianchini, Erik Verhagen (Cambridge, Mass; London, England: MIT Press, 2016), 459-467, 459-460.
[267] In a 2004 interview the artist described the social character of the work: "I'm not interested in weather as a matter of science...I'm not a meteorologist or a botanist. I'm interested in people: how people engage sensually with the qualities of weather -- rain, mist, ice, snow, humidity -- so that through their engagement they may understand how much of our lives are cultural constructions."
Michael Kimmelman, "The Sun Sets at the Tate Modern," New York Times, March 21, 2004 https://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/21/arts/art-the-sun-sets-at-the-tate-modern.html (Accessed: 02/05/2017)

3.4 DEMATERIALISATION AND RELATIONAL AESTHETICS

3.4.1 THE INTERSTICE

What is interesting here is that, while the resistance that activist tendencies of socially engaged art demonstrate toward the production of art objects follows from their premises, relational practices, despite often operating directly within and through the institutions of art, demonstrate a similar tendency toward occluding the material art object. Relational practices are, indeed, centred on the production and examination of gestures and social relations which are by definition not as readily quantifiable in traditional economic terms compared to conventional art objects. This inevitably raises certain questions regarding their position in the wider art-economy matrix: what are the material relations that arise from relational art in the absence of clearly demarcated art objects? Bourriaud's response to this was rather ambitious— as he wrote in "Relational Aesthetics" of 1998, relational art practices, irreducible to portable, self-enclosed art objects, are governed by an economy that is not subsumed by the relations of the general. Because "practice" as a category does not collapse into "object," the mechanisms of production and dissemination of relational practices exhibit a certain resistance to the formation of exchange-values; ultimately, a resistance to the commodity-form.[268]

In Bourriaud's account, central to relational art's decommodifying function is its "interstitial" character, with "interstice" being a term that Bourriaud references from Marx's writings.[269] As Bourriaud wrote, operating as a "social interstice," the exhibition of relational art:

> "creates free zones, and time spans whose rhythm contrasts with those structuring everyday life, and it encourages an inter-human commerce that differs from the 'communication zones' that are imposed upon us."[270]

Nevertheless, Bourriaud constructs this claim on the basis of a bizarre distortion of the original meaning of "interstice" in Marx. Bourriaud claims that by "interstice" Marx described those communities which existed alongside early capitalist economies without being integrated in capitalist relations— these communities lived, according to Bourriaud,

---

[268] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 42.

[269] Marx had in turn borrowed the concept from the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus. In Epicurean cosmology, "interstices" ("μετακόσμια" in the original language, and "intermundia" in the Latin the term survived in) designated spaces wherein atoms were not joined up, leaving them, thus, void and formless. Manuel Mazetti, "Epicureans and Gnostics in tr.47 (Enn. III 2) 7.29-41," in *Plotinus and Epicurus: Matter, Perception, Pleasure*, eds. Angela Longo, Daniela Patrizia Taormina (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 69-81, 73.

[270] Bourriaud,16.

self-sufficient lives, "free from the law of profit"[271] even. This could not be further from the truth however: what for Bourriaud carries melancholic, yet empowering connotations, for Marx was a definite sign of regression— of inadequate evolutionary or economic development. Interstices, which in Marx's Capital are used to refer to the societies of tribal ancient trading nations:

> ...are founded either on the immaturity of man as an individual, when he has not yet torn himself loose from the umbilical cord of his natural species-connection with other men, or on direct relations of dominance and servitude. They are conditioned by a low stage of development of the productive powers of labour and correspondingly limited relations between men within the process of creating and reproducing their material life, hence also limited relations between man and nature.[272]

Interstices were, thus, not conceived as liminal "third spaces"[273] of freedom from oppression. They were social formations that were either lagging in terms of the development of their productive forces compared to the societies they existed in the peripheries of, or even worse, kept together by relations of brutal domination. What is even more illustrative is that in the "Grundrisse," the concept of "interstice" is painted in an even more negative light: when Marx referred to it, he did so to juxtapose the ancient trading nations— the Carthaginians and Phoenicians— with societies that had developed commodity producing economies, such as the ancient Greeks and Romans. Yet again, in Marx's analysis, the nations of the interstices were not free in the way that Bourriaud would misinterpret: in fact, due to their lack of an advanced productive base sufficiently organised within the productive process, they were utterly enslaved to exchange-values. In Marx's analysis, for the nations of the interstices exchange-value was the "nexus rerum."[274]

It will have to be, of course, presumed that Bourriaud's intention was not to project Marx's observation of interstitial despotic tribalism or the complete subordination to exchange-values onto the social space of the contemporary exhibition of relational art. Apart from the absence of materialist analysis that Bourriaud's use of interstice demonstrates— an absence which characterises a significant part of relational discourses—

---

[271] Ibid..

[272] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1990), p.173.

[273] Here, I am very liberally referring to Homi K. Bhabha's interstitial theory and its "third space" as the space wherein colonial subject and coloniser could temporarily coexist outside the strictly defined framework of colonial domination.
Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004)

[274] Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, (Notebook II: The Chapter on Money), trans. Martin Nicolaus (Vintage Books, 1973), 223.

Bourriaud's use of this metaphor is also an attempt to address the art space with an unexpected Adornian twist; a move admittedly uncharacteristic considering the significant differences among the two on issues of art's autonomy.[275] Nevertheless, the evocation of Marx in Bourriaud writing inadvertently calls attention to another cynical historical truth. Within a predominant, totalising economic paradigm, divergence can exist only marginally and temporarily: the interstitial nations did not survive their encounters with the ancient societies that could mobilise greater productive forces— that is, the "capitalist" ones in Bourriaud's quasi-Marxian narrative.

If, on the other hand, a parallel model of production is allowed to exist alongside the hegemonic one in *non-antagonistic* terms— "more or less harmoniously and openly into the overall system," as Bourriaud remarks[276]— then we have to examine its utility, and whether its relative exemption from the totalising pressures of market economics is a reflection of a specific role it fulfils. This is also the problem of analyses that examine the political character of art on the basis of its direct commercial exploitation alone; these analyses tend to overlook the specific political and cultural functions of the artworld in modernity— from nation building to the normalisation of social protocols, to celebration of democratic freedoms. There is, consequently, always the possibility that art can appear exempt from mechanisms of commodification, not as the result of some radical act of resistance, but due to a particular role it fulfils; that its availability and generous distribution are in some shape or form useful for the reproduction of a specific political economy. If the commodity does not emerge explicitly inside an art space it might not be because artists or curators have devised a strategy that banishes the commodity-form from a specific sphere of social life, but that it was perhaps not designed to appear there in the first place.[277] This

[275] Bourriaud's twist is Adornian in its evocation of premodern, precapitalist institutions as vestiges of resistance to capitalist domination. Adorno had highlighted that the domination of cultural production by the market unfolded in parallel with the democratic control of life in modernity. Prefascist modern Europe then, having a more substantial historical connection to predemocratic socio-cultural institutions, tended to grant artists more substantial freedoms from commercialisation compared to the United States of America. Horkheimer, Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightement: Philosophical* Fragments, 105.

[276] Bourriaud Op.cit., p.16.

[277] Even this hypothesis is too generous. In reality, by withholding the artwork from the possibility of exchange, the work is not divested from its value, but the opposite: it is reframed as too valuable— rare— for exchange. It could, therefore, be understood along the lines of Igor Kopytoff's singularisation; a process precipitating an artwork's temporary removal from the flow of exchange. Parallel to its (temporary) removal from exchange, economic activity can be carried out through an entire array of related products and documents that take its place and are monetised as its proxy forms. Furthermore, we should not forget that relational works do get sold and bought, just as Conceptual works did in the 1960s and 1970s. For example, Rirkrit Tiravanija's *untitled (free/still)* has been purchased by the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which it then recreated in 2012.
See Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as a Process," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, 1986), 64-91.

is the essence of the affirmative character of art, after all— that it can operate as a zone of human experience seemingly shielded from the relations of subordination and alienation which govern the totality of human life. And, fully cognisant of my bordering on a "rabid criticism of culture," as Adorno had framed cultural critique on the basis of a totalised affirmative character,[278] by fulfilling this role, the space of art can indirectly affirm and reproduce the conditions of its own existence in capitalism which are the conditions of a capitalist economy.

3.4.2 CONCEPTUALISM AND COMMODIFICATION

Bourriaud's formulation that relational practices' irreducibility to the portable, self-enclosed object insinuates their being governed by an economy that stands in relative autonomy from the general one, clearly echoes Lucy Lippard's analysis of Conceptual art's dematerialisation of the art object during the late 1960s and 1970s. In 1968, outlining the general characteristics of this transformation, Lucy Lippard and John Chandler wrote:

> During the 1960's, the anti-intellectual, emotional/intuitive processes of art-making characteristic of the last two decades have begun to give way to an ultra-conceptual art that emphasizes the thinking process almost exclusively. As more and more work is designed in the studio but executed elsewhere by professional craftsmen, as the object becomes merely the end product, a number of artists are losing interest in the physical evolution of the work of art. The studio is again becoming a study. Such a trend appears to be provoking a profound dematerialization of art, especially of art as object, and if it continues to prevail, it may result in the object's becoming wholly obsolete.[279]

This transition toward conceptualism had, Lippard described, impacted upon not simply the forms and processes of art production but its commercial character, as well. The Conceptual turn had liberated artists from the limitations that materiality imposed on their practice; a work of art could exist even if it was never embodied in a specific and finalised material form. At the same time, the potential existence of the artwork in the conceptual realm removed the artwork-as-object from the market: "since dealers cannot sell art-as-idea,

[278] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 252.
[279] Lucy Lippard and John Chandler, The Dematerialization of Art, in Lucy Lippard, *Changing: Essays in Art Criticism* (New York: Dutton, 1971), 255-276, 255.
Reprinted from Lucy Lippard and John Chandler, The Dematerialization of Art, Art International, Vol 12, no.2 (February 1968)

economic materialism is denied along with physical materialism."[280] Lippard posited thus the primacy of the abstract, ideational qualities in 1960s-1970s Conceptual practices as a strategy against art's commodification.

It is hard not to identify the origins of Lippard's thinking in late eighteenth and nineteenth century ideologies of autonomy— in the emergence of a conception of art as a reaction to the crisis of the bourgeoisie: the widespread anxiety about the rising bourgeois commercialisation of life and the concomitant deterioration of cultural-intellectual life. In Lippard's text the artist suspends the artwork's materiality— dematerialises art— allowing it thus to exist safely as an idea, free from the corrupting influence of the bourgeois art dealer-cum-philistine. Ironically then, Lippard's immateriality appears to have been motivated by the same concerns that had led Greenberg to materiality— the medium— close to three decades earlier.[281]

It is probably redundant to state here that Lippard's utopian projection was undoubtedly wrong, and that Conceptual art did not dismantle the art market. The most troubling aspect of her suggestion is, however, that it was not proven wrong by history; it was wrong even at the time it was being articulated. The entire movement toward art's dematerialisation occurred in parallel with the evolution of a variety of methods aimed to establish the legal-commercial status of the artwork, and, hence, its ability to be sold and exhibited. Even more illuminating is that these strategies were, in fact, pioneered by artists themselves. When the conventionally visual and material aspects of the artwork retreated, their place was taken by contracts, certificates and instructions. This was a change already underway from the early 1960s.

For example, in 1961 Piero Manzoni produced multiple *Declarations of Authenticity*. These were, however, not intended to accompany and authorise an artwork. They were instead certifying the status of their buyer as an artwork; in reality, Manzoni did not produce

---

[280] Ibid., 270.

[281] "Picasso, Braque, Mondrian, Miro, Kandinsky, Brancusi, even Klee, Matisse and Cézanne derive their chief inspiration from the medium they work in."
Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch", in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 3-21, 7.
Greenberg's thesis in "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" was that the industrialisation of Western societies was plagued by the asymmetric development of material and cultural standards. The universal literacy of the new working and petit-bourgeois classes went alongside demands for cultural consumption. These newly formed needs were met by new cultural industries profiteering off the debased material of capitalism or the vulgarisation of high art tropes. Greenberg originally highlighted the kitsch bastardisation of high and low culture as the most insidious threat to the survival of "genuine" culture. This was a position that he later revised with his identification of middlebrow culture as significantly more effective in subverting the standards of intellectual and cultural achievement.
Clement Greenberg, "The Plight of Our Culture (1953)," in*The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 3: Affirmations and Refusals, 1950-1956*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 122-157.

but the certificates of non-existent artworks which he then proceeded to sell as works of art. On the other hand, Robert Morris's *Document (Statement of Aesthetic Withdrawal)* of 1963 (Fig.22) was not intended to authorise an artwork but, on the contrary, to suspend its status. *Document* was a notarised declaration which proclaimed in a legalistic manner that the art status of Morris's earlier work *Litanies* (1961) had been withdrawn by the artist himself. If visuality and permanence were the hallmarks of the object of the art market, Morris's gesture was pointing to the negation of both: Morris recognised that after the Duchampian readymade the artwork had become a matter of "legal definition" and "institutional validation."[282] Nevertheless, his performative invalidation of the artistic status of *Litanies* was not merely a comment on Duchamp's legacy— it was also his mock retaliation to Philip Johnson's failure to pay him on time for the purchase of *Litanies*: Morris was, therefore, defending his own interests as an artist by retroactively invalidating the status of his work through the production of another work. Ironically, *Document* ended up being purchased by the architect himself. Finally, in Robert Barry's *Inert Gas Series* of 1969 the material substance of the artwork was replaced by a series of distractions and confirmations that the artwork truly exists. Barry had promised that when *Inert Gas Series* was purchased, he would release inert, hence invisible, gases in Mojave Desert. Seth Siegelaub, the pioneer and "curator-at-large"[283] of Conceptual art, had advertised *Inert Gas Series* as a poster but, in reality, the poster only repeated a description of the work, provided a post office box address, and a phone number. The phone number, finally, completed the cycle as it only led to a pre-recorded description of the work.[284]

Figure 22 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions

Figure 22 Robert Morris, Document, 1963. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

It would then be safe to conclude that the market proved to be rather receptive to the Conceptual dematerialisation of the artwork. What needs to be underlined is that the performative legal and commercial manoeuvres which facilitated the integration of Conceptual art in the market were not post hoc adjustments aiming to subsume an unexploited market, but were happening in parallel with the development of Conceptual

[282] Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October*, vol. 55 (1990): 105–143, 117. www.jstor.org/stable/778941

[283] Joseph Kosuth, "Art After Philosophy," in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*,eds. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, Mass; London, England: MIT Press, 2000), 158-177, 175.

[284] Noah Horowitz, *Art of the Deal: Contemporary Art in a Global Financial Market* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014), 96.

art. Declarations, instructions and various other types of documents were not produced after the fact, as memorabilia or compensation for the absence of artworks in an exchangeable material form.[285] The entire history of dematerialisation was rather intertwined with the development of strategies of display, acquisition and reproduction which became necessary with the retreat of materiality and visuality.[286]

Furthermore, the strategies that composed the production and distribution apparatus of Conceptual art did not evolve in a historical vacuum but reflected wider shifts in the techno-economic landscape of the 1960s and 1970s. As David Harvey demonstrated in his influential study of 1989, beginning in the mid-1960s, the American post-World War II economic model (Fordist industrial organisation and Keynesian economics) entered a phase of irreversible decline. Fordism as a system involved three dimensions: mass production, mass consumption, and a system of regulation that ensured a level of stability among producers and consumers to sustain the system.[287] Unable to absorb the post-war economic recoveries of Western Europe and Japan, as well as the increased competition following the internationalisation of Fordist productive structures in developing countries, the corporate economy of the United States of America was faced with a crisis of profitability.[288] This period of internal uncertainty— with American corporate productivity and profitability being in steady decline after 1966[289]– came to an end when the 1973 oil crisis, caused by the OPEC embargo on USA for its support to Israel in the Yom Kippur War of 1973, substituted the slow decline of that period with a full-blown crisis and a deep recession.[290] From 1973 onward, Western advanced capitalist economies, with USA leading the way, moved to a rapid internal restructuring which Harvey has described as the regime of "flexible accumulation."[291]

---

[285] Miwon Kwon, "Exchange Rate: On Obligation and Reciprocity in Some Art of the 1960s and After," in *The 'Do-it Yourself' Artwork: Participation from Fluxus to New Media*, ed. Anna Dezeuze, (Manchester University Press, 2010), 230.

[286] It should thus come as no surprise that a major concern of Siegelaub was the regulation of transactions in Conceptual art; in 1971 he and Robert Projansky published the contract template "The Artist's Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement."

[287] For an analysis of "Regulation Theory" see:
Alain Lipietz, *Towards a New Economic Order: Postfordism, Ecology, and Democracy* (New York; Oxford: 1992)

[288] Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, 141.
The eventual internationalisation of Fordism created conditions of competition that fully advanced Fordist economies with strong labour social contract could not address.
See Erica Schoenberger "From Fordism to Flexible Accumulation: Technology, Competitive Strategies, and International Location," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 6, no. 3 (Sept. 1988): 245–262, pp.248-252.

[289] Harvey Op.cit., 141.

[290] Ibid., 145.

[291] Harvey described flexible accumulation as follows: "Flexible accumulation, as I shall tentatively call it, is marked by a direct confrontation with the rigidities of Fordism. It rests on flexibility with respect to labour processes, labour markets, products, and patterns of consumption. It is characterized by the emergence of

Now, the regime of "flexible accumulation" had important consequences on the physical nature of production. Utilising enhanced technological protocols, the post-Fordist alignment of the economy managed to reduce the production turnover time, which ultimately pressed toward the acceleration of consumption turnover time. This led to the sharp reduction of product life-spans, with certain sectors recording reductions even by fifty percent.[292] As Harvey has pointed out, the acceleration of production and consumption replaced the relatively stable aesthetic of Fordist modernism with an ever-changing, ephemeral and unstable one: the economic mobility of flexible accumulation fed into a new cultural and aesthetic dynamism.[293] All the tendencies associated with dematerialisation in Lippard's account— conceptualism, process art, performance— were embedded thus in a socio-economic environment under reconstruction. Already underway from the mid-1960s, the rigidity of the post-war Fordist paradigm was yielding to more flexible forms of employment, consumption and identity. With that, the symbolic stability of the centralised, permanent hierarchies underlying the industrial commodity of Fordism was receding in favour of flexible types of organisation valorising change, ephemerality and mobility. That Lippard did not identify the connection between the negation of the art object and the decline of the Fordist "sublime" can certainly be attributed to the inchoate stage of these transformations at the time of her observations. On the other hand— and taking into account the mainstream acceptance of post-Fordist analyses in contemporary critiques of capitalism— it is perplexing that "Relational Aesthetics" did not reflect on what the implications of these changes might be with regard to art's dematerialisation and its position in post-1960s Western capitalism. Even more so since Bourriaud does acknowledge the historicity of relational art— its embeddedness in the shift from an industrial to a service-oriented production model.[294]

---

entirely new sectors of production, new ways of providing financial services, new markets, and, above all, greatly intensified rates of commercial, technological, and organizational innovation."
Ibid, 147.

[292] By 1989, when Harvey's study was published, in the so-called "thoughtware industries" (video games, software programmes) the lifespan of a product had recorded a decrease to less than eighteen months.
Ibid.,156.

[293] Ibid.

[294] Bourriaud has drawn a parallel between the formal inaccessibility and complexity of modernist form, which he interpreted as a response to the domination of mass production, and the relational exploration of human relations and communication which corresponds to the service-oriented globalised present.
Nicholas Bourriaud, *Postproduction: Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World* (New York: Lucas & Steiberg, 2002), 14.

3.4.3 THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY

In 1998, the year of the publication of "Relational Aesthetics," in the world of economics, Harvard Business Review was publishing an article announcing triumphantly a new stage in the history of capitalism. The article's title was welcoming the world of business into a new lucrative market, that of experience.[295] In the following year, Joseph B. Pine II and James H. Gilmore, the writers of the original article, would compile their observations and strategies into a larger work titled "The Experience Economy." There, the writers built upon the premise of the original article: goods and services are no longer enough "to foster economic growth, create new jobs and maintain economic prosperity."[296] Yet, the venerable world of business had nothing to fear from the unfolding crisis of the secondary and tertiary economic sectors: the most successful among them had already adapted their model from the production of goods and services to the production of experiences— a true "fourth economic offering,"[297] promising triumph over competition, and ultimately the redefinition of global capitalism.

The observations of the writers were not truly as new or revolutionary as they would have liked them to be. In fact, the writers were clearly polishing and rebranding things that had been known and applied for decades. The commodification of experience had been anticipated decades earlier with the adaptation of 1950s humanist, individual-focused psychological theories of self-actualisation to the manageralisation of human needs, and the connection of psychological wellbeing with productivity.[298] There is thus no clear distinction between the tertiary domain of the economy and experience; the discovery of experience as a commodity rather reflects a stage in the evolution of capitalism where the oversaturation of the market casts into relief the necessity of a purely aesthetic reorientation of value derived from consumption— it is not so much a "fourth economic offering" as it is a new process of fetishisation. On that account, the commodification of experience offers indeed certain objective advantages. Experience is an elusive commodity— it is a form of economic activity which continuously denies the possibility of its existence as commodity.[299] Because experience entails the ways by which the external world is filtered

[295] Joseph B. Pine, James H. Gilmore, Welcome to the Experience Economy, *Harvard Business Review,* Vol 76, no. 4(1998): 97-105.
[296] Joseph B. Pine, James H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy*: Updated Edition, (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2011), ix.
[297] Ibid., 3.
[298] See for example Abraham Maslow's 1965 work (originally titled "Eupsychian Management") on applied psychology in the workplace where he connected the idea of self-actualisation to the work environment.
Abraham Harold Maslow, *Maslow on Management* (John Wiley, 1998)
[299] "Commoditized. No company wants that applied to its products."
Pine, Gilmore Op.cit., 1.

through subjectivity, under conditions that do not resemble a dissociative state, experience asserts itself in relative continuity with one's sense of identity. It thus lays a claim to a naturalness unmediated by the predetermined bounds of consumption.

As experience is internalized and is, therefore, not anymore confined to the spatiotemporal characteristics of its production and dissemination, it obscures its quantification in measurable units. Experience follows its consumers beyond the context of their consumption: it unfolds in time and "time is the currency of experiences:"[300] the consumer of experience embodies it long after and outside its context. As a consequence, the experience-based enterprise does not merely deal in commodities whose production relations are more resistant to demystification, but also radically expands the horizon of transactions. The experience economy does not get to monetise simply the time spent in locations or events but also the time past it.[301] It is thus illustrative that Pine and Gilmore propose that experience's transformative potency can and should be activated through the hybridisation of enterprise and art— theatre in particular:

> From now on, leading-edge companies— whether they sell to consumers or businesses— will find that the next competitive battleground lies in staging experiences.[302]

The rhetoric of the experience economy presents, therefore, the cynical inversion of Lippard's "art intended as pure experience," defying "ownership, reproduction, and sameness:"[303] it is certainly not art but parasitic to it, free just enough to reproduce its own conditions, and as spontaneous as life in its total administration. When the world of business is openly repackaging the rhetoric of immateriality in marketing manifestos ridden with managerial newspeak, the insistence on some abstract decommodifying qualities that immateriality procures becomes rather troubling.

3.4.4 MARXIAN PROBLEMS

Damning as that may be, it only touches the surface of the necessary critique of Bourriaud's position. His suggestion that the primacy of practice over object— that is, the objective irreducibility of relational art practices— signifies a kind of escape from the general economy and thus relational art's intrinsic resistance to the formation of exchange-

[300] Ibid., xv.
[301] Ibid.
[302] Pine, Gilmore, Welcome to the Experience Economy, 97.
[303] Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1997), 112.

values, needs to also be recognised as a clear evocation of Marx's critique of commodity fetishism. Marx's classical analysis of commodity fetishism posited that for as long as a product of human labour exists outside a relation of exchange, it exists as a use-value. As a use-value, the materials and labour expended for the object's production are still intelligible. With its isolated production and subjection to a measure of universal equivalency— money— its use-value is obscured by its place in exchange. This constitutes the mechanism of commodity production: the commodity emerges when the product of private human labour enters the horizon of universal equivalency. The effect that the commodity-form has is to obscure the actual material realities of the object's production; the prevalence of exchange removes the commodity from the sphere of the social relations of production as it now appears only related to a specific amount of money ascribed to it. This reframes the human characteristics of production as the "objective characteristics" of the commodity;[304] commodification therefore mystifies the social relations that production is embedded in. In the world of universal equivalency the world of social relations becomes thus the world of relations between objects.[305] Bourriaud, drawing on this analysis, suggested that since the production of an exchange-value obscures the actual social relations of the producers— hence, the relations between people— and relational practices foreground the primacy of social relations, relational practices then manage to demystify the social relations between people as they free them from the mediation of the commodity.[306] Bourriaud used this logic to describe relational practices but in reality, if his argument was valid, it would cover socially engaged practices more generally. It is my position that, more than any omission of contextual economic information, this argument is the most dangerous one. The reason for that is that it carries the semblance of rigour that could facilitate its universalisation to legitimise all artforms that lay claim to the demystification of social relations on the basis of resisting the art object. It is also deeply misleading.

Firstly, the application of a Marxian value-form analysis in art production is not uncontroversial. An artwork in the Western tradition is certainly the product of a process of fetishisation but, unlike other products of human labour, it is precisely this fetishisation which allows its existence in its intended status— as an artwork. Whereas with commonplace products of human creativity the conceptual distinction between their pre-commodity and commodity-form is possible, the Western conception of the artwork is fully

[304] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1990), 164-165.
[305] Ibid.
[306] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 42.

inscribed in a process of fetishisation. While an everyday object is still objectively an everyday object before it becomes a symbol of a sociocultural identity and lifestyle, the artwork, disentangled from a horizon of appreciation which, governed by a particular understanding of history and theory, objectifies its value, becomes something else entirely: sometimes a piece of biography, sometimes a tool for broader knowledge production, sometimes an utterly non-communicative, closed off form. The use-value of the artwork is not, therefore, obscured by its entry in the relation of exchange: its use-value *as artwork* exists only due to the objectification of its characteristics. Bourriaud, indeed, acknowledges that an art object is devoted from its inception to the world of commerce, that it is in fact an "absolute commodity,"[307] which exists purely as exchange-value devoid of any use, and thus inextricable from what Marx described as fetishism, yet exempts "practices" from this process.[308]

Bourriaud's suggestion is not entirely without merit: as practices reveal the processes of the artwork's production, they resist the tendency toward autopoiesis— they resist their perception as objective, self-enclosed and self-produced entities, separated from the material of social life. This may well be valid, yet isolating the examination of autopoiesis to the production process of an artwork and not the total system of its signification fails to acknowledge the absolute dependence of relational practices, and often socially engaged art more generally, on the category of art. That we understand the performance of certain, sometimes unremarkable, aspects of sociality and social activity as carrying out a specific function with a specific importance that merits a specific discussion and analysis is a consequence of this episode of sociality unfolding inside or in relation to the institutions of art. The artists championed by Bourriaud in "Relational Aesthetics" do not derive authorship and value as mere facilitators of ordinary social relations. They extract material and symbolic capital as *artists* whose work taps into a contemporary demand for a re-enchanted consumption of democratic culture. There is thus no system of mystification that distorts the original meaning of relational practices: this distortion is their original meaning. That relational art can ostensibly avoid the overt association with the "absolute commodity" should by no means be construed as testament to its escape from the commodity-form. In fact, this semblance of resistance is drawn from the long post-avant-garde history of art as exploration of the relations it is embedded in *and* the "social turn's" reinterpretation of Bourdieu's art as inversion of economic logic that has been laid out in previous chapters. Bourriaud's refusal to scrutinise the relational practice-artworld as a totality effectively

[307] Adorno op.cit., p.21.
[308] Bourriaud op.cit., 42.

depoliticises relational practices as the artworld becomes a space with little individual symbolic significance.

Even if we brushed aside all previous objections as unnecessarily cynical toward relational practices and rather presumptuous with regard to the ideological role of the artworld, and conceded that a Marxian perspective on commodity fetishism could account for Bourriaud's claim to the demystification of social relations, we would still have to face the fact that an art of "decommodified" social relations would mark the apogee of art's autonomy. In reality, however, Bourriaud's proposition is premised on a misconstrual of the role that objecthood plays in the process of commodification.[309] As a result, Bourriaud limits its effects to the production and exchange of objects. Yet for Marx, the site of the commodity-form is not commensurate with the "physical nature of the commodity."[310] The commodity-form does not emerge from the object-commodity, but out of the abstraction of labour: it is the selling and purchase of human labour as a commodity that produces exchange-values. This is an absolutely fundamental observation for any analysis that draws from Marx's theory of fetishism: the alienation inherent in the perception of social relations as relations between objects does not mean that if these objects were somehow removed from an economic equation, human relationships would revert back to a state of non-alienation. Ultimately the contradictions that follow Bourriaud's ascription of resistance to "practice" as opposed to "object" derive from an incomplete understanding of Marx's theory of commodification.

The crucial question is, therefore, not whether we can arrive at a type of resistance toward commodification through the substitution of "object" for "social relation," but what kind of material conditions arise from specific social relations, and in what ways these social relations can become self-critical. Overlooking this dimension equals affirming the most basic neoliberal fantasy: that the informatisation of Western capitalism has liberated the working classes from alienation.[311] Once this connection has been made— once we recognise that what is at stake in Bourriaud's formulation is in fact the projection of a social

---

[309] This is an observation that Stewart Martin has made and elaborated in:
Stewart Martin, "Critique of Relational Aesthetics," *Third Text* 21, no.4 (2007): 369-386.

[310] Marx op.cit., p.165.

[311] By "informatisation" I am referring to the process of qualitative transformation of the economy which elevated information manipulation and services as the centre of the productive model. As Negri and Hardt have underlined, this has been a qualitative rather than quantitative change. The informatisation of the economy does not imply that the number of information workers has exceeded agricultural and industrial ones globally, that is to say, the agricultural and industrial sectors of the economy globally have been supplanted by information/knowledge production or services. What the writers describe is the subjection of all economic sectors to a process of restructuring on the basis of informatisation: their models are subject to its pressures.
Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2000), 280-282.

structure liberated from alienation on the merit of it being unmediated by a specific material systematicity— the problem of "Relational Aesthetics" becomes a reflection of a deeper political problem.

3.5 NEOLIBERALISM AND UNIVERSAL CREATIVITY

Harvey's historical account of neoliberalism traces its emergence in the years shortly after World War II. There, through the activity of organisations such as the Mont Pelerin Society it began to erode the postwar Keynesian, social democratic consensus. In his "Brief History of Neoliberalism" Harvey describes neoliberalism as:

> A theory of political economic practices that proposes that human wellbeing can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free market, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices.[312]

Neoliberalism is therefore the economic and political regime of deregulation, financialisation and anti-inflationary monetary policy that overturned the postwar Keynesian social democratic consensus of the West. In Harvey's account, nevertheless, neoliberalism is only theoretically coherent— and rightly so. Even though neoliberalism might exhibit certain systematic characteristics, it is still in essence a political program and can thus depart from its professed orthodoxies. This becomes all too evident when, despite its alleged self-minimising ideology, the neoliberal state intervenes to create markets, or rescue financial organisations and contain the damage of financial speculation downwards. Neoliberalism, for Harvey, is thus fundamentally a hegemonic project of elite takeover.[313]

Neoliberalism's incoherence, however, is not merely a characteristic of its utopian construction— of its inability to actually accomplish what its theory purports— but constitutive. Neoliberalism's incoherence was, in fact, written in its inception, as outlined by Friedrich von Hayek's in 1944. In "The Road to Serfdom," Hayek drew a line between classical liberalism and, what would later be established as, neoliberalism by explicitly defining the latter as the legal-political framework of economic competition, as opposed to exchange. Nineteenth century liberalism, Hayek pointed out, was founded on a conception of social life as constituted through mutually beneficial economic activity between rational actors; in this schema, exchange was the signifier of moral and material prosperity. In

[312] Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 2.
[313] Ibid., 31-32.

opposition to what he perceived as a distinct gravitation toward collectivism in Western political and economic life, Hayek envisioned a new liberal paradigm that could intercept Western democracy's alleged march toward totalitarianism. As the root cause of collectivism was the formation of monopolies, the new liberal paradigm had to be founded on the principle of competition: monopolies' only efficient preventative mechanism according to Hayek. Nevertheless, competition, Hayek acknowledged, had no real grounding in nineteenth century moral ideologies of mutually beneficial economic activity; this was the domain of exchange. Neoliberalism had to therefore abandon "dogmatic laissez-faire" attitudes: the neoliberal regime could not and would not emerge automatically as an expression of the liberal conception of human economic nature as exchange.[314] In order to succeed, the neoliberal project had to instead produce the conditions appropriate for competition to shape economic-political life, and most importantly, create the legal and political mechanisms to intervene when these conditions are not met.

This Hayekian, "unnatural" vision of neoliberalism was the starting point for Michel Foucault's investigation of the phenomenon. As a consequence, Foucault did not examine neoliberalism as a mere ideology or as a political program that simply evangelised an intensification of the grasp of market economics on society: "neoliberalism is not Adam Smith; neoliberalism is not market society; neoliberalism is not the Gulag on the insidious scale of capitalism."[315] Rather than an expansion of the free market, Foucault's neoliberalism signified a complete remodelling of political power on the basis of the market's characteristics, and thus entailed a comprehensive transformation of socio-economic life. What separates Foucault's neoliberalism from an ideological construct— either implemented from above or through the hijacking of "common sense," as it does in Harvey's critique— is that it comprises a form of power that creates its conditions at the level of subjectivity formation: neoliberalism is, before all, a problem of governmentality.[316] As

[314] Friedrich A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), 37, 42.
[315] Foucault, 131.
[316] Thomas Lemke provides a historical and conceptual overview of the development of the idea of "governmentality" in Foucault's work. Lemke identifies governmentality emerging as the corrective to the Nietzschean prism that Foucault employed in his critique of the "juridico-discursive" concept of power in works such as "Discipline and Punish." There, Foucault attempted to displace law and legitimacy as the basis of power for war and domination. As Lemke observes, this substitution produced a theory that lacked a sufficient explanatory power for two main reasons. Firstly, as it reversed law and legitimation into war and domination, it essentially avoided directly confronting the problem of how feelings of legitimacy and consent come to be generalised. Secondly, its specificity- its derivation from specific disciplinary sites (prison, hospital)- made it a rather impractical model for the production of a theory that could account for the generation and stabilisation of power relations on a larger scale. Governmentality, in the form that it appears in the 1978-1979 lectures at the College de France presents, therefore, a conception of power beyond the dichotomy between consent and domination; it is founded on technologies of domination and technologies of self.
Thomas Lemke, 11-12.

such, it emerges through a specific subject: competitive, possessive, and most importantly, self-administering.

Since neoliberalism has to create the subject which embodies and reproduces it, it has to produce a positive— utopian even— vision of life in capitalism. In Foucault's analysis the necessary step for this was the bridging of the gap between labour and its abstraction. The abstraction of labour was in Marx's definition the process by which labour is commodified, that is, becomes detached from social reality and is reduced to mere numbers. Being the process that separates labour from its human subject, labour's abstraction is in Marxist economy theory a direct consequence of the alienation of labour in capitalism: the process which separates the worker from the human characteristics of work. At this point, Foucault pointed out, neoliberal economists did not take on the problem head-on but attempted to reframe its terms. While in Marxist thought the abstraction of labour is inextricable from the position of the worker in the capitalist mode of production— in short, the worker's position within a system based on the private ownership of means of production and extraction of surplus value— neoliberalism instead proposed that the abstraction of labour is a consequence of the tools designed to observe it. That is to say, the fundamental proposition of neoliberalism was to attribute the distortion of abstraction to the way that economic discourse had described it up until that point.[317] It was, therefore, a problem of economic analysis's formulation and scope which isolated the human element of the labour process as an agency-deprived cog between production and consumption, rather than as a subject that participates in economic life on its own accord. If the terms of economic life are redefined as extensions of the human characteristics of the worker, the depersonalising effects of capitalism cease holding universal validity.[318] This was the neoliberal incarnation of the theory of "human capital:"[319] a theory that, as Foucault remarked, attempted to extend economic analysis to the totality of social life, and thus economised areas "previously thought to be non-economic."[320]

---

[317] Foucault, 222.

[318] Ibid., 221-222.

[319] Historically, its origins go back to Adam Smith. Smith wrote in 1776: "The acquisition of such talents, by the maintenance of the acquirer during his education, study, or apprenticeship, always costs a real expense, which is a capital fixed and realized, as it were, in his person...The improved dexterity of a workman may be considered in the same light as a machine or instrument of trade which facilitates and abridges labour, and which, though it costs a certain expense, repays that expense with a profit."
Smith, 282.

[320] Foucault, 219.
Here it should be noted that the extension of economic rationality that Foucault described had been underway for decades before Mont Pelerin Society-style neoliberalism. In 1927 Ludwig von Mises specifically defined peace as the desired order of things not on moral-humanitarian grounds but on purely economic. Mises asserted that peace is natural not because killing violates some inalienable human right, but because war destroys wealth, and any disruption of peaceful relations is exceptionally harmful in economies organised on the social division of labour. Even more suggestively, Mises dislodged equality from its foundation in natural

One of the foundational principles of the theory of human capital was that in advanced economies individuals do not participate in the market simply as sellers of their labour power but as capitalists themselves.[321] However, the capital that they are in possession of no longer corresponds to the inanimate or abstract assets that can be converted into money but is inscribed into their own physical reality: it is the skills and abilities that can be cultivated through investment to yield greater returns for seller and buyer. Human capital comprises the, partly nonalienated— that is, inherited— and partly socially constructed, transformation of human labour into human asset. Through the prism of human capital, labour thus ceases being abstract; it is very specific and particular to the unique talents of the individual and the unique ways these are cultivated through work. By modifying the frame of reference, "human capital" theory redirected economic theory's attention from the analysis of the mechanisms of production, exchange, consumption to the analysis of human behaviour and its rationality. While from classical to early twentieth century economic theory the human factor has been treated as a rather secondary variable of economic activity, "human capital" theory now foregrounded it as its focus: economics became thus the study of the motivations that govern decisions on mutually exclusive choices.[322] As such, the study of economic activity collapsed into the study of human behaviour. The moment when human behaviour became the object of economics, life in its totality was subsumed by an economic rationality.

This is the discursive space wherein "the entrepreneur of the self" emerges.[323] As all aspects of human behaviour fall now under the jurisdiction of economic analysis, and everyone can be conceived as being in possession of perfectible skills and assets in the form of personal capital, individual self-understanding in capitalism no longer corresponds to one's position in consumption but on the horizon of a constant production of oneself. Every relation, every transaction now offers a possibility for an investment in oneself and comes with the promise of ever-increasing returns. No longer merely the "self-moving" and "self-directing" appetitive machines of liberal individualism,[324] the docile go-betweens

---

law: equality is necessary because freedom and equality before the law maximise the productive ability of individuals and preserve social peace. In Mises writing there is, thus, a distinct movement toward the substitution of the moral-humanitarian for the utilitarian. Of course, if equality and peace are no longer defended as moral-political projects and are redefined as conditions for economic growth, it is easy to see how they could be discarded without hesitation once they stop serving that purpose.
Ludwig von Mises, *Liberalism in the Classical Tradition*, trans. Ralph Raico (New York: Foundation for Economic Education- San Francisco: Cobden Press, 1985), 25-28.

[321] Theodor Schultz, "Investment in Human Capital," *The American Economic Review,* Vol. 51, no. 1, (Mar., 1961): 1-17, 3.

[322] Foucault, 222.

[323] Ibid., 226.

[324] Crawford Brough Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 31.

surrounded by the thousand petty tyrants of Adorno,[325] or the human products of a disciplinary regime that extends from the factory to envelop all life: the "entrepreneur of the self" is the self-sufficient orchestrator of personal flourishing. The new definition of subjectivity in the framework of human capital attempts to dilute— or even dissolve— the class antagonism between worker and capitalist; in Harvey's words, it attempts to "bury the significance of the class relation between capital and labour."[326] This is where the "new" of neoliberalism is truly made manifest: in its formation of a subject that perceives socio-economic activity not as the source of exploitation, disenfranchisement and depersonalisation but in continuity with one's sense of identity. So, what Marx appeared to anticipate in the Grundrisse— that the development of individual skills in one's free time could be understood as the production of capital, with "this fixed capital being man himself"[327]— is now inverted into the self-definition of worker as an eternal becoming-of-the capitalist. The subject of neoliberalism is no longer an alienated subject; there lies neoliberalism's utopian construction— in the promise of a true, perfectly perverted vision of isothymia, a state of universal equality wherein the "slave's work" has now become a fulfilling Sisyphean cycle of self-overcoming.

The predominant mode of subjectivation in neoliberalism detests thus the passive, detached subject of modernity: in Franco Berardi's words, neoliberalism has managed to turn "disaffection and absenteeism" into "marginal phenomena."[328] Consumption is production of satisfaction while production is production of the self; this signifies a "breakdown between production and reproduction" as Roberts observes.[329] Neoliberalism is fundamentally dynamic because it eliminates the distance between the labour expended in production and the labour necessary to return to the original conditions of the productive activity: communication, exchange and creativity become the objects of work and the mechanisms by which to organise the social relations around it. The immaterial is integral to this process because it is the immaterial that has made the transition between production

[325] "As the professions of the middle-man lose their economic basis, the private lives of countless people are becoming those of agents and go-betweens; indeed the entire private domain is being engulfed by a mysterious activity that bears all the features of commercial life without there being actually any business to transact."
Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*: *Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London; New York: Verso, 2005), 23.
[326] David Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 186.
[327] Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, 711-712.
[328] Franco Bifo Berardi, "What does Cognitariat Mean? Work, Desire and Depression," trans. Melinda Cooper, *Cultural Studies Review volume 11*, No.2 (September 2005): 57-63, 59.
[329] John Roberts, "Art and the Problem of Immaterial Labour: Reflections on its Recent History," in *Economy: Art, Production and the Subject in the Twenty-first Century*, eds. Angela Dimitrakaki, Kirsten Lloyd (Liverpool University Press, 2015), 49-66, 55.

and social reproduction seamless— or even worse, completely obsolete.[330] When productive labour is simply an extension of one's intellectual and affective world— when it assumes thus the characteristics of self-expression— the restrictions and divisions that govern it become elusive.[331]

Returning to Bourriaud, it becomes then clear that the problem does not merely lie in the dubious validity of his original formulation. What I mean by this is that the problem does not simply amount to a misguided defence of art as social relations: if anything, it is primarily misleading, as it directs the discussion to questions that should not have to be answered— "practices" do not comprise an economy separate from that of "objects," and by extension, the production of social relations as art has no bearing on the demystification of the social relations of life in capitalism. However, insofar as Bourriaud arrives at his claim by looking at relational practices, and it is a notion that is reinforced by participating in them, his misinterpretation morphs into an actual indictment of relational practices themselves; it signifies that relational practices run the risk of incorporating the breakdown between production and social reproduction too seamlessly— that they are not sufficiently self-critical. Which means that, as they remove the technical barrier of entry, their idealistic democraticity conceals the actual existing dichotomies between unskilled and high-skilled immaterial labour: "the instrumentality and repetitions" that immaterial labour is still subject to and cannot escape as long as work is subject to the law of profit.[332] By reconstructing a vision of social life where these divisions no longer hold, Bourriaud's interpretation of relational art projects a vision of universal creativity wherein work is liberated from its alienating characteristics. The endgame of the projected upward erasure of labour is the fantasy of a neoliberal post-work society. And in that regard, neoliberalism reveals its chiliastic character and attempts to outcompete communist "utopia;" after all, the elimination of the distinction between mental and physical labour was a central feature of the higher stages of communist society as Marx had outlined in the "Critique of the Gotha Programme" of 1875.[333] It is therefore not a matter of a blanket rejection of relational practices but of

[330] Franco Berardi considers the breakdown to be a consequence of digitalisation and, by extension, of the immaterial: the emergence of an info-productive type of capitalism and its concomitant cognitive worker during the last decades of the twentieth century.
See Franco Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*, trans. Francesca Cadel and Giuseppina Mecchia, (Semiotext(e), 2009)

[331] For this reason, as Roberts points out in his critique of Negri and Hardt, immateriality is alarmingly close to being framed as an "escape from, or even undermining of, capitalist control."
Roberts Op.cit., 53.

[332] Ibid., 57.

[333] Marx wrote in the said famous passage: "In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and thereby also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has vanished; after labour has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of

examining the ways they interact with notions of work in their strategies of delegation: we need to examine which attitudes toward work echo the neoliberal gospel of the end of work and, therefore, the end of class.

3.5.1 FREEDOM AND NECESSITY IN DELEGATION

Let us then look at two examples which highlight different degrees of criticality toward the conditions of their production: Tiravanija's iterations of *Untitled (free)* and Tino Sehgal's *This Situation* of 2007 and *These Associations* of 2012 (Fig.23). As was described earlier in the chapter, Tiravanija's *Untitled (free*) is premised on a gesture of hospitality: the exhibition space becomes a place of unconditional exchange and interaction, with the audience activating the work by uniting over the offered traditional recipe. By minimising the rules and conditions that produce the artwork, Tiravanija removes its systematic dimensions significantly; it becomes a nexus of free, open-ended and non-compelled relations. Nevertheless, while Tiravanija abandons a conception of art as an idealised process mediated by the art object, he replaces it with a vision of social relating with similarly unequivocal universalist pretensions. In this substitution, one process which conceals its material conditions is thus replaced with another: Tiravanija's replacement of the aesthetic appreciation of the object with the performance of social exchange and conviviality is a critique of mystification only insofar as the unacknowledged dimension of mystification is expedient, and aims to highlight the limits of critique itself. In the hypothesis of its sincerity, Tiravanija's substitution of the art object with uncompelled, and putatively non-commodified social relations becomes no different than the redirection of its aura toward the actions of self-perceived free subjects. The fetishised object's postexistence becomes then the fetishised relations of the now emancipated subjects.

Tino Sehgal's "constructed situations," on the other hand, demonstrate a different awareness of the relations they emerge out of. Sehgal's works tend to follow a specific pattern: the artist recruits and employs collaborators from artistic and academic circles who are then instructed to perform specific roles in their interactions with the audience. These collaborators are referred to as "interpreters" and their role is to mediate between the artist's

common wealth flow more abundantly only then can the narrow horizon· of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs!"
Karl Marx, Critique of the Gotha Programme, in Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works Vol.24: 1874-1883* (New York: International Publishers), 75-99, 87.

intention and the work's visitors.[334] In *This Situation* of 2007, Sehgal instructed the "interpreters" to engage with the audience through the performance of a preconceived set of questions, quotations, and poses referencing famous historical artworks.[335] By structuring the work around these distinctly choreographed moments of relating, Sehgal aimed to create an atmosphere of generalised impersonality; the "interpreters" were instructed to remain impersonal throughout their interactions with the visitors and to not allow these to devolve in personal questions or questions about the work— that is, in questions that either disrupted the choreography or reframed it into purely spectatorial terms.[336] In *These Associations* of 2012, Sehgal repeated this formula but, as a work, *These Associations* was less rigid and allowed more space for free, unregulated interaction between the "interpreters" and the audience compared to Sehgal's earlier examples: here, the staged routines were only three in number.[337] Its premise was the production and performance of "conceits," that is, semi-autobiographical personal stories that the interpreters were instructed to use as their platforms of communication with the audience. The "conceits" were established and practiced in rehearsals and drew from a variety of predetermined emotional states and concepts including "arrival, departure, belonging, satisfaction, dissatisfaction."[338]

The types of labour that Sehgal delegated to the "interpreters" corresponded, therefore, to the markedly immaterial character of his works. Even though the work of the "interpreters" lacked a strictly technical component, the communicatively sophisticated nature of their role set specific requirements for participation: an affective-intellectual barrier which ultimately preselected participants from specific educational backgrounds. And while the restriction of participating positions to specific professional-educational strata effectively constructs microcosms of the "creative class," it also underlines that immateriality carries and reproduces its own divisions and biases, and ultimately produces class. More importantly, the elite educational-cultural background of his "interpreters" is not a liberating factor of their participation: their work is regulated, routinised, and in time becomes tedious and mechanical. The immaterial character of these performances of human interaction is, therefore, not designed to allude to a state of spontaneous, unmediated relating. On the contrary, the interactions between visitors and audience are choreographed, in

[334] Toni Pape, Noémie Solomon and Alanna Thain, "Welcome to This Situation: Tino Sehgal's Impersonal Ethics," *Dance Research Journal,* vol. 46, no. 3(2014): 89-100, 99.
muse.jhu.edu/article/566330
[335] Ibid., 93.
[336] Ibid., 92.
[337] Mary E. Richards, "The Orchestrated Crowd: Choreography, Chorus, Conceit in Tino Sehgal's These Associations," *Choreographic Practices*, Vol.8, no.2(2017): 181-98, 184.
[338] Ibid., 189.

varying degrees of control, developed through long hours of practice, and performed on demand as a service which allows the work to exist. Sehgal's situations produce sociality as a process of work and are thus embedded in a dialectic of freedom and necessity; they exist in the moments where the "realm of freedom" and the "realm of necessity" intersect. What remains to be seen is whether the tension of this intersection can survive the experience of art, as the audience's work of sociality becomes the work of the artist.

Figure 23 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Figure 23 Tino Sehgal, These Associations, 2012. Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, London.

THE DEMOCRATIC LIFE OF ANTAGONISM

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Okwui Enwezor described his vision of *documenta 11* as one of "spectacular difference."[339] Consisting of five separate yet interrelated platforms and taking place over the course of two years around the world, the exhibition was conceived as a series of intercessions to pressing social, political as well artistic questions of our time.[340] These platforms were not however reserved for an exchange of ideas between artists; artists were just one professional class among many, including political activists, historians, cultural theorists, sociologists, and community workers. Enwezor extended this new approach to the structure of the art exhibition itself. Contesting traditional curatorial conventions, the "actual" art exhibition was "relegated" to the fifth and final platform, which in turn mirrored the issues that the preceding four had taken on. Unifying all five platforms was the intent to transform the exhibition of art into a public space of knowledge production, political theory, and activism.

"Democracy Unrealized" was the first of the five platforms. There, in the numerous papers and discussions over the conditions and future of democracy, two were the main targets: Fukuyama's liberal democracy as historical inevitability, and the Habermarsian-Rawlsian liberalism of deliberative democracy. Fukuyama's infamous narrative of the "end of history" needs no particular introduction; its central and most controversial contention was its casting of Western-type liberal democracy as the ultimate socio-political horizon of human history. By the 1990s, liberal democracy had, according to the writer, attained to the status of a universal ideological monopoly— not necessarily because the entirety of the world had already been organised in its image, but because the great historical shifts of the previous decades had left extant no other ideological system "with pretensions to universality."[341] Not only had the modern ideological competitors of liberal democracy

---

[339] Okwui Enwezor, "The Black Box," in *Documenta XI, Platform 5: Exhibition* (Hatje Cantz, Germany, 2002), 43.
Cited in Anthony Downey, "The Spectacular Difference of Documenta XI," *Third Text* 17, no. 1 (2003): 85-92, 86.

[340] The first platform, 'Democracy Unrealized,' took place in Vienna in March 2001 and continued in Berlin. Platform 2, 'Experiments with Truth: Transitional Justice and the Processes of Truth and Reconciliation,' took place in New Delhi. The third Platform, 'Créolité and Creolization,' was held on the West Indian island of St Lucia in the Caribbean. Platform 4, "Under Siege: Four African Cities, Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, and Lagos" took place in Lagos. Finally, Platform 5 comprised the art exhibition in Kassel, Germany.

[341] Fukuyama, 45.

(fascism and communism) become largely marginal political systems but even deviations from a system based on "popular sovereignty and individual freedom,"[342] as Fukuyama summarised liberal democracy, were now seeking legitimacy though the invocation of liberal democratic ideals. On the other hand, deliberative democracy as a concept emerged after the 1970s to model the organisation of democratic social and political life on the principles of rational self-government through deliberative decision-making. Rejecting the minimalist tradition of democratic theory which casts political life as primarily the domain of conflict, competition and domination, minimising as a consequence citizens' democratic role disproportionately in relation to that of (elected) authorities,[343] theories of deliberative democracy tend to underline, in varying degrees, the possibility of political consensus through bargaining and public reason.[344] Even though the concepts of "end of history" and deliberative democracy correspond to different categories of thought, as the former constitutes a Neo-Hegelian interpretation of history as progressing to the universalisation of liberal democracy, and the latter a theorisation of liberal democracy on a participatory model, they both converge in the presupposition of the consensual construction of a democratic polity. Opposing this premise, "Democracy Unrealised" sought instead to qualify dissent and oppositionality as the qualities responsible for the expansion and deepening of core democratic values.

That the emergence of such problematics in the artworld unfolded in parallel with the societalisation of art practice since the mid-1990s is not particularly surprising. In fact, "Democracy Unrealised" is just one iteration of the problematics posed by this dichotomy; indicatively, variants of this debate appear in Kester's critique of the rhetoric on artistic autonomy and self-determination in arts bodies since the 1970s,[345] Maria Lind's critique of Thomas Hirschhorn's *Bataille Monument* of 2002 for documenta 11 as degrading toward the local community it was co-created by and was supposedly addressing,[346] the aggressive back-and-forth between Bishop and Kester in the wake of the former's scathing critique launched with "The Social Turn: Collaborations and its Discontents" of 2006, or even

[342] Fukuyama, 42
[343] A famous representative of this tradition would be Joseph Schumpeter's theory of democracy outlined in: Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (Routledge, 1994)
[344] For an overview of certain key formulations of deliberative models of democracy see: James Bohman and William Rehg (eds.), *Deliberative Democracy: Essays on Reason and Politics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: MIT Press, 1997), 1-141.
[345] Grant H. Kester, "Rhetorical Questions: The Alternative Arts Sector and the Imaginary Public," in Art, Activism, and Oppositionality: Essays from Afterimage (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 103-135.
[346] Maria Lind, "Actualisation of Space: The Case of Oda Projesi," *Artists as Producers* (10/2004) http://republicart.net/disc/aap/lind01_en.htm (Accessed: 25/02/2017)

perhaps the more recent advocacy of overidentificatory art practices by Marc James Léger.[347] In this chapter I chose to focus on Claire Bishop's critique of relational aesthetics in "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics" of 2004, published two years after the English translation of "Relational Aesthetics," as it frames the argument directly in the terms of antagonism and democracy in contemporary art practices, the relationship of which I will explore.

In Bishop's now famous critique of relational aesthetics, as exemplary of an open-ended, processual curatorial "paradigm of the laboratory" since the mid-1990s,[348] Bourriaud's sociable and convivial conceptualisation of art practice was juxtaposed with a more morally ambiguous, and conflictual interpretation of the social character of art. This was however not a polemic presented simply as a disagreement on artistic matters. Bishop's intention was instead to address a key argument that Bourriaud put forward; namely, the attribution of a democratic quality to relational aesthetics. Yet, while Bourriaud's democracy is enacted "through negotiations, bonds and co-existences,"[349] democracy, as counterproposed by Bishop, becomes possible as long as antagonistic social relations are allowed to make visible its unacknowledged exclusions.[350] Transposed onto the level of artistic practice, this dichotomy materialised in the opposition between the ostensibly conciliatory character of the work of Rirkrit Tiravanija and Liam Gillick against the antagonistic and authorial practices of Thomas Hirschhorn and Santiago Sierra. The opposition between these two groups of artists set the stage for the confrontation between democracy as the political form of consensus and antagonism.

To outline the terms of the political language of antagonism, Bishop turned to one of the early conceptualisations of the idea of "radical democracy" as articulated in "Hegemony and Socialist Strategy," written in 1985 by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. Departing from an orthodox Marxist analysis of class, Laclau and Mouffe's book advanced an interpretation of the social world on the basis of Antonio Gramsci's "hegemony." This reorientation away from class analysis was a response to what the writers perceived as a pluralistic— or even fragmented— world that could no longer be encompassed by categories

---

[347] Léger's theorisation of overidentification in art parallels the Lacanian identification with the symptom during the process of analysis. The writer's defence of overidentification as an artistic-political strategy is based on the theory that artistic practices which overidentify with the political symptom— that is, capitalist heteronomy— suspend the transference between analyst and analysand and therefore force the latter to recognise their dominated position.
Marc James Léger, *Brave New Avant Garde: Essays on Contemporary Art and Politics* (Winchester; Washington: Zero Books, 2012), 100-126.
[348] Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," 51-52.
[349] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 45.
[350] Bishop Op.cit., 65.

which could not account for the centrality of difference in the postwar formation of political identity. The dimension of difference plays a key role in the theory of radical democracy both as the generative condition of political mobilisation and its figuring of a pluralistic milieu that needs to be defended against the totalisation of the ascending rightwing neoliberalism of the 1980s. To that end, Laclau and Mouffe insisted that social struggles need to be redefined in "hegemonic articulations." Because these are always partial, they are always in potentially conflictual relationships with other articulations. The field of political power is thus structured antagonistically; antagonism for Laclau and Mouffe is the element that underlines the impossibility of general equivalence and reconciliation, and, at the same time, the force that can produce collective political identity by revealing relations of inequality.[351]

The centrality that antagonism is accorded in the construction of radical democracy in "Hegemony and Socialist Strategy" echoes the prominence of the concept of antagonism in Carl Schmitt's political theory. In fact, Mouffe's subsequent research would engage extensively with Schmitt's own intellectual output in a project that she has described as aiming to "think with Schmitt against Schmitt."[352] Confronted therefore with this bizarre trajectory of antagonism from Schmitt to Mouffe, and from Mouffe to Bishop against Bourriaud, it becomes necessary to seriously examine antagonism's implications and see how these could help produce a framework for the interpretation of the antagonistic gesture in art practice. In this chapter I attempt to therefore test Bishop's proposition of the antagonistic construction of democracy in the practice of Santiago Sierra, by returning to Schmitt's own work. This analysis can then provide a platform for a deeper interpretation of the dynamics between artist and audience and its political-cultural implications in socially engaged practice.

[351] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (Second Edition) (London; New York: Verso, 2001), 193.

[352] Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), 14.
Mouffe would devote a substantial part of her scholarship to Carl Schmitt's political theory, so it is admittedly surprising that there is not a single reference to Schmitt in the work of 1985. Beginning with "The Return of the Political" in 1993 Mouffe's project is to great extent focused on the "rehabilitation" of Schmitt's thought as a corrective to liberal democracy.
See: Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (London; New York: Verso Books, 1993), Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London; New York: Verso Books, 2000), and Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London; New York: Routledge, 2005)

4.2 THE UBIQUITY OF DEMOCRACY

Bourriaud's engagement with the social character of contemporary art started in the 1990s. Although not yet termed relational, the catalogue for "Traffic" (CAPC Musée d'art Contemporain de Bordeaux, France, 1996) offered a blueprint for the future development of a cohesive model of practice. For Bourriaud, "Traffic" had a double purpose: to transform the passivity of "viewing" into the more active experience of engaging physically or socially with artworks, and to create platforms capable of exploring new modes of communication and experience.[353] In the catalogue of Traffic, Bourriaud, acknowledging the transformation of social relations of production from material to immaterial, advocated for a contemporary art that could recuperate the socio-communicative characteristics of contemporary capitalism, and redirect them outside of their normative function— into strategies of resistance.[354] The quasi-Marxist, quasi-Debordian proposition of "Traffic" served thus as the foundation for the core principles of "Relational Aesthetics" of 1998. In "Relational Aesthetics," however, the vague anticapitalist polemic of "Traffic" had now given way to a new, pedagogic conception of a democratic, participatory art: one that sought to teach the public "to inhabit the world in a better way."[355] For Bourriaud, the democratic artist of relational art was called to envision, produce and disseminate new models of social co-existence, free from the instrumentality of social relations in neoliberal capitalism.

Democracy is a certainly a resonant concept nowadays, but it was particularly so in the 1990s. This was, after all, the decade of the fall of the Iron Curtain, a decade of economic growth, of fantasies of world democracy and the socio-historical environment that would legitimise the "end of history" thesis. As Anthony Gardner underlines, this was also the historical context of Bourriaud's gravitation toward artistic forms of democracy in "Relational Aesthetics." By that time, democracy had become a "master signifier" globally; as the nexus of competing discourses united only by their claim to be democratic, democracy came to signify things as radically different as interventionist wars and anti-globalization movements, revivals of local traditions and the globalisation of human rights.

In Europe, which primarily matters for Bourriaud's development of ideas, democracy reflected the desire for reunification, openness and prosperity— in the European context, therefore, democracy was rather "europeanised." It is no surprise then that the two ideas— democracy and Europe— eventually became interchangeable. Admittedly, the prospect of

[353] Nicholas Bourriaud, "Espaces-temps de l'échange," in Nicholas Bourriaud, Traffic (Bordeaux CAPC, 1996), np.
Cited in Gardner, 23.
[354] Ibid., 22-25.
[355] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 13.

pan-European unification under the banner of liberal democracy was an inviting thought for many and this was reflected in its various artistic conceptualisations: "Wanderlieder" (Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1991) imagined Europe as "a better design for society,"[356] "Europa, Europa" (Bonn, 1994) as a symbol of change and hope, while the first Manifesta (Rotterdam, 1996) attempted to portray "an uncodified experience" of a borderless, open Europe.[357]

Europe, however, represents an idea which is at the same time too amorphous and too specific to inspire long-term artistic projects in its name. After a point, therefore, the more universal and, at the same time, stronger idea of democracy superseded Europe in artistic imagination. Among the projects that reflect this shift Gardner lists "Interpol" (Stockholm, 1996), "Wounds: Between Democracy and Redemption in Contemporary Art" (Stockholm, 1998), and Bruno Latour's "Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy" (ZKM, Karlsruhe, 2005). More characteristically, by 2000 the Manifesta Foundation had redefined its mission in openly democratic terms— with a collaborative and interactive conception of democracy in its centre:

> Foremost among Manifesta's objectives have been responding, as appropriate, to new forms of artistic practice, experimenting with new curatorial methods and developing new audiences for contemporary art. All this was to be achieved through the development of open-ended, democratic procedures, which emphasised the values of collaboration and interactive communication.[358]

This was therefore the political and cultural climate of Bourriaud's "inhabit the world in a better way;" it is impossible to separate his ideas on art from the general climate of democratic optimism of that era. This was also probably one of the reasons why a few years later his ideas would become particularly vulnerable to critique. Once the democratic "end of history-ish" global nirvana was interrupted, these ideas were deprived of their original legitimating context. So, in the new world dawning with 9/11, the revival of crusades in the Middle East, and a global surveillance and torture apparatus, this type of optimistic celebration of democracy, collaboration and conviviality was subject to suspicion. It was

---

[356] Wim Beeren, *Wanderlieder* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1991), backflap.
Cited in Gardner, 19.
[357] Rosa Martinez et al., *Manifesta 1: Rotterdam: The Netherlands, 1996* (Rotterdam: Manifesta Foundation, 1996), 7.
Cited in Gardner, 19.
[358] Manifesta Board Members, "Preface," in *Borderline Syndrome: Energies of Defense: Manifesta 3*, ed. Francesco Bonami et al. (Ljubljana: Cankarjev Dom, 2000), 9.
Cited in Gardner, 20.

therefore Bourriaud's claim of relational art's democraticity that Bishop appeared to mostly take issue with.

At this point, there are two basic observations that need to be made. Firstly, the opposition between Bourriaud's relationality and Bishop's advocacy of antagonistic practices is from the outset framed politically: Bishop does not so much politicise a disagreement on artistic matters as she contests Bourriaud's political claims by way of art. While Bourriaud procures a vision of democracy grounded in the imaginary of "negotiations, bonds, and co-existences," Bishop advances a conceptualisation of democracy based on the constant and conflictual renegotiation of difference and the dialectic of inclusion and exclusion. The new rigorous criteria for art are not simply explored outside aesthetics but also outside art's own field of (self)reference, which respectively characterised its aesthetic and post-aesthetic histories. The porosity between political and artistic discourses is a crucial characteristic of art since the "social turn," which cannot be fully explained through reference to the subject matter of art itself; it is a consequence of art's reorientation toward the social which, as I have analysed in the introductory chapter of this study, is in turn a claim to artistic legitimacy. This means that the political discussion of socially engaged practices does not merely signify its adaptation to the specificities of art itself but also amplifies art's claim to legitimacy. The way that this claim is advanced is through the inversion of the characteristics of art practices perceived stereotypically as subordinated by the market: the "social turn's" political commitment, aesthetic deflation and eventual character preclude art's fungibility as asset which tends to presuppose its durability as object, certain intriguing formal characteristics that underline its authorial construction, and perhaps a referential character toward other consecrated works. Of course, as was discussed in the previous chapter, there can be no doubt that art's escape from its objective characteristics should not be uncritically celebrated as a strategy of resistance of the commodity-form.

Secondly, it is particularly illustrative that the language of the debate between Bishop and Bourriaud was firmly grounded in the symbolic space of democratic language. Neither Bourriaud nor Bishop projected their political claims beyond the level of a different signification of democratic social life and the ways by which it can be constructed. What this entrenchment of critical language within the limits of democracy undoubtedly demonstrates is democracy's universalisation as a value, and its incontestability as "ambient milieu," as Marc James Léger has pointed out.[359] Once this has been established, therefore, what remains is to determine the exact configuration that is more adequate to democracy's

[359] Marc James Léger, *Brave New Avant Garde: Essays on Contemporary Art and Politics*, 137-138.

meaning; this is the field of all possible disagreement. This kind of circularity appears to affirm Stuart Hall's diagnosis of democracy's existence as a horizon: the idea of democracy has acquired such prominence that now defines the limits of all discourse.[360] Ironically, the reduction of all politics to a litigation of democracy's details is also rather "Fukuyamean"— it discloses a collective internalisation of the oft-maligned projection that the eponymous political scientist first made in the late 1980s. In a sense, then, it is not only the number of choices that nations can make politically and economically that has been diminishing in the global hegemony of Western type democracy, but the limits of political discourse too.[361]

The focal points of Bishop's critique were two. Firstly, Bourriaud's theorisation of relational art practices was seen as premised on a conceptual confusion between the ideas of open-endedness, viewer participation and democracy. Bishop underlined that the "activation" of the viewer per se should by no means be construed as a "democratic act" in its own right.[362] Drawing on Eco's insistence on the necessary existence of a minimal logical organisation in every artwork— irrespective of the degree of its formal open-endedness— Bishop underlined that the parameters of participation are always set by an authorial subject. Indeed, there is an intrinsic limit to participation that cannot be exceeded before the collapse of the artwork, and this limit can never be the product of unconditional democratic deliberation. Instead of mystifying the structure of the work on the basis of its relational construction, the crucial task of the critic should be to dissect the relations it emerges out of and the relations that it consequently produces.[363] This is a dimension that Bourriaud certainly overlooks in "Relational Aesthetics" as was also demonstrated in the previous chapter; in "Relational Aesthetics" the limits of freedom and necessity disappear in ways akin to their abolishment in the universal creativity of neoliberalism. Yet, the impossibility of this delimitation is no longer the self-critique of the artwork or the institution which creates its conditions, but a "micro-utopia" of reciprocity.

Bishop's criticism addressed therefore the intrinsic limit of participation, as well as emphasised its value-neutral character. These two issues are interconnected; in fact, the

---

[360] Stuart Hall was referring to Ernesto Laclau's definition of horizon: "We call horizon that which establishes, at one and the same time, the limits and the terrain of constitution of any possible object— and that, as a result, makes impossible any 'beyond.' Reason for the Enlightenment, progress for positivism, communist society for Marxism— these are not the names of objects within a certain horizon but of the horizon itself."
Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)* (London: Verso, 1994), 102.
Cited in Oliver Marchart, "Enacting the Unrealized," in *Democracy Unrealized: Documenta 11_Platform 1*, eds. Okwui Enwezor et al. (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002), 253-266, 255.
[361] The irony has not been lost on Slavoj Žižek who has pointed out this contradiction; namely, that the "end of history" has been widely derided and humiliated among liberal-left commentatots but implicitly accepted.
Slavoj Žižek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (London; New York: Verso, 2009), 88.
[362] Bishop op.cit., 78.
[363] Ibid., 65.

reason underlying the misinterpretation of viewer activation and participation as liberatory in their own right in "Relational Aesthetics" is precisely the concealment of the artwork's systematic properties— its systematicity— and, consequently, of the fact that these are governed by variables, however elusive, that are set by an author. Participation is essentially the democratisation of activity, and democratisation exists as a technical as well as political process. The former refers to the technical characteristics of the arrangement of relationships between people and things, while the latter corresponds to the types of political relationships specific configurations produce. As the technical character of democratisation entails the method by which processes are broken down to individual stages which are then distributed to a group, it becomes meaningless outside of a specific economic and technological framework. After all, the consolidation of the productive base in capitalist modernity amounted essentially to a massive process of technical democratisation, with the social division of labour being one of its most representative manifestations. While political democratisation must necessarily involve the expansion of political power, technical democratisation by no means guarantees that. The reason why these two dimensions sometimes coincide in popular imagination is due to the historical overlap between the democratisation of social organisation-production and the extension of political rights and civic liberties in Western history. This contextual overlapping is then projected as the identity between processes of technical implementation and social progress according to specific political values.

The second key point of disagreement in Bishop's essay was related to Bourriaud's selection of art practices to describe under the category of relational aesthetics. Bishop understood Bourriaud's privileging of art practices with a markedly optimistic, convivial character as highly inconsistent with his political claims. While the origins of the ideal of a convivial contemporary democratic co-existence can be traced to the utopian articulations of left-wing post-industrialism of the 1960s-1970s,[364] these ideas might be less persuasive to the left-wing thought of a disenchanted new millennium, which has experienced the rhetoric on subsistence and de-industrialisation for what it really is: not a return to a genuine way of relating with the world but an extension of neoliberal brutality.

The main problem that Bishop identified in Rirkrit Tiravanija's hospitality and Liam Gillick's (Fig.24) open-endedness is their uncritical exploration of the social relationships they enable. To clarify, Bishop considers the unity— the "togetherness" upon which the works of the two artists are premised— to be superseding any potentially critical dimensions

[364] See for instance: Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality* (Fontana/Collins, 1975)

that socially engaged practices should foreground. Instead of transforming common experience toward a democratic revaluation of social structures, Bishop argues that the generalised conciliatory character of relational art offers only temporary reprieve, while at the same time obfuscates the reality of social tensions. In her analysis, the foundational premise of the work of Tiravanija and Gillick is, therefore, the production of social synthesis. In doing so, their work becomes the space wherein art and outside world are presented to co-exist in a harmonious balance. For Bishop, this is alarmingly close to an art of consensus-production: its enthusiastic rhetoric conceals all tensions that might underlie social relationships. Bishop's objection, however, is that social tensions need to be acknowledged for democratic dialogue to exist. In short, the art of Tiravanija and Gillick cannot lay claim to Bourriaud's professed democratic qualities as it suppresses the dissent and conflict that permeate social relationships. Instead, Bishop argues, a radical conception of contemporary democracy can only be advanced insofar as the antagonistic dimension of social relations is sustained and highlighted.[365]

Antagonism is a concept that Bishop borrows from Ernesto Laclau's and Chantal Mouffe's "Hegemony and Socialist Strategy" of 1985. Bishop writes:

> Laclau and Mouffe argue that a fully functioning democratic society is not one in which all antagonisms have disappeared, but one in which new political frontiers are constantly being drawn and brought into debate— in other words, a democratic society is one in which relations of conflict are *sustained*, not erased. Without antagonism there is only the imposed consensus of authoritarian order— a total suppression of debate and discussion, which is inimical to democracy.[366]

Bishop thus juxtaposes Bourriaud's "relationality" with the idea of radical democracy, as proposed by Laclau and Mouffe. The implication here is clear; while Bourriaud's model is likened to a vision of democracy based on amicability and consensus, there is a wholly different conception of democracy which ever denies the possibility thereof and reconfigures democratic politics on the basis of antagonism. Antagonism cannot simply be erased in a pluralist democratic society; for Laclau and Mouffe it is pluralism's constitutive element. Unlike liberal theorisations of democratic life, radical democracy attempts to dispel the illusion that the multiplicity of positions in a pluralistic social landscape can be reconciled through recourse to a universal order of reason common to every member of society.[367] In

[365] Bishop op.cit., 64-67.
[366] [Emphasis in original]
Ibid., 65-66.
[367] It has to be mentioned here that the main target of Laclau's and Mouffe's radical democracy in "Hegemony and Socialist Strategy" is Jürgen Habermas and his "discourse theory" of democracy.

opposition to the politics of reason and communication as mediators of social relationships, Laclau and Mouffe define radical democracy as:

> [A] form of politics which is founded not upon dogmatic postulation of any "essence of the social," but, on the contrary, on an affirmation of the contingency and ambiguity of every "essence," and on the constitutive character of the social division and antagonism.[368]

What is important in this formulation is that radical democracy is not conceived as a theory with a specific political content but as a theory of political form. The central element of this form is antagonism: radical democracy is the political form of antagonism. Even though it is not openly acknowledged in "Hegemony and Socialist Politics," the overtly antagonistic determination of the political signals a conception of the political directly indebted to Carl Schmitt. Schmitt was the originary theorist of antagonism, and largely responsible for the redefinition of the entire field of the political as the field of antagonism from as early as 1932, with the publication of "The Concept of the Political."[369]

Figure 24 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Figure 24 Liam Gillick, Big Conference Centre Legislation Screen. 1998.

For Schmitt, there is only one meaningful political distinction in social life and that is between friend and enemy; in fact, a distinction becomes political only insofar as it can mobilise this oppositional grouping— every other distinction is ultimately reducible to it.[370] Just as questions of morality are defined through the distinction between good and evil, and aesthetic problems through the distinction between beautiful and ugly, the political is governed by the distinction between friend and enemy.[371] All politics, thus, constitutes instances of conflict that follow the necessary polarisation between friend and enemy, and every political concept acquires its meaning through a reference to a specific struggle; there is no meaningful politics outside conflict.[372] The political is not defined as a specific sphere with substantial characteristics, separate from the rest of the spheres of human activity, but

[368] Laclau and Mouffe Op.cit.,193.
[369]The first edition was published in 1927. The second edition of 1932 is however different as Schmitt followed up on a suggestion by Hans Morgenthau and added a few sections on the subject of civil war.
[370] Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political: Expanded Edition*, trans. George Schwab (University of Chicago Press, 2007), 26.
[371] Ibid.
[372]Ibid, 30-31.

constitutes the field of antagonisms and antitheses— be they cultural, religious or economic— once the polarisation they create is strong enough to divide groups of people into relationships of friendship and enmity.[373] The friend-enemy distinction is superior to every other possible one and once its generative antagonism reaches the levels of intensity necessary for its formation, it takes over all original disagreements and politicises them:

> The real friend-enemy grouping is existentially so strong and decisive that the nonpolitical antithesis, at precisely the moment at which it becomes political, pushes aside and subordinates its hitherto purely religious, purely economic, purely cultural criteria and motives to the conditions and conclusions of the political situation at hand.[374]

In Schmitt's political thought every political relationship is therefore a relationship shaped by antagonism, and every relationship that can be potentially politicised is antagonistic.[375]

4.3 THE ANTIPOLITICS OF LIBERALISM

Schmitt's political worldview is a worldview of war; the state cannot define itself outside the polemical "us" versus "them" relation of conflict— without an enemy, it is incomplete and weak: at the heart of it, the formation of the demos is oppositional, not positive. The question that inevitably arises is why this worldview of relentless antagonism and conflict– a universe where *homo homini lupus est*— was conscripted in the service of a model of radical democracy. Why Laclau and Mouffe, and especially Mouffe as I will discuss later on, drew on a theory premised upon man's need for dominion on the basis of humanity's inescapable evil,[376] and a political philosophy that ultimately led to "The leader

---

[373] In Schmitt's own words: "The political can derive its energy from the most varied human endeavours, from the religious, economic, moral, and other antitheses. It does not describe its own substance but only the intensity of association or dissociation of human beings whose motives can be religious, national (in the ethnic or cultural sense), economic or of another kind."
Ibid, 38.
Michael Marder, rephrasing of Schmitt's thought, provides some additional clarity: "...the political comes to reside in all other domains as the intensity of oppositions peculiar to them."
Michael Marder, "From the Concept of the Political to the Event of Politics,"*Telos* 147 (Summer 2009):.55-76, 59.

[374] Schmitt Op.cit., 38.

[375] Ibid., 29.

[376] Leo Strauss in his private correspondence with Schmitt summarised Schmitt's political theory as follows: "The ultimate foundation of the Right is the principle of the natural evil of man; because man is by nature evil, he therefore needs dominion. But dominion can be established, that is, men can be unified, only in a unity against— against other men. Every association of men is necessarily a separation from other men. The tendency to separate (and therewith the grouping of humanity into friends and enemies) is given with human nature; it is in this sense destiny, period."
Heinrich Meier (ed.), *Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss: The Hidden Dialogue*, trans. J. Harvey Lomax (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 125.

protects the law" ("Der Führer schützt das Recht") of 1934.[377] Granted, Schmitt as the writer of "The Concept of the Political" did not subscribe to essentialised categories as the foundation of collective political identity; his "political" is not limited to the ethnic-racial politics of fascism and Nazism. Theoretically, Schmittian antagonism as formulated in "The Concept of the Political" could even lead to political formations on the basis of a group's production relations, that is, the formation of the proletariat as a political class, rather than the Volk of the German Nazi state. This has been pointed out by writers such Andrew Schaap, but also acknowledged by Schmitt himself.[378] Nevertheless, in practice there is always something prepolitical that governs the decision for the formation of the political community in opposition to an enemy— there is always something prepolitical that influences the "*primary* tendency in human nature to form *exclusive* groups,"[379] that is, political formations in the Schmittian sense. This does not describe a prepolitical opposition or refer to a militant prepolitical identity but to the fact that certain "exclusive groups" might be more receptive to mobilisation on the basis of certain characteristics compared to others. Hence, within one year from the publication of "The Concept of the Political" and with Adolf Hitler's seizure of power now being final, the same writer elevated a racialised concept— *Artgleichkeit*, that is, sameness of species or racial homogeneity— to a fundamental principle of his constitutional theory.[380]

What Schmitt's analysis does however provide is an incisive critique of liberal democracy. Liberal democracy, as it is founded on the *assumption* of the existence of a unifying social and moral good which can be arrived at through consensus, has historically been, according to Schmitt, the political space of depoliticisation par excellence. As he analysed in his 1929 essay titled "The Age of Neutralizations and Depoliticizations," liberal polities comprise the constitutional space for the diminution of the political— the diminution

---

[377] This was the title of a pamphlet that Schmitt published in 1934, justifying the Night of the Long Knives on the basis of the expanded executive powers of the head of the state.

[378]Schaap, .63.

Schmitt op.cit., 37.

[379] Leo Strauss briefly touched upon this issue in one of his letters with Schmitt in 1932.

Meier, p.125.

This still remains a largely ignored question among the proponents of agonistic politics. The problem of course lies in the fact that Schmitt himself also overlooked it. For a more comprehensive discussion on the importance of the prepolitical see:

Inna Viriasova, "The Political Totalization of Carl Schmitt: Deciding on 'the Absolutely Unpolitical,'" *Telos* 175 (Summer 2016): 85-104.

[380] Simona Draghici translates Artgleichkeit as "ethnic identity" which is a rather specific concept compared to the original German term.

Carl Schmitt, *State, Movement, People: The Triadic Structure of the Political Unity, 1933/ The Question of Legality, 1950*, trans. Simona Draghici (Corvallis: Plutarch Press, 2001), 48.

For a survey of Schmitt's writings during his, short-lived albeit substantial, alignment with the NSDAP see: Claudio Minca, Rory Rowan, *On Schmitt and Space* (London; New York: Routledge, 2015), 129-152.

of the distinction between friend and enemy.[381] This comes with grave consequences for the inner political body, as well as the "constitutive outside."

At this point, it is worth pointing out that Schmitt did not regard the depoliticising tendencies within liberalism, evident in the prevalence of synthesising, consensual schemas, as phenomena which suddenly materialised in modernity, but as products of a centuries-long process structurally akin to Weberian rationalization.[382] Schmitt understood Western history after the sixteenth century as a history of growing distanciation from the conditions that allowed the distinction between the nature of order and the threats facing it— a problem which corresponds precisely to the essence of the political.[383] This long history of depoliticisation, or neutralisation, expressed one central impulse: the flight from conflict and the desire for a "neutral" state of things. This was in Schmitt's view a direct consequence of the devastating religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with the Thirty Years' War standing prominent among them.[384] Nevertheless, and despite all concerted efforts to create conditions which contain and neutralise conflict, the political has always proven inescapable. Every era has only temporarily managed to suppress or disguise the intensity of contradictions before these give rise to new conflicts. For Schmitt then, liberalism is fundamentally an ideology of depoliticisation: the survival of liberal societies is contingent upon their ability to create of institutions that can successfully subdue political enmity into economic competition, and intellectual or ideological conflict into rational

---

[381] Carl Schmitt, The Age of Neutralizations and Depoliticizations, trans. Matthias Konzen and John P. McCormick in Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political: Expanded Edition*, trans. George Schwab (University of Chicago Press, 2007), 80-96.

[382] The difference here is that Schmitt's historical theory of sublimation (or neutralisation in this case) did not seek to progressively limit the scope and extent of irrationality as much as to demonstrate that it survives in less apparent guises. After all, one of the contributions of his "Political Theology" can be found in his insistence on the depoliticised theological principles of liberalism. Schmitt wrote in 1922: "All significant concepts of the modem theory of the state are secularised theological concepts not only because of their historical development— in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of the state, whereby, for example, the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver— but also because of their systematic structure, the recognition of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of these concepts."
Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 36.
Despite Schmitt's early reliance on Weber's rationalisation theory, Schmitt eventually rejected the one-sidedness of Weber's account as it failed to convincingly explain the forms of irrationalism that had survived or were emerging in modernity. For a comprehensive discussion on the influence of Weber's theory of rationalisation on the thought of Schmitt see:
John P. McCormick, "Transcending Weber's Categories of Modernity? The Early Lukács and Schmitt on the Rationalization Thesis," *New German Critique*75, (1998): 133-177.

[383] Schmitt described the history of depoliticisation in terms of "central domains." These are hegemonic rationalities that determine how the world is interpreted and administrated in every historical era. From the sixteenth century onward, Schmitt named the theological, the metaphysical, the moral-humanitarian, the economic, and the technical.
Schmitt, *The Age of Neutralizations and Depoliticizations*, 81-83.

[384] Ibid., 89

debate and deliberation.[385] Yet, for Schmitt conflict and antagonism can never be eradicated and a truly unpolitical world is the utopia of the end of conflict: modern history is consequently revealed to be a movement of failing depoliticisation.[386]

In Schmitt's writing, liberal democracy's depoliticising tendencies present two main complications. By suppressing antagonism, the liberal state is no longer able to make the existential distinctions crucial for its stability; it forfeits its ability to define the "enemy" and, as a consequence, is unable to create a cohesive political community in opposition to it. Not too surprisingly then, Schmitt directly associated liberal toleration with weak and unstable government.[387] Nevertheless, as Schmitt's political-oppositional determination refers always to external entities, what follows the liberal state's inability to define itself in relation to an enemy is enmity's inward turn. In his political theory, liberal government— an actual metonymy for a weak, disjointed state— ultimately opens up the possibility of civil war and total collapse.[388]

The second great complication of liberalism, and certainly the one most useful for a theory of radical democracy, concerns the self-legitimation of the politics of the liberal state on abstract, universal concepts. As the liberal state attempts to suppress the real political element of life— its constitutive antagonism— liberalism needs to resort to abstract, universal concepts for its own legitimation. But because conflict is simply inescapable, and the challenges of liberal societies are not neutral ones— they do not concern an indivisible public and cannot consequently be resolved in a neutral, hence non-political, manner— these abstractions, the ideas of abstract equality and universal humanity, end up paradoxically "theologising" oppositions. That is, the liberal depoliticised state wages war on the basis of absolute categories: in the name of humanity, progress, peace. Once ideals of an abstract humanity are deployed in conflict, the combatants are completely deprived of their actual humanity: they become enemies not in the sense of opposed political entities but of humanity. As Schmitt wrote, when an "outlaw of humanity" is essentialised, "war…can be

---

[385] In the words of Schmitt: "Thus the political concept of battle in liberal thought becomes competition in the domain of economics and discussion in the intellectual realm."
Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 71.

[386] Oliver Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and* Laclau, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 45.

[387]Schmitt's profound disdain towards liberalism and consensus-based political institutions (such as parliamentarism) was rooted in his experience of the political instability of Weimar Germany. His "Political Theology" begins with the problem of Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution which was designed to deal with crises and states of emergency by bypassing the consent of the parliament. The years-long (1924-1929), irresolute debate around the correct interpretation of the article has to be construed as having played a crucial role in cementing his illiberalism.
Carl Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, trans. Ellen Kennedy (Cambridge, Mass.; London, England, MIT Press, 1988), xxx.

[388] Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 32.

driven to the most extreme inhumanity."[389] This naturalisation of an essential humanity comes with terrifying consequences. Actual political battle, however, is not one based on a denial of humanity, hatred and the wish for total annihilation; one can have an enemy who is still "the other, the stranger… existentially something different and alien" without the relation devolving into utter dehumanisation.[390] It is thus important to understand that in Schmitt's political theory, liberalism's weakness as a depoliticised space is always on the brink of escalating into the capacity for unprecedented— total even— violence.

This desacralising of conflict betrays therefore an unexpected "humanitarian" aspect in Schmitt's political theory: it is the absolute necessity to deny the liberal state the ability to resort to the evocation of universal abstractions, such as humanity, as a source of legitimation for its actions. If these forces are left unchallenged— if the liberal state is thus allowed to wage its wars in the name of humanity, war becomes a mere pretext for annihilation:[391]

> Humanity as such and as a whole has no enemies. Everyone belongs to humanity..."Humanity" thus becomes an asymmetrical counter-concept. If he discriminates within humanity and thereby denies the quality of being human to a disturber or destroyer, then the negatively valued person becomes an unperson, and his life is no longer of the highest value: it becomes worthless and must be destroyed. Concepts such as "human being" thus contain the possibility of the deepest inequality and become thereby 'asymmetrical.'"[392]

What Laclau and Mouffe draw from Schmitt's antagonistic interpretation of political life is the ability of antagonism to mobilise and reveal actual political and not essentialised conflicts. The longer political identity is allowed to be constructed on abstractions with universalist pretensions, the likelier it becomes that these will be actively expropriated from an "enemy." And the longer political processes are masqueraded as final, anodyne and consensual, the closer we get to their universal and unconditional enforcement.

---

[389] Ibid., p.54.
[390] Ibid., p.27.
[391] This was also, according to Schmitt, the defining characteristic of the unprecedented cruelty of European colonialism; it was the unassailable conviction that the European colonists were representative of a universal humanity which the colonial "other" did not conform to. This was possible only after ideas of universality were firmly established; that it was "humanists" and "humanitarians" who orchestrated, carried out, oversaw and, above all, philosophically justified slavery and extermination was no surprise at all, Schmitt contented. See Carl Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*, trans.G. L. Ulmen (New York: Telos Press, 2003), 103.
[392] Carl Schmitt, "The Legal World Revolution," *Telos* 72 (Summer 1987), 88.
Cited in Tracy B. Strong, Foreword, in *The Concept of the Political*, p.xxii.

These are therefore the ideas that Bishop evokes in her criticism of relational aesthetics. Bishop argues, that unlike Tiravanija and Gillick, Sierra and Hirschhorn allow the artwork to acquire antagonistic characteristics, to acknowledge the exclusionary constitution of social formations, and the impossibility of their final, rational reconciliation. The forms of dialogue Sierra and Hirschhorn facilitate do not collapse "these relationships into the work's content;" the relations that they produce are "marked by sensations of unease and discomfort rather than belonging," and their incorporation of the labour of disenfranchised economic classes challenges contemporary art's "self-perception as a domain that embraces other social and political structures."[393] In lieu of the conviviality of relational aesthetics, Bishop finds a radical democratic promise in the abject shock of Sierra and Hirschhorn's adherence to an alienating autonomy.

4.4 PROCESS AND THE POST-POLITICAL: THE CASE OF SANTIAGO SIERRA

Just as community-based and relational art practices correspond to the need for an escape from modern isolation, antagonistic socially engaged practices attempt to disrupt the depoliticising normativity of liberalism. And indeed, there is something deeply existential, even aesthetic, in the reaction against life in the depoliticised liberal state— the state of the "minimal political morality."[394] The unique political-moral hollowness of liberalism is, of course, not the result of an inadequate development of its ideas but an intrinsic property, as Schmitt highlights. Liberalism imagines itself not as an overarching ideology but as a set of principles necessary for the protection from a despotic authority. The success of liberalism is thus not predicated upon the survival of an ethnic group, the construction of a workers' state, or mankind's eschatological salvation; the object of liberalism is the formation of a society as the neutral space for the unfolding of individual freedom. And apart from the moderation or prohibition of interference with the relative freedom of others, liberalism does not procure any specific positive doctrines that can be distilled into practical guidelines to live according to.[395] The ideals of the liberal state are abstract: mutual respect, responsibility, toleration— all ostensibly non-ideological ideas necessary for its frictionless reproduction.

---

[393] Bishop ibid., 70.

[394] I am using Toula Nicolacopoulos's description of liberalism as a "minimal political morality" in her analysis of John Rawls's ideas on citizenship.
See Toula Nicolacopoulos, *The Radical Critique of Liberalism: In Memory of a Vision* (Melbourne: Re.press, 2008) and more specifically the chapter: "Political Liberalism as a Minimal Political Morality," 179-194.

[395] In theory, even a top-down definition of collective social goals borders on anti-liberal imposition.
Judith Shklar, Liberalism of Fear, in Nancy Rosenblum (ed.), *Liberalism and the Moral Life* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Press), 21-38, 21.

These are nevertheless ideas of complacency, atomisation, and the technocratic reproduction of life. If there is little to no substantive content in liberalism, all politics ultimately becomes a politics of process— the administration of how things are done and how we relate with one another take the place of questions over the meaning of objects and social relations. The hollowness of liberalism creates then a life full of surfaces where the judgment of value becomes an extension of the judgment of process. This is why Bourriaud overlooks the actual nature of the relationships that relational art practices form: conviviality and hospitality become gestures of democratic resistance in their own right. Knowingly or not, this assumption expresses the central idea underlying the rational construction of political life in liberalism; the belief that, because humans are naturally rational, once certain processes are upheld, good is made possible. Human collaboration under the conditions of relational art practice will therefore produce resistant subjectivities and "better ways to live."

The preoccupation with process is both a cause and symptom of the post-political from a Mouffean-Schmittian perspective. Because the post-political has removed all political decisions from the public sphere— from the sphere of politics— and now appears to govern with the characteristics of an institution ostensibly outside the jurisdiction of political decision— be that economics, science or morality— the only object left up to contestation is the process by which things work. As the post-political derives its legitimacy from outside of politics, it forecloses its boundaries and presents itself with the veneer of naturalness and objectivity. A political decision will create rifts and mobilise dissent, whereas a scientific fact or moral precept will present itself as an embodiment of the order of things. This is one of the points where a Schmittian-Mouffean analysis intersects with a more traditional Marxian one: as post-political rules and operations are no longer understood as concretised instantiations of historical relations of power, they ultimately become abstractions with objective and non-contestable characteristics: this is precisely the process of reification.[396] As the post-political world heralds a state of things wherein the only possible disagreements concern the process of things, it presents itself in the image of a life wherein "the struggles over all of the large issues have been largely settled."[397] The tangible characteristics of social, political and economic life become less tangible as they are internalised as objective, natural properties of individual life. It is this attachment to a mystified vision of the world

---

On the other hand, John Rawls's attempt to produce a liberal universal political theory of justice was strongly criticised by Michael Sandel for its reliance on Kantian metaphysics, and its susceptibility to the weaknesses thereof— the intrinsic individualism of Kant's Categorical Imperative.
Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (New York; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982)

[396] Peter L. Berger, Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Penguin Books, 1991), 106.

[397] Fukuyama, 320.

that prohibits its comprehension as originating in specific social relations and therefore politically subject to change. In the depoliticised politics that sustain any sufficiently sophisticated form of capitalism, it then becomes "easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism."[398]

If in the absence of a real existential enemy the political is bound to its inward turn, in the post-political present the political becomes entrenched in the interpersonal. When public life is walled off the political, the private sphere becomes politically overdetermined. There, the only thing that remains within one's control is to attempt to administer or reconfigure the ways that identity is produced through ways of interpersonal relating. So, while Bishop correctly diagnoses the depoliticised character of relational synthesis and its suppression of dissent, it is only the second order of its depoliticisation that she is targeting. The first order antedates the work and it is the confinement of politics to the sphere of the interpersonal. Only there do processes of relating become the centre of human life. Dislodging therefore the understanding of the political from the realm of interpersonal relating expresses a specific political impulse regularly suppressed. To the extent that Sierra dissociates the moral or political judgment of his process from the substantive moral-political reality underlying it, his work becomes a protest against the politics of process. In this light, his work assumes an anti-prefigurative character— the processes and relations that it is founded on and reproduces are precisely those that foreclose utopia; contractual brutality, sexual humiliation, the spectacular dimensions of the world of absolute heteronomy.

Yet, does that make his work what Bishop contends it is? Is it really a radical *democratic* antagonism that Sierra represents? If it is, what would be the political bodies constituted though the confrontation of the art audience and the degraded workers of his installations? The workers are certainly never realised in this confrontation; Sierra in reality goes to great pains to make sure they never are. Nowhere in his work are there any traces of their cathartic vindication or signs of their release from a terrible state of being; this would most definitely signify the possibility of salvation through culture which would not simply reduce his work to a gesture of dreadful condescension and misplaced faith in art's power, but also to the least of Sierra's own intentions.[399] The workers of Sierra's installations are in fact radically unrealised in every possible way: faceless and nameless, forced to turn their

[398] An aphorism of seemingly unspecified origin which Mark Fisher attributes to Frederic Jameson or Slavoj Žižek but first appeared published in Jameson's "Future City."
Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative* (Zero Books, 2009), *2*.
Frederic Jameson, "Future City," *New Left Review* 21, May- June 2003.
[399] Bishop quotes Sierra: "I can't change anything. There is no possibility that we can change anything with our artistic work. We do our work because we are making art, and because we believe art should be something, something that follows reality. But I don't believe in the possibility of change."
Bishop, 71.

backs to the viewer or covered in cardboard boxes, they are utterly non-representable. In that sense, Sierra evokes Schmitt's interpretation of Marx's ontology of the proletariat as non-substantive and amorphous— existing in the negative only as the pure contradiction of the bourgeoisie. Before its real politicisation against the bourgeoisie, the proletariat exists as negativity. It is the bourgeoisie instead that has specific representable, objective characteristics, all of which are centred on possession. The possessive individualism of the bourgeoisie is so consuming that in fact turns the bourgeois into possessions themselves— they are representable because they are no longer human. The proletarian, in contrast, owns nothing— not even a body— and through this extreme dispossession emerges as "nothing but a person," and thus negatively defined. Schmitt wrote in "The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy:"

> The proletariat can only be defined as the social class that no longer participates in profit, that owns nothing, that knows no ties to family or fatherland, and so forth. The proletarian becomes the social nonentity.[400]

In the Hegelian-Marxist dialectic, the proletariat needs to be realised in the "absolute contradiction" of its humanity: in class.[401] This is the mechanism of the historical process condensed in the absolute opposition between proletariat and bourgeoisie. Only after this opposition materialises can the proletariat acquire representable characteristics which redefine it away from pure negativity. This is the culmination of antagonism, the highest moment of political conflict: the moment when class ceases being simply economic, that is, "class in itself" in Marx's terms, and becomes real— a "class for itself," and therefore political.[402]

For Schmitt then, the proletariat becomes a political body only insofar as it is mobilised by the greatest antagonism against the bourgeoisie. In contrast, Sierra's workers are trapped in the eternal non-becoming of the "slave," and will never be realised: they are not political bodies and will not be they are "nothing but persons." Of course, to realise the dispossessed and non-representable into a political class in the Schmittian sense is utterly unrealistic, and certainly way beyond the power and jurisdiction of the artist. To therefore enlist Sierra's "homines sacri" in a project of radical democracy feels unfounded. And it is

---

[400] Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, 61-62.
[401] Ibid., 62.
[402] Schmitt described the politicisation of class in "The Concept of the Political:" "Also a class in the Marxian sense ceases to be something purely economic and becomes a political factor when it reaches this decisive point, for example, when Marxists approach the class struggle seriously and treat the class adversary as a real enemy and fights him either in the form of a war of state against state or in a civil war within a state."
Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 37.

unfounded because it implies that in another configuration of democratic rule— one more democratic, one which acknowledges the hegemonic, and thus contingent, construction of social relations, and therefore does not present these "as dictated by rationality or morality" but through "a particular regime of inclusion-exclusion," Sierra's workers would not exist.[403] Ironically then, the antagonistic reading of his work turns into the conflict between Schmitt and Mouffe.

4.5 AGONISM, OR THE PROBLEM OF SOVEREIGNTY

Since 1993 with the publication of "The Return of the Political," Mouffe has been gradually revising her theory of antagonistic radical democracy in favour of an "agonistic pluralist democracy." The concept of antagonism has not been discarded altogether; it is still central to her political theory, albeit now understood not as an inevitability that needs to be cultivated but as an inevitability that needs to be sublimated. Crucial for this reorientation was the recognition that the essence of Schmitt's antagonism is the Heraclitian "war is the father and king of all;" not something to be harnessed for the deepening or radicalisation of liberal democracy but the reason for Schmitt's own original verdict against it.

"The Democratic Paradox" published in 2000 provides a useful summary of Mouffe's reorientation to an agonistic approach. Mouffe distinguishes between two types of political opposition: antagonism and agonism. Whereas antagonism is constituted by the confrontation of enemies, agonism describes the oppositional relation of adversaries.[404] "Agonism" and "adversary" therefore represent sublimations of "antagonism" and "enemy." Unlike antagonism, agonism presupposes the existence of a common symbolic ground wherein a conflict plays out, and, unlike the enemy, the adversary shares the "ethico-political principles of liberal democracy: liberty and equality."[405] Mouffe's revised democratic theory attempts then to rescue liberal democracy from itself by dislodging it from its consensual, deliberative ideologies. As antagonism cannot be eliminated, and the possibility of the friend-enemy grouping is ever present, Mouffe's agonistic approach aims to create the conditions that make antagonism less likely to emerge, or rather the conditions that can transform it into agonism.[406] With the sublimation of antagonism into agonism, Mouffe contends that we can "construct the 'them' in such a way that is no longer perceived as an enemy to be destroyed, but as an 'adversary,' that is, somebody whose ideas we combat but

[403] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 49.
[404] Ibid., 13.
[405] Ibid., 102.
[406] Ibid.,13., 103.

whose right to defend those ideas we do not put into question."[407] To accomplish that, antagonism needs to be acknowledged— any attempt at its suppression leads to its intensification. Universalist illusions need to be therefore abandoned; there is no indivisible public sphere and every social configuration is inevitably hegemonic. Democratic politics needs instead to engage in the production of hegemonic configurations which nevertheless remain open to democratic critique and contestation. This is the essence of Mouffe's agonistic democracy or agonistic pluralism.

In Mouffe's attempt "to think with Schmitt against Schmitt" the objective of democratic politics becomes the transformation of the "frontiers" of exclusion that every political configuration inevitably establishes into porous, contestable limits that are continuously subject to progressive change on the horizon of a greater inclusion of difference. Transposed onto the level of art's iconography, the agonistic approach would foreground the existence of Sierra's workers because a democratic polity needs to acknowledge and conflictually renegotiate its exclusions.

For Schmitt however, the exception that produces Sierra's workers is not an anomaly or malaise that can be treated or corrected; the exception is the moment that reveals the true order of things, and not the unpleasant reminder of its secondary, rectifiable or dispensable characteristics.[408] The exception is the very basis of sovereignty, and without sovereignty there is no possibility for the formation and survival of the cohesive political community: Schmitt is a philosopher of suspicion— the breakdown of the order is the order of things. If it is the nation-state that has produced the exception in Sierra's workers, then this is the real face of the nation-state. If it is democracy that is responsible, then this is the nature of democracy. No matter how open or "radical" it becomes it will always produce its excluded, and thus banish them beyond its "frontiers." For Schmitt, the moment that the state surrenders this power and thus forfeits its ability to produce exception through establishing a new order, is also the moment when it is faced with its imminent collapse. This is something that Giorgio Agamben understood well when in his own analysis of sovereignty he elected the "camp" as "the hidden paradigm of the political space of modernity."[409] "The nomos of the modern" is not the consequence of an illiberal or undialectical formulation of

[407] Ibid., 101-102.
[408] Schmitt wrote: "...the exception is to be understood to refer to a general concept in the theory of the state, and not merely to a construct applied to any emergency decree or state of siege."
Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 5.
[409] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 73.

the state, but fundamentally a problem of sovereignty that has only been accelerated in the modern era with humanity's inscription into a legal entity.[410]

The central problem in Mouffe's formulation of agonism lies therefore in its attempt to retain Schmitt's collective, conflictual understanding of the political and synthesise it with the liberal tradition of individual rights. From the moment, however, that the critique of liberal democracy aims to simply improve liberal democracy, the horizon of available action limits itself to the degree and scope of the faith in the fairness or universality of liberal democratic procedures: any action is forced to represent itself through liberal democracy. Mouffe's agonistic pluralism simply acknowledges that these procedures are not universal or transhistorical but produced through conflictual relationships; hers is a discursive model of democracy different from liberal orthodoxy in its self-fortification against the facile criticism that liberal deliberative models are normally vulnerable to. The difference is, therefore, primarily one of definition: with Mouffe we understand a more meaningful democracy as the unstable field of agonistic pluralism rather than as a system of rational agreement or compromise. Nevertheless, as Mouffe does not offer any paradigm other than the liberal democratic one, agonistic pluralism will inevitably materialise in a form of consensus— different only in its theoretical integration of the productive possibility of dissent. In more concrete terms, agonistic pluralism will stabilise in an inclusive democratic model: one that has abandoned its pretensions of unpolitical, or post-political, objectivity.

Behind the agonistic repudiation of universalist proceduralism lies therefore another type of proceduralism, less apparent this time— one according to which the crisis of liberal democracy can be absorbed by a less rigid, and epistemically undogmatic political framework. Agonistic pluralism becomes then a framework of social relations which attempts to integrate the awareness of Schmitt's friend-enemy distinction while largely doing away with its substance. As Mouffe's agonistic politics does not procure a theory of sovereignty, it produces a disarmed, liberalised Schmittian formulation wherein the subject of difference is arbitrarily allowed to survive its antagonistic relation with a political body— a *protego* that is not followed by *obligo*. This is by and large a corrective to liberal democracy's hegemonic discourse which does not produce a substantively different model.[411] Once Mouffe's agonistic democracy is forced to confront the question of its survival; once it has to decide on its enemies instead of adversaries, those who seek to

[410] This is precisely why Žižek has insisted that enlisting Agamben in a radical democratic project that seeks to "renegotiate/redefine the limits of in-and exclusion" borders on a misappropriation of his ideas.
Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates*, (London; New York: Verso, 2002), 98.
[411] Schaap, 72.

suppress its fledging freedoms rather than negotiate them, it will have to revert to Schmitt or reaffirm his original verdict on liberal democracy's unstable constitution.[412]

More importantly, this liberal democratic corrective can only fail its programmatic declarations to bring about the repoliticisation of social life. Contemporary depoliticisation is not the consequence of neoliberalism— although neoliberalism certainly expands and intensifies it— nor even of an improperly defined and insufficiently defended liberal democratic framework. As I argued in the beginning of this study, depoliticisation is an intrinsic force within liberal democracy which originates in its most fundamental ordering of governing power: the autonomisation of the economic and the political.

4.6 THE ARTIST AS SOVEREIGN

If then, the problem of Sierra's workers is the problem of sovereignty there can exist no democratic salvation for them; Sierra appears to leave no doubt about that, after all. This realisation should be the starting point of an analysis of the politics of antagonistic practice. That is, the antagonistic, anti-consensual model of authorship should be dislodged from the rhetorical ascription of a vague, radical democratic character— a direct consequence of the reduction of politics into the dialectic of inclusion-exclusion— and become instead understood as a mode of exploration of sovereignty, political and artistic. That this dimension is not the primary one in the context of Bishop's polemic is, on the one hand, testament to the effectiveness of the obfuscation of sovereignty in liberalism, as Schmitt had after all highlighted many decades ago,[413] and on the other, a symptom of the critical investment of the artworld to rehabilitate artistic activity in the context of an endless campaign of democratisation of social and cultural life. This is, as has already been argued earlier, a clear reflection of the political transubstantiation of artistic criteria and their subsequent inscription in the horizon of democracy, but also the form that claims to artistic and critical legitimacy assume.

That critical frameworks lacking a theory of sovereignty as a constituent power— as Mouffe's and by extension Bishop's do— redirect analysis to the examination of the

[412] Matthew Jones interrogates some of these contradictions regarding agonistic democracy's mechanisms of coercion and exclusion.
Matthew Jones, "Chantal Mouffe's Agonistic Project: Passions and Participation,"*Parallax* 20, no.2 (2014): 14-30, 25-28.

[413] Schmitt wrote in 1928 in one of his milder diagnoses of the problem: "a distinctive feature of the bourgeois Rechtsstaat constitution is to ignore the sovereign, whether this sovereign is the monarch or the people."
Carl Schmitt, *Constitutional Theory*, trans. and ed. Jeffrey Seitzer (Durham; London: Duke University Press., 2008)

particularities of inclusion-exclusion, allows the artist to advance a double claim to truth. On the one hand, the artist's sovereignty is established as a power so fundamental and expansive that can represent itself as emphatically surviving the disorder and violence which comprise its constituting elements before materialising into the artwork. As this is a work that establishes itself as a non-communicative totality, it escapes judgement by existing norms; hence its moral ambiguity. At the same time, its interpretative reframing on the basis of the conflictual, non-consensual dynamics that underpin it— that is, the work's reframing though the dialectic of exclusion-inclusion— allows the artist to synthesise, or even disguise the exceptional gesture with a symbolic power akin to holding up a mirror to the audience. Sometimes this is enacted in real time through the encounter in the gallery space between the work's audience and its contracted collaborators, as in the case of *Person Remunerated for a Period of 360 Continuous Hours* (MoMA PS1 New York, 2000) while other times exclusively through the work's alienating documentation, as in *Hooded Woman Seated Facing the Wall* (Venice Biennale, 2003) whose original performance took place absent an audience. The artist then embodies a duplicity of roles— both the bearer of order and the dissension against it. This is a double gambit: the directorial, morally disinterested gesture is reframed as the symbolical dismantling of the space of art as a space of pacification and contends to confront the audience with a hidden world, the domination of which sustains its cultural habits.

What this highlights is that if the antagonistic artist performs the impulse toward sovereignty suppressed in the diminution of the political in liberalism, then the political body which is realised should not be looked for in the dehumanised collaborators of Sierra's installation, but in its audience. It is not the subjects suffering under the absolute heteronomy of the antagonistic artist that are realised— it is us. Yet, this raises a crucial question that needs to be addressed— what is the form of this political becoming? As Kester correctly identifies, to argue for Sierra's revealing of antagonism, conflict and drudgery as gestures transformative of political subjectivity implies that there is a contemporary art audience for which all these conditions are still concealed.[414] This conceptualisation is in reality closer to an ideal type of a late nineteenth or early twentieth century audience of philistines than it is to an audience of contemporary art. Or, as Kester suggests, it is premised on the universalisation of a "naïve" and "ill-informed" viewer, an "imaginary" viewer who needs to be disrupted and disabused of ideological blindness and insensitivity through art— a

[414] Grant H. Kester, "The Device Laid Bare: On Some Limitations in Current Art Criticism," in *e-flux Journal* No.50 (December 2013): 1-11, 7.

viewer who is largely *not* a member of the audience.[415] On the contrary, the spaces of contemporary art tend to primarily attract these educational and professional classes whose certainties "need" to be disrupted the least; despite art's formal and thematic societalisation, the primary audience of a performance or installation remains an initiated one.

If we were to therefore engage with Bishop's proposition against Bourriaud— the proposition according to which we "must judge the relations that are produced" by the work[416]— and this judgement encompassed the artwork as a site of cultural production in its totality, rather than dwell at the level of a semiotics of inclusion-exclusion, we would encounter an entirely different picture. As long as the antagonistic act unfolds within the art space, it is entirely dependent on the specific context that signifies it as an artistic and political experience. The publics most likely to accept it as a legitimate proposition through attendance, engagement and discussion are those already largely sympathetic to its underlying ideas. For this public, the forms of relations that the work produces are those that construct a symbolic space for the performance of sympathy, outrage or a momentary dissociation from bourgeois normalcy. The work's politicising effect becomes then the affirmation of the belief system of members of a progressive creative or professional class. Once the dimension of the "imaginary" public is removed from the picture, what is revealed is that the work's function presupposes the existence of a common ideological ground among the people it addresses, that is, the art audience. As the case of Sierra demonstrates, antagonistic works premised upon revealing the unacknowledged public acceptance of exception can be recognised as such insofar as the wider public sphere is still structured hegemonically in a way that can recognise it as perverse. The work becomes possible as critique of the contemporary distribution of sovereignty only due to the existence of a generalised agreement on how its exclusions should be negotiated.

What happens, however, when the common symbolic ground between artist and public that grants the former their sovereignty and the latter the perception of political becoming is absent or contested? What happens when the parameter of exclusivity that safeguards the modicum of agreement between artist and audience is removed? The following two examples are enlightening: the events of "Interpol" (Färgfabriken Stockholm, 1996) showcase the artwork's collapse under forces properly antagonistic— that is, forces not corresponding to a shared ideological framework— while Thomas Hirschhorn's *Deleuze Monument* of 2000 (Fig.25) demonstrates the symbolic character of artistic sovereignty.

---

[415] Grant H. Kester, "Rhetorical Questions: The Alternative Arts Sector and the Imaginary Public," in *Art, Activism, and Oppositionality: Essays from Afterimage* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 103-135, 123.
[416] Bishop, 64.

"Interpol," organised by the Swedish Jan Åman and Russian Viktor Misiano, was an international exhibition that sought to bring together art from Western and Eastern Europe after the end of the Cold War. Positioned centrally in the main hall of the Färgfabriken was Gu Wenda's installation *United Nations: Sweden and Russia Monument* by Gu Wenda. The work, consisting of hair-knitted sheets collected from Swedish and Russian barbershops, a rocket from the Swedish Air Force and the flag of the European Union, attempted to emblematise the exhibition's spirit of international connectedness and unification.[417] Even though Wenda's installation was presented as a collaborative project, it was only euphemistically so. In addition to its conception and execution without the input of any other artist, the work also completely omitted any representations of the Russian side participating in the exhibition [but instead subsumed it] under the universalism of the liberal democratic West.

Partly motivated by personal antipathy but mostly outraged by the imperialist premises of Wenda's work, on February 2, 1996 the Russian artists Oleg Kulik and Alexander Brener decided to disrupt the exhibition. In the brawl that ensued, Kulik ended up getting arrested after he assaulted an audience member and got kicked in the face by Jan Åman, while Brener destroyed the installation (Fig.26).[418] As Igor Zabel later remarked, the incident was collectively interpreted as a politically motivated one; a scandal for one side and a gesture of resistance for the other.[419] In an open letter signed by eighteen non-Russian critics, curators and artists, the Russian dissidents were condemned for "an attack against art, democracy, and freedom of expression,"[420] while Brener defended his actions as a radical democratic attack against neoliberalism and a retaliation to the mistreatment that Russian participants were subjected to in this exhibition.[421] Meanwhile, Gu Wenda attributed the actions of Brener and Kulik to their nationalist and communist ideologies, the second of which he even associated with Nazism.[422]

---

[417] Gu Wenda, "The Cultural War," in *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art Since the 1950s*, eds. Laura J. Hoptman, Tomáš Pospiszyl (The Museum of Modern Art, 2002), 351-354, 352.

[418] Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, 212.

[419] Igor Zabel, "Dialogue," in *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art Since the 1950s*, 354-361.

[420] Viktor Misiano, "Interpol: The Apology of Defeat," *in Interpol: The Exhibition that Divided East and West*, eds. Eda Čufer and Viktor Misiano (Moscow: Moscow Art Magazine, 2000).
Cited in Gardner, 3.

[421] Brener wrote in response: "[a]t this exhibition I was the only democrat who had openly declared his position and demonstrated his disagreement with the organizers. Radical democracy in action! Bang on simulation and neoliberal vulgarity!"
Alexander Brener, *Ticket that Exploded*, 1998
http://www.ljudmila.org/interpol/ Accessed 23/03/2017

[422] Gu Wenda, "The Cultural War," in *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art Since the 1950s*, 351-354, 352.

While "Interpol" underlines the rhetorical nature of critical invocations of antagonism in art practice and how artworks collapse under actual antagonistic forces, Hirschhorn's *Deleuze Monument* of 2000 underlines the contingency of artistic sovereignty upon the sociocultural space of the institution. Hirschhorn's large-scale public monuments dedicated to important intellectual historical figures are among his most characteristics works. His first project of the series was the *Spinoza Monument* in Amsterdam (1999), followed a year later by the *Deleuze Monument* in Avignon. For *documenta 11* (2002) he designed the *Bataille Monument* in Kassel, while the last one in this series was the *Gramsci Monument* of 2013 in New York. The monuments are conceived as living socio-political and cultural sites within urban environments, hosting performances, discussions, screenings and various other educational and leisure activities for the local and general public. Despite the apparent social, open and collaborative character of these projects, Hirshhorn is adamant about the centrality of his importance as authorial identity for the materialisation of his works; a system of principles which he describes as "Presence and Production." On the occasion of the Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival in 2009, Hirschhorn expanded on this philosophy:

> My presence (the artist's presence) and my production (the artist's production) first of all, because that's the condition that makes participation possible for the inhabitants of the Bijlmer neighbourhood of Amsterdam. Therefore, 'participation' is not the aim of this work; 'participation' can only be a consequence of my presence and my production. I am the one who must give something of myself first, in order to invite the other (the inhabitant) to give something in turn.[423]

Hirschhorn conceived the *Deleuze Monument* of 2000 (Fig.26) for the city-wide exhibition "La Beauté*"* curated by Jean de Loisy. Defying the suggestions of the curator, Hirschhorn decided to construct the project outside Avignon's walled historical city centre, and move the work to the city's banlieues so that it could face the social "reality" of the city.[424] The first option was Cité Louis Gros, which had to be eventually abandoned after the rejection of the local residents due to fears that the project would exacerbate issues of criminality in the neighbourhood. Hirschhorn's remaining option was Cité Champfleury, a neighbourhood similarly plagued with poverty and violence.

Nevertheless, two months after the opening of "La Beauté*"* and two months before its originally scheduled end, Hirschhorn decided to abandon the work (25-28 July 2000). There

[423] Thomas Hirschhorn, Critical Laboratory: The Writings of Thomas Hirschhorn, eds. Lisa Lee, Hal Foster (Cambridge; Mass: MIT Press, 2013), 299.
[424] Ibid., p.209.

are two events that sealed the monument's premature death: the theft of a one of the video players used in the work's screenings and an assault against the visiting critic Hervé Laurent and his partner.[425] Hirschhorn attributed both events to his personal inability to be continuously physically present in Avignon. Notwithstanding the rather symbolic character of this proposition, it signifies something important about the nature of artistic control and the impossibility of the artwork to exist in its absence. The truth is that by moving outside the geographical and cultural space and therefore addressing constituencies outside those that socio-culturally comprise the audiences for contemporary art, the artwork is exposed to the possibility of heteronomous forces against which it cannot survive. Artworks can exist only by virtue of a system of belief that artist and public partake in. When this system is disrupted, works— no matter their social conceits— fall apart.

Figure 25 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Figure 25 Thomas Hirschhorn, Deleuze Monument, 2000. "La Beauté," Avignon, France.

Figure 26 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Figure 26 Gu Wenda, United Nations-Sweden & Russia Monument, 1996.

[425] Anna Dezeuze's "Deleuze Monument" provides a detailed account of the history of the short-lived project and the events that led to its premature closure.
See Dezeuze, *Deleuze Monument*.

THE MORAL COMMUNITY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In 1995 Glasgow hosted "Trust." "Trust" was a collective exhibition of artworks from many future stars of relational art. Visitors to the exhibition could enjoy tea prepared by Carsten Höller and food cooked by Rirkrit Tiravanija, while Andrea Zittel's *Pit Bed* offered a place to rest. Despite the exhibition's pronounced communal atmosphere, with works aiming to inspire intimacy and interpersonal exchange, the public did not respond positively; for art critic Clare Henry, the show was in its very conception designed to indulge an inner circle.[426] In a sense, "Trust" epitomised certain characteristics central to the liberal impulse toward community: an imagining of community as a self-conscious, performative cultivation of relations, rooted in the voluntary and consensual association of individuals in liberalism. The public's disconnect becomes then testament to the insufficiency of this permutation of community; temporary, ineffective, reproducing all the psychological characteristics at the heart of community's own disintegration.

The present chapter seeks to juxtapose this rather "homeopathic," in its frequent prescription of solutions inextricable from a problem's underlying causes, community, with artistic explorations of community outside the walls of the institution, as this has been conventionally demarcated. Unlike, therefore, the previous chapter which primarily engaged with the problems of institutional art practice, this discussion aims to interrogate the more community-oriented theory and practice of the "social turn," with Grant Kester's model of "dialogical aesthetics" as its point of departure. Kester, in his extensive documentation of socially engaged art practices that reach outward and engage directly with communities has articulated a series of ethical considerations about the nature of power relations between artist and participating public, and the pedagogic, transformative potential of such practices. These positions will be examined here in relation to their wider implications for contemporary community-oriented art practices.

Claire Bishop famously pointed out in 2006 that a remarkable change that the "social turn" highlighted was the substitution of aesthetic judgements for ethical criteria.[427] This

[426] Clare Henry, "Leaving Them at a Loss,"*The Herald* (Scotland), May 15, 1995.
Cited in Lane Relyea, *Your Everyday Art World* (Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: MIT Press, 2013), 133.
[427] Bishop, *The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents*, 180.

observation underlines the fraught relationship between the categories of aesthetics and ethics. Following that cue, I propose a historicisation of the separation between aesthetic and moral ideas in relation to art.[428] The rupture between the aesthetic and the moral that can be observed in Kester's theory of "dialogical aesthetics" has its origins not so much in the history of art— although art has historically negotiated it— but in the evolution of the religious ethic across the centuries. My analysis turns to Max Weber's theory of rationalisation, and specifically his theorisation of the sublimation of religious faith into methodical moral conduct. For Weber, this was a process that resulted in the systematisation of religiosity and its entrenchment in the sphere of human relations. With the departure of morality from its transcendental, non-communicative characteristics and its normalisation as conduct, the void of the irrational was gradually filled by aesthetic practice. Then, as all autonomous spheres in modernity, rational morality— which adheres to the unity of intention and form— and the irrationality of the aesthetic— characterised by the dissonance between form and utility— inevitably grew antagonistic. Kester's "dialogical aesthetics," with its heightened emphasis on ethical considerations and method, presents a vision of a rational-moral community in opposition to the non-communicative, irrational utopianism of the avant-garde tradition.

One of the central concepts in Kester's vision of community in socially engaged practices is the "politically coherent community." The "politically coherent community" describes a community whose formation predates the artistic intervention, and is based on specific social, economic or political characteristics. The determinacy of this type of community comes to balance the power differential between artist and participating community as it shields the latter from its potential subsumption by the intervention of the artist. This underlies Kester's insistence on forms of socially engaged art of restrained subversiveness; non-antagonistic practices that do not seek to deconstruct or undermine the collective identity of the community. This insistence is, however, not as innocuous as it might appear, and in fact, carries implications that need to be seriously considered: Kester's preference for social practices that do not disrupt the self-perception of the community, and therefore present a vision of community as integral and self-conscious, risks collapsing an idealistic conception of community identity into the expedient presentation of community as coherent and self-sufficient by the neoliberal state. The neoliberal state, as it programmatically deflects its social responsibilities, derives legitimacy from the

[428] The alternation between moral and ethical corresponds to the Weberian-Foucauldian definition of ethics as the systematised conduct proper to an idea of morality.

presentation of social groups as empowered— an illusion which it then reproduces to establish its rule over a society broken into self-administering but disjointed communities.

This opens up a broader discussion on community as a site of political expediency, and the role of socially engaged art. Of course, it cannot be denied that all forms of culture and art can to some extent function as means of pacification and ideological reproduction. Nevertheless, in the context of community the literature of the last two decades suggests a more targeted, systematic, and practical utilisation of art and culture as political technique. These decades have seen a palpable move toward the instrumentalisation of art for purposes of social cohesion— as a substitute for those "intermediate associations"[429] of society which have not and could not have survived its neoliberalisation. The dimension of political expediency casts a different light on the community-oriented tendencies of the "social turn" and further complicates their critical assessment.[430]

While it serves no purpose to engage in a "rabid criticism of culture," denying thus any material or psychological benefits that such art-communal projects may have on vulnerable communities,[431] it is also impossible to ignore the central aporia of all ameliorative interventions: the risk of legitimising the very same structures that made the original intervention necessary. To highlight that social cohesion and pacification are only separated by a very thin line is a rather commonplace observation, however. What I am primarily interested here is how the moral-ethical conceptualisations of community risk buttressing specific strategies of the neoliberal state with unintended political and economic consequences for the communities they activate. Akin to the way that Chapter 3 demonstrated that dematerialisation catalyses the breakdown between production and social reproduction in neoliberalism, the moralisation of community in "dialogical aesthetics" obfuscates precarious communities' underlying objective conditions by amplifying voluntarist models of self-determination. These, underexamined by Kester, dimensions cast a new light on community-oriented practice at large, and should thus be seriously considered.

---

[429] "Intermediate associations" is the tem that the conservative sociologist Robert Nisbet used to describe social formations which mediate the relationship between individual and state in his influential study entitled "The Quest for Community: A Study in the Ethics of Order and Freedom," later published under the title "Community and Power."
Robert Nisbet, *Community and Power* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1962)

[430] For a good summary of the rhetoric that the New Labour government employed in its large-scale project of economic regeneration through the support of community and public art see:
Loretta Lees, and Clare Melhuish, "Arts-Led Regeneration in the UK: The Rhetoric and the Evidence on Urban Social Inclusion," *European Urban and Regional Studies*, vol. 22, no. 3(July 2015): 242–260.

[431] I am thinking of Rick Lowe's "Project Row Houses" (Houston, Texas) which since 1993 has been providing affordable housing in the working class Ward 3 of Houston, or even the more recent "Elpidos 13, Victoria Square" for *documenta 14*, where Rick Lowe and the Greek artist Maria Papadimitriou set up a social space in the Victoria neighbourhood in Athens, Greece, organising cultural events, but most importantly providing support to the local Greek and substantial migrant community.

5.2 AN UNLIKELY SCENARIO

The two tendencies of the "social turn"— the institutional and the communitarian— share an at times uneasy co-existence. While the former's history can be, more or less, inscribed in the admittedly adventurous history of fine art, the latter also intersects with a tradition of practice that has existed in parallel with institutionalised art (or the art of institutions): community art. Community art resists a fundamental transformation in the history of art practice that has succinctly been described by Norbert Elias as separating modern and premodern artist: the shift from the "employed" to the "free artist." That is, the shift from the artist in direct working relationship with the consuming audience of the artwork to the artist producing for an impersonal market. This shift has been a historical phenomenon intertwined with sociological changes among the social units who provide the framework for artistic creation. In more concrete terms, this shift took place during the modern movement toward generalised individualisation concomitant with the bourgeoification of social structures and the displacement of the older feudal/aristocratic order. The transition to self-employment freed the artist from producing art for a specific buyer, social group or social function.[432]

To be sure, as we have already seen, this was a liberation mainly in name which thrust the modern artist upon a whole new world of anomy. Despite the new uncertainties of the market, art's production for a largely bourgeois audience does nonetheless mean that the new consumer of art was no longer in possession of the types of social, symbolic and often economic capital that religious authorities or aristocratic elites held in the past. Furthermore, art's escape from subjugation to specific social functions, be that in ritual or the self-portrayal of courtly society in Bürger's account,[433] meant that the success of the artwork was no longer related or reducible to a set of extra-artistic goals. Freed from the reflection of divine or worldly authority, the exceptional artwork became a declaration of the indispensability of the artist. From that perspective, in terms of the symbolic capital that artist and consumer could extract from a *successful* artwork, the individualisation of production and reception which underscored the social disembeddedness of art in the modern era improved the *relative* position of the artist compared to the premodern era. In more pronounced cases, this change produced a range of archetypes evoked to describe the exceptional artist of modernity: isolated genius, revolutionary, seer, martyr.[434]

---

[432] Norbert Elias, *Mozart: Portrait of a Genius* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993)
[433] Bürger, 47-48.
[434] This proposition should not be interpreted as implying that self-employment brought about the improvement of the living conditions for modern artists or that the types of mystique attached to the autonomous artist were not under constant negotiation by an increasingly empowered bourgeois public. On

Conversely, as a type of practice, community art resists or even attempts to reverse this historical transformation. Art production and reception are still collective processes, pertinent to the characteristics and useful to the needs of specific constituencies unlike the generalised purposelessness of fine art, and often rely on the employment of craft-based practices which lift the latter's elitist barrier. With regard to the position of artist vis-à-vis the public, the community artist by definition does not partake in the modern fetishisation of artistic subjectivity and, indeed, surrenders some of its privileges.[435] This is a position underpinned by distinctly moral considerations on the relationship between artist and community. In contemporary community-oriented practices this moralisation of the relationship between artist and community transcends the problematics of their power balance and is, in fact, projected onto the artistic vision of community itself. Consider the following hypothetical scenario:

In 1994, the team around the art space Shedhalle in Zurich invited the Austrian collective WochenKlausur to design and produce a work of social intervention. Consistent with the collective's modus operandi— largely focused on implementing strategies of social amelioration and empowerment in non-hierarchical collaboration with local populations— for the Zurich project, WochenKlausur targeted the dehumanising conditions facing local victims of drug addiction, many of whom were ultimately forced into prostitution. After renting a small boat (Fig. 27), the collective proceeded to invite representatives of local interested parties on a three-hour cruise; these included representatives of local politicians, activists, sex workers, journalists. There, free from the prying eyes of the public and liberated from the protocols that need to be ceremoniously observed in public life, the unlikely group engaged in open, uncompromised dialogue on the issue plaguing the local community. WochenKlausur's hope was that under these extraordinary conditions the concerned parties would be pushed out of their entrenched positions toward a satisfactory solution. The plan turned out to be successful— this unusual cruise led to a consensual decision for the creation of a shelter.[436]

---

the one hand, the artistic economy is fundamentally an economy of scarcity exceeding the "numerus clausus" of which deflates the relative value of the work. On the other hand, the conformist and contractual nature of bourgeois society suffocates artistic megalothymia. These are after all the conditions that we have demonstrated as instrumental for the emergence of the historical European avant-gardes of the early twentieth century. The improvement that I am referring to here concerns solely the power balance of artist vis-à-vis consumer with regard to the symbolic capital that the successful artwork could confer upon each during modern and premodern times.

[435] Here I am intentionally painting a picture in broad strokes for the sake of clarity. The politicisation of the artwork after the historical avant-garde and the post-Duchampian mode of authorship through its renunciation have led to a certain cross-pollination between fine and community artist in relation to the object of their practice and its social responsibility.

[436] Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, 2.

Figure 27 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions

Figure 27 WochenKlausur, Intervention to Aid Drug-Addicted Women, Shedhalle, Zurich, Switzerland, 1994-5.

Now, let us return to Zurich— or any other city for that matter. An artist collective, not WochenKlausur but a fictional this time, has indeed been invited by a local initiative. And their invitation is still directed toward a problem facing a local community. This time the problem might be concerning the devastating drug addiction of sex workers or even the social integration of newly arrived refugees. This time, however, the concerned community is not sympathetic to the plight of these groups but instead driven by different motivations; they might feel threatened, unsafe, or resist what they perceive as an unpleasant change to their everyday life. In this scenario, therefore, a community has united around the exclusion of certain undesired elements. And let us continue this rather preposterous scenario by imagining that somehow the artist collective decides to engage in dialogue with the community and model a work based on it. Of course, the rhetorical question here is, would that still qualify as a community-based artistic intervention? The premise is certainly ugly, yet communities can be petty, conformist and normalising.

So, let us attempt a slightly different scenario, one which does not entail the accommodation of explicit enmity. Let us imagine that the aforementioned community is organised in the form of a grassroots protest. The motivations of the grassroots protest are not particularly noble, but they are not explicitly harmful toward some perceived "enemy" either. In fact, the community does not name a "pariah" or target any outcast this time at all. They instead fashion themselves after a Tea Party-esque grassroots protest, calling for a conservative or libertarian-oriented return to localist politics. And somehow— however unlikely— an artist or collective decide to work with them and amplify their voices. Would that in any possible universe be accepted as an artistic intervention to be considered alongside the dozens of examples that have been discussed in the prolific contemporary literature on socially engaged practice? The question remains of course rhetorical.

The history of Western modern art is undoubtedly rife with all sorts of reactionary, and even hateful, politics which did not exist simply in the background of the lives of otherwise important artists, as mere disconcerting biographical backdrops to their oeuvre, but clearly informed their actual artistic output: Ezra Pound, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Wyndham Lewis, the list is too long to even offer the slightest semblance of conclusiveness. In the case of community-oriented practices however, such politics become taboo— and this, despite the long tradition of conservative and reactionary visions of community. If, however,

there are certain aspects of social life that the realist impulse of the "social turn" cannot acknowledge or interact with, if there are therefore certain limits to the social phenomena and constituencies that it engages with, then perhaps the dimension of community in these practices is governed by specific moral preconditions: it is not sufficient that the artist surrenders authority in collaboration with a community, but this collaboration needs to take place along a specific axiological system. It is thus very doubtful that a theorist like Kester would even deign to think of practices that do not meet certain moral-political criteria, and it would be certainly unthinkable to consider the cases of Park Fiction and WochenKlausur alongside Tea Party-esque localism-communitarianism and other similar reactionary protests and deliberations. Art then becomes dialogical insofar as it is motivated by and expresses specific moral and political ideas. Absent these ideas, these projects cannot be examined as legitimate artistic explorations of community. Among the proponents of the "social turn," it is only Nato Thompson who has considered the ramifications that follow from the inability to aesthetically delimit socially engaged practice— and that only briefly, without according the necessary gravity to the question.[437] If the community of the "social turn" is primarily a moral category I would then like to explore its genealogy and propose a historisation of morality's separation from aesthetics.

5.3 THE AESTHETIC-IRRATIONAL COMMUNITY OF ART

Community in art is what emerges in the space between form and content, in their frictional or harmonious correspondence. This is the space of signification onto which the attempt to belong is projected. The Western premodern history of art is a history of art as social bond; in its sacral status art functioned as a didactic medium collectively consumed and, if the exclusive character of literacy throughout history is taken into account, was very often the primary source and enforcement of a unified morality. Sacral art was instrumental for the production of a community of values— when medieval laity confronted Gislebertus's tympanum at Saint-Lazare, they knew they were facing a real judgement, and a real call for a moral life following the word of the Christian God. In the moral community of the sacral status, art was an extension of a top-down dissemination of power; just as unifying as it was prescriptive— art did not exist autonomously but was integrated in other moral and political institutions. The community of sacral art was enacted through form's derivation from art's

[437] Thompson cursorily acknowledged the problem that social practice could potentially be instrumentalised toward reactionary politics but refrained from exploring its implications further. That this is not considered a problem worth seriously investigating is undoubtedly due to the tendency of art institutions toward liberal and humanitarian politics.
Thompson, "Living as Form," 16-33, 31.

content; there, moral-political and aesthetic considerations overlapped significantly, if not coincided.

It was only in modernity that the world of artistic representation and moral community were observably separated. Jacques Rancière captured this phenomenon vividly represented in Friedrich Schiller's "On the Aesthetic Education of Man" of 1794 and termed it the "aesthetic regime of art."[438] Schiller, Rancière wrote, confronted with the otherworldly aloofness and detachment of *Juno Ludovisi*, saw her majestic disinterestedness in the affairs of mankind relieved in "free appearance."[439] The statue was "a completely closed creation" that "dwells within itself,"[440] incapable and uninterested to reflect or express the human world. The work's complete detachment from any sense of commonality with its human environment— the utter disinterestedness of its divinity— made it thus a paradoxical figuration of "what has not been made, what was never an object of will."[441] At that moment, for Rancière, the experience of art became autonomous— the work of art was experienced for what it did not intend to reveal as art: it was art for what it did not convey. What it did convey as a work of art however, was the want of the human world; what it conveyed was a non-propositional promise of utopia. For Rancière, the aesthetic then comes to embody the promise for "the possession of a new world," one that cannot be possessed in any other way.[442] The non-propositional promise of utopia is, therefore, the promise of an ideal community which cannot be accessed through reason and system anymore, cannot be organised or communicated. As such, for Rancière, the autonomous experience of art becomes akin to a Schopenhauerian suspension of will:

> It is not the autonomy of free Reason, subduing the anarchy of sensation. It is the suspension of that kind of autonomy. It is an autonomy strictly related to a withdrawal of power.[443]

Once this shift started to take shape, once the viewer learned to "cast an aesthetic gaze" that separated "the pleasure of appearance" from utility, art became an "autonomous form of

---

[438] Rancière refers to Schiller's description of the Greek statue of *Juno Ludovisi* in the fifteenth letter of "On the Aesthetic Education of Man."
Rancière, "The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes," in *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. trans. Steven Corcoran (London; New York: Continuum, 2010), 115-133.
[439] Schiller wrote in the fifteenth letter: "Inspired by this spirit, they effaced from the features of their ideal, together with inclination, every trace of volition as well; or rather, they made both unrecognisable because they knew how to unite them both in the closest alliance. It is neither charm, nor is it dignity, that speaks to us from the superb countenance of a Juno Ludovisi; it is neither of them, because it is both at once."
Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (Dover Publications, 2004), 80-81.
[440] Ibid., 81.
[441]Rancière, 117.
[442] Ibid.
[443] Ibid.

life."[444] The autonomy of experience in the disentanglement of what art represents and how this comes to be represented signalled thus the emerging rupture between art's form and moral content; as art becomes art "to the extent that is something else than art,"[445] its actual moral truth is one that does not derive directly from its appearance.

Art as aesthetic representation gradually abandons, therefore, the litigation of practical morality; this is a process of dissociation central to Max Weber's analysis of rationalisation in modernity. The reference to rationalisation in this context— the context of art's abandonment of the systematic representation of a tangible, practicable morality— might be slightly unexpected, but it is rationalisation that is the root cause of the separation of aesthetic beauty and moral value. It is in parallel to the rationalisation of morality, the sublimation of the religious ethic really, that the experience of art enters the non-communicative, irrational utopianism that Rancière's aesthetic regime describes. In modernity, Weber highlighted, the relationship between morality and aesthetics becomes highly antagonistic; the moral and the aesthetic become spheres increasingly self-autonomising, both vying for control over the domains of conduct, experience and world-knowledge. Eventually their formerly symbiotic relationship collapses entirely, and one can exist only in the negation of the other:

> If anything, we realize again today that something can be sacred not only in spite of its not being beautiful, but rather because and insofar as it is not beautiful. You will find this documented in the fifty-third chapter of the book of Isaiah and in the twenty-first Psalm. And, since Nietzsche, we realize that something can be beautiful, not only in spite of the aspect in which it is not good, but rather in that very aspect.[446]

The rationalisation of morality follows a very interesting trajectory from the evolution of world religions and is intimately related to their birth out of the rejection of magic and the systematisation of devotional practice. This change unfolded in parallel with the move

---

[444] Ibid., p.118.
[445] Ibid.
[446] Max Weber, "Science as Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, eds. Gerth, H.H., and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 129-156, 147-148.
Here Weber was referring to Nietzsche's famous aesthetic justification of life. Nietzsche had outlined the schism between art and morality already from "The Birth of Tragedy" of 1872. Only art can make life tolerable because life is not concerned with morality, and "only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* is existence and the world eternally *justified*." Later in his life, Nietzsche would develop aesthetic observations highly critical of the Kantian/Schopehauerian disinterestedness of aesthetic experience which still characterised "The Birth of Tragedy;" ideas which he would associate with the "ascetic ideal." For him, the aesthetic experience would ultimately become life-affirming and antimetaphysical.
Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and other Writings*, eds. Raymond Geuss, Ronald Speirs, trans. Ronald Speirs (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1-115, 33.
For Nietzsche's discussion on the "ascetic ideal" see:
Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 68-120.

toward what Robert Bellah describes as "intermediate societies:" societies which have replaced organisation on the basis of kinship for the more complex structures of patriarchy, patrimony and bureaucracy.[447] In the Western world the rationalisation of morality led to the formation of the concept that Weber described as "inner-worldliness:" a reorientation of the religious ethic away from anti-systematic, transcendental ideologies and toward the moral ordering of the social conduct of the faithful. This was how the idea of the "calling" came to existence: a conception of moral conduct in worldly affairs as "the highest form which the moral activity of the individual could assume."[448] This rationalising tendency influenced the development of religious morality broadly but also had profound impact on Protestantism, and more specifically, Calvinism. To clarify: in the wake of the Reformation, the emergence and development of ascetic sects within society— that is, religious groups which did not abandon social life altogether but were composed of inner-worldly anchorites— was founded upon the methodical enforcement of virtuous conduct among their members. The reason for the innerworldly sublimation of transcendence after the Reformation was firmly theological: it was a consequence of the protestant rejection of the Catholic universalism of Grace by the Calvinists; that is, the Calvinist rejection of the idea that God's plan involves the potential salvation of everyone. This rejection of universalism was most palpable in the Calvinist doctrine of "double predestination," according to which salvation has been predetermined before time and, as a consequence, individual devotion can have little to no impact.

While one would expect that a religious ethic based on the preselection of the elect would deflate the exigency of religious obeisance, what it, in reality, resulted in was the diffusion and intensification of moral imperatives in the realm of personal conduct. The theological foreclosure of salvation was therefore internalised as a deep existential anxiety which pushed people toward protocols of disciplined social co-existence. This was for Weber the underlying cause for the emergence of a new rational path toward salvation; the transmutation of religious virtue into coherent systems of humility and sobriety in the sphere of personal conduct as a psychological counterbalance to the fear of eschatological exclusion.[449] Of course, Weber's famous analysis singled out Calvinism as the most impactful example of this type of rationalisation but, in reality, this was a process that encompassed all organised moral systems in the Western world; liturgical norms,

[447] Robert N. Bellah, "Max Weber and World-Denying Love: A Look at the Historical Sociology of Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 67, no. 2 (1999): 277–304, 280. www.jstor.org/stable/1465738 (Accessed 06/08/2018)
[448] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Routledge, 1992), 40.
[449] Max Weber, The Social Psychology of the World Religions in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, 267-301, 291.

philanthropy, moral codes and so on, are all products of varying degrees of religious rationalisation. The rationalisation of conduct in the form of the "calling" might have been instrumental for the emergence of the new human type of capitalism, but entering modernity, all moral systems were sufficiently developed according to their "rationalising potentialities."[450]

Weber's isolation of Protestant theology as the religious-philosophical substrate of the new disciplined, self-reliant human type of capitalism is still productive and provocative to this day. The danger that it however faces as a formulation lies in its tendency toward its own conflation with the production of the capitalist rationality. This is a problem that derives mainly from Weber's absence of a strong distinction between modernity and capitalism—an absence certainly uncharacteristic given Weber's particular attention to the distinction between economic and economically-determined phenomena. Surprisingly, it was Marx, famous for tending toward the elision of this distance, who highlighted the more economically value-neutral, or even emancipatory, effects of moral rationalisation: this was also the reason why Marx would refer to Martin Luther as the first German revolutionary. In a passage which evidently anticipated Weber's analysis, Marx wrote:

> *Luther,* we grant, overcame the bondage of *piety* by replacing it by the bondage of *conviction.* He shattered faith in authority because he restored the authority of faith. He turned priests into laymen because he turned laymen into priests. He freed man from outer religiosity because he made religiosity the inner man. He freed the body from chains because he enchained the heart.[451]

Marx, therefore, saw the rationalisation of the religious ethic as a necessary step toward the liberation from the religious ritualism of what he pejoratively described as "Catholic paganism."[452] The new sensibility of rationalisation tore the exteriority of religiosity asunder and made it a matter of inner life, fully embedded in everyday conduct: the process of rationalisation of religiosity was thus a process of internalisation of morality. It is this sublimation which planted the seeds of a secular faith expressed in coherent systems of personal morality. Of course, Marx argued, despite its historically progressive character, this change was far from sufficient for the project of popular liberation, and indeed, fell short of the necessary transformation of the moral impulse into a worldview of collective struggle

---

[450] Bellah, 280.

[451] [Emphasis in original]
Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law. Introduction," in Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works: Marx, Engels, 1843-44 (vol. 3)*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd, 1987), pp.175-187, p.182.

[452] Karl Marx, Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, in ibid., 229-346, 290.

for social change. The problem lay primarily in rationalisation's "enchainment of heart;" this is the point where Marx and Weber's analyses are in agreement. Despite, therefore, its proverbial contribution to the emergence of a capitalist individualist ethos, the rationalisation of the religious ethic was the necessary literalisation of a moral-religious code, which the second German revolutionary— the contemporary philosopher— was tasked with turning into a programme of revolutionary transformation of life in its totality.

Weber, on the other hand, eliminating the optimistic overtones of Marx's analysis, focused mainly on the spiritually impoverishing consequences of this process. Weber considered the rationalisation intrinsic in the departure of faith away from its focus on transcendence, and the subjection of religiosity to moral-humanitarian norms as symptoms of the broader disenchanting character of modernity. With rationalisation being a fundamentally qualitative transformation which subjected various domains to its pressures, the rationalisation of morality was commensurate with the rationalisation of economic activity. Rationalisation in Weber's account foreclosed thus the modes of experience necessary for the "escape from the senselessness of work."[453] With the bifurcation of moral value into the realms of aesthetics and practiced morality, art gradually became the sphere of "an inner-wordly irrational salvation," claiming a "redemptory function" and directly competing with the methodicalness of sublimated religiosity.[454] In rationalised modern life we are therefore confronted with a fully-developed schism between the moralist and the mystic.[455] To reframe this observation in artistic terms, as Walter Benjamin correctly grasped, the aesthetic regime of art in bourgeois society was in fact historically rooted in magic and ritual; the cultic origination of aesthetic art survived in its exclusivity and seeming defiance of organisation on the basis of reproducibility.[456] What Benjamin failed, however, to recognise was that the types of academic and bourgeois art that he lumped in together with Aestheticism were by the mid-nineteenth century only vaguely still related to the lineage of magic and taboo. Instead, they had become highly systematised and thoroughly rational, communicative forms that had to meet specific criteria and fulfilled specific functions.[457] If we were to extend the distinction between moralist and mystic, these

[453] Max Weber Op.cit., 291.
[454] Max Weber, "Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*,.323-359, 342.
[455] Ibid., 325-326.
[456] Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, 218-219.
[457] Bourdieu has highlighted an important dimension here. Firstly, it was relatively common practice for nineteenth century artists to execute several copies of their most successful works. These copies or variations— which were sometimes almost identical to the originals— were often as critically acclaimed as the original works. Furthermore, even successful and celebrated French artists of the nineteenth century were subject to extensive demands from their patrons and were even often forced to remake their works in order to accommodate those. For instance, Louis Charles Auguste Couder had to remake his representation of the

practices would no longer reflect the world of the mystic but that of the rationalised moralist.[458]

This dichotomy was just one aspect in Weber's account of modern polytheism: the endgame of rationalisation was not the harmonious co-existence of different axiological systems but the generalised and irreconcilable value fragmentation across all aspects of organised life. The polytheistic character of Western modernity comprised thus a universe lacking a stable, unifying order.[459] With aesthetic art's autonomous development as an escape from rationalisation— defying the production of morality as deriving from the rational analysis of art's own form— autonomous art denied the possibility of a rational, communicative community. There lay the antisocial nature of art for art's sake, the elitism of the Central European secessions, and the self-enclosure of abstraction: autonomous art was now "a cosmos of more and more consciously grasped independent values which exist in their own right."[460]

In this history we can therefore identify two very different conceptions of art as community. The heritage of sacral art was one of art as the source of communal and prescriptive values. The rationalisation of the value systems it represented were eventually secularised into the naturalistic impulse of the post-Renaissance history of art. This is the era of art as an apparatus of nation building, discovery of the natural world and human sociality— the representational and early bourgeois stages of art's evolution in Bürger's account. This trajectory underlines the gradual shift from theology to pedagogy, and the internalisation of religiosity into personal morality; common among all was the belief in an ordered universe that can be accessed methodically. Rationalisation, however, as it produced

---

Fête de la Fédération after the instructions of Louis Philippe. These two elements point to a rather systematised and formalised system of artistic recognition which was less concerned with the authentic and irreducible vision of the artist but more on the (moral and aesthetic) content of their work and the technical virtuosity of its execution: the readability and clarity of the pictorial narrative, as well as the work's finish. Bourdieu, "Manet and the Institutionalization of Anomie," in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Literature and Art*, 244.

[458] Adorno, on the other hand, understood that Benjamin's undifferentiated treatment of the "bourgeois idealism" of the academy and the autonomous impulse underlying "art for art's sake" was rather reductive, and expressed his disagreement in their private correspondence. As he pointed out in a letter to Benjamin in 1936, "l'art pour l'art is just as much in need of a defence." Adorno's disagreement was, nevertheless, motivated by a different logic to the one I outline here. For Adorno, autonomy had the transformative potential to turn art production into a new materialist pursuit— into an art that can be "consciously produced and made." Adorno, of course, was not referring to the moral or political legibility of autonomous art but to its inner construction. Adorno's liberatory materialism of autonomous art did not lie in its standardisation or in the performance of tangible outcomes morally or politically, but in what he understood as the emancipation of the artwork from its compositional, autopoietic ideologies. It was thus related to his analysis of the non-organic avant-garde artwork. Even though Adorno was describing the process of art's production and not its reception which is my concern here, his position unfortunately overlooked the mystical dimensions in the work of Stéphane Mallarmé— or even Paul Valéry— that he employed as examples. Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht, Georg Lukács, *Aesthetics and Politics*, 122.

[459] Weber, *Science as Vocation*, 147-149.

[460] Weber, *Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions*, 342.

a universe in order, planted at the same time the seeds of its overcoming; as the different spheres of life were organised according to their own laws, they established the conditions which undermined the world as a totality of scientific, moral, and aesthetic truth. Rationalisation, therefore, undercut the conception of life as the pursuit of a universal good, or even the possibility of its existence: this is the essence of Weberian disenchantment. This epistemological aporia, combined with the alienating conditions of the art market— itself a product of rationalisation— formed the foundations for art's abandonment of a rational communicative model and the embrace of moral ambiguity. With art's dissociation of form and utility, art became free but non-communicative; a force of disruption and ambiguity. This is the genesis of the avant-garde tradition in the Adornian sense which now did not seek to communicate but to radically challenge the "very possibility of rational discourse."[461] Under these conditions the artwork's negation of communication became a sign of its critical disposition and at the same time the root cause of its inability to realise itself in the world of social relations:

> "The acute reason today for the social inefficacy of artworks -those that do not surrender to crude propaganda- is that in order to resist the all-powerful system of communication they must rid themselves of any communicative means that would perhaps make them accessible to the public."[462]

The growing prominence of theory in the twentieth century might have managed to translate some of the non-communicative aspects of the tradition of shock, provocation, and alienation into a communicative form, but art's dependence on theory made it a largely exclusive experience. Symptomatic of this entrenchment in theory— of the fact that the experience of the artwork had become dependent on the comprehension of its broader theoretical substructure— was the reorientation from "what is art" to the "how or when is art" of the 1960s-1970s analytic turn. Theory has, as Boris Groys points out, the paradoxical effect that, even though its purpose is to explain and thus widen art's audience, it operates by narrowing it.[463] Kester's model of "dialogical aesthetics" attempts therefore to dislodge the elitist framing of theory by highlighting a conception of the artwork as the experience of a democratic collectivity working toward specific practical outcomes. The "dialogical" model can retain certain challenging elements of the avant-garde tradition, but these need to become more convivial and less alienating. The art of "dialogical aesthetics" does not

[461] Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces, Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2004), p.12.
[462] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 243.
[463] Groys, *In the Flow*, 23.

challenge or destabilise by foregrounding the impossibility of community but through the methodical, rational exploration of the relations that arise from the "dialogical" model. It is thus no surprise that Kester begins his analysis from the pedagogical, communicative history of the art that preceded the introspective alienation of modernism: the art which preceded the schism between aesthetics and morality— Rococo's sociality, Antoine Watteau's conversation pieces, the communal values of Georgian landscape.[464]

5.4 THE MORALITY OF PREFIGURATION

Kester's discussion of Rachel Whiteread's *House* from 1993 (Fig.28) sheds some light onto the moral dimensions of community in the discourse of the "social turn." Whiteread's work was an artistic intervention in one of the poorest parts of London— in the Bow neighbourhood of the Tower Hamlets borough— plagued by rampant unemployment and housing mostly provided by the local municipal authorities. The object of *House* was an Edwardian three-story terrace house which was now scheduled for demolition as part of a process of urban redevelopment, a house which the artist commemorated through the construction of its interior as concrete cast. *House* represented therefore the negative space of a once inhabited domestic environment, the concrete shadow of life that was no longer; it was conceived as a pithy and elegiac commentary on gentrification, abandonment, urban and domestic memory. Whiteread's work reflected these overtones of social disintegration formally: it was a completely non-communicative, closed-off, disruptive and functionless intervention in the shadow of a community.

House would also ignite one of the great controversies in the recent history of British art. On the one hand, critics embraced it— after all, Whiteread won the Turner Prize of that year. Whiteread's vision was praised for its "disruption of... social time spaces,"[465] its laying bare "the limits of language and expectation which afflict the contentious arena of public art,"[466] and its defiance of a straightforward, consensual message. In short, the work was praised for its difficult, enigmatic character, and its disruption of what we come to expect from public art. On the other hand, the non-artist public was visibly displeased by it. Residents, local councillors, and protesters formed a camp in protest: the work did not relate to their lives in any way, it was incomprehensible, offered nothing to the local community,

[464] Kester Op.cit., 26.
[465] Doreen Massey, "Space-Time and the Politics of Location," in *Rachel Whiteread House*, ed. James Lingwood (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), 36.
Cited in Kester Op.cit.,18.
[466] James Lingwood, Introduction: in *Rachel Whiteread House*,.8.
Cited in ibid., 19.

and ultimately came to symbolise the elitist detachment of the contemporary artworld.[467] The work's ambiguity even troubled the same family whose house Whiteread's work was a memorial to.[468] For the local community *House* became a scandal of grand proportions, a cynical ploy and a symbol of gentrification. The work's polarisation— its unintentional division of the audience into "cognoscenti" and "philistines"[469]— epitomised for Kester a serious pathology of contemporary art.

Figure 28 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Figure 28 Rachel Whiteread, House, October 1993-January 1994.

As expected, Kester's discussion of Whiteread's work did not register its divided reception as one more episode in a long tradition of artistic controversy. Instead, Kester proceeded to assess it in relation to another project, which, this time, did not divide the public, and was completed with the collaboration of the local community that it addressed. *West Meets East* of 1992 (Fig.29) was a project by Loraine Leeson in collaboration with a class of Bengali girls and their teachers at the Central Foundation School in Bow, London.[470] Through their collaboration, the collective produced a textile and photomontage piece that was later displayed as a billboard on the Isle of Dogs, London.[471] Unlike *House*, *West Meets East* was a public project that aimed to explore the complexity of identity in a multicultural world. It was planned and carried out through extensive, productive conversations between professional artist and public and aimed to cultivate and express a "collective identity." In *West Meets East* the role of the artist was not that of an "object maker" but of a facilitator of "shared visions."[472]

Evidently, Kester's discussion of the two works reflects the contemporary art critic's peculiar predicament. Although the decision itself to juxtapose the two works insinuates their totalisation against a specific set of non-aesthetic criteria, Kester hesitates to assign to it the character of value judgment over the works' quality. Such claims to objectivity, however, are in reality unnecessary. The cross-pollination between art and moral-political discourses does not in its own right delegitimise art or its criticism but, as has been argued,

[467] Lingwood, 8.
Cited in ibid.
[468] Lingwood, 8.
Cited in ibid.
[469] Kester Op.cit., 22.
[470] Ibid., 22.
[471] Ibid.
[472] Ibid., 24.

emerges as a historical tendency that seeks to reverse the perceived cynicism of the contemporary artworld and compensate for the inability of aesthetics to encompass the general social expansion of artistic activity.[473] It is therefore not the evocation of moral or political language alone that is important. What is important is the specific content of these extra-aesthetic propositions and what they reveal about a work's relation to broader cultural and socio-economic structures.

Figure 29 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Figure 29 Loraine Leeson, The Art of Change, West Meets East, 1992.

One of the central positions that Kester advocates for in his theorisation of "dialogical aesthetics" is the organic and non-hierarchical structure of the interaction between artist/artist collective and the involved community. Kester does not simply qualify artworks which demonstrate moral considerations about the impact that artistic interventions can have on communities, but practices which specifically reflect these considerations in every facet of the relations they produce. From this perspective, the insistence on the symmetry between artist and community is undoubtedly echoing the prominence of the organising model of prefigurative politics in New Left and anarchist circles after the 1980s. Prefigurative politics, contrary to the long tradition of democratic centralism in left-wing politics, emerged in political organisations during the 1960s and outlined a politics founded on the unity of means and end. Unlike the model of the Leninist revolutionary party which sought to capture the state through the strategic employment of revolutionary vanguardism, prefigurative politics emphasises the necessity of harmony between the social relations developed within the political group and the social relations of a post-revolutionary society. Carl Boggs, who coined the term in 1977, defined it succinctly as "the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal."[474] This type of organising philosophy was eventually adopted broadly in the anti-globalisation movement of the turn of the twentieth century, which was also precisely the time that Kester was developing his theory of

[473] It is not a coincidence that around the time that Kester was writing "Conversation Pieces," across the pond, Erik Hagoort was arguing for the inclusion of the intentions of the artist as a criterion for the evaluation of social practice.
See Erik Hagoort, *Good Intentions: Judging the Art of the Encounter* (Amsterdam: Foundation for Visual Arts, Design and Architecture, 2005)

[474] Carl Boggs "Marxism, Prefigurative Communism and the Problem of Workers Control," *Radical America* 11 (6)/12 (1) (1977): 99–122, 101.
Cited in Uri Gordon, "Prefigurative Politics between Ethical Practice and Absent Promise," *Political Studies*, vol. 66, no. 2 (May 2018): 521-537, 527.

"dialogical aesthetics" and, is safe to say, evokes significantly. Later on, prefigurative politics would come to characterise the philosophy of international grassroots movements such as Occupy and become the predominant methodology for various anticapitalist, antiracist, and antipatriarchal practices around the world. The main characteristics of prefigurative politics, as summarised by Uri Gordon, are a preference for "decentralised organisation in affinity groups and networks, decision-making by consensus, voluntary and non-profit undertakings, lower consumption, and an effort to identify and counteract regimes of domination and discrimination (e.g. patriarchy, racism, homophobia and ableism) in activists' own lives and interactions."[475]

The emphasis of prefigurative politics on the ethical conduct of the political subject is not however coincidental but can be traced in the historical roots of the concept of prefiguration itself. Gordon has not only brilliantly associated prefigurative politics with the ethics of means-ends unity predominant in contemporary leftwing spaces, but also uncovered its history deep in Christian thought: "prefiguration" is in fact a Christian concept, originating in the "τύπος" (figura in Latin) of Pauline and Augustinian theology. "Τύπος" (or figura) was an exegetic apparatus based on the faith in the recursion of biblical figures and events; this is the essence of Christian typology which sought to unify the Old and New Testament by creating meaningful links between the figures, statements and events that appear in pre-Christ and post-Christ scripture. Throughout the centuries, this precursive interpretation of specific events, actions and biblical persons— that is, the essence of prefiguration— was adopted by schools of Christian chiliastic thought. In chiliastic thought, nevertheless, these ideas ceased to simply reflect the faith that certain actions and relations have been anticipated or will reoccur in the kingdom of God, but extended, more importantly, to the belief that the egalitarianisation of communal life could bring about the heavenly kingdom in earthly life— in other words, "immanentise the eschaton."[476]

Naturally, such ideas were over the centuries secularised and in the political environments wherein prefigurative politics became instrumental, such as the post-1960s New Left and anarchist circles, the temporal dimension of prefiguration became generative instead of promissory. It was no longer expressing the reassurance that one was participating in the making of history but the conviction that the relations created in the present ought to reflect the desired organisation of a post-revolutionary future. As Gordon points out however, the subtraction of the historically determinist dimension— an inevitable consequence of the secularisation of the concept— denuded prefigurative politics of a clear

[475] Ibid., 523.
[476] Ibid., p.525.

historical vision of the future. This transformed the character of political prefiguration into a less end-oriented and more process-focused philosophy: "non-hierarchical social relations are to be extended and defended with neither the assurances of historical momentum, nor a full determinacy of ends."[477] This "turn to the present" has nearly turned prefigurative politics into a tactic devoid of strategy: a political attitude focused mainly on the cultivation of an ethics of anti-hierarchical social relations, often dislodged from wider practical historical outcomes.[478] Ironically, this devolution of prefigurative politics into the formation of anti-hierarchical relations as autonomous, moral exercises in micro-politics was anticipated— prefigured— in the logic of prefigurative politics itself. Even Wini Breines, one of the most prominent theorists of prefigurative politics, recognised its resistance as a political framework toward "strategic politics" and "strategic thinking,"[479] the consequentialist character of which— underscored by the primacy of large-scale political-economic change— was perceived as endangering the moral integrity of communal relations.[480]

It is in this political and intellectual climate that Kester's emphasis on the consensual and non-hierarchical dimensions of social practice needs to be understood; the question of process becomes of paramount importance because in this climate, it is process that is thought to prevent the devolution of a movement into "the iron law of oligarchy."[481] It is then not too surprising that Kester, despite his criticism of the more institutional relational practices as elitist and out of touch, tends to avoid contextualising Park Fiction, WochenKlausur and others within broader sociopolitical movements.

---

[477] Ibid., p.531.
[478] Ibid., p.532.
[479] Wini Breines, *The Great Refusal: Community and Organization in the New Left: 1962-1968* (New Brunswick; London: Rutgers University Press, 1982), 7.
[480] Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams have critically described these tendencies within contemporary left thought and activism as engaging in "folk politics" or attached to "folk-political thinking." In their critique, "folk politics" demonstrates a certain aversion to questions of political power, and a "fetishisation of local spaces, immediate actions, transient gestures, and particularisms of all kinds."
See Nick Srnicek, Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work* (London; New York: Verso, 2015), 3.
[481] This was Breines's rationale when she recounted the collapse and split of the American organisation of Students for Democratic Society (SDS) in 1969 due to disagreements on the political direction of the student movement.
Wini Breines, "Community and Organization: The New Left and Michels' 'Iron Law,'" *Social Problems*, vol. 27, no. 4 (1980): 419-429.
www.jstor.org/stable/800170.

5.5 PATERNALISM AND THE "POLITICALLY COHERENT COMMUNITY"

For Kester, therefore, the crucial question that socially engaged art needs to confront is how the interaction between the concerned community and the artist or artist collective can avoid replicating the asymmetries that characterise their positions of power outside the context of the artwork. Drawing from Bourdieu's analysis of the symbolic and political relationship between the "delegate" and the "community," Kester recognises that this is a problem that even the most ostensibly reciprocal and anti-hierarchical dialogical practices cannot escape. For Bourdieu, the act of delegation is a mutually productive process which actualises rather than simply reflects the relationship between delegate and community: the delegate derives their identity from the community, while the community actualises itself politically and symbolically through the delegate.[482] As a productive process, the act of delegation influences the balance of the political formation between the two parties and therefore always carries the risk that the delegate, in speaking for the community, will emerge fetishished, with the characteristics of the community objectified into their own individual identity.[483]

Correspondingly, the dialogical practice as an act of delegation always risks collapsing into an irreciprocal manifestation of artistic magnanimity, indifferent to the particularity of the needs and identity of the participating constituency; indeed, social practices are rife with examples of paternalism of this kind. For Kester, the solution to this conundrum between insensitivity and paternalism emerges through the concept of the "politically coherent community." In Kester's writings, the "politically coherent community" is described as a type of community whose identity firmly predates the intervention of the artist-delegate and is therefore relatively resistant to subsumption during the process of representation.[484] In the "politically coherent community," the identity of the community is neither actualised by the act of artistic representation nor artificially formed around the project. This collective identity has instead been formed through a "complex process of political self-definition," usually "against the backdrop of collective forms of oppression," and organically "within a set of shared cultural and discursive traditions."[485] Kester underlines, his is not an essentialist definition of collective identity; these are communities that have come to existence through

[482] Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identiy* (Cambridge; Mass.; London; England: MIT Press, 2002), 139.
[483] Kester, *Conversation Pieces, Community and Communication in Modern Art*, 147-148.
[484] Kester points out that the presence of the "politically coherent community" is not a guarantee that paternalistic relations will not emerge— it cannot eliminate the presence of paternalism entirely but somehow makes it more tolerable; it still exists but is generally "well intentioned and often well received." Ibid., 151.
[485] Ibid, 150.

"a process of dialogue and consensus formation rooted in specific historical moments and particular constellations of political and economic power."[486] With a sense of shared identity forged, therefore, through collective struggle against specific forms of oppression, Kester argues that the integrity of the "politically coherent community" is cemented.

Kirsten Lloyd has correctly noted an important contradiction here; Kester's definition of "politically coherent communities" demonstrates a propensity for socio-economically precarious populations— "*communities marked by precarity*."[487] While his model of "dialogical aesthetics" is understandably characterised by a certain anxiety about the possibility of identity erasure of marginalised communities, his insistence on the integrity of these identities is not without problems either; Kester's advocacy for a model of socially engaged art premised on an unmediated communal identity is in fact reinforcing stereotypes of "authenticity." This is an issue that Miwon Kwon has pointed out: Kester's "authenticity" exposes the "politically coherent community" to reification. By highlighting the community's constitution on the basis of a shared identity that has been shaped around a dimension of exclusion or hardship, it becomes a vehicle for instrumentalisation: its singularity can be abstracted and turned into a prop that simply frames the exploration of a social issue around which this authentic identity is conceived.[488] The "politically coherent community" is, therefore, not impervious to the forces of heteronomy; it can very well facilitate the standardisation of the community art project into a simple bureaucratic formula: "artist + community + social issue= new critical/public art."[489] On the other hand, while Kester acknowledges the danger of totalisation, he counterargues that the "politically coherent community" exercises its own political agency in the self-determination of its identity, which is categorically different from simply being forced to conform to an identity created and imposed from above: the "politically coherent community" corresponds to "the difference between naming and being named."[490]

Kester's response is, nevertheless, completely circumventing the issue. The problem cannot be framed as a question on whose agency is being put to action in community-oriented practices, but to what extent agency exists in neoliberalism, beyond the reproduction of capitalism's contemporary relations and contradictions. While the danger of totalisation is real indeed, totalisation already predates the instrumentalisation of the

---

[486] Ibid.
[487] [Emphasis in original]
Kirsten Lloyd, "Being With, Across, Over and Through: Art's Caring Subjects, Ethics Debates and Encounters," in *Economy: Art, Production and the Subject in the Twenty-first Century* (Liverpool University Press, 2015), 140-157, 143.
[488] Kwon Op.cit., 146.
[489] Ibid.
[490] Kester Op.cit., 162.

community by the artist or cultural bureaucracy. "Naming" oneself, as opposed to "being named," does not produce authentic, resistant identities; the process of self-determination is still subject to the alienation and distortions of ideology whereby all aspects of social life are saturated.[491] If we assume that certain identities are exempt from the downward pressures of capitalism, or that there is a turning point past which the specific intensities of capitalist subjectification are reversed into militant and coherent identities, then the only logical conclusion remaining would be that proletarisation is a process with limited reach, and certain material conditions are somehow afforded the power to exempt specific groups from its alienation.[492] The problem therefore lies not so much in Kester's production of a materialist, oppositional community, unified through shared opposition, and thus indifferent to inner difference as a continuous productive process, as Kwon proposes.[493] On the contrary, the problem is that Kester does not produce a framework that is materialist enough to account for the possibility that the alienation, depersonalisation, frustration and resentment that dominate social life in capitalism also dominate identity formation. Kester's insistence on spontaneity and empowerment, as well as his deference to the authenticity and epistemological value of community's self-definition are just a step away from the reinvention of community as a self-sufficient social unit.

In other words, Kester's vision of community is so attached to an ethics of empowering immediacy that loses sight of its political ramifications. Empowerment is in reality the leading ideology of the neoliberal state: the sleight of hand deployed in the normalisation of the abandonment of precarious communities during neoliberalism's dismantling of the welfare character of the state. By lionising the unique and autonomous character of communities, the state is pre-emptively legitimising its abdication of responsibility. The assertion of communal identity through processes of self-determination, and the emphasis on its lived characteristics render state intervention disrespectful, paternalistic, oppressive

---

[491] Ironically, in the case of disenfranchised black communities, Kester rhetorically frames the distinction between "naming" and "being named" as the difference between forming an identity around luminaries of black liberation such as bell hooks and Dhoruba Bin Wahad, and being ascribed with the identity of the criminal, the "superpredator." Being allowed to exercise the agency of self-determination therefore liberates the potential of revolutionary identity, as if there was a magical essence that connects black communities to the writings or activism of these individuals— an elevation akin to Trotsky's worker reaching the heights of Goethe, this time without the radical transformation of material conditions.

[492] This is a warning that Foster specifically made in "The Artist as Ethnographer." Foster highlight that the turn of the artist to the expanded field of culture risked replicating myths of alterity based on exoticist assumptions about communities' social and psychological characteristics. Foster wrote: "[o]ften this realist assumption is compounded by a primitivist fantasy: that the other has access to primal psychic and social processes from which the white (petit) bourgeois subject is blocked."
Hal Foster, "The Artist as Ethnographer," in *The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology*, eds. George E. Marcus and Fred R. Myers (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1995), 302-308, 303.

[493] Kwon Op.cit., 148.

and totalising: the integrity of community becomes a metonym for its self-sufficiency. Under these conditions, the social role of socially engaged art is reduced to simply providing a voice for communities to express their identity and vision— to be recognised for what they "authentically" are. The economic considerations that underlie the toleration and reproduction of precariousness are thereby disguised as matters of openness, acceptance and mutual respect. And ultimately, the bureaucratic subsidisation of a few community art projects as platforms for communal assertion of identity becomes testament to the state's progressive, multicultural character, rather than a symptom of its retreat. This is the mechanism which cynically subverts a romantic anarchist belief in self-determination into a neoliberal "noble-savageism." The neoliberal "noble savageism" asserts that everyone under capitalism is subject to false consciousness except for some abstract "interstitial" communities and identities that have managed to retain their connection to authenticity. This is the end-limit of neoliberal subjectivation: beyond that point, false consciousness is no longer false. Kester's aversion to the paternalistic artist as the extension of a paternalistic state paves the way for the most insidious type of paternalism; one which attempts to trick its subjects into the illusory belief that they are coherent and self-administering.

5.6 THE INSTRUMENTAL COMMUNITY

While criticism of similar romantic visions of community can certainly be attributed to different philosophical dispositions toward the social role of art, the moral reimagining of community comes with specific, unintended, consequences, which become evident in the recent conscription of public art into an ancillary apparatus of social amelioration. During the last three decades, the neoliberal state has indeed unleashed an entire machinery advancing the instrumentalisation of community-based practices; a move that Bishop has attached to a far-reaching project aiming at the creation of "self-administering, fully functioning consumers" in the face of the dismantling of the welfare state and the extensive privatisation of the public sphere.[494]

François Matarasso's "Use or Ornament? The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts," written in 1997, has been one of the most fleshed out cultural policy proposals that directly associated the communitarian and participatory turn in contemporary art production to specific objectives of governance. Matarasso's study— which has to be noted, exerted a significant influence on New Labour cultural policies— focused on the multiple important benefits that the state subsidy of communal art projects can potentially yield. Matarasso

[494] Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, 14.

pointed out that a cultural policy which encouraged collective participation in art could successfully infuse individuals with a new confidence on a personal level, tighten interpersonal relationships— reinforcing thus new types of social cohesion— and, finally, strengthen people's engagement with their communities in a cost-efficient way.[495] Interestingly enough, Matarasso's study did not qualify or even hint at a particular type of art as being the most optimal for the production of these effects; community or professional arts' priority appears to be rather situational and context-dependent. It is "relationship" that is important and not "form;" the central feature of his proposition is the act of participation itself.[496]

The participatory turn of Matarasso's proposal was indicative of a wider reorientation of political discourse toward the culturalisation of social problems. Madeline Bunting, who was briefly the director of Demos, one of the think tanks which managed the adaptation of community to the neoliberal state of New Labour, underlined in her evocatively titled "Culture, Not Politics, is Now The Heart of our Public Realm" article of 2006 the urgent need that the political class look beyond monolithic political and economic solutions to problems of social cohesion as "the arts inspire collective experience in a way that our political languages no longer can." Inspired by the enthusiastic collective engagement with Antony Gormley's *Waste Man* of 2006, Bunting highlighted the socially ameliorative character of public art. However, Bunting's positive and optimistic tone quickly took a darker turn:

> In key areas such as identity, where emotions are raw and intense, culture of all kinds is a vital arena in which to explore hopes and defuse fears before the latter take violent or political form.[497]

The implication here is clear: no longer limited to rectifying the loss of a unifying social vision, art and culture could also be conceived at the level of an intervention in the formation and expression of identity. Art can be scaled down and humanised— it can be made to proffer attention to particularity and defuse possible tensions before these lead to generalised discontent. Art can serve as social armor against the potentially dire consequences of the loss

---

[495] François Matarasso, *Use or Ornament? The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts*. (London: Comedia, 1997), 74-76.
[496] Ibid, 74.
[497] Madeleine Bunting, "Culture, Not Politics, is Now The Heart of our Public Realm," *The Guardian* (Tuesday October 3, 2006)
Cited in Charlie Gere, Michael Corris, "Non-relational Aesthetics," in *Transmission: The Rules of Engagement 13* (London: Artwords Press, 2008), 1-35, 1.

of a unifying social vision, as well as point to ways out of the cul-de-sac of contemporary identity fragmentation.[498]

While Matarasso and Bunting come from a background in art and cultural policy, these discussions have not remained limited to the field. Roughly around the time of Matarasso's publication, the German sociologist Ulrich Beck would contribute his own article on the subject titled "The Soul of Democracy" (1997). A central category in Beck's proposal is "civil labour." "Civil labour" was generally conceived as a means for the democratisation of community life and the cultivation of a post-national subjectivity among citizens. Nevertheless, "civil labour" could also double as a cost-effective solution to problems related to unemployment which, should be underlined, become particularly pressing after the neoliberal internationalisation of anti-inflationary economic orthodoxy. Instead of sustaining antiquated and costly welfare networks, states were now incentivised to transform welfare structures into programmes aimed at stimulating citizen proactivity and engagement. This "civil labour" expended in the participation of social activities led by "public good enterprises" offered thus the prospect of rehabilitation for millions of unemployed or underemployed citizens. The socially engaging activities of "civil labour" ranged from social work to participation in public artistic and cultural projects. Under this scheme, the volunteering citizens would not necessarily be materially compensated but rewarded in the form of distinctions which in turn incentivise proactivity.[499] Again, the social character of public art figures prominently; art is rebranded as a remedy for social and economic exclusion, a form of lifetime training, and a type of welfare. Nevertheless, the link between "citizen" and "labour" drawn in Beck's writing underlines another troubling development in recent history: the explicit inscription of citizenship in productivity and employment. An even more troubling aspect of this observable tendency toward the relativisation of political rights, which is a direct consequence of human capitalisation,[500] is that in this process art is reimagined as performing a mediating role. Just how normalised this re-interpretation of citizenship on the basis of employment is can be surmised from the fact that even allegedly critical art practices end up overtly reproducing it.[501]

---

[498] Considering the gravity that this conclusion assigns to participatory public art, and if these are indeed the stakes at play here, one has to wonder about the future possibility of a state-supported art that is not of relational or public character.

[499] Ulrich Beck, "Die Seele der Demokratie," *Die Zeit*, 49:28 (November 1997), 7-8.
Cited in Christian Kravagna, "Working in the Community: Models of Participatory Practice," in *The 'Do-it Yourself' Artwork: Participation from Fluxus to New Media*, 240-256, 240.

[500] Wendy Brown writes characteristically: "Nor do specifically political rights adhere to human capital; their status grows unclear and incoherent."
Brown, 38.

[501] For instance, "Women-led Workers´ Cooperative" (Glasgow, 2013) which was WochenKlausur's contribution to the exhibition "Economy" (CCA Glasgow, STILLS Gallery Edinburgh) aimed to

The reorientation of art toward social amelioration has led to a rearrangement of political and cultural roles which, as George Yúdice argues, benefits all concerned parties: state, arts institutions and bodies, and artists. On the one hand, the implementation of policy— or rather the attempt to substitute it for cultural policy— through the deployment of community art projects and programmes allows the neoliberal state to outsource the management of socio-economic problems and the oversight of "problem" communities. On the other, by pivoting to a different social function, art institutions manage to survive in the midst of massive cuts in arts and culture budgets: institutions thereby project their status as apparatuses serving public well-being.[502] Finally, artists can carve out a new social role away from the navel-gazing manipulation of intradisciplinary tropes and signs. This realignment, Yúdice concludes, means that art institutions and artists are enlisted as functionaries of governance while at the same time improve their public profile of social responsibility.

This, I would argue, is not an entirely fair assessment of the situation, even though it does reflect the rearrangement of roles rather accurately. The advocacy for the communal and useful turn in art production does not necessarily always disguise some cynical or insidious agenda; adapting to the political expediency of the era has very often been a survival strategy for arts organisations and artists. This was made evident with the publication of the American National Endowment for the Arts "American Canvas" in 1997. "American Canvas" argued that in the present political circumstance— one of economic deregulation inflamed by the seemingly perennial American culture wars— the survival of arts funding lay in the adoption of social and pedagogic goals, well outside art's role in the traditional context of culture. The new fields that artists were instructed to engage with ranged from "youth programs and crime prevention to job training and race relations."[503] "American Canvas" advised artists that in this environment the survival of any public funding for art relied on art's ability to prove its social usefulness.

Neither should art's embeddedness in specific political processes be perceived as justification for its blanket dismissal. The central aporia that any critique of social engagement in contemporary art is inevitably faced with derives from the occasional complicity of artist and neoliberal state; the former in the dissemination of a democratic politics of solidarity and cohesion, and the latter in the legitimation of its reduced role in the

professionally rehabilitate unemployed women from Drumchapel, Glasgow through the formation of a cooperative selling healthy food. Larne Abse Gogarty provides a useful analysis for the problematic dependence of citizenship on productivity and its history in:
Larne Abse Gogarty "'Usefulness' in Contemporary Art and Politics," *Third Text*, 31:1 (2017): 117-132.

[502] George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2003), 11-13.

[503] Ibid., 11.

implementation of these ideas. Yet, acknowledging the potential symbolic and material benefits of such projects cannot mean their unexamined idealisation either— this is a problem exacerbated when the projection of moral characteristics onto community overrides community's underlying material reality. The task of analysis should therefore be the critique of the institutions and ideological distortions which facilitate public participatory art's utilisation as a mechanism of neoliberal governance.

Nevertheless, this is but an afterthought in Kester's analysis.[504] And one is led to wonder, are the implications of the non-communicative and hierarchical work of art— "orthopaedic," to use Kester's term— graver than the mobilisation of entire bureaucracies around the inscription of artistic expression in campaigns of social pacification and urban development? The ramifications of the debates emerging in cultural policy since the mid-1990s are instead hardly considered. And when they are, it is primarily in order to demarcate the solidaristic and transformative qualities of "dialogical aesthetics" from practices merely buttressing social stability.[505] Yet, it seems obvious that if organised state apparatuses demonstrate a predilection for specific types of art, a greater degree of suspicion is warranted.

Let us then return to the case of Park Fiction. Park Fiction, both during its planning process as well as its completion, was in fact financed with public funds; its construction was funded specifically with 2,4€ million by the "Art in Public Space" programme of the Department of Culture of city of Hamburg.[506] Yet, these details are omitted in Kester's salutary accounts of the project. Only after a long discussion which consciously emphasises the radical modern history of St. Pauli and celebrates every practical aspect involved in the project as a radical gesture of profound importance, does Kester finally concede that the work was in fact funded by the state government— and that, without the exact financial sum being disclosed. Even more characteristically, the process of the negotiation over the project's funding is treated as a subversive artistic-political act in its own right, with emphasis on the "round table" near the park site and the playfully defiant participation of the local community: a framing that explicitly artifies— theatricalises— the deliberations between community and authorities in the manner of a political theatre play.[507] Any tension,

[504] Indicatively, Matarasso's "Use of Ornament" is mentioned just once in Kester's "The One and The Many," while NEA's "American Canvas" once in "Conversation Pieces." Demos along with Comedia are again only cursorily mentioned as think tanks which influenced the participatory rhetoric of New Labour. Kester, *The One and the Many*, 198.
Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 129.
[505] Kester, *The One and the Many*, 198.
[506] Viola Rühse, "Park Fiction: A Participatory Artistic Park Project," *North Street Review*, Vol.17 (2014): 35-46, 43.
[507] Kester Op.cit., 209-210.

however, during the negotiations was less about the funding per se and more related to the insistence of the Park Fiction committee to be given full control over the funds. Which they ultimately were.[508]

Nevertheless, the most troubling misrepresentation in Kester's discussion concerns the role that Park Fiction played in the gentrification of the district. When the topic of gentrification is raised, Kester centres on Park Fiction constituting a hub for anti-gentrification actions. That might be true on the surface; the park was officially inaugurated with an anti-gentrification picnic, and in 2009 collectives associated with Park Fiction participated in the emergence of a Right to City movement in Hamburg. Ironically, however, at the same time that the park was used to coordinate anti-gentrification actions, the transformation of the public, formerly unused land to a colourful hub of "creative dissent"[509] was contributing to the increase of property values in the area and the rapid gentrification of St. Pauli, with the project ultimately spearheading the urban redevelopment agenda of the city of Hamburg. The park is nowadays an important cultural site in a highly gentrified neighbourhood, whose space is even monetised by surrounding restaurants and bars.[510] As Charles Landry, the founder of the think tank Comedia, had disarmingly asserted in the 1990s:

> The artist in effect is the explorer and regenerator kickstarting a gentrification process, bringing life to rundown areas and generating the development of support structures such as cafes, restaurants and some shops. They then attract a more middle-class clientele who would not have risked being the first, either through fear, the dislike of rundown areas, or pressure from peer groups. Only when the grottiness has been tamed and made safe by the artist will this second group arrive.[511]

Now, even if we concede that some of these details could not have been known during the time of Kester's writings on Park Fiction, it is still important to consider the work and its effects in duration as a social entity. There can be no social practice disembedded from the examination of the dimension of duration; after all, Kester's theorisation foregrounds its transformative character, and that can only exist in time. If we then accept that the temporal dimension of an artistic-activist project is in fact part of the living work, shouldn't the ease by which a work of useful public art is co-opted, or even worse, actively contributes to

[508] Ibid., 209.
[509] Ibid., 210.
[510] Rühse, 44.
[511] Charles Landry, *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators* (London: Earthscan, 2000), 125. Cited in Lees, Melhuish, 246.

gentrification and the culturalisation of the economy of a specific urban area be of concern? Shouldn't the work of the artist in the "expanded field of culture" be assessed for its political effects precisely there? Shouldn't then the artwork's role be examined beyond the myopic dimensions of immediacy and organicity? This is no longer the case of the straightforward decontextualization of the art object and its re-emergence, for instance, in an advertising medium; after all, it is highly doubtful that nowadays an art object would be lauded as socio-politically transformative and liberating in its own right. The stakes of socially engaged art involve actual social formations which in turn generate specific economic relations and interact with socio-economic processes. At which point does the facility by which a specific social entity become a vehicle for agendas seemingly antithetical to its self-professed ones become understood not as the entity's subversion but as its structural propensity?

5.7 COMMUNITY MUST BE RESISTED

When dealing with the problem of community, Raymond Williams wrote in 1976 that the insurmountable difficulties that any definition of it is forced to deal with are not signs of analytic weakness. The problems plaguing its definition are direct consequences of community's own historical development as a concept. Community is embedded in a profound ambiguity, as it signifies at the same time the "common concern" and the form of organisation that comes to express it. This interlocking of the ideal and the pragmatic distinguishes community from other formations that collective human life has developed, and makes it resistant to critique:

> *Community* can be the warmly persuasive word to describe an existing set of relationships, or the warmly persuasive word to describe an alternative set of relationships. What is most important, perhaps, is that unlike all other terms of social organisation (*state, nation, society,* etc.) it seems never to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term.[512]

Williams recognised that in community's interlocking signification, its moral characteristics always tend to override its political particularities. The primacy of its moral characteristics— or rather its existence as a moral category— facilitates its reception as a universal value; a state of human relating that has fascinated political identities ranging from anarchists such

[512] [Emphasis in original]
Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society, New Edition* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 40.

as Murray Bookchin to moral philosophers such as Alasdair MacIntyre, and from left-wing pedagogues such as Ivan Illich to conservative localists such as Robert Nisbet and, more recently, Robert Deneen.

The moral character of community makes it so that it can truly mean anything insofar as it is consistent with one's idea of "good;" it has become so malleable a category, truly an empty signifier onto which whatever is understood as "good" can be projected. The artificiality of the concept similarly informs its artistic explorations, despite any realist pretensions formalised in organic, non-hierarchical community constructions. In Kester's case, this translates in forms of community that always carry a hint of resistance, a promissory element of liberation against all odds— never reactionary, brutal, petty or abject. Community's omnipresence in its conceptualisation as an organic, non-hierarchical formation with specific moral characteristics ends up reconstructing a contemporary version of a Tönnies-esque dichotomy between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft.[513] In Kester's "dialogical aesthetics," community is allowed to be political only in a rather Arendtian sense, and is thus imagined to provide the space for the emergence of a "we" as "a potential experience of solidarity in moments of collective action."[514] Community becomes therefore a solidarity-forming, adverse but nurturing environment that exists as a locus of truth and resistance. Yet, there are clear indications that this is not the case anymore, if it ever really was.

Community is nowadays the site of political power. After the neoliberal state collapsed any possibility of a cohesive meaning of society and social relationship, it attempts to reconstruct those in community: not as external mediators between state and individual this time, but as "aspects of all of us."[515] Once the social gave way to the communal, community was inevitably redefined as the site of the administration of individual and collective life; there, the state can retain control by casting away any responsibility of consistency and universality. To that end, it creates and supports a series of "hybrid mechanisms" which modernise and particularise the mediation between itself and society. Residents associations, non-profits, focus groups, NGOs, community police, community development programs; an

[513] I am referring here to the distinction between community and society in the work of Ferdinand Tönnies. See Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society*, ed. Jose Harris, trans. Jose Harris, Margaret Hollis (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 22-92.

[514] Schaap, 60.

[515] This is quote from New Labour Home Secretary Jack Straw.
Jack Straw, "Building Social Cohesion, Order and Inclusion in a Market Economy" (paper presented to the Nexus Conference on Mapping Out the Third Way).
Cited in Nikolas Rose, "Community, Citizenship, and the Third Way." *American Behavioral Scientist* 43, no. 9, (June 2000): 1395–1411, 1395.
("Netnexus" was a UK virtual think tank founded in 1996. It is no longer active nowadays, so I am relying on Rose's quotation.)

entire industry which resides in the grey zone between profit and contribution is erected.[516] As the responsibility of the state is detotalised from a single-bounded space to the heterogeneity of multiple communities, it creates a citizenship of "neighbourhoods, associations, regions, networks, subcultures, age groups, ethnicities, and lifestyle sectors."[517]

This process is described by Nikolas Rose as the double movement of "autonomisation and responsibilisation."[518] Autonomisation, or devolution in Wendy Brown's terms, describes the decentralising logic of neoliberal governance— the process by which previously centralised decision-making powers are broken up and delegated downward. This is however only superficially analogous to the expansion of political participation in social life. On the one hand, as Brown highlights, the subject of devolution is always in a state of precarity: at an institutional as well as personal level, the devolved subject finds itself bereft of the necessary resources to make the optimal decisions expected of it, and incapable to escape the asphyxiating framework of the market. On the other, by devolving its powers in an environment wherein no impactful decision can be made but the reproduction of the pieties of actually existing neoliberalism, the state can emerge unscathed out of every crisis. Devolution represents therefore a hollow de-hierarchicalisation of power which is always enforced through a regime of intensification of responsibility on the level of the individual— a "moral burdening" of the subject enlisted to perform in a nexus of ever-competing forces.[519]

With community's emergence as the predominant political unit of control, the locus of control is redirected to its moral characteristics. This is no mere compensation for the neoliberal state's devolution of control but the state's exertion of control *by other means*. It is a conscious, methodical process which amplifies the importance of personal responsibility in government, accomplished through the formalisation of a new politics of behaviour— an "ethopolitics," as Rose has incisively described it.[520] The politics of community reveals itself as the post-political politics of morality and responsibility. It is a relocation of political control in the moral register; there, where the political can present the illusion of its self-negation into moral conduct and thus escape critique. This is always a political operation which speaks the language of morality: the moralisation of the political is always a political

[516] Ibid., 1405.
Nikolas Rose, "Death of the Social? Re-figuring the Territory of Government," *Economy and Society*, Vol. 25, no. 3 (August 1996): 327-356, 331-332.
[517] Rose, "*Community, Citizenship, and the Third Way*," 1398.
[518] Ibid., 1400.
[519] Brown, 132.
[520] Ibid., 1399.

act and so is the attempt to disguise its political character. As Carl Schmitt observed in 1922, "any decision about whether something is *unpolitical* is always a *political* decision."[521]

The new importance of the familial and the communal are not then mere symptoms of a nostalgia for simpler, more meaningful times, the yearning for an antidote to metropolitan alienation— they are not simple reactions to the brutal disintegration of social ties that "has left no other bond between man and man than naked self-interest" as Marx and Engels wrote at the dawn of the bourgeois revolutions of 1848.[522] It is its continuation in a different form. It is the platform through which the neoliberal state makes the promise for a culturally, socially, and racially equal brutality, and the administration of life once the relation with government becomes a matter of inner life; a question of morality. Community is the aura of authenticity that accompanies one's own government, and the morality of "governing without governing society."[523]

[521] [Emphasis in original]
Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapter on the Concept of Sovereignty*, 2.
[522] Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York: International Publishes, 1948), 11.
[523] Rose, *Death of the Social? Re-figuring the Territory of Government*, 327-328.

ON FAILURE

In the first pages of this study I alluded to the double character of the politicisation of contemporary art, as always the consequence of an artistic and political decision. It is through this framing that the "social turn" emerges and becomes intelligible as a phenomenon. What I have attempted to demonstrate is that with the integration of socio-political categories as art's subject matter and form, the judgement of art becomes inextricable from the judgement of how art negotiates, subverts or legitimises social and economic structures. The "social turn" asserts that political discourse is not external to art anymore, something that could potentially be considered along a series of other considerations, but the language through which art practice distinguishes itself by overcoming its aesthetic and post-aesthetic histories to lay a new claim to legitimacy. And this is a claim that is advanced through the heightened attention to its social character, through the systematic effort to reinstate a character of social responsibility.

Political critique, or rather the critique of the political, is nevertheless a critique of heightened negativity. Unlike art production which has largely abandoned the dichotomies and distinctions proper to a transcendental understanding— it has been for decades inappropriate to frame art in terms of beauty or as the exercise of taste— the production of political thought preserves some of those more abstract external criteria that it always tests itself against; justice, progress, prosperity and so on, are always categories to be considered in political formulations. While political formulations are always assessed on how they position themselves with regard to these signifiers, and how persuasively they can compete over them against other political propositions, they also always involve or invite a critique of their own mechanisms and procedures: such critiques involve the examination of the internal coherence of the premises of a political formulation, of blind spots and unacknowledged contradictions, as well as the relations of power its structures presuppose. These are also critical processes that art has cultivated throughout the years— art's post-avantgarde inscription in the analysis of micropolitical and processual relations testifies to that. What art practice has generally lacked since the abandonment of beauty is the concept of an overarching purpose that it can align with and test itself against. This sense of purpose is rediscovered through art's politicisation, that is, the moment when art's advance of self-differentiation through the critique of its internal relations can progress only through the critique of its relation to broader socio-political and cultural structures. This is a dialectical process which expands the limits of the critique of art practice from the nature of its

processes to also encompass its conduciveness to professed overarching ideals. Under these conditions, art is understood in terms of its conceptualisation of political categories, as well as the ways it proposes to symbolically, and often materially, represent those.

Inheriting therefore, in a sense, the structure of political critique which advances through the immanent negation of its propositions in relation to the normative standards they correspond to, what I have attempted to show throughout this study is that socially engaged practice cannot be examined only for its professed successes but most importantly its failures. In fact, the failure of the artwork to align its internal processes in a way that could allow it to live up to its political claims and commitments reveals more about the social character of art, its misconceptions, the limitations it is subject to, as well as the socioeconomic and cultural conditions of its production than any possible success. In that regard, assertions such as Tania Bruguera's that "[f]or Arte Útil, failure is not a possibility, if the project fails, it is not Arte Útil"[524] do not only betray a certain triumphalist spirit but also a misrecognition that for art, after its legitimation through the political field of critique, *the possibility of success is no longer available*. To pretend otherwise implies that one's conceptualisation of the social character of contemporary art cannot be coherently articulated as distinct from social work. It is only through a narrow, utilitarian perspective that we can equate artistic production and the administration of tasks consisting of specific steps and outcomes, and then declare the artwork's success by virtue of its meeting criteria of that kind. This does not simply subvert the oppressive Kantian doxa of art's purposive purposelessness, as Stephen Wright would argue.[525] This leaves Arte Útil, and perhaps socially engaged practice more broadly, unable to justify its unique role and value as separate from the various social welfare programmes and NGOs, if not for the vanity of artists attached to the idea of being useful.

The political thought of contemporary art needs to move beyond that. If, as Boris Groys proposes, the distinction between early twentieth century avant-gardes and contemporary socially engaged practices can be reframed as the distinction between the negation and construction of the world,[526] and art's construction of the world aspires to

---

[524] Tania Bruguera, 'Reflexions on Useful Art', November 2012, http:// www.taniabruguera.com/cms/592-0-Reflexions+on+ Arte+til+Useful+Art.htm
Cited in Larne Abse Gogarty, "'Usefulness' in Contemporary Art and Politics," *Third Text*, 31:1 (2017): 117-132, 124.

[525] Stephen Wright's glossary-manifesto of 2013, which attempts to outline a theory of art on the basis of usership instead of spectatorship, dedicates considerable energy to the critique of Kantian aesthetics. See: Stephen Wright, *Toward a Lexicon of Usership* (Eindhoven: Van Abbenmuseum, 2013)
The publication is freely available on: https://www.arte-util.org/tools/lexicon/ (Accessed: 2/10/2019)

[526] Groys, *In the Flow*, 43.
It should be noted that this distinction is drawn from Boris Groys's essay titled "On Art Activism," originally published in *e-flux Journal no. 56* (June 2014) and subsequently included in "In the Flow" (2017). The

escape the mere reproduction of its current conditions, then any assessment of contemporary art's propositions has to examine them in duration and in relation to a totality of the dimensions they interact with. And this entails art's assessment through processes of (self)critique which will always point to art's failure; this is a consequence of the objective limitations of art in capitalism as well as the structural negativity of political critique art seeks to derive legitimacy from. Failure is the default state of contemporary socially engaged practice and yet this is a beneficial failure: failure ties art to a discourse machine of constantly regenerating material.

The recognition of artistic engagement with the social world as legitimate art practice therefore puts art into a new predicament, as it exposes it to a whole new set of problems and challenges. This predicament presents art with its material and a horizon of possible critiques which seek to refine art's propositions and at the same time amplify its claim to legitimacy. As I have discussed throughout this thesis, we could schematise the new problems of socially engaged practice as manifesting along two intersecting axes: instrumentalisation and subjectivation. Instrumentalisation, which could probably be considered the most discernible effect of art's social repositioning, concerns the vulnerability or even willingness of artistic activity to submit itself to the solution of socioeconomic problems. As a development this is not too surprising; with the reimagining of artistic autonomy through art's restoration of social responsibility, social amelioration becomes a distinct possibility of artistic production. Yet, in doing so, art without a doubt risks its self-reduction to a legitimating apparatus of the neoliberal antisocial turn by offering a veneer of legitimacy to the state's abdication of social responsibility, as well as normalising its categories.

Abstracted at the personal and interpersonal level, art's instrumentalisation manifests in its subjectivating function. Subjectivation, of course, is not a problem unique to art but a function integral to all sites of ideological production. Different socioeconomic and cultural milieus advance different models of subjectivation and, as Foucault had long argued, while traditional models of subjectivation tended to be characterised by discipline, the social construction of subjectivity in neoliberalism shifts toward the production of self-sufficient, non-alienated subjects. The non-alienated subject is the subject that has attained to a relation of continuity between inner and outer world and has thus overcome the separation between

argument that the writer advances in this specific essay is that art's aestheticisation of socio-technical and economic structures should not be interpreted as a strategy of defeat and complicity but as a gesture which signifies a rendering obsolete historically of these structures. This is without a doubt an intriguing proposition but one whose premises my analysis does not share.

self-understanding and material action. While Marxist analysis has historically posited the overcoming of alienation in the upending of capitalist productive relations, neoliberalism advances a different yet similarly radical solution: the internalisation of social life in continuity with the inner world of motivations and dispositions— that is, the internalisation of social life as a personal-interpersonal matter of expression. While institutional practices, such as relational aesthetics, might at times mirror or aestheticise certain characteristics of this process, it does not follow that the dissemination of art practices extra-institutionally presents a persuasive solution; in fact, works that directly engage with communities often end up enacting the same formula but without the overt defamiliarising mediation of the art institution. To advocate for art's critical potential on the basis of its relative autonomy from the spaces conventionally associated with the ideological production of culture one would then need to demonstrate how these practices do not simply extend and diffuse broadly the very same "self-ordering and self-civilising" technologies.[527] This is of course impossible as this ambiguity is art's critical horizon.

Unlike therefore the identification of art's macroscopic socially ameliorative realignment, art's subjectivating function is rather elusive. Yet, for the mass production of subjectivity in continuity with the external world there is always one necessary condition, and that is the negation of apathy. The negation of apathy is by definition the form and content of socially engaged practice; irrespective of the degree of a work's socially conciliatory or antagonistic qualities, its more or less authorial or non-hierarchical construction, the activation of the participant, materially or symbolically, is an ever-present dimension across socially engaged practice. In its dependence on the work's activation by a wider non-artist audience, the decentering of authorship in socially engaged practice creates the conditions for a participatory and collective production of meaning— and this is done in the literal sense and not through recourse to the openness of the audience's interpretative role.

As a model of resistant political subjectivity, processes of activation and resignification of collective social and cultural life correspond to what Baudrillard had described as "the liberating claim of subjecthood."[528] In simple terms, to assert one's subjecthood means to aspire to leave an imprint on the world, to create and intervene; similarly, socially engaged practices represent an individual and collective life imbued with meaning and a rediscovery of political agency. There are two thorny issues that need to be

[527] Tony Bennett, "Exhibition: Truth, Power: Reconsidering the 'Exhibitionary Complex,'" in the *Documenta 14 Reader*, 339-352, 344.
[528] Jean Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities ... or the End of the Social* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), 108.

considered here. On the one hand, partly due to the objective limitations that art production has to wrestle with in capitalism, but also on account of the thematics that art practices themselves negotiate, the resignification of individual and collective life often unfolds entirely in the realm of ordinary social life. Relational practices are certainly largely guilty of that, but even the more activist-oriented practices discussed in this thesis, such as Loraine Leeson's *West Meets East* for instance, present a rather modest interpretation of social change. Which leads to the second point: the pressure for the work to "succeed" in relation to certain outlined goals under conditions which foreclose substantive material change imposes an unambitious interpretation of political agency. This is not necessarily a consequence of a poverty of imagination but also due to the objective conditions of artistic production— that is, the generalised competition over limited resources. What this results in is the proliferation and social diffusion of small, modest and particular gestures, interventions and acts of creativity, made meaningful as works of art and presented as small victories, that amount to very little beyond a vague sense of empowerment. After a point, therefore, it does not suffice to frame the problem singularly from the perspective of the socialisation of artistic activity but also in relation to the artification of broader social life. What this would mean is that, moving beyond the problematics of art's socially ameliorative role, the subjectivating function of socially engaged practice could be associated with deeper changes in capitalism's self-representation and self-organisation over the last decades.

In their major work titled "The New Spirit of Capitalism" written in 1999, Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello famously argued that a central characteristic of post-Fordism, as the prominent productive regime in neoliberalism, is the observable tendency toward a generalised "artification" of life. By examining the evolution of business literature from the 1960s to the 1990s, the writers traced a steady reorientation of economic and managerial discourse toward ideas and organisational models which evidently broke with the paternalism of the older Fordist model. Since the 1970s the hierarchical, disciplinary overtones of corporate language appears to have been gradually yielding to a rhetoric of autonomy, flexibility, spontaneity, openness to new experiences, informality and sociality, representing thus the emergence of a new, humanised, expressive and communicative corporate culture.[529] For the writers, this shift was not to be understood as an isolated phenomenon but as a sign of an ongoing restructuring of the beliefs, dispositions and actions that capitalism qualified as most conducive to its reproduction. This shift epitomised therefore a new "spirit of capitalism," beyond the older model of the small bourgeois

[529] Luc Boltanski, Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliot (London; New York: Verso, 2005), 97.

entrepreneur, as well as the dyad of the bureaucratised director and expert worker of Fordist production.[530] Unlike the older regimes of violence and law, the new capitalist paradigm, the writers claimed, exhibits qualities which have historically fallen within the prerogative of an idealised conception of the artist-type: ideals of authenticity, autonomy, creativity and individual freedom. That is, the new paradigm appears to have been structured by ideas drawn from a long history of cultural opposition to capitalism itself. We are consequently talking about the self-reinvention of capitalism through the integration of its "artistic" critique: the critique of capitalism which focuses primarily on its disenchanting, inauthentic, and oppressive worldview, rather than explicit issues of material inequality.[531] This phenomenon— capitalism's discovery of "routes to its survival in critiques of it"[532]— demonstrates, on the one hand, capitalism's great adaptability and assimilating capabilities but also advances a fundamental expansion of its commodifying grip. Boltanski and Chiapello effectively suggest that a crucial goal of neoliberalism is the production of a universal "artistic" subject by means of which social and economic life can eventually be recodified as disruption, creativity and communication; that is, as meaningful phenomena.

The new conditions of capitalism as an endless stream of activity and creativity dislodge meaning and agency from their historical role in the formation of critical political subjectivity. In fact, the insistence to view those as preconditions for a radical reinterpretation of life evokes a conceptualisation of resistance residual of older oppressive and repressive milieus— only in such socio-cultural environments can the impulse to create and intervene be inscribed in the logic of resistance. The contemporary artist, hailing from the social milieu where proactivity and meaning are the norm extends this culture outwards to engulf all of society.

If this hypothesis holds and the changes outlined above are signs of an intensifying unfolding historical logic, then the historical trajectory of capitalism cannot but end in the artification of all social and economic life. The endgame is clear— the reframing of socio-economic phenomena as artistic can only lead to the reinvention of capitalism itself as a work of art; as Stewart Martin writes, the reinvention of capitalism as a "*cultural or artistic capitalism*."[533] At a microscopic level, the effects of this new type of capitalism could be made manifest in the convivial and communicative overriding of the objective relations that structure processes of work— in the dilution of work into self-expression and sociality. The

[530] Ibid., 19.
[531] Ibid., 38.
[532] Ibid., 27.
[533] [Emphasis in original]
Stewart Martin, "Artistic Communism— a Sketch," *Third Text*, 23:4 (2009): 481-494, 482.

concealment of the objective conditions of social relations reproduces thus the creeping indistinction of production and self-expression in neoliberalism— as an act of resistance even.

This is, nonetheless, only the tip of the iceberg. The existential threat of a "*cultural or artistic capitalism*" consists, in fact, in the prospect of a definitive justification of all life in capitalism as the product of a universal and enforced, inescapable agency. Unlike Baudrillard's panoply of signs no longer referring to any "real" or what Bourdieu referred to as the "ironic and metatextual" barrages of mass communication,[534] the experience of life through the prism of active, impactful participation in social and cultural affairs saturates the individual with meaning that can no longer be negated. Under these conditions, critical activity as artistic event does not find itself simply powerless to subvert the symbolic order of capitalism but, on the contrary, feeds into capitalism's general project of artification of life. If this is the direction of history our texts are monuments to failure and future memorials of the idea of criticality.

[534] Pierre Bourdieu, *On Television*, trans. Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson (New York: The New Press, 1996), 9.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS

- Ades, Dawn, Cox, Neil, Hopkins, and David Hopkins. *Marcel Duchamp*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1999.
- Adorno, Theodor W. *Aesthetic Theory*. London: Athlone Press, 1997.

  ——. *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*. Translated by E. F. N. Jephcott. London; New York: Verso, 2005.
- Adorno, Theodor W., Benjamin, Walter, Brecht, Bertolt, and Georg Lukács, *Aesthetics and Politics*. London; New York: Verso, 2007.
- Adorno, Theodor W., Horkheimer, Max. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Edited by Gunzelin Noerr, and translated by Edmund Jephcott. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.
- Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.
- Amorales, Carlos. *Work Documentation 1996-2015*. Mexico City, 2015.
- Angell, Norman. *The Great Illusion*. Cosimo Classics, 2007.
- Barasch, Moshe. *Theories of Art: I. From Plato to Winckelmann*. Routledge, 2000.
- Baudelaire, Charles. *Intimate Journals*. Translated by Christopher Isherwood. New York: Dover Publications, 2006.
- ——. *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*. Translated and edited by Jonathan Mayne. London; New York: Phaidon Press, 1995.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities ... or the End of the Social*. New York: Semiotext(e), 1983.

  ——. *The Conspiracy of Art*. New York: Semiotext(e), 2005.
- Becker, Howard S. *Art Worlds*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London:University of California Press, 2008.
- Bell, Daniel. *The Coming of Post-industrial Society*. Basic Books, 2008.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. Edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry John. New York: Schocken Books, 1968.

  ——. *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Baudelaire*. Edited by Michael W. Jennings, and translated by Howard Eiland, Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingston and Harry Zohn. Cambridge, Mass; London: The Bellknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006.

- Berardi, Franco. *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*. Translated by Francesca Cadel and Giuseppina Mecchia. New York: Semiotext(e), 2009.
- Berger, Peter L., Luckmann, Thomas. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Penguin Books, 1991.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *Nation and Narration*. London; New York, Routledge, 1990.
  ——. *The Location of Culture*. London; New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Bishop, Claire. *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. London; New York: Verso, 2012.
- Boltanski, Luc, Chiapello, Eve. *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. Translated by Gregory Elliott. London; New York: Verso, 2005.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *On Television*. Translated by Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson. New York: The New Press, 1996.
  ——. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Literature and Art*. Edited by Randal Johnson. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993.
  ——. *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*. Translated by Susan Emanuel. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996.
- Bourriaud, Nicholas. *Postproduction/ Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World*. New York: Lucas & Steiberg, 2002.
  ——. *Relational Aesthetics*. Translated by Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods. Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2002.
- Breines, Wini. *The Great Refusal: Community and Organization in the New Left: 1962-1968.* New Brunswick; London: Rutgers University Press, 1982.
- Brown, Wendy. *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*. New York: Zone Books, 2015.
- Bürger, Peter. *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Translated by Michael Shaw. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
- Buskirk, Martha. *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art*. Cambridge, Mass; London: The MIT Press, 2003.
- Cabanne, Pierre. *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*. Translated by Ron Padgett. New York: Da Capo Press, 1987.
- Călinescu, Matei. *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism Avant-Garde Decadence Kitsch Postmodernism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1987.

- Cernuschi, Claude. *Re/casting Kokoschka: Ethics and Aesthetics, Epistemology and Politics in Fin-de-siècle Vienna*. Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 2002.
- Dezeuze, Anna. *Deleuze Monument*. London: Afterall Books, 2014.
- Durkheim, Emil. *Moral Education: A Study in the Theory and Application of the Society of Education*. Edited by Everett K. Wilson. Translated by Everett K. Wilson and Herman Schnurer. London; New York, The Free Press, 1973.
- Duve, Thierry de. *Pictorial Nominalism: On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade*. Translated by Dana Polan. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.

  ——. *Kant After Duchamp*. Cambridge; Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1999.
- Eco, Umberto. *The Open Work*. Translated by Anna Cancogni. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989.
- Elias, Norbert. *Mozart: Portrait of a Genius*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993.
- Eliot, T.S. *Selected Essays*.London: Faber and Faber, 1953.
- *Fisher, Mark. Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative.Zero Books, 2009.*
- Fleming, Paul. *Exemplarity and Mediocrity: The Art of the Average from Bourgeois Tragedy to Realism*. Stanford; California: Stanford University Press, 2009.
- Foster, Hal. Recodings: *Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics*. Seattle: Bay Press, 1985.
- Francis, Fukuyama. *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: The Free Press, 1992.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*. Translated by Graham Burchell. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 19*. London: The Hogart Press, 1974.
- Fried, Michael. *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews*. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Gardner, Anthony. *Politically Unbecoming: Postsocialist Art Against Democracy*. Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: MIT Press, 2015.
- Gorz, André. *Critique of Economic Reason*. New York; London: Verso, 1989.
- *Gramsci,Antonio. Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. Edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. New York: International Publishers, 1971.
- Greenberg, Clement. *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1961.

——. *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 3: Affirmations and Refusals, 1950-1956*. Edited by John O'Brian. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

——. *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 4: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969*. Edited by John O'Brian. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

- Groys, Boris. *Art Power*. Cambridge, Mass; London, England: Mit Press, 2008.

  ——. *In the Flow*. London; New York: Verso, 2016.

  ——. *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*. Translated by Charles Rougle. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992.

- Hagoort, Erik. *Good Intentions: Judging the Art of the Encounter*. Amsterdam: Foundation for Visual Arts, Design and Architecture, 2005.
- Hardt, Michael, Negri, Antonio. *Empire*. Cambridge, Mass; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2000.
- David Harvey. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

  ——. *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

  ——. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Cambridge; Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 1990.
- Harvie, Jen. *Fair Play: Art, Performance and Neoliberalism*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- Hauser, Arnold. *The Social History of Art, Vol. II: Renaissance, Mannerism and Baroque*. London: Routledge, 1962.
- Hayek, Friedrich A. *The Road to Serfdom.* London; New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Hentea, Marius. *TaTa Dada: The Real Life and Celestial Adventures of Tristan Tzara*. Cambridge, Mass; London; England, MIT Press, 2014.
- Hewison, Robert. *Cultural Capital: The Rise and Fall of Creative Britain*. London; New York: Verso, 2014.
- Hibbitt, Richard. *Dilettantism and its Values: From Weimar Classicism to the Fin de* Siècle. London: Legenda, 2006.
- Hirschhorn, Thomas. *Critical Laboratory: The Writings of Thomas Hirschhorn*. Edited by Lisa Lee and Hal Foster. Cambridge; Mass: MIT Press, 2013.

- Hoptman, Laura J., Pospiszyl, Tomáš, eds. *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art Since the 1950s*. Cambridge, Mass; London; England, MIT Press, 2002.
- Horowitz, Noah. *Art of the Deal: Contemporary Art in a Global Financial Market*. Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014.
- Huyssen, Andreas. *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*. Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986.
- Illich, Ivan. *Tools for Conviviality*. Fontana/Collins, 1975.
- Jackson, Shannon. *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics*. London: Routledge, 2011.
- Jensen, Robert. *Marketing Modernism in fin-de-siècle Europe*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994.
- Jones, Amelia. *Irrational Modernism: a Neurasthenic History of New York Dada*. Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: MIT Press, 2004.

  ——. *Postmodernism and the En-gendering of Marcel Duchamp*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Jones, Caroline A. *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist*. Chicago; London : University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Jouve, Nicole W. *Baudelaire: A Fire to Conquer Darkness*. Palgrave Macmillan, 1980.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgement*. Translated by Werner S. Pluhar. Indiana; Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987.
- Kester, Grant H. *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2004.
- Alexandre, Kojève. *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures On The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Edited by Alan Bloom, translated by James H. Nichols, Jr. Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1980.
- Kondylis, Panagiotis. Η Παρακμή του Αστικού Πολιτισμού: Από τη Μοντέρνα στη Μεταμοντέρνα Εποχή και από τον Φιλελευθερισμό στη Μαζική Δημοκρατία [The Decline of Bourgeois Thought and Life-Forms: The Liberal Modern and The Mass-democratic Post-modern]. Athens; Θεμέλιο, 1991.
- Kwon, Miwon. *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*. Cambridge; Mass.; London; England: MIT Press, 2002.

- Laclau, Ernesto, Mouffe, Chantal. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (Second Edition). London; New York: Verso, 2001.
- Lemke, Thomas. *Foucault, Governmentality and Critique*. London; New York: Routledge, 2012.
- Lipietz, Alain. *Towards a New Economic Order: Postfordism, Ecology, and Democracy*. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Lippard, Lucy. *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*. Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1997.
- Livingstone, Marco. *Pop Art: A Continuing History*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1990.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. *Libidinal Economy*. Translated bu Iain Hamilton Grant. London: Athlone, 1993.
- Locke, John. *Two Treatises of Government, and a Letter Concerning Toleration*. Edited by Ian Shapiro. New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2003.
- Losurdo, Domenico. *Liberalism: a Counterhistory*. Translated by Gregory Elliott. London; New York: Verso Books, 2011.
- Macpherson, Crawford Brough. *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1962.
- Marchart, Oliver. *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and* Laclau. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.
- Marcuse, Herbert. *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*. Translated by Jeremy J. Shapiro. London: Mayfly Books, 2009.
- Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1*. Translated by Ben Fowkes. New York: Penguin, 1990.

  ——. *Grundrisse: Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy*. Translated by Martin Nicolaus. Vintage Books, 1973.

  ——. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972.
- Marx, Karl, Engels, Frederick. *The Communist Manifesto*. New York: International Publishes, 1948.
- Marx, Leo. *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1964.
- Meier, Heinrich, ed. *Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss: The Hidden Dialogue*. Translated by J. Harvey Lomax. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

- Mouffe, Chantal. *The Return of the Political*. London; New York: Verso Books, 1993.

  ——. *The Democratic Paradox*. London; New York: Verso Books, 2000.

  ——. *On the Political*. London; New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Maslow, Abraham Harold. *Maslow on Management*. John Wiley, 1998.
- Matarasso, François. *Use or Ornament? The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts*. London: Comedia, 1997.
- Mattick Jr., Paul. *Art In Its Time: Theories and Practices of Modern Aesthetics*. London; New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Mundy, Jennifer, ed. *Man Ray: Writings on Art*. Getty Publications. 2016.
- Nicolacopoulos, Toula. *The Radical Critique of Liberalism: In Memory of a Vision*. Melbourne: Re.press, 2008.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson, translated by Carol Diethe. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

  ——. *The Birth of Tragedy and other Writings*. Edited by. Raymond Geuss,and Ronald Speirs, translated by Ronald Speirs. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

  ——. *Twilight of the Idols: Or How to Philosophize with a Hammer*. Translated by Duncan Large. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Nisbet, Robert. *Community and Power*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1962.
- Pine, Joseph B., Gilmore, James H. *The Experience Economy*: *Updated Edition*. Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2011.
- Plato. *The Republic*. Translated by Allan Bloom. Basic Books, 1991.
- Poggioli, Renato. *The Theory of The Avant-Garde*. Translated by Gerald Fitzgerald. Cambridge; London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968.
- Rancière, Jacques. *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. Edited and translated by Steven Corcoran. London; New York: Continuum, 2010.
- Reckwitz, Andreas. *The Invention of Creativity*. Translated by Steven Black. Polity Press, 2017.
- Relyea, Lane. *Your Everyday Art World*. Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: MIT Press, 2013.

- Roberts, John. *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde*. London; New York: Verso, 2015.

  ——. *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art after the Readymade*. London: Verso, 2007.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Discourse on Political Economy and the Social Contract*. Translated by Christopher Betts. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Rubin, Patricia Lee. *Giorgio Vasari: Art and History*. New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1995.
- Sandel, Michael J. *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*. New York; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.
- Schiller, Friedrich. *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. New York: Dover Publications, 2004.

  ——. *Schiller's Complete Works: Vol II*. Translated by Charles J. Hempel. Philadelphia: I. Kohler, 1861.
- Schmitt, Carl. *Political Theology: Four Chapter on the Concept of Sovereignty*. Translated by George Schwab. Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: MIT Press, 1988.

  ——. *The Concept of the Political: Expanded Edition*. Translated by George Schwab. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

  ——. *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*. Translated by Ellen Kennedy. Cambridge, Mass.; London, England, MIT Press, 1988.

  ——. *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*. Translated by G.L. Ulmen. New York: Telos Press, 2003.
- Scholette, Gregory. *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture*. London; New York: Pluto Press, 2006.
- Schumpeter, Joseph Alois. *Imperialism and Social Classes: Two Essays by Joseph Schumpeter*. Translated by Heinz Norden. Meridian Books, 1951.
- Seigel, Jerrold. *The Private Worlds of Marcel Duchamp: Desire, Liberation, and the Self in Modern Culture*. Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1997.
- Srnicek, Nick, Williams, Alex. *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work*. London; New York: Verso, 2015.
- Smith, Adam. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations, vol. 1: Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith*. Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1981.

- Tatarkiewicz, Władysław. *A History of Six Ideas: An Essay in Aesthetics*. Translated by Christopher Kasparek.The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1980.
- Tomkins, Calvin. *The Bride and the Bachelors: Five Masters of the Avant-Garde*. Penguin Books, 1976.
- Tönnies, Ferdinand. *Community and Civil Society*. Edited by Jose Harris and translated by Jose Harris and Margaret Hollis. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Vassiliou, Konstantinos. *Προς την Τεχνολογία της Τέχνης: Από τη Μοντέρνα στη Σύγχρονη Τέχνη* [Toward the Technology of Art: From Modern to Contemporary Art]. Athens: Plethron Press, 2012.
- Veblen, Thorstein. *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. Edited by Martha Banta. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Weber, Max. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Edited by H.H Gerth, and C. Wright Mills. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946.

  ——. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. London: Routledge, 1992.

  ——. *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. Translated by A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons. Edited by Talcott Parsons. Glencoe: The Free Press, 1947.
- Williams, Raymond. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society, New Edition*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Wolff, Janet. *The Social Production of Art*. London: Macmillan, 1981.
- Wright, Stephen. *Toward a Lexicon of Usership*. Eindhoven: Van Abbenmuseum, 2013.
- Yúdice, George. *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era*. Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2003.
- Zamora, Daniel. Behrent, Michael C., eds. *Foucault and Neoliberalism*. Polity Press, 2015.
- Žižek, Slavoj. *Welcome to the Desert of the Real: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates*. London; New York: Verso, 2002.

  ——. *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*. London; New York: Verso, 2009.

ARTICLES AND ESSAYS

- Baudelaire, Charles. “The Salon of 1846: On the Heroism of Modern Life.” In *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Francis Frascina, Charles Harrison, and Deirdre Paul. SAGE Publications: 1982, pp.17-23.
- Bell, Duncan. “John Stuart Mill on Colonies.” *Political Theory* 38, no. 1 (Feb. 2010): 34-64.
- Bellah, Robert N. “Max Weber and World-Denying Love: A Look at the Historical Sociology of Religion.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67, no. 2 (1999): 277-304.
- Bennett, Tony. “Exhibition: Truth, Power: Reconsidering the ‘Exhibitionary Complex.’” In the *Documenta 14 Reader*. Edited by Quinn Latimer, Adam Szymczyk. Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2017.
- Berardi, Franco. “What does Cognitariat Mean? Work, Desire and Depression.” Translated by Melinda Cooper. *Cultural Studies Review* 11, no.2 (September 2005): 57-63.
- Bernstein, Susan. “Imagine (Kant)” *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture,* Theory 72, no.2 (Spring, 1997): 108-118.
- Beuys, Joseph. “I Am Searching for Field Character.” In *Participation,* edited by Claire Bishop. Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: MIT Press, 2006.
- Bishop, Claire. "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics." *October* 110 (Fall 2004): 51-79.

  ——. “The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents.” *Artforum* (February 2006): 178-183.

  ——. “Delegated Performance: Outsourcing Authenticity." *October* 140 (2012): 91-112.
- Breines, Wini. “Community and Organization: The New Left and Michels' ‘Iron Law.’” *Social Problems* 27, no. 4 (1980): 419-429.
- Brener, Alexander. *Ticket that Exploded.* 1998. http://www.ljudmila.org/interpol/ (Accessed 23/03/2017)
- Buchloh, Benjamin H. D. “Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions.” *October* 55 (1990): 105–143. www.jstor.org/stable/778941 (Accessed: 11/12/2016)

  ——. “Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return of Representation in European Painting.” *October* 16 (1981): 39–68. www.jstor.org/stable/778374 (Accessed: 09/07/2016)

- Corrigan, Robert W. “The Transformation of the Avant Garde.” *Michigan Quarterly Review* 13, (no. 1): 31-48.
- Critical Art Ensemble. “Observations on Collective Cultural Action.” *Art Journal* 57, no. 2, (1998): 73–85.
  www.jstor.org/stable/778010 (Accessed 15/08/2018)
- Crow, Thomas. "The Birth and Death of the Viewer: On the Public Function of Art." In *Discussions in Contemporary Culture, vol. 1*, edited by Hal Foster. Seattle: Bay Press, 1987.
- Cheney, Liana de Girolami. “Giorgio Vasari: Artist, Designer, Collector.” In *The Ashgate Research Companion to Giorgio Vasari*, edited by David J. Cast. London; New York: Routledge, 2016.
- Delacour, Hélène, Leca, Bernard. “The Decline and Fall of the Paris Salon: a Study of the Deinstitutionalization Process of a Field Configuring Event in the Cultural Activities.” *M@n@gement* 14, no. 1 (2011): 436-466.
  https://www.cairn.info/revue-management-2011-1-page-436.htm
  (Accessed 03/02/2017)
- Dieckmann, Herbert. "Diderot's Conception of Genius." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 2, no. 2 (1941): 151-82.
- Dezeuze, Anna. “‘Neo-dada,’ ‘Junk Aesthetic’ and Spectator Participation.” In *Neo-Avant-Grade*, edited by David Hopkins. Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2006.
- Downey, Anthony. “The Spectacular Difference of Documenta XI.” Third Text 17, no.1 (2003): 85-92.
- Duchamp, Marcel. “Apropos of 'Readymades.” In *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, edited by Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson. London; Thames & Hudson, 1975.
  ——. “The Creative Act.” In *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, edited by Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson. London; Thames & Hudson, 1975.
- Foster, Hal. “The Artist as Ethnographer.” In *The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology*. Edited by George E. Marcus and Fred R. Myers. Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1995.
  ——. “Who is Afraid of the Neo-Avant-Garde,” in Hal Foster, *The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 1996)
- Gere, Charlie and Michael Corris. “Non-relational Aesthetics.” *Transmission: The Rules of Engagement* 13. London: Artwords Press, 2008.

- Gervais, André. “Connections: Of Art and Arrhe.” In *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*. Edited by Thierry de Duve. Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: MIT Press, 1991.
- Gogarty, Larne Abse. “‘Usefulness’ in Contemporary Art and Politics.” *Third Text*, 31:1 (2017): 117-132.
- Gordon, Uri. “Prefigurative Politics between Ethical Practice and Absent Promise.” *Political Studies* 66, no. 2 (May 2018): 521–537.
- Groys, Boris. “The Russian Avant Garde Revisited.” In *The Idea of the Avant Garde: and What it Means Today*. Edited by Marc James Léger. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014.
- Hauptmann, William. “Juries, Protests, and Counter-Exhibitions before 1850.” *The Art Bulletin* 67, no. 1 (Mar., 1985): 95-109.
- Hausmann, Raoul. “The German Philistine Gets Upset.” In *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, edited by Anton Kaes, Martin Jay and Edward Dimendberg. Berkeley, Calif.; London: University of California Press, 1994.
- Hausmann, Raoul, and Richard Huelsenbeck. “What is Dadaism and What Does it Want in Germany?” In *The Dada Painters and Poets*, edited by Robert Motherwell, translated by Ralph Mannheim. Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: The Bellknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Hirsch, Faye. "Multiplicity: Passport, Please." *Art in America 6* (June/July 2011): 79-83.
- Huelsenbeck, Richard. “First German Dada Manifesto.” In *The Dada Painters and Poets*, edited by Robert Motherwell, translated by Ralph Mannheim. Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: The Bellknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Heinich, Nathalie. “Singularity and Excellence.” In *Genealogies of Genius*, edited by Joyce E. Chaplin and Darrin M. McMahon. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
- James, Carol P. “An Original Revolutionary Messagerie Rrose, or What Became of Readymades.” In *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, edited byThierry De Duve. Cambridge, MA; London, England: MIT Press, 1991.
- Farr, James. “Locke, Natural Law, and New World Slavery.” *Political Theory* 36, no. 4, (Aug. 2008): 495-522.
- Jameson, Fredric. “Foreword.” In Jean-Francois Lyotard. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

- Jensen, Robert. "A Matter of Professionalism: Marketing Identity in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna." *Austrian History Yearbook* 28 (1997): 247-268.

  -----. “The Avant-Garde and the Trade in Art.” *Art Journal* 47, no. 4 (1988): 360-367.
- Jones, Matthew. “Chantal Mouffe's Agonistic Project: Passions and Participation.” *Parallax* 20, no.2 (2014): 14-30.
- Kimmelman, Michael. “The Sun Sets at the Tate Modern*.” New York Times*, March 21, 2004.

  https://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/21/arts/art-the-sun-sets-at-the-tate-modern.html (Accessed: 02/05/2017)
- Kopytoff, Igor. "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as a Process." In *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Edited by Arjun Appadurai. Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- Kosuth, Joseph. “Art After Philosophy.” In *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson. Cambridge, Mass; London, England: MIT Press, 1999.
- Kravagna, Christian. “Working in the Community: Models of Participatory Practice.” In *The ‘Do-it Yourself’ Artwork: Participation from Fluxus to New Media*. Edited by Anna Dezeuze. Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2010.
- Kraynak, Janet. “Rirkrit Tiravanija's Liability.” In *The ‘Do-it Yourself’ Artwork: Participation from Fluxus to New Media*, edited by Anna Dezeuze. Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2010.

  -----. “Therapeutic Participation: On the Legacy of Bruce Nauman’s Yellow Room (Triangular) and Other Works.” In *Practicable: From Participation to Interaction in Contemporary Art*. Edited by Samuel Bianchini, and Erik Verhagen. Cambridge, Mass; London, England: MIT Press, 2016.
- Kwon, Miwon. “Exchange Rate: On Obligation and Reciprocity in Some Art of the 1960s and After.” In *The ‘Do-it Yourself’ Artwork: Participation from Fluxus to New Media*. Edited by Anna Dezeuze. Manchester; New York: University Press, 2010.
- Martin, Stewart. “Artistic Communism— a Sketch.” *Third Text*, 23:4 (2009): 481-494.

  ——. “Critique of Relational Aesthetics.” *Third Text* 21, no.4 (2007): 369-386)

  ——. “The Absolute Artwork Meets the Absolute Commodity.” *Radical Philosophy*, no. 146 (Nov/Dec 2007): 15-25.

- Lacy, Suzanne. “Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys.” In *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*. Edited by Suzanne Lacy. Seattle; Washington: Bay Press, 1995.
- Lees, Loretta, and Clare Melhuish. “Arts-Led Regeneration in the UK: The Rhetoric and the Evidence on Urban Social Inclusion.” *European Urban and Regional Studies* 22, no. 3 (July 2015): 242-260.
- Lewitt, Sol. “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art.” In *Sol Lewitt*. Edited by Alicia Legg. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1978.
- Lind, Maria. “Actualisation of Space: The Case of Oda Projesi.” *Artists as Producers* (10/2004)
  http://republicart.net/disc/aap/lind01_en.htm (Accessed: 25/02/2017)
- Lippard, Lucy. “Looking Around: Where We Are, Where We Could Be.” In *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, edited by Suzanne Lacy. Seattle: Bay Press, 1995.
- Lippard, Lucy and John Chandler. “The Dematerialization of Art.” In Lucy Lippard, *Changing: Essays in Art Criticism*. New York: Dutton, 1971.
- Lloyd, Kirsten. “Being With, Across, Over and Through: Art’s Caring Subjects, Ethics Debates and Encounters.” In *Economy: Art, Production and the Subject in the Twenty-first Century*. Edited by Angela Dimitrakaki, and Kirsten Lloyd. Liverpool University Press, 2015.
- *Lukács*, Georg. “Expressionism: Its Significance and Decline.” In *Essays on Realism*. Edited by Rodney Livingstone, translated by David Fernbach. Cambridge; Mass: The MIT Press, 1980.
- Marchart, Oliver. “Enacting the Unrealized.” In *Democracy Unrealized: Documenta 11_Platform 1*. Edited by Okwui Enwezor et al. Ostfildern-Ruit : Hatje Cantz, 2002.
- Marder, Michael. “From the Concept of the Political to the Event of Politics.” *Telos* 147 (Summer 2009): 55-76.
- Marien, Michael. “The Two Visions of Post-industrial Society.” *Futures* 9, no.5 (1977): 415-431.
- Marinetti, Filippo Tommaso. “The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism.” In *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. Edited by Charles Harrison, and Paul Wood. Blackwell Publishing, 2003.

- Marx, Karl. “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law. Introduction.” In Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works: Marx, Engels, 1843-44* (vol. 3). London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd, 1987.

  ——. “Critique of the Gotha Programme.” In Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works Vol.24: 1874-1883*. New York: International Publishers.

  ——. “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844.” In Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works: Marx, Engels, 1843-44* (vol. 3). London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd, 1987.

  ——. “Preface to ‘A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy.’” http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critiquepol-economy/preface.htm (Accessed: 04/03/2017)
- May, Jon, and Nigel Thrift. “Introduction.” In *Timespace: Geographies of Temporality*, edited by Jon May, Nigel Thrift. London: New York; Routledge, 2001.
- Mazetti, Manuel. “Epicureans and Gnostics in tr.47 (Enn. III 2) 7.29-41.” In *Plotinus and Epicurus: Matter, Perception, Pleasure*, edited by Angela Longo, and Daniela Patrizia Taormina. Cambridge University Press, 2016.
- McCormick, John P. “Transcending Weber's Categories of Modernity? The Early Lukács and Schmitt on the Rationalization Thesis.” *New German Critique* 75 (1998): 133-177.
- Mouffe, Chantal. “Art And Democracy: Art as an Agonistic Intervention in Public Space.” In *OPEN 14. Art as a Public Issue: How Art and its Institutions Reinvent the Public Dimension*, edited by Liesbeth Melis, Jorinde Seijdel. NAi Publishers, 2008.

  ——. “Which Ethics for Democracy.” In *The Turn to Ethics*, edited by Marjorie B. Garber, Beatrice Hanssen, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz. London; Routledge, 2000.
- Naumann, Francis M. “*Belle Haleine: Eau de Voilette (Beautiful Breath: Veil Water), 1921*.” https://www.toutfait.com/belle-haleine-eau-de-voilette-beautiful-breath-veil-water-1921/ (Accessed: 04/01/2019)
- Obalk, Hector. “The Unfindable Readymade.” *Tout-fait* 1, no.2 (2000) http://www.toutfait.com/issues/issue_2/Articles/obalk.html (Accessed: 15/04/2016)
- Pape, Toni, Solomon, Noémie and Alanna Thain. "Welcome to This Situation: Tino Sehgal’s Impersonal Ethics." *Dance Research Journal, vol.* 46, no. 3, (2014): 89-100.

  Project MUSE, muse.jhu.edu/article/566330 (Accessed: 15/12/2018)
- Park Fiction Installation, Documenta11, 2002.

http://park-fiction.net/park-fiction-documenta11/ (Accessed 12/11/2017)

- Pine, Joseph B., Gilmore, James H. "Welcome to the Experience Economy." *Harvard Business Review* 76, no. 4, (1998): 97-105.
- Reckitt, Helena. "Forgotten Relations: Feminist Artists and Relational Aesthetics." In *Politics in a Glass Case: Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions*. Edited by Angela Dimitrakaki, Lara Perry. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013.
- Rehberger, Tobias. "Sleeping on a Van Gogh: Interview with Antony Spira." In *Tobias Rehberger: Private Matters*. Edited by Antony Spira. London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2004.
- Richards, Mary E. "The orchestrated crowd: Choreography, Chorus, Conceit in Tino Sehgal's These Associations." *Choreographic Practices* 8, no.2, (2017): 181–98.
- Roberts, John. "Art and the Problem of Immaterial Labour: Reflections on its Recent History." In *Economy: Art, Production and the Subject in the Twenty-first Century*. Edited by Angela Dimitrakaki, Kirsten Lloyd. Liverpool University Press, 2015.

  ——. "Productivism and Its Contradictions." *Third Text* 23:5 (2009): 527-536.

  ——. "Revolutionary Pathos, Negation, and the Suspensive Avant-Garde." *New Literary History* 41, no. 4 (2010): 717-30.
- Rose, Nikolas. "Community, Citizenship, and the Third Way." *American Behavioral Scientist* 43, no. 9, (June 2000): 1395-1411

  ——. "Death of the Social? Re-figuring the Territory of Government." *Economy and Society* 25, No. 3, (August 1996): 327-356.
- Rühse, Viola. "Park Fiction: A Participatory Artistic Park Project." *North Street Review* 17, (2014): 35-46.
- Schaap, Andrew. "Political Theory and the Agony of Politics." *Political Studies Review* 5 (2007): 56-74.
- Shklar, Judith. "Liberalism of Fear." In *Liberalism and the Moral Life*. Edited by Nancy Rosenblum. Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: Harvard University Press, 1989.
- Schmidt-Lisenhoff, Viktoria. "On and Beyond the Colour Line: Afterimages of Old and New Slavery in Contemporary Art Since 1990." In *Slavery in Art and Literature: Approaches to Trauma, Memory and Visuality*. Edited by Birgit Haehnel, and Melanie Ulz. Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2010.
- Schultz, Theodor. "Investment in Human Capital." *The American Economic Review* 51, No. 1 (March 1961): 1-17.

- Sierra, Santiago. *160 cm Line Tattooed on 4 People*. (El Gallo Arte Contemporáneo, Salamanca, Spain. December 2000) http://www.santiago-sierra.com/200014_1024.php (Accessed: 20/03/2015)
  ——. *Person Saying a Phrase* (New Street, Birmingham, United Kingdom, 2002) http://www.santiago-sierra.com/200202_1024.php (Accessed: 19/03/2015)
- Szymczyk, Adam. "Iterability and Otherness— Learning and Working from Athens." In *The Documenta 14 Reader*. Edited by Quinn Latimer, Adam Szymczyk. Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2017.
- Thompson, Nato. "Living as Form." In *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2001*, edited by Nato Thompson. Cambridge; Mass: MIT Press, 2012.
- Vázquez-Arroyo, Antonio Y. "Liberal Democracy and Neoliberalism: A Critical Juxtaposition." *New Political Science*, 30:2 (2008): 127-159.
- Viriasova, Inna. "The Political Totalization of Carl Schmitt: Deciding on 'the Absolutely Unpolitical." *Telos 175* (Summer 2016): 85-104.
- Wolin, Richard. "Carl Schmitt: The Conservative Revolutionary Habitus and the Aesthetics of Horror." *Political Theory* 20, No. 3 (Aug. 1992): 424-447.
- Ziarek, Krzysztof. "The Work of Art in the Age of its Electronic Mutability." In *Walter Benjamin and Art*. Edited by Andrew Benjamin. London: Continuum, 2005.