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PRECARIOUS LABOUR IN THE FIELD OF ART

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PRECARIOUS LABOUR
IN THE FIELD OF ART

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The general shift from manufacturing to services as a source of employment has
effected also the field of visual art, changing the labour market for curators.
Their position in the division of labour has become closer to the one of artists,
in the sense becoming much more unstable, short term, flexible, and exploited.
An important aspect of the new working conditions is the demand for physical and
mental mobility. This is affecting both the curators with "steady" jobs whose
working places and working hours are becoming fluid, and even more so the freelance
curators who offer their services to a free (art) labour market.

The advantage of institutional curators is that they hold power positions, that
provide them with opportunity to outsource or insource labour to external collabo-
rators or smaller partner institutions. Freelance curators are on the other hand
in constant search for gigs, and have to demonstrate multi-tasking skills, accept
flexibility in regard of the working conditions and even readiness to pre-finance
their research and preparatory phases of the project they are commissioned for
while waiting to be remunerated. They are completely on their own until the accom-
plishment of the final product, which makes that work extremely precarious.

This issue of *On Curating* brings contributions from theorists, artists and ac-
tivists concerned with the new conditions of labour under present day capitalism.
Contributions range from theoretical analyses of different concepts regarding
the issues of precarious labour, to reflections on the use value of such concepts
in analyzing the present position of labour within the institutional contexts in
the realm of contemporary visual arts. The motives for assembling these texts were
to contextualize working conditions in the field of curating contemporary art
and culture; to foster self-reflection of curators and to provide a link between
curatorial studies, sociological and economical studies on the real impacts of
creative industries, activist writings on the present use and abuse of cultural
work.

In the text selected to open the thematic concern of the journal, **Andrew Ross**,
amongst other issues, stresses three important features of today's treatment of
labour in general, that could help drafting the general framework of the preca-
rious position of labour in the field of art and other creative cultural prac-
tice. Firstly, he points to the high level of self-exploitation of the cultural
workers in response to the gift of autonomy, and dispensability in exchange
for flexibility. As to the role of governments in that process, he notices that
most of them have been withdrawing from their obligations by introducing wel-
fare provision reforms and weakened labour regulation, which was combined with
subcontracting, offshore outsourcing and benefit offloading on the part of
corporations. Finally, he praises the role of the Italian autonomists in analy-
sing contemporary post-industrial capitalism as disorganizing employment and
socio-economic life in general, producing a new precarious underclass, but with
its inherent potential to grow into a 'self-organizing precariat'.

In his essay **Anthony Davis** analyses the effects of neoliberal capitalism on cul-
tural institutions. He takes the example of the activist collective ctrl-i that
was formed out of temporary workers at MACBA that dared to criticize the dubious
employment practices of this institution in the framework of the event that was
exactly dealing with the issue of "El Precariat Social Rebel". Davis gives evidence
of uneven process of neoliberal restructuring as it courses its way through cul-
tural institutions that tend either to fully embrace it or remain critical to it.
For him, both options are seen as coexistent forms of neoliberalism that are going
in same direction at a different pace, or with uneven rates. The consequence of
this situation, as seen in the case of ctrl-i, is that many of these "progressive"
institutions are formally affirming the fight against precarious labour, while on
the other hand they continue to maintain high levels of labour insecurity among
their workers.

Adrienne Goehler in explaining her thesis on the possible advantages of introducing the "Basic Income Grant", points out that one could learn from artists and academics, cultural and social creatives, ways of dealing with the incertitude of the open contexts of today's "liquid modernity". They know how to deal with "errors, doubts, rejections, to combine and recombine, to sample and mix", and that knowledge can be used in all cultural and democratic development of our societies. In her opinion, creativity is a generic human feature, and should be used not only in art, but in other spheres of life as well. She advocates for an environment in which creativity is perceived as a capability lying within every individual, and with that in mind she does not stand for the Basic Income Grant as something primarily for artists and academics, but everybody.

London based *Carrotworkers' Collective* uses the figure of an intern to open up questions on the relations between education, work and life at the present moment, mainly in the European framework, defined by the lifelong flexible learning process as introduced by the Bologna process and the shift from employment to occupation. They claim that even it is usually told that internships provides one with an opportunity to experience the 'real' work before employment, one should be aware that real' conditions of work are something that is produced, and not simply given as a set of rules that to learn in order to 'play the game'. What is in fact learned during an internship is precarity as a way of life. On the other hand, interns and volunteers temporarily fill the gap resulting out of the collapse of the European cultural sector, and hide the exodus of the public resources from such activities, preventing the general public to perceive the unsustainability of the situation in which cultural production is at the present stage.

Rosalind Gill and Andy Pratt in their essay give a comprehensive overview of theoretical concepts and political practices related to the issues of precariousness and cultural work, starting from the Italian autonomous Marxists and the *Operaismo* in the 1970s. The authors give a thorough analysis of the key concepts like multitude, the social factory and immaterial labour and the impact they had on the current precarity movement, where the artists, new media workers and other cultural labourers are seen as iconic representatives of the new 'precariat'. Herewith, the precarity is understood in its double meaning, both as it signifies the growth of unstable, insecure forms of living, but also new forms of political struggle and solidarity that have potential for new subjectivities, new socialites and politics beyond its traditional forms. For Gill and Pratt it is important to shift the focus of research from the central point of work in all these discourses to the understudied relationship between the transformations within working life and workers' subjectivities because the capitalism of today attempts to exercise control over not simply workers' bodies and productive capacities but over their subjectivity as well. In this respect, they emphasize the role of autonomist writers that are concerned with emergent subjectivities and the possibilities of resistance, seen as the features of subjectivity that surpass capitalist control and regulation.

The *Freee Art Collective's* contribution aims to bring economic and social distinctions to the idea of precarity in reference to the Marxist concept of labour. Their analysis focuses on contemporary forms of labour under advanced capitalism, particularly considering the position of the artists that do not fit into the "proper" capitalist labour relations. They claim that artistic labour could be seen as unproductive labour according to the definition made by Adam Smith. This kind of unproductive labour is albeit not producing luxurious commodities, but it is "luxury good" itself. The art collective Freee unlike many collectives of activists suggests that exactly at the point of free labour — only if it is not a surplus wage labour – workers could have a type of agency, and they see the potential of free labour to "destroy" the capital.

Pascal Gielen deals with the art scene as a sociological concept. He differentiates it from the concepts such as 'the group', 'the category', 'the network' and 'the subculture', stressing that 'the social scene', and the art scene in particular are relatively unexplored as an area of research. He then points out that in the framework of post-Fordist economy, as characterized by fluid working hours, high levels of mobility, hyper-communication and flexibility, and special interest in creativity and performance, the notion of the scene as a social-organizational form becomes quite useful. Building on Paolo Virno's insights, he states that in today's capitalism, in which individuality and authenticity are highly prized, both in leisure activities and at the workplace, the scene offers a specific form of social cohesion and a shared identity unknown in a social category like an age-related or professional group. The accepted flexible work that marks artistic projects, appearing as a form of deliberate choice, with no obligation from the side of the employer, is being used as the key to the new paradigm of work at the labour market. The old

Arbeit macht frei slogan, located on the gates of Nazi concentration camps, is now reversed into Freiheit macht Arbeit (freedom creates work). That is the basis on which the creative industries are built.

Marc James Léger's article revisits the ideas of the avant-garde in the context of neoliberal cultural politics of administration of creative labour. With the art system disposed as it is, he considers the progressive potential of discredited vanguardist strategies as the repressed underside yet genealogical complement of contemporary community art strategies. Léger aligns with the conclusion of Andrea Fraser that the avant-garde aesthetic autonomy has been devalued within the actual trends of the culture industries. In this situation, the criticism by many artists avoids to directly confront with the manifestations of neoliberal capitalism in public institutions. Léger therefore poses the question what are the forms of socially engaged cultural practice that would be able to stand up against such a hegemonic order in capitalism of today.

Finally, **Angela McRobbie** defines the "post-industrial" economy as a "cultural" economy. Being a "talent-led economy", it brings along a new work ethic of self-responsibility in which the entrepreneurial individual alone is to blame if the next project (such as the next script, film, book or show in the sphere of cultural production) is not up to scratch. It relies on impossible degrees of enthusiasm and willingness to self-exploit, and offers individuals mainly just to be sub-contracted and, in that way, wholly dependent on the bigger companies for whom they provide services. The ideal of that economy in the cultural sector is of the arrival of a high-energy band of young people which would drive the cultural economy ahead, but in a totally privatized and non-subsidy-oriented direction. What we get out of that is only a society of lonely, mobile, over-worked individuals for whom socialising and leisure are only more opportunities to do a deal, and doing a deal as just an opportunity more to socialize.

THE NEW GEOGRAPHY OF WORK. POWER TO THE PRECARIOUS?

Andrew Ross

Anyone who wants to survey the origins of cultural stu-
dies will feel obliged to cite Raymond Williams' painstaking
analyses, from the late 1950s onwards, of how the term
'culture' has been variously identified and interpreted
(Williams, 1985, 2001). From our vantage point today, it
is noteworthy that, in all of these surveys, Williams barely
dwelt on the topic of culture as a form of labor — on how
people actually make a living out of culture. No doubt,
there are several reasons for this inattention, one of them
being a certain distancing from laborism itself. Without
doubting Williams' own indebtedness, by dint of his back-
ground and standpoint, to the world of labor, it is fair
to say that his writings helped to fuel the cultural turn
away from economism that characterized the laborist left
of the day. Another, more specific reason for his disregard
may be that the landscape of cultural work, in the era
of the Keynesian welfare state, was a relatively settled
environment, and not especially eligible for the kind of
thorough reconceptualization that Williams set himself
to undertake. Those who made a secure living from culture
belonged either to the stable commercial industries of
broadcasting, recording and publishing, or to the design
and academic professions. By contrast, the non-commercial
sector, in part supported by public subsidy, was a vast
domain of nonstandard work, entirely marginal to the pro-
ductive economy but essential to the prestige of elites
and the democratic lifeblood of the polity.

The study of artworlds (broadly defined) was a steady sub-
field of the social sciences, and the few economists who
surveyed the productivity of artists puzzled over the gap
between their income or performance outputs and that of
their counterparts in service occupations more amenable to
quantitative analysis. The most well-known, William Baumol,
would conclude that the performing arts in particular were
subject to a 'cost disease' which condemns the cost per
live performance to rise at a rate persistently faster than
that of a typically manufactured good (Baumol and Bowen,
1966). Hampered by this cost disease (often known as the
Baumol effect), the arts, in his judgment, could either
join the productive sector — by emulating the commercial
culture industries in their adaptation of productivity-
boosting technologies — or conform to the model of social
services, like health or education, which produce a sub-
sidized public good under the heavy hand of bureaucratic
administration.

In the decades since Williams' inattention and Baumol's
prognosis, the ground has shifted quite noticeably, and in
ways neither could have been expected to predict. Cultural
labor finds itself in the cockpit of attention, front and
center of the latest rollouts of neoliberal programs. As
paradigms of entrepreneurial selfhood, 'creatives', as they
are now labeled, are the apple of the policymaker's eye,
and are recipients of the kind of lipservice usually bestowed
by national managers on high-tech engineers as generators
of value. Art products are the objects of intense finan-
cial speculation; cultural productions are top hit-makers
in the jackpot end of the New Economy; 'cultural districts'
are posited as the key to urban prosperity; and creative

industries policy is embraced as the anchor of regional development by governments around the world on the look-out for a catch-up industrial plan. In the business world, creativity is viewed as a wonderstuff for transforming workplaces into powerhouses of value, while intellectual property — the lucrative prize of creative endeavor — is increasingly regarded as the 'oil of the 21st century'.

This paradigm shift has been well documented in accounts of the emergence and international spread of creative industries policy (Garnham, 2005; Hartley, 2004; Hesmondalgh and Pratt, 2005; Huws, 2007; Keane, 2007; Lovink and Rossiter, 2007); the career of the 'creative city' as a recipe for development (Florida, 2002; Landry, 2000; Peck, 2005); the explosive growth of knowledge-driven business sectors that depend on 'intellectual capital' (Saxenian, 2006; Stewart, 1997); and the conceptual turn toward the 'expediency of culture' (Yudice, 2004). The shift has occurred with a rapidity that has generated widespread skepticism, not least among cultural workers themselves, unaccustomed to attention, let alone the proverbial limelight (Wallinger and Warnock, 2000). Consequently, the policies, programs and statistical outcomes are often regarded as a slick routine, designed to spin value out of thin air, or else aimed, more surreptitiously, at bringing the last, most recalcitrant, holdouts into the main currents of marketization, where they can swim alongside the other less exotic species (managers, insurance agents, lawyers) that are lumped together, in Richard Florida's widely cited formulation, as the 'creative class'.

So, too, there is an element of desperation in this turn toward a 'creative economy'. Managers struggling to retain a competitive edge in globalizing markets are easily sold on any evidence that creative activity in and of itself can generate value for a city, region or nation. If nothing else, there is the proven capacity of 'creative districts' to boost realty prices in select cities, building on well documented and, by now, formulaic cycles of gentrification. At the same time, in a milieu when offshore outsourcing has become a way of life, there is the hope that jobs in a creative economy will not be transferred elsewhere. Among their other virtues, creative occupations do not entail cost-intensive institutional supports, like those in high-skill manufacturing sectors, which require expensive technical infrastructures as well as customarily lavish tax incentives. All in all, the combination of low levels of public investment with the potential for high-reward outcomes is guaranteed to win the attention of managers on the lookout for a turnaround strategy. Accustomed to seeing corporate investors come and go, they have seized this rare opportunity to capitalize on a place-based formula for redevelopment. Last but not least, there are those who see the creative economy as a plausible model for job creation that offers work gratification on a genuinely humane basis.

It is important to note that the uptake of these creative industries policies represents a shift in the mentality of capital-owners and their compliant allies in the legislature, though not in the conduct of capital in general. After all, the profile of the creative economy fits the bill of capitalist expansion into untapped markets, utilization of hitherto marginal labor pools and the exploitation of neglected sources of value. Less proven is whether these activities can support a productive economy with an engine of sustainable jobs at its core. Much of the evidence so far suggests that the primary impact is on land value and rent accumulations, which are side effects,

to say the least, rather than transmissions, of the ideas originated by creative workers (Harvey, 2001).

Not surprisingly for a policy-intensive paradigm, statistics generated about the creative sector have been legion. By contrast, there has been precious little attention to the quality of work life with which such livelihoods are associated. No doubt it is ritually assumed that creative jobs, by their nature, are not deficient in gratification. If anything, their packaging of mental challenges and sensuous self-immersion is perceived to deliver a surplus of pleasure and satisfaction. Proponents of this line of thinking may well concede that the life of creatives, in the past, has also been associated with misery, frustration and deprivation, but the given wisdom is that those pitfalls were primarily the result of economic inattention and social marginalization. In a milieu where creativity is celebrated on all sides, such drawbacks will surely dissolve.

Yet the ethnographic evidence on knowledge and creative industry workplaces shows that job gratification, for creatives, still comes at a heavy sacrificial cost — longer hours in pursuit of the satisfying finish, price discounts in return for aesthetic recognition, self-exploitation in response to the gift of autonomy, and dispensability in exchange for flexibility (Ehrenstein, 2006; Gill, 2002, 2007; Huws, 2003; Perrons, 2003; Reidl et al., 2006: Ross, 2002). If policymakers were to undertake official surveys of the quality of work life, they would find the old formula for creative work very much alive and well in its newly marketized environment (Oakley, 2004). In this respect, arguably the most instrumentally valuable aspect of the creative work traditions is the carry-over of coping strategies, developed over centuries, to help endure a feast-or-famine economy in return for the promise of success and acclaim. The combination of this coping mentality with a production code of aesthetic perfectibility is a godsend for managers looking for employees capable of self-discipline under the most extreme job pressure. It is no surprise, then, that the 'artist' has been seen as the new model worker for high-skill, high-reward employment (Menger, 2002).

It would be a mistake, however, to see the creative economy sector as simply a marketized uptake of these long-standing traditions of painstaking endeavor and abiding forbearance. For the precariousness of work in these fields also reflects the infiltration of models of nonstandard employment from low-wage service sectors. The chronic contingency of employment conditions for all low-skill workers and migrants is more and more normative, where before it was characteristic of a secondary labor market, occupied primarily by women working on a part-time basis, or at discounted wages in an era dominated by the 'family wage' of the male breadwinner (Beck, 2000). Capital-owners have won lavish returns from casualization — subcontracting, outsourcing and other modes of flexploitation — and increasingly expect the same in higher-skill sectors of the economy. As a result, we have seen the steady march of contingency into the lower and middle levels of the professional and high-wage service industries.

This development has prompted some theoretical commentators, especially from the post-operaismo Italian school, to see the formation of a multi-class *precariat*, somehow linked by shared concerns about the Rossiter, 2005; Papadopoulos et al., 2008). The youthful cast of this for-

mation is often evoked by the slogan of 'the precarious generation', and the activist networks generated on its behalf are driven by a spontaneous, though far from dogmatic, belief that the precariat is the post-Fordist successor to the proletariat, both in theory and practice (Raunig, 2004, 2007). Even if this concept is theoretically plausible, does it make sense to imagine cross-class coalitions of the precarious capable of developing a unity of consciousness and action on an international scale? Critics of this view dismiss as naive the assumption that a highly trained aristocracy of labor will find common cause with the less skilled, simply on the basis of insecurity. Yet we cannot afford to reject out of hand any evidence of, or potential for, such forms of cross-class identification, and so the second part of this article will consider the case for and against the theory. In the first part, I will see how far an insistence on qualitative assessments of work life will take us in changing the conversation about the new precarious work ethic that has emerged under neoliberal auspices.

Good Job, Bad Job
The concept of 'quality of work life' is somewhat tainted today, largely because of its association with managerial responses to the 'revolt against work' that broadly manifested itself in Europe and North America in the early 1970s. Alienation on the job arising from boring, repetitive or otherwise ungratifying tasks produced widespread discontent in white-collar as well as blue-collar workplaces (Bell, 1956; Terkel, 1974). The result — pervasive sabotage, chronic absenteeism and wildcat strikes — was interpreted by corporate and government managers as a system-wide protest against the factory-centered conditions of Fordist industrialization (Garson, 1975; Tronti, 1980; US Department of Health, 1973; Zerzan, 1974).

In the first of a long series of management innovations designed to stimulate a jaded workforce, employers introduced quality of work life (QWL) programs to inject some participation into decision-making and deliver more personal fulfilment to employees. These efforts to make work more feelgood and meaningful also marked the onset of a long decline in job security. As the workplace became more inclusive, free or selfactualizing for employees, it became less just and equal in its provision of guarantees. This was as true for production workers, reorganized into teams exercising a degree of decision-making around their modules, as for whitecollar employees, encouraged to be self-directing in their work applications. In either case, the managerial program to sell liberation from drudgery was accompanied by the introduction of risk, uncertainty and nonstandard work arrangements. As far as corporate conduct went, it is fair to say that one hand gave while the other took.

This two-handed tendency reached its apotheosis in the New Economy profile of the 'free agent', when the youthful (and youth-minded) were urged to break out of the cage of organizational work, and go it alone as self-fashioning operatives, outside of the HR umbrella of benefits, pensions and steady merit increases (Pink, 2001). By this time, large corporations were being scorned by management gurus for their bureaucratic stagnancy, just as their work rules, hierarchies and rituals were condemned for stifling initiative and creativity. The small, entrepreneurial start-up was hailed as a superior species, likely to adapt quicker and evolve further in a volatile business environment (Henwood, 2003). These were the roots of the much-hyped face-off between the Old Economy and New Economy

in the 1990s. The former was seen as risk-averse, coddling employees with a sheltering raft of benefits and securities, and smothering their sense of individual purpose and potential. The latter was risk-tolerant, and it tested employees with an endurance course of challenges and edgy feats, rewarding their mettle and initiative with jackpot-style wealth.

The legacy of this face-off is clearly visible in the breathless business rhetoric applied to the new 'creative economy', often portrayed as the ruledefying guarantor of the next bonanza. Temporarily homeless in the wake of the dotcom bust, corporate lipservice to the powers of 'creativity' looks to have found a new haven. Because the creative industries are, in part, a construction of the state's making — policymakers routinely lump together a motley range of professions under that rubric — this rhetoric has also become the language of government, at federal, regional and city levels. In place of exhortations to think outside the box addressed to systems analysts, sales agents, project managers and other corporate echelons, we now hear politicians and policymakers proclaiming that the future of wealth generation might lie in the hands of bona fide creative practitioners.

As before, however, the condition of entry into the new high-stakes lottery is to leave your safety gear at the door; only the most spunky, agile and dauntless will prevail. This narrative is little more than a warmed-over version of social Darwinism, but, when phrased seductively, it is sufficiently appealing to those who are up for the game. Once they are in, some of the players thrive, but most subsist, neither as employers or employees, in a limbo of uncertainty, juggling their options, massaging their contacts, never knowing where their next project or source of income is coming from. The resultant cycle of feast and famine is familiar to anyone whose livelihood folds into the creative economy. Its unpredictable tempo is far removed from the gospel of steady, hard work and thrifty gain glorified in the 19th-century work ethic (Rodgers, 1978). Indeed, it is more like the survivor challenge of an action video game, where skills, sense of timing and general alertness to the main chance enables the protagonist to fend off threats and claim the prize. In return for giving up the tedium of stable employment, there is the thrill of proving yourself by finding out if you have what it takes. Neoliberalism has succeeded wherever its advocates have preached the existential charge of this kind of work ethic, and of the virtues of being liberated from the fetters of company rules, managerial surveillance and formal regularity.

The low-wage equivalent is a different kind of limbo. For one thing, the rungs on the ladder of social mobility have almost all been knocked out, so that there is little chance of upward advancement for those in the vast majority of low-end service jobs. While there are no prizes to be won, the prospect of being trapped in a dead-end job further lubricates the labor markets in employment sectors already characterized by churning. High rates of turnover, stagnant wage levels and chronic disloyalty are characteristic features of a formal service economy, where intermittent work is more and more the norm. Casualization, driven home by market deregulation and neoliberal labor reform, has placed an ever-growing portion of the workforce on temporary and/or part-time contracts.

In the informal economy, migrant workers occupy more and more of the vital markets; without their contingent labor, the whole machinery of services would grind to a halt.

While their rights and work conditions are degraded by off-the-books employment, their freedom of movement is also prized. Migrancy is what guarantees their remittances, their transnational options, and their ability to evade state scrutiny and capitalist discipline. While mass mobility facilitates the ready availability of workers, often in straitened circumstances, the flighty nature of migrant labor is a source of frustration to the state's strictures of population management and capitalowners' desire to control labor supply. The evasion tactics adopted by transnational migrants in their running battle with agents of repressive border policies, unfair labor regulation, detention camps and deportation lie on the frontlines of neoliberal conflict, both a consequence of discipline and a fugitive response to it (Mezzadra, 2001).

The escape of capital to cheaper locations in other parts of the world is never a clean getaway. Transferring dirty or dangerous industrial operations to less regulated regions is increasingly a corporate liability when toxic substances taint the brand by showing up back home via the intercontinental trade in material goods and food produce. So, too, the bargaining power of labor gets relocated and, sooner or later, asserts itself in a variety of ways (Silver, 2003). The mercurial rise of workers' protests in the world economy's labor-intensive Chinese centers of accumulation is a case in point (Lee, 2007). The chronic 'shortage' of unskilled workers — migrants in their millions who fail to show up, en masse, in Guangdong's sweated factories each year — is further evidence of the unorganized form that such 'refusals of work' can take (Ross, 2006). The more recent response on the part of the Chinese government — new labor legislation (from January 2008) that guarantees the right to sign contracts with no fixed termination dates for employees after ten years of service — is evidence that regulators can be made accountable if a coalition of advocates connects effectively with public concern about precarity.

To insist, today, on the quality of work life is certainly to call attention to these precarious conditions, both in high-end and low-income occupational sectors. But the ingredients of that demand require careful consideration. It would be a mistake, for example, simply to hark back to the diet of security enjoyed by a significant slice of white collars and core manufacturing workers in the Fordist era. The male breadwinner of the postwar 'family wage' breathed a different air from those employed in the secondary labor markets of the era, and did so at the cost of the latter. Employers conceded to workers' gains in core sectors only because they profited so handsomely from the degraded income and status of female pink-collar workers, while the whole system of 'standard employment' rested on the sprawling foundation of unwaged labor in the home. Justice for one was not justice for all, and the trade union leadership of that era, notwithstanding its affirmation of an alternative understanding of how the economy works, can rightly be faulted for its complicity in this multi-tiered arrangement.

In addition, it is important to recall that one of the most salient elements of the 'revolt against work' was a protest against the long-term tedium of organizational employment. Many workers concluded that the conformist discipline of this kind of stability had not produced 'meaningful' experiential outcomes, only classic (Marxist) alienation on the job. 'Jobs for life' was not a recipe for liberation nor should it be. Nor could incremental gratification through consumer materialism be considered a longterm source of fulfilment, even if it were sustainable as a way of life.

Once again, we should acknowledge the compliant role of the era's labor chieftains. Because they so obviously disciplined the workforce, delivering strike-free productivity in return for a steady regimen of wage and benefit increases, their members had to resort to independent action to call attention to the inhumanity of an industrial work process that treated them like cogs in a machine.

When we speak of quality of work life today, we cannot speak of security as an aspiration if it entails a guaranteed slot in a sclerotic organizational hierarchy, where employee participation is clearly tokenistic, and where the division of labor functions as a fixed and formal regime of discipline. The appeal of self-employment, so pervasive, for example, in the creative sector, is a powerful draw, and it should not be conflated entirely with the neoliberal ethos of the self-absorbed entrepreneur. The market evangelism of neoliberalism has produced so many converts because it exploits the credo that individuals actually have some power over their economic destinies. Yet this belief is not the exclusive property of market fundamentalists; it can and should be shared by individuals in a vibrant work environment that is also protected from the rough justice of the market. Nor does the appetite for self-direction necessarily engender a posture of selfish neglect for the welfare of others. Autonomy is not the opposite of solidarity, as is commonly assumed. On the contrary, solidarity, if it is to be authentic, has to be learned — it cannot be enforced — and this can only occur when we are free enough to choose it as an outcome of efforts and ideas that we share with others.

It would be misguided, then, to dismiss the hunger for 'free agency' as a mere product of market ideology; the flexibility it delivers is a response to an authentic employee demand. Autonomy is a critical goal, and while its attainment is more approachable for the self-employed, there is no reason why it cannot be nurtured inside organizations where the work process has been genuinely humanized. In either case, the ability of individuals to take pleasure in freely applying their skills depends on a just social environment which supports and rewards all the players, and does not stigmatize those who do not land the most glittering prizes.

Contrary to market dogma, basic cultural freedoms can only be secured through regulation. Media deregulation, to take one example, has resulted in a drastic reduction in the range and quality of available public opinion (conversely, the power of the dominant culture industry corporations depends on the lavish support of several government agencies). Regulation of creative work need not stifle innovation (another marketeer myth), it just formalizes its conditions of possibility, outlawing the kind of hypercompetitive environment where most of the players turn into losers, along with all of those declared unfit for the contest for reasons of age, attitude or unreadiness. Consequently, it is harmful to perpetuate the belief that innovation is solely the product of preternaturally endowed individuals. All creative work is the result of shared knowledge and labor; originality springs forth not from the forehead of geniuses but from ideas pooled by a community of peers and fellow-travelers. Aesthetic champions are good at what they do, but we cannot promote the assumption that they alone should be beneficiaries of a winner-takes-all culture of creativity centered on the acquisition of intellectual property.

Among the other resident dogmas of the creative life is the longstanding equation with suffering — as expressed in the stereotype of the 'struggling artist' — but there is no natural connection there. Personal sacrifice is not a precondition of creativity, though widespread acceptance, or internalization, of this credo is surely one of the reasons why employees in the creative sectors tolerate long hours, discounted compensation and extreme life pressure in return for their shot at a gratifying work product. Few things are more damaging to the quality of work life than this belief that physical and psychic hardship is the living proof of valuable mental innovation. When compared to the ravages of heavy industrial labor, this may appear to be a minor threat to public health, but its lionization in cutting-edge sectors like high-tech design has accelerated its spread to an alarming range of workplaces and occupations.

In place of this debilitating ethos, we need to see creative work as a basic human right, or entitlement, of the workforce. After all, the call for meaningful, stimulating work was a bedrock demand of the original 'revolt against work'. The current spate of attention to the creative sectors is an opportunity to remember that this desire persists as a goal of all employees. Creative industries policy-making was bolstered by Tony Blair's faux-populist declaration that 'everyone is creative'. To fully realize this loose rhetoric about the creativity of ordinary people will require a progressive industrial policy driven not by GDP stats about the revenue extracted from creative jobs, but by qualitative input about what makes a job creative.

To speak of rights and entitlements is also to speak of obligations on the part of the state and employers. Yet most governments and firms have been withdrawing from their obligations for over two decades now through a combination of (a) welfare provision reforms and weakened labor regulation on the part of the state and (b) subcontracting, offshore outsourcing and benefit offloading on the part of corporations. The latest retreat has been in the privatization and/or reduced state payments to pension plans, even to the most securely employed. As a result, the ever-ageing retiree population in advanced economies will soon be joining the ranks of their precarious brethren in the developing world (Blackburn, 2007a, 2007b).

In contrast to the neoliberal drift in Anglophone countries, some of the European social democracies had created new forms of welfare to protect workers in flexible labor markets. Termed flexicurity, the policy was pioneered in Denmark and the Netherlands in the 1990s, and was subsequently adopted in north-western European countries (Jørgensen and Madsen, 2007; Wilthagen et al., 2004). Flexicurity acknowledges the advantages of flexibility for employers (and some employees), making it easier to hire and fire; it increases the pay and welfare entitlements of flexi workers over time; and it includes strong provisions for those who are temporarily unemployed in flexible labor markets. The successes of these strategies in reducing unemployment, sustaining growth and reinforcing the state's obligations to protect and secure the most contingent members of the workforce have encouraged European legislators to take them up as a goal for the EU as a whole (Cazes and Nespova, 2007; European Expert Group, 2007). No such entitlements apply to migrants, however, and as their numbers swell the service sector, pink-collar work is more and more awash with unregulated forms of flexploitation.

There, where the perils of low-wage contingency are most acute, considerations of the quality of work life have to start with the demand for dignity and respect. As for creativity, it does not take much for employers to enhance and reward workers' inherent impulse to extract meaning and pleasure from even the most routine tasks. But arguably the most radical potential of immigrant labor politics lies in the argument that a host society owes a standard of life to all those who contribute their labor in meaningful ways. Labor, in this paradigm, is a pathway to quality of life in general — envisaged through the basic provisions available to regularized citizenresidents — access to public education and other services, social housing, labor and civil rights, living wages, social security, and above all, amnesty for the undocumented. So, too, the moral clarity of this claim is buttressed by knowledge, on the part of workers and recipients of the services alike, about the essential utility of the jobs in question. Unlike vast slices of the economy that are devoted to producing unnecessary and environmentally unsustainable goods and services, immigrant-dominated sectors like agriculture, food processing and preparation, construction, trucking, textiles, and cleaning and janitorial services are considered indispensable. In this respect, they satisfy some of the requirements of 'useful toil' set by William Morris, the patron saint of quality work. In many others, however, they fall into the category of 'prison-torment', which he reserved for burdensome toil that should be done only intermittently, for short periods of work time, and by a greater variety of individuals from different classes (Morris, 1886).

Political Bedfellows?

Though they occupy opposite ends of the labor market hierarchy, workers in retail and low-end services and the 'creative class' temping in high-end knowledge sectors share certain elements of precarious or nonstandard employment. These include the temporary or intermittent nature of their contracts, the uncertainty of their future, and their isolation from any protective framework of social insurance. Demographically, youth, women and immigrants are disproportionately represented in what some commentators have termed the precariat. While these different segments have existential conditions in common, is there any reason to imagine that they interpret or experience them in similar ways? And, even if they do, is there enough commonality to forge a political coalition of interest against the class polarization associated with economic liberalization?

Over the last decade, precarity emerged as a mobilizing concept for sectors of the European left, and has become a stock slogan among antiglobalization activists (Foti, 2004; Neilson and Rossiter, 2005). Theorists of the Italian post-operaismo school (Hardt and Negri, 2000; Lazzarato, 1996; Virno, 2004), who see the cognitive workforce of 'immaterial labour' as harboring a potential source of power, are often invoked to lend heft to the political consciousness of organized anti-precarity youth groups. Public manifestations of the 'precarious generation' have centered around the Euro- MayDay events, which began to attract tens of thousands of participants in dozens of cities from 2002 onwards (Raunig, 2004, 2007). Organized groups like the Chainworkers in Italy, and Les Intermittents in France captured headlines with their inventive actions. In France, government plans to introduce labor policies that discriminated against youth (making it easier to fire those under 26) generated massive student resistance and occupations of universities in 2006. Formative efforts have been made to link student movements, service worker and immigrant rights struggles with protomilitancy in the new

media sectors. The goal has clearly been to build a cross-class alliance — drawn from sectors of the service class, the creative class and the knowledge class — which students and trade unions would come to support (Foti, 2006; Mabrouki, 2004; Shukaitis, 2007).

On the face of it, an alliance of cleaners, web designers and adjunct teachers, to cite just three representative occupations from these sectors, is an unlikely prospect. It is easier to imagine on paper as a theoretically plausible construct than as a flesh-and-blood coalition in broad agreement on strategies and goals. For one thing, there is a sizeable imbalance in the social capital enjoyed by this range of constituents. Those in occupations with the most cachet would almost inevitably expect to be front and center, and, over time, would surely sideline the others (Mitropoulos, 2006: Shukaitis, 2007; Vishmidt and Gilligan, 2005). So, too, many members of this putative coalition would like nothing more than to have the security of full-time work, with benefits thrown in. Others surely prefer the intermittent life, and take part-time employment so that they can finance other interests, like acting, writing, travel or recreation. Even among low-end service workers, there are reasons to favor flexibility over being locked into dead-end jobs. In this respect, precarity is unevenly experienced across this spectrum of employees, since contingent work arrangements are imposed on some and self-elected by others. In and of itself, precarity cannot be thought of as a common target, but rather as a zone of contestation between competing versions of flexibility in labor markets. Ideally, workers should be free to choose their own level of flexibility in a socially regulated environment where the consequences of such choices are protected against unwanted risk and degradation. Of course, the chances of realizing that ideal are much greater in regions like the EU where employment protection is still a matter for active governance. In countries like the US, with no tradition of social democracy, the prospects are dimmer.

So, too, there appears to be a gulf between the highly individualizing ethos of creative and knowledge workers and the tolerance, even enthusiasm, for traditional, collective action on the part of service workers. Immigrant organizing in campaigns like the Service Employees International Union's Justice for Janitors has played a large, ongoing role in renovating the trade union movement in cities like Los Angeles (Milkman, 2006), and may yet transform the labor movement as a whole. On Mayday 2006, the mass mobilizations against repressive anti-immigrant legislation in a host of US cities were a tribute to the power of collective protest and organization. These developments proved that 'organizing the unorganizable' was not only feasible, but that the results far exceeded expectations, and have given fresh hope to trade unions in decline (Milkman and Voss, 2004).

By that same token, creative and cognitive workers are often assumed to be incapable of organizing on account of their self-directed mentality. Yet, wherever they have turned to union-based action, they have been surprised to find how quickly a common sense of purpose emerges. Recent North American examples include the IT workers in the WashTech union (an affiliate of the Communication Workers of America), who have become a lobbying force on a range of industrial legislation; the adjuncts and graduate teachers who jumpstarted the academic labor movement by organizing at the margins of the profession; and even the most recent Hollywood writers strike, whose internal resolve was buoyed by prominent support from other industry professionals. In each case, employees were organizing in the teeth of industrial cultures that promote an individualist professional ethos, and each discovered that a little solidarity can go a long way. Not long after the writers' strike was resolved, actors joined janitors and longshoremen in a 28-mile march, billed as 'Hollywood to the Docks', as part of an LA campaign for good jobs.

Cross-class coalitions are not easy to envisage, let alone build, but we should be attentive to any evidence of the fellow-feeling that is their precondition (Rose, 2000). In my own research, for example, in IT and other technology-driven firms, I have found it common for employees to refer to their workplaces as 'high-tech sweatshops', especially when they are pressured by long hours, deadline speed-ups, and crunch-time stress on the job (Ross, 2002, 2006). No doubt, these are throwaway comments, and are often simply expressions of the most cynical side of office humor. They can also imply that sweatshops are somehow appropriate for the unskilled, but only for that class of worker. Yet I have found that they also contain real elements of self-recognition and identification with the plight of those toiling in workplaces customarily associated with sweatshop labor.

Historical instances of this kind of complicated identification abound. 'Wage slavery', for example, once resonated as a slogan, in the 1840s, for skilled artisans opposed to factory deskilling and to employers' efforts to make them compete with Southern chattel labor. The slogan also played a role in Abolitionist sentiment and action, though it was increasingly displaced by the explicitly racist shibboleth of 'white slavery' (Roediger, 1991). However fraught as a catchword for the free labor movement of the time, the continuity — between plantation and factory conditions — established by the slogan had a moral power that helped to establish some measure of cross-class and transracial solidarity. Today, I would argue that this moral power has been claimed for the 'global sweatshop'. Activists in the anti-sweatshop movement who sought to harness that power have had a similar kind of impact in building associational sentiment across lines of race and class. They have pieced together an agile, international coalition to confront the power of large corporations and have had some success in pushing labor rights on to the table of the reluctant policymakers who shape global trade agreements (Bender and Greenwald, 2003; Bonacich and Appelbaum, 2000; Esbenshade, 2004; A. Ross, 2004; R. Ross, 2006). The student wing of the movement succeeded in orienting student consciousness toward labor causes, arguably for the first time since the 1930s, and some of that impetus has carried over into cross-class campaigns for a living wage for service workers on campus and in campus towns (Featherstone, 2002).

While the anti-sweatshop movement helped revive public sympathy for the predicament of workers in labor-intensive jobs, it has also made available a moral language and posture for those in value-added trades who are more and more inclined to see their own occupational sectors following a similar path, offshore and downmarket. Now that offshore outsourcing has climbed into white-collar sectors and is taking its toll on the professions, the plight of garment workers, onshore and offshore, can no longer be viewed as a remote example of job degradation, unlikely to affect the highly skilled (A. Ross, 2006). Creatives are only the latest to be told that, come what may, that there will always be a domestic, onshore need for their occupational talents, which cannot be replicated elsewhere. Yet the 'industrialization of creativity' has been proceeding

for some time now, as managers in the knowledge industries seek out project templates that will impose a reliable rhythm on the delivery of intangibles like ideas, concepts, models, formulae and renderings.

Though they tend to share the mentality of elites, independently minded brainworkers are often the easiest to alienate, even radicalize, when their thought processes are subject to routinization. One conspicuous example is the case of the academic professional. Once a domain of occupational security, higher education in the US is now awash with contingency; between a half and three-quarters of its teaching has been casualized, leaving a minority in the tenure-stream to exercise the security and the academic freedoms that are the signature of the profession and, for that matter, of a free society. For the largely youthful ranks of adjuncts, the experience of deprofessionalization has triggered an embryonic labor movement that may yet transform the workplace if it can successfully draw in larger numbers of the securely tenured (Bousquet, 2007). The concomitant demystification of academe and its genteel cult of disinterestedness has cleared the way for a more accurate assessment of its work life — an advance in consciousness that will almost certainly bear more fruit.

For the North American left, the Popular Front remains the shining historical example of cross-class alliances. The ecumenical spirit of the CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) challenged the craft-exclusiveness of the AFL (American Federation of Labor) trade unions by its advocacy of organizing the unskilled alongside the skilled (Denning, 1998). Creative sector unions from the fields of entertainment, journalism and the arts made common cause with proletarian interests and reached out to the unemployed, displaced and destitute. The Popular Front was an antifascist formation, promoted by the Comintern and its fellow-travelers from 1936, but it would not have been 'popular' if the foundation for these cross-class relationships had not been so soundly laid in the years before. That the liberal version, at least — often termed the New Deal coalition — endured for several decades is a testament to the strength of these alliances.

The backdrop for the Popular Front was, of course, the Great Depression, whose widespread propagation of precarity was the result of a *collapse* of capitalist control. By contrast, today's precarity is, in large part, an *exercise* of capitalist control. Post-industrial capitalism thrives on actively disorganizing employment and socioeconomic life in general, so that it can profit from vulnerability, instability and desperation. Some thinkers from the Italian autonomist school see this disorganization as an advantage, because it harbors the potential for pushing creative labor outside the orbit of disciplining institutions such as the state or the trade unions. One of the slogans that captures this tendency is the 'self-organizing precariat'. It speaks not only to the oppositional side of the 'free agency' mentality lionized by liberation capitalists, but also to the long-standing traditions of grassroots democracy in workers' movements.

In some respects, this autonomous tendency may be interpreted as a clear rejection of the path taken by New Left advocates who pursued the 'long march through the institutions' from the early 1970s onwards, with the goal of reforming the culture of power from the inside. But today's institutional boundaries are no longer demarcated so cleanly. The centrifugal impact of deregulation has shifted some of the balance of power toward *outlying* locations; renegade centers of accumulation in the economy (hedge

funds, or startups gone global like Google, eBay and Starbucks); civil society and outside-the-beltway organizations in politics and welfare delivery (evangelical churches, human rights NGOs, corporate social responsibility divisions); and, in the sphere of ideology, the myriad of 'alternative' sites of cultural and informational activity that populate the busy landscape of attention. So, too, work has been increasingly distributed from sites of production to the realm of consumption and social networking. The outside is no longer the extraneous — marginal or peripheral to the real decisionmaking centers. Increasingly it is where the action is located, and where our attention to building resistance and solidarity might be best directed. The recent focusing of policymakers' interest in a heretofore fringe sector like creative labor can quite rightly be seen as part of that story.

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TAKE ME I'M YOURS: NEOLIBERALISING THE CULTURAL INSTITUTION

Anthony Davies

MCBA subvertisement by ctrl-i

In March 2006, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Barcelona (MACBA), flagship 'progressive art institution', staged the second part of Another Relationality, a conference and workshop project examining the legacy of institutional critique and the new social and political functions of art. The event included presentations from sociologist Maurizio Lazzarato, critic-activist Brian Holmes and economist Antonella Corsani — all broadly associated with debates on the role of creativity, knowledge and subjectivity within contemporary capitalism.

Just prior to a conference workshop in which they had been invited to participate, local activist collective ctrl-i issued a public declaration of withdrawal, accusing the museum of complicity with the very neoliberal imperatives it purported to critique. On the surface at least, their statement — including the trenchant line 'Talking about precariousness in the McBa is like taking a nutrition seminar at McDonald's' — had the hallmarks of a typical struggle against institutionalisation. But there was one key difference: ctrl-i is partly made up of temp workers formerly employed by the museum and not, as might be expected, an unaligned or 'autonomous' body resisting co-optation. It was moreover their knowledge and critique of precarious labour conditions and cultural neoliberalisation in Barcelona that was to form the basis of their contribution. The collective had been born in direct response to an earlier MACBA event, El Precariat Social Rebel, where, under the auspices of activist network The Chainworkers, they spoke out against the museum's dubious employment practices and later gave up their jobs in circumstances that remain largely unclear.[1] While ctrl-i's unique status as temp workers and local activists may have prompted the invite from MACBA, it also gave the group licence to dramatise Another Relationality's underlying themes in an emphatic act of withdrawal.[2]

To understand the context for this signal act of protest on the part of a group of culture sector workers, and to give a material basis to the discussions on institutionalisation currently taking place in publications such as *Art Monthly* and *Mute*, we need first to look at the uneven process of neoliberal restructuring as it courses its way through cultural and educational institutions.[3] According to Marxist geographer David Harvey, neoliberalism's trademark rhetoric that human wellbeing is contingent on developing individual entrepreneurial freedoms — chiefly the freedom to operate in the market — should be contrasted with the unprecedented 'creative' destruction that accompanies neoliberal reform. In *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Harvey describes how this process results in an erosion of existing social relations, ways of life and thought, as the market gradually penetrates and puts to work the 'common sense' way that many of us live in and engage with the world. The state's role becomes principally that of ensuring the proper functioning of markets, setting up institutional frameworks which ultimately guarantee the 'maintenance,

1
Email correspondence with ctrl-i, August 2006. According to ctrl-i's account of their relations with the museum's Temporary Employment Agency, Serveis Educatius Ciut'art, SL, some of those who had spoken out against the museum were removed from their contracted positions in the 'guided tour' programme and placed in other, less publicly engaged, roles. Within two months all had left the museum. As temporary workers none had recourse to claiming 'constructive' or unfair dismissal. In UK law constructive dismissal is where an employee is moved to resign due to their employer's behaviour (and this can range from the interpersonal, harassment etc., to the structural, where the nature or description of the job changes), see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constructive_dismissal [1]. For an online account of ctrl-i 's relation to MACBA and their withdrawal letter see http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/response-letter-to-invitation-to-talk-macba [2] and i-manifest at http://sindominio.net/ctrl-i/invert_andsubvert.html [3]

2
The invitation to ctrl-i to participate in the Another Relationality (part 2) workshops was made by MACBA and Marcello Expósito on behalf of the now disbanded 'Faculty for Radical Aesthetics', an offshoot of the European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies (eipcp). See the call for applications, https://lists.resist.ca/pipermail/autop-sy/2005-June/004311.html [4]

3
This article is based on a text originally commissioned by Art Monthly, where debate on institutionalisation and so-called 'New Institutionalism' has been developed through Dave Beech's'Institutionalisation For All', No. 294, March 2006; Peter Suchin's 'On Institutionalisation', No. 295, April 2006; Lisa Le Feuvre's 'The Institution Within', No. 297, June 2006 and Jakob Jakobsen's 'Self-Institutionalisation', No. 298, July-August 2006, as well as the conference Worlds Within Worlds: the Institutions of Art, July 2006: http://www.artmonthly.co.uk/institutions.htm

reconstitution and restoration of elite class power'. It is difficult to track these developments across different regional and national contexts, however, and this is exacerbated by the multifaceted, hybrid and localised manner in which they unfold, another symptom/condition of the process Harvey terms 'uneven geographical development'.[4]

subvertisement by ctrl-i

Where do state-funded cultural and educational institutions fit into all this? What role do they play? At a point where many have been set to work by capital in ever more 'innovative' (read: commercialised) ways, a host of contradictions and antagonisms have surfaced. While some now openly promote the liberating capacity of new revenue streams linked to consultancy, outsourcing, business incubation and enterprise activities, others seek out more tactical models of engagement, looking to new constituencies and standards of practice to offset the crisis of legitimation which opens up as institutions are subjected to neoliberal agendas.

An attempt to address some of these issues in the European cultural sector can be found in European Cultural Policies 2015: A Report with Scenarios on the Future of Public Funding for Contemporary Art in Europe.[5] This publication acted as the cornerstone of the International Artist Studio Program in Sweden's (Iaspis) contribution to the Frieze Art Fair, 2005. Against the backdrop of an earlier rejected proposal to the Frieze Foundation, state-funded Iaspis decided to pursue a more general enquiry into the cultural and political questions opened up by their compromised participation in the fair, focusing specifically on its exemplary and problematic identity as a 'public-private partnership'.[6] In collaboration with the European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies (eipcp) and London-based design group Åbäke, Iaspis went on to commission reports from eight local experts on key social, political and economic determinants of cultural policy in seven regions across the EU. The reports integrated hypothetical scenarios of what the cultural landscape might look like in 2015 as well as introductions by Iaspis director Maria Lind and eipcp

director Gerald Raunig. These latter two texts illustrate the grand
ambitions of the project: to influence — and possibly reform — European
cultural policy, and to strengthen 'radical-reformist elements of the
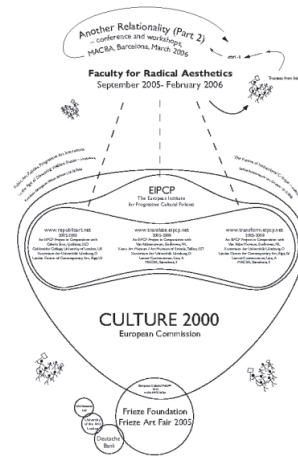cultural-political discourse in Europe'.[7]

Diagram by Nils Norman and Dismal Cartographics,
November 2006

In spite — or rather, because — of its political ambitions, European
Cultural Policies 2015's focus on the meshing of the state, its institu-
tional apparatus, and the market elides any significant debate on class
power within art institutions themselves and across the commercial sec-
tors with which they interact. This makes the underlying economic dis-
parities and antagonisms associated with neoliberalism's specific mode of
'uneven development' impossible to gauge. It also obscures the interests
of those whom the report's findings ultimately serve.

Along with the policy minutiae, however, we do get an insight into the
inter-institutional faultlines opening up across Europe. The report's
account of the breakdown of Frieze/Iaspis's earlier collaboration and the
subsequent soul-searching undertaken by Iaspis director Maria Lind and
her colleagues is symptomatic of such conflicts. 'Progressive' institu-
tional voices, mostly those in the upper echelons (directors, key admini-
strators and curators), in conjunction with a new type of defector aca-
demic/activist 'communication consultant to the prince' look for new
operational models to open up a critical engagement with the institution's
complicity in cultural neoliberalisation.[8] Lind's introduction to 2015
registers Iaspis's discomfort regarding the 'collaboration' with Frieze
while the report itself atones by disclosing the financial details of the
project. It's a characteristic deflective move. Frieze Art Fair's enthu-
siastic adoption of corporate values, dramatically high turnover and
audience figures, together with the generally porous membrane separating
its commercial and non-commercial activities, become the anti-model of
neoliberal institutional practice, the vanguard of the 'almost completely
instrumentalised' cultural/art dystopia for which we are notionally all
destined in 2015.

The 2015 report contrasts this nightmare vision of neoliberal cultural
lockdown with a wet dream of agile, socially responsible and responsive
transnational infrastructures — something like eipcp's ever-expanding
network of 'Co-organisers', 'Associated Partners', etc.[9] Behind its cri-
tical reflections on cultural policy there lies a bid for future state
funding. The report's not so tacit conclusion is that the European Com-
mission should reconsider its priorities and shift monies away from the
big players and richer member states (read: UK plc., Frieze & Co.) and
over towards 'responsible actors' (read: Iaspis/eipcp) and smaller
self-organising networks.

7
Gerald Raunig,
'2015 [Introduc-
tion]', http://
eipcp.net/poli-
cies/2015/raunig/
en. For Maria
Lind's introduc-
tion, see http://
eipcp.net/poli-
cies/2015/lind/en

8
Pierre Bourdieu
and Loïc Wacquant
have identified
such consultants'
role in granting a
veneer of legi-
timacy to projects
of the new state
and business nobi-
lity. Their proto-
typical example
was Anthony Gid-
dens, British
sociologist and
ideological archi-
tect of the Third
Way. See Pierre
Bourdieu and Loïc
Wacquant, 'Neo-
liberal Newspeak:
Notes on the New
Planetary Vul-
gate', *Radical
Philosophy*, 108,
January 2001,
http://www.radical-
philosophy.com/
commentary/new-
liberalspeak

9
They are listed
in the 'co-
operation' section
of epipcp's web-
site and stand at
around 50 organi-
sations as of
March 2007, http://
eipcp.net/insti-
tute/cooperation/
cooperation

10
'European Added Value' is outlined in the 'Award Criteria' section of the European Commission, Culture 2000 Specifications document, http://ec.europa.eu/culture/archive/how_participation2000/pract_info/appel_2006_en.html

11
See Discordia exchange on progressive institutions: 'more than one shining institution', http://www.discordia.us/scoop/story/2004/2/10/191433/396.html and Jorge Ribalta, 'Mediation and Construction of Publics. The MACBA Experience', April 2004, http://www.republicart.net/disc/institution/ribalta01_en.htm

12
Republicart manifesto, September 2002, http://www.republicart.net/manifesto/manifesto_en.htm and eipcp 2002 intro, http://eipcp.net/institute/reflectionzone/eipcp2001/en

This goes some way to explaining the absence of any debate in the report on wage and labour relations within art institutions themselves. It also throws up other questions. For instance, given the EU's aim of promoting the transnational dissemination of culture as a catalyst for socio-economic development and social integration, and its funding of both Frieze and eipcp, which of the two operational models delivered the most 'European Added Value'?[10] The introduction to 2015 threw up a series of binaries: Iaspis-eipcp versus Frieze Art Fair; public versus public-private partnership; self-organised versus instrumentalised; institutions acting as 'responsible actors' versus institutions as mere 'facilitators'. However, these alternatives should not be read as divergent paths but as coexistent forms of neoliberalism, evolving at uneven rates and in different phases perhaps, but all moving in the same direction. Each leads towards the same future — one with a human face, the other without — as various institutional actors become the unacknowledged legislators of neoliberalism and work to pioneer a socially acceptable form of its hegemony.

MACBA Barcelona

This process sees a proliferation of transnational infrastructures connecting art institutions up with self-organised (activist) networks. As a tendency it can be tracked back at least as far as the earlier institutional incorporation of activist strategies in the late 1990s—early 2000s with MACBA frequently being cited as one of the first institutions to spearhead this with their Direct Action as One of the Fine Arts workshop in 2000 and Las Agencias (The Agencies) in mid 2001.[11] However, the consolidation of left radical-reformist agendas and coalitions at the first European Social Forum in Florence in November 2002 provides the more obvious ideological blueprint for the type of 'critical' policy alternatives found in 2015. Around this time, eipcp also launched its 'Republicart Manifesto', setting the tone and operational parameters of a three-year, EU-funded programme of events, web essays and conferences. This hauled a range of micro-institutional programmes and discourses into its investigation of the 'development of interventionist and activist practices of public art'. The manifesto also claimed to pose a corrective to the dialectical cul-de-sacs and 'revolutionary pathos' characterising '90s political art. It explicitly rejects 'reforming a form of state', but nevertheless lays out a road map that would later enable state-funded institutions to harness some of the provisional overlaps between their activities and those of social and political movements.[12]

Eipcp continues to function as the project leader in a transnational cartel of institutions and individuals, all of whom feed into its web portals Republicart (2002-05), Transform (2005-2008) and Translate (2005-), and back out, to conferences, symposia, exhibitions and workshops (see diagram). The network is now positioned at the institutional epicentre of a number of European cultural debates on progressive and radical reformist cultural strategies.

The phrase 'progressive art institution' for example can be tracked back to eipcp and, as a generalised catch-all, has proven itself particularly adaptable to the kind of concerted effort the network makes to generate a coherent theoretical framework. This project starts to take shape in

the run up to the conference Public Art Policies: Progressive Art Institutions in the Age of Dissolving Welfare States, in 2004. An open discussion on web platform Discordia between the organisers, participants and other interested parties offers an insight into some of the general confusion, disputes and problems associated with the term 'progressive'. According to eipcp's Raunig, it should be read as 'becoming' not 'being' progressive:

"this becoming progressive happens between the two poles of movement (micropolitical actions etc.) and institutions (political organisation, etc.). The abstract negation of one of these two poles would lead directly into myths of freedom (which I also suspect behind notions like 'open cultures' or 'free networks', especially if in connection to the art field) or reformist reductions".[13]

While key figures in the eipcp network continue to promote various modes of 'non-dialectical' engagement, any claims to new forms of resistance and political action should be tested by their effect on the core of the (art) institutions in question. If they simply serve to insulate and insure these neoliberal cultural nodes against attacks on their legitimacy or provide ideological cover for a process of economic restructuring, how 'progressive' are things becoming?

In addition to its pioneering approach to outsourcing, MACBA, according to its website, is economically supported by a foundation of thirty-eight sponsoring members and thirty-three founding businesses including multinational financial and consultancy services groups like Ernst and Young, Deloitte and scandal-hit Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria (BBVA).[14] As state-funded cultural and educational institutions pass through the eye of the neoliberal storm, it's hardly surprising that a conspicuous self-reflexivity about their inner contradictions has become the stock in trade of progressives and radical reformers alike, broadcasting consciousness of the problems but holding their resolution in abeyance. With uneven rates of movement and development between states, regions and cities, the institutions in which these professionals work are now bogged down in an erratic process of 'catch up' as the state at once withdraws public sector support and economically mobilises culture and education.

This can be seen in the plethora of strategies for public sector reform and outsourcing. On the one hand, new models of efficiency and standards of assessment are introduced, on the other institutions are given the task of attracting inward investment, contributing to cultural tourism, urban regeneration and the Creative Industries. Cultural and educational institutions, then, are in the midst of various forms of neoliberal enclosure and the concomitant restructuring is seen by competing individuals, networks and agencies to offer openings for a range of agendas seeking to gain purchase on institutional structures/bureaucracies. Referring to the market for higher education and universities for example, academic Ned Rossiter has argued that,

"just as NGOs and CSOs have filled the void created by the neoliberal state's evacuation from the social, so too must organised networks seize upon the institutional persona of the 'external provider'".[15]

At the other end of the scale, the many and varied external providers linked to finance capital are also busy at work. At the inaugural conference of the British Venture Capital Association in September 2006, for example, companies referred to a 'land grab' as they rushed to secure stakes in the future output of university departments.[16] This activity is mirrored in the University of the Arts London's (UAL) Innovation Centre and wholly owned subsidiary company UALVentures — part of a dozen or so other schemes set up at UAL since 2002 to capitalise on staff and student enterprise initiatives, develop company spin-outs and build up IP portfolios.[17]

In response to this rapid proliferation of new enterprise zones in the cultural and educational sectors, some leading progressives advocate a rearguard challenge to neoliberalisation with the aid of what MACBA's head of public programmes, Jorge Ribalta, has called his 'trustees from below' (e.g. displaced, dispossessed and previously excluded constituencies).[18] With uncanny echoes of Blairite sociologist Anthony Giddens's

13
See Discordia, http://www.discordia.us/scoop/comments/2004/2/10/191433/396/14.html

14
According to the MACBA website the objective of the Foundation is to 'actively contribute to the creation and development of the Contemporary Art Museum through the growth of its permanent collection.' The MACBA Consortium on the other hand (which consists of two public administrations) contributes the resources to maintain the museum's basic functions. See MACBA Foundation http://www.macba.cat/en/consortium and for BBVA see: 'A Widening Probe in Spain', *Business-Week Magazine*, 22 April, 2002

15
Ned Rossiter, 'Organised Networks: Transdisciplinarity and New Institutional Forms', http://transform.eipcp.net/correspondence/1144943951

16
'Jon Boone, 'University Spin-Outs Turn the Heads of Venture Capitalists', Financial Times, September 28, 2006 and venture capital firm Quester's commentary/report into 'Building University Spin-Outs: A VC's View on Three Key Ingredients to Success', October 2006, http://www.quester.co.uk/pdfs/Building_viableuniversity_spin-outs.pdf

17
The University of the Arts, London is at the forefront of this debate in the UK and in addition to the rapid growth of business incubators and enterprise initiatives it has recently set up Creative Capital-World City. This state funded initiative been developed in conjunction with a number of London based 'partner' universities (including Kings College London, London Business School and the School of Oriental and African Studies) to open up key world markets for the UK Creative Industries. See: http://www.arts.ac.uk/docs/Creative_Capital_-_World_City.pdf and http://www.arts.ac.uk/business/about.htm

18
Jorge Ribalta, 'Mediation and Construction of Publics. The MACBA Experience', April 2004, http://www.republicart.net/disc/institution/ribalta01_en.htm

earlier totem 'the state without enemies', these art institutions without enemies no longer recuperate resistance or institutionalise critique but claim to operate as its facilitators — partners in its very construction. And herein lies a principle contradiction: the content of the institution's discourse can be utterly inverted in the institutional form. While formally affirming the fight against precarious labour, for example, institutions continue to maintain high levels of labour insecurity among their workers. Ctrl-i's act of refusal brought this to wider attention, but it was already the subject of earlier critiques from activist network The Chainworkers at El Precariat Social Rebel (November 2003) and Spanish Indymedia activists at EuroMayDay Barcelona (2004). All these critiques actually occurred 'within' MACBA and, to varying degrees, at the behest of the museum itself (Indymedia Barcelona for example, is said to have grown out of one of its workshops). MACBA not only 'commands' criticism but lays down the terms and conditions in which it can take place. It does it by offering its facilities and expertise, by inviting the big international celebrity activists to further politicise their 'trustees', and generally help to integrate anti-capitalist and social movements into its programme. As Gerald Raunig puts it:

A productive game emerges here in the relationship between activists and institution, which is neither limited to a co-optation of the political by the institution, nor to a simple redistribution of resources from the progressive art institution to the political actions.[19]

This then begs the question whether, for all the autocritique conducted by institutional directors, curators and activists, for all the talk of transnational networks linking up radical reformist elements, what tangible 'progressive' change has occurred within art institutions? Or indeed, for all those on temporary, fixed term contracts, in Spanish and other European (non-art) contexts?[20] Are we just looking at institutions looking at institutions looking at institutions — churning self-reflexivity as they oversee the creation of the EU's socially conscious variant on UK/US neoliberalism.

If two earlier phases of institutional critique broadly located in the '70s and '90s have been integrated into cycles of legitimation and further disabled by the ongoing privatisation of culture and education, should we take these more recent state-funded institutionally led initiatives seriously as a 'third phase' as some have argued? Of all the interpretations put forward by eipcp 'correspondents' and associates at the 2005 conference The Future of Institutional Critique and in the first issue of the web journal Transversal, filmmaker Hito Steyerl's is perhaps the most plausible though by no means unproblematic.[21] She notes the integration of cultural workers into the flexible, temporary and exploitative labour conditions ushered in by neoliberalisation and claims that there is a 'need for institutions which could cater to the new needs and desires that this constituency will create'.

It's necessary here, when talking about needs, desires and constituencies, to acknowledge class struggle in these new enterprise zones/progressive art institutions and maintain clear lines of antagonism in any proposed 'third phase' of institutional critique. As ctrl-i have shown, we could start by directly confronting in-house disparities and inequities and ask why radical reformers avoid debating ongoing and often intensified labour market segmentation (i.e. the differential between permanent and temporary workers) within their own 'exemplary' cultural and educational institutions? Why do those at the top of the institutional pile and their army of new consultants continue to promote self-reflexivity and claim to facilitate dissent while acting as a buttress to elite class power? The question then is not so much whether 2015's call for the EU 'to invest in long-term basic funding for transnational infrastructures' should be met (eipcp's continued funding suggests that it has been, in their case) but the manner and extent to which these infrastructures function in the service of capital.

Text commissioned and first published in: *Mute - It's Not Easy being Green: The Climate Change Issue*, **Vol. 2, No. 5, April 2007.**

19
Gerald Raunig, "The Double Criticism of parrhesia. Answering the Question 'What is a Progressive (Art) Institution?'", http://www.republicart.net/discinstitution/raunig04_en.htm

20
Spain accounts for 31 percent of temporary workers in Europe and has more temp workers than Italy, the UK, Belgium and Sweden combined. See Sebastian Royo, 'The European Union and Economic Reforms: The case of Spain', http://www.real instituto elcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_eng/Content?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_in/zonas_in/europe/dt8-2006 . An OECD survey from 2005 noted labour market segmentation between permanent workers protected by high severence payments and the growing army of temp workers with little employment stability as a 'harmful feature' affecting productivity growth. See: http://www.oecd.org/document/ 10/0,2340, en_ 338731 08_338 73806 _34585738_ 1_1_1_1,00.html

21
Debates on a third 'phase' or 'wave' of institutional critique can be found in Simon Sheikh's 'Notes on Institutional Critique', Hito Steyerl's 'Institution of Critique' and Gerald Raunig's 'Instituent Practices: Fleeing, Instituting, Transforming'. All can be found at http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0106/raunig/en

BASIC INCOME GRANT –
THE CULTURAL IMPULSE
NEEDED NOW!

Adrienne Goehler

My approach to the idea of a basic income grant is a consequence of my analysis of the radical change of societies due to globalization, world economic crises, increasing unemployment and climate change; radical changes that affect indeed the possible role of artists and scientists.

We live in a time of extensive social transition, a time of the no longer and the not yet. There is no longer hope for a "more, better, faster." There will be no longer a return to full employment in our countries, as in most high-price countries, but what is to take its place is not yet a subject of public debate. We live in an in-between situation: on the one hand, the economic and social "one size fits all" solutions of our political parties no longer work in a globalised, labour-divided world that generates more and more productivity through fewer and fewer jobs (experts such as Jeremy Rifkin call it "jobless recovery"). The political party concepts are no longer and not yet capable of reacting to the global challenges of economic and climate change and the social upheavals that come with it all. On the other hand, there is a significant increase of jobs — most of them badly paid — in the creative sector, in the non-profit sector, in NGOs; so that we may speak at the same time of an economic and social basis of a society, that is looking for more than an administration of its shortages.

We live in an interim: we are no longer sufficiently provided for by the father, the state, but not yet able to break a new — our own — ground, because the preconditions for social constructions that could create hybrids between welfare, individual responsibility and self-organisation are still missing.

The lack of a guaranteed place in society frightens. I claim that artists, academics, cultural and social creative minds are more experienced in dealing with the incertitude of the open contexts of "liquid modernity", as Zygmunt Bauman characterises our present. It is the nature of artistic and academic practice to deal with errors, doubts, rejections, to combine and recombine, to sample and mix, and to deal with imagination. And this is needed for all cultural and democratic development of our societies. We find ourselves stuck in hardened, solidified structures which are empty, the facade covered with new neo-liberal garments.

What we need is to use the productivity of error, the ability to begin again and again, to navigate between shortage and abundance, to think in transitions, laboratories, models, movements, excess, energy, desires, potentials, visions, yearning, breathing... This is what liquid cities need, and this is what a society may learn from artistic and scientific practice. We need new forms of social co-existence, new resonance spaces. Based on the residents' richness of possibilities and various ways of life. What we need is their talents and creative power, their awareness of being able to participate in the extensive deve-

lopment of their city — at work and in life. And what we need are flexible, creative counterparts in politics and administration. As creativity is a flexible, liquid resource, "not a reserve, not a commodity, but a current!". An energy that runs dry if it is abused by reducing it to its immediate economic usability. To recognise the potential of the creative industry is an immensely important step that European politics is taking only very hesitantly. But in order to keep creativity in the city, a creativity that cannot be perceived as a model for a business plan, we need more. In the words of your Manifesto: It is not culture that needs "business exercises," it is the market that needs a cultural revolution! As Philosopher Hannah Arendt said: "The privilege of the human being is to call something new into the world."[1]

This is why, culture-based society, doesn't just refer back to the rather small group of those for whom culture is their means of living, but those who perceive culture as a matrix for creativity as a general human capacity. Culture is as an expression of the individual's desire to change and connect with others in order to try out, link and dismiss solutions, ways, views. Albert Einstein puts the interrelationship between individual creativity and social development precisely: "Without creative personalities who think and judge for themselves, a higher developed society is as unthinkable as the development of an individual personality without the breeding ground of the community."Creativity is not an exclusive property of the "happy few." There is no either "you belong" or "you'll-never-belong". An environment in which creativity is perceived as a capability that lies within every individual is, in fact, crucial.

Because every human being relies on resonances, wants to be useful, to create, to be valued. A cultural society is about multi-dimensional and experimental ways of thinking that also interlink the various fields of artistic, social, technical and economic creativity and whose chances are being decided as early as kindergarten and at school. In this sense, creativity is the processor in the development towards something that is socially bigger as well as economically more powerful. Economy is not the driving force, but it ultimately profits when humans think, live and work creatively. What we need is a milieu that supports the idea of laboratories and strengthens the notion of empowerment for self-empowerment.

We need the required change to perceive arts and sciences not just as a subsidy burden, but as a long-term investment in a society capable of development. They must become experts for transitions and in-between certainties — a protagonist of change. We need to face the question of what types of recognition and participation a society can offer to its members, taking into account the fact that for an increasing number of people — from all classes, age groups and nationalities — there is no opportunity for a traditional sense of belonging. ("Not in our name" manifesto

in Hamburg.[2]) We need creative solutions for education, for universities, for institutions, for social issues, for employment, for the recapture of public space.

Art and science are vital for a liquid city, especially where they generate socially relevant strategic concepts. Their actions, which might once have been attributed to bohemians, have by now become a model that can be generalised for future ways of working and living. Characterised by the abolition of work and leisure, sometimes a lot, sometimes not a lot of paid work, alone or in a team, often from home. However, these activities are completely connected with what we call "the precarious." New studies suggest that about half of those employed in the creative industries do not earn enough money to survive.

In this respect, Berlin, the city I come from, is the capital of these precarious circumstances. It is visible to the naked eye that there isn't and won't be enough paid work in this city to counter the jobless rate of 14 percent. For some years now, this shortage has forced jobless artists and academics into new forms of working and living that arise from a lack of money and a simultaneous surplus of ideas.

If I am right in my analysis that our societies cannot renounce the artistic and academic practice, the question is: How to make this happen? It is the inability to tackle unemployment and escalating social and cultural exclusion with conventional means that has led in the last decade to the idea of the BIG (Basic Income Grant). Social, economic and cultural policy can no longer be conceived separately, and the basic income is increasingly viewed as the only viable way of reconciling three of their respective central objectives: poverty relief, full employment and participation in the cultural production and richness.

The guaranteed basic income grant is the most simple and powerful idea for the 21st Century. It constitutes the foundation of a self-transforming society, and it provides the idea for a society based on culture. I am not standing up for the BIG primarily for artists and academics but for everybody. Also, from a strategic point of view, I would not advise to fight for the BIG as an exclusive right for artists and academics, or — as the manifesto says — for cultural producers. Even if it is only for a short perspective. Liberty and equality, efficiency and community, common ownership of the Earth and equal sharing in the benefits of technical progress, the flexibility of the labor market and the dignity of the poor. A fight against inhumane working conditions, against the desertification of the countryside and against interregional inequalities; the viability of cooperatives and the promotion of adult education, autonomy from bosses, husbands and bureaucrats, have all been invoked in its favour.

There are different approaches, terms and definitions concerning what a guaranteed income could be. I assume, like most concepts do, four principles of the Basic Income Grant (BIG):

— is an individual right
— it hedges one's existence
— is not means-tested
— is not under constraint to work.

It should be high enough to guarantee the participation in the cultural and social life, and it is independent from maintenance as obligations of spouses, parents and adult children.

[2] "Not in Our Name, Marke Hamburg!", http://nionhh. wordpress.com/. Accessed 5.12.12

[3] More sources on this topic can be found here: www. grundeinkommen.de; www.archiv-grund einkommen.de; www. unternimm-die-zu-kunft.de; www.grundein-kommen.tv; www. initiative-grund einkommen.ch; www.freiheitstatt vollbeschaefti-gung.de. Accessed 5.12.12

The BIG gives an individual the freedom to choose between different spheres of her/his life the one that makes the surplus value for the society. The BIG is a synonym for dignity. The BIG is the right to say "No!" (The right to choose and to say "No" is then real in the "labor market.") The BIG is empowerment for self-empowerment. The activists of this idea expect that once the constraint of work is abolished, when "Income" and "Labor" are separated, multiple, co-existing forms of paid labor, caring, further education, social and cultural relevant occupations will be possible. And I will add, also the right of idleness which is important to the health of a society.

The German Basic Income Network, consists of:
— The paid amount secures existence and enables economic, social, cultural, and political participation and is not means-tested.
— The basic income is paid without making demands in return, such as forced labor or coerced return services.
— There are additional needs, special supports, and special needs for certain groups of persons in addition to the basic income. This concerns, for example, single parents, pregnant women, the handicapped, or people with chronic illnesses.
— The basic income is an aspect of the maintenance, extension, and the democratization of public infrastructures.
— The basic income stands in the context of the perspective of gender equality that realizes a radical redistribution of socially necessary labor (paid and unpaid) between men and women.
— The concept of basic income is embedded into societal development towards sustainability and a concept of society that focuses on ecological sustainability.[3]

The French economist and philosopher, André Gorz, gives his argument for the basic income: The connection between "more" and "better" has been broken; our needs for many products and services are already more than adequately met, and many of our as-yet-unsatisfied needs will be met not by producing more, but by producing differently, producing other things, or even producing less. This is especially true as regards our needs for air, water, space, silence, beauty, time and human contact.

The Basic Income Earth Network was founded in 1986 as the Basic Income European Network, expanding in 2004 to an international network. The basic income is an income unconditionally granted to all on an individual basis, without any means-test or work requirement.

*It is paid to individuals rather than households; a basic income is paid on a strictly individual basis. Not only in the sense that each individual member of the community is a recipient, but also in the sense that how much s/he receives is independent of what type of household s/he belongs to.
Precisely because of its strictly individualistic nature, the basic income tends to remove isolation traps and foster communal life. The operation of a basic income scheme, therefore, dispenses with any control over living arrangements, and it preserves the full advantages of reducing the cost of one's living by sharing one's accommodation with others.

*It is paid irrespective of any income from other sources. It is paid at the same level to the rich and the poor alike, irrespective of their income level. Neither a person's informal income, nor the help s/he could claim from relatives, nor the value of her/his belongings. Taxable "means" may need to be taxed at a higher average rate in order to fund the basic income.

*It is paid without requiring the performance of any work or the willingness to accept a job, if offered. The right to a guaranteed minimum income is, by definition, not restricted to those who have worked enough in the past, or paid in enough social security contributions to be entitled to some insurance benefits. The basic income is paid as a matter of right — and not under false pretences — to homemakers, students, break-takers and permanent tramps. The participation income is a model proposed by Anthony Atkinson, Professor of Economics at Oxford, that differs from the BIG at this point.

A participation income would be a non—means—tested allowance, paid to every person who actively participates in economic activity, whether paid or unpaid. Persons who care for young or elderly persons, undertake approved voluntary work or a training, or are disabled due to sickness or handicap, would also be eligible for it. After a while, one may well realise that paying controllers to try to catch the few really work-shy would cost more and create more resentment all over than just giving this modest floor income to all, no questions asked.

Frequently asked questions:

No — the BIG is not a remedy for all sorts of sicknesses and injustice in our societies.
Yes — the BIG is affordable. Dozens of studies in different countries and from different social backgrounds and perspectives show it. But as the BIG would be such a change of paradigm in our societies, I think we need much more interdisciplinary research on this subject.

What about migrants?

There are more or less inclusive conceptions how to deal with non-native-citizens. Some, especially among those who prefer the label "citizen's income," entitle people restricted to nationals, or citizens in a legal sense. The right to the basic income is then of a piece with the whole package of rights and duties associated with full citizenship.
Others, especially among those who view the basic income as a general policy against exclusion, conceive of membership in a broader sense that tends to include all legal permanent residents. The operational criterion may be, for non-citizens, a minimum length of past residence, or it may simply be provided by the conditions which currently define residence for tax purposes.

Children?

Some restrict the basic income, by definition, to adult members of the population. Others conceive of the basic income as an entitlement from the first to the last breath and therefore view it as a full substitute for the child benefit system. The level of the benefit then needs to be independent of the child's family situation, in particular of his or her rank. But the majority of those who propose an integration of child benefits into the basic income scheme differentiate the latter's level according to age, with the maximum level not being granted until maturity, or later. Anthony Atkinson claims that Europe should introduce the basic income for kids. It would be the only appropriate way to fight back the tremendous poverty of the kids.

Does not make the rich richer?

From the fact that the rich and the poor receive the same basic income, it does not follow that the introduction of the basic income would make both the rich and the poor richer than before. The basic income needs to be funded.

Makes work pay?

The other aspect of the unemployment trap generated by means-tested guaranteed minimum schemes is the lack of a significant positive income differential between no work and low-paid work. Since you can keep the full amount of your basic income, whether working or not, whether rich or poor, you are bound to be better off when working than out of work.
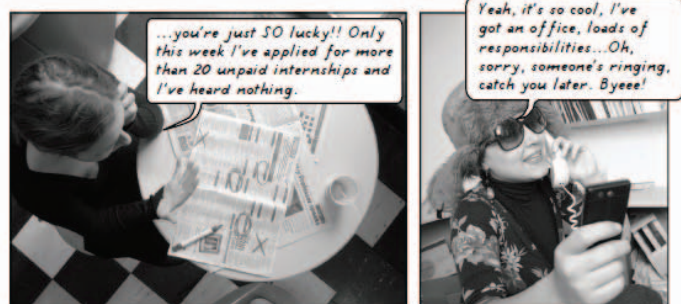
Learning from Africa

The Basic Income Grant (BIG) pilot project in a village in Namibia is continuing to make national and international headlines. The proposal for a Basic Income Grant in Namibia was made in 2002 by the Namibian Tax Consortium (NAMTAX), a government appointed commission. In January 2007, in the village of Ortijero, there started the two-year experiment, based on the following conditions: A monthly cash grant of not less than N$100 (~13USD/8¬) is paid to every Namibian citizen as a citizen's right. Every person receives such a grant until pension age from where onwards s/he is eligible to the existing universal State Old Age Pension of N$370. The Basic Income Grant experience in Ortijero is to date the biggest civil society project, united in fighting poverty and work towards economic empowerment in Namibia.

BBC World News summarised the enterprise in 2008 as follows: "Namibians line up for free cash." "Economic activity has picked up in the settlement since the beginning of the year and a grocery store, a hairdresser, a barber and an ice-cream vendor have opened for business"[4]. 'The opponents of the BIG always have the reasoning that people will become dependent,' says Pastor Wilfred Diergaardt. 'In fact, what we are seeing here is really lifting people up out of dependency into becoming human again.' (...) If the pilot project succeeds within the next two years, the BIG could become a national provision for all people under the pension age of 60. It could help balance one of the most unequal societies in the world."[5]

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COMPROMISE, THE SECRET TO A GOOD RELATIONSHIP?

...you're just SO lucky!! Only this week I've applied for more than 20 unpaid internships and I've heard nothing.

Yeah, it's so cool, I've got an office, loads of responsibilities...Oh, sorry, someone's ringing, catch you later. Byeee!

AFTER MONTHS OF APPLICATIONS, OUR DEDICATED ARTS GRADUATE FINALLY GETS AN INTERVIEW FOR A POSITION AT A PRESTIGIOUS ART GALLERY...

We need someone enthusiastic creative

Capable of working independently proficient in at least three European languages...

one year experience as an art administrator

six months minimum as curator

proven record of excelling in project management

an MA from a London college, a must

conversational Japanese, a plus

hands-on, practical ability

... of course, the position is voluntary...

CONGRATULATIONS! The unpaid position of invigilator is yours!

A DAY LATER

A WEEK LATER

A MONTH LATER

This is my chance to shine!

We know you're ambitious, so we have set aside a small project for you to manage over the summer...

We thought you could sort out our filing cabinets... This is your chance, think creatively!

MEANWHILE, THE SUCCESSFUL FRIEND...

Hi sweetie... How're you settling in?! Would you mind sorting out the catalogue today? The designer's called in sick and we are a bit tight with time... I'm sure you'll do a great job!

TODAY...?!

Carrotworkers' Collective: Photo-romance

ON FREE LABOUR

Carrotworkers' Collective

Free Labour, Enforced Education and Precarity: an initial reflection, 2009

Situated in a broader debate around the condition of precarity, the context for our analysis of free labour is around two trends in Europe:

1. The Bologna process proposition to validate and standardise lifelong, lifewide and 'flexible' learning, and

2. The European Union language promoting 'occupation' rather than 'employment', marking a subtle but interesting semantic shift towards keeping the active population 'busy' rather than trying to create jobs.

The figure of the *intern* appears in this context paradigmatic as it negotiates the collapse of the boundaries between Education, Work and Life.

Like Tiziana Terranova suggested in her analysis of free labour in digital media, we must conceive of free labour, internships, volunteer work not as a separate sphere of activity but as condition of late capitalist cultural economy.

While Schneider, the inventor of cooperative programmes in the U.S.A. (the first structured university programmes combining secondary education with practical work experience) referred to them as **'the people pipeline'**, now, we might say with Magritte — Ceci n'est pas une pipe!

What appears to be a 'stage' (like the French word for internship) in the trajectory whose result is to be found in a lifetime paid employment, is a rehearsal for uncertain career paths, hyper-active networking, strategic lunching and infinite flexibility: in other words, an internship in the strategic use of affects, an internship without end.

We are aware that the discussion around the educational value of job placements finds its roots in the model of the apprenticeship, and that today it articulates a longing for the valorisation of learning experiences outside the narrowly defined institutional curricula and classroom simulations. We are told that internships give us an opportunity to experience the 'real' work. Indeed, the danger could be to loose the criticality necessary to the understanding that the 'real' conditions of work are something that is produced, and not given as a set of rules that we must learn in order to 'play the game'.

While we agree with the need of rethinking many aspects of education and pedagogy, we believe that what we are learning in the internship is precarity as a way of life.

Furthermore, internship is functioning as an access filter to professions perceived as desirable, a regulatory valve that replicates the most classic lines of class division. In order to be able to work for three or six months for free, the intern/volunteer needs to have the economic possibility of doing so. Internships finally are not so 'free' after all, as the cost of the unpaid labour is absorbed by the families or by the self-exploitation of the worker who then seeks complementary jobs.

Desires
There is a subtle but important shift that occurs in going from 'working for a very bad salary' to 'working for free' (or for symbolic reimbursements), as the economy of the exchange becomes completely based on social capital and voluntarianism.

The condition of free labour thus faces us with a particular investment to be productive that may require a different framework of analysis that the ever popular socialist and populist valorisation of work (let's think of Sarkozy's recent valorisation of 'those who want to work" and promises to "The France that wakes up early". There is a hollowing out here of what is at stake in working. Rather than the a living wage, or to fulfil the desire to be an active member of society, the emphasis here is on the 'being busy' of work, occupation as the ultimate achievement, at any cost (i.e. without pay)

On the one side, the autonomist call for a 'refusal of work' seems also somehow inadequate to understand the micropolitical configurations of desire (Guattari) and the affective investments that make people want to apply for absurdly demanding job placements and to derive their identity from affiliations with institutions. The refusal of work may be a first step, but a further investigation in the differences between labouring, working (Arendt), being productive, being creative and being active may be a fruitful line of research.

This is funnily reminiscent of futurist Alvin Toffler's fear that in **the third wave** (the unfounded moment when technology fulfilled all needs within the productive chain), free time in its vastness and threat of the figure of the sloth, would require an army of 'leisure counsellors' to fill the endless expanses of time.

This also speaks directly to Illich's assessment of the negation of '**useful unemployment**' produced by the rise of the professional classes, consolidating of all social relations into the framework of clients and users.

The Culture Factor(y)
The first moves of the group in London are much inspired by those who have worked on similar campaigns — i.e. the Intermittents and the White Masks in France.

Culture, however, is somewhat distinct from these contexts as in England it is an unregulated sector. Those who work in cultural institutions often seek out and arrange their internships independently and this makes it harder to think of a revendication of rights through an agreement between employers and educational institutions.

Furthermore, the cultural sector presents us with another peculiar phenomenon, where the increasing number of people wanting to find a 'creative' employment has been matched by a consistent withdrawal of funds and public resources across Europe.
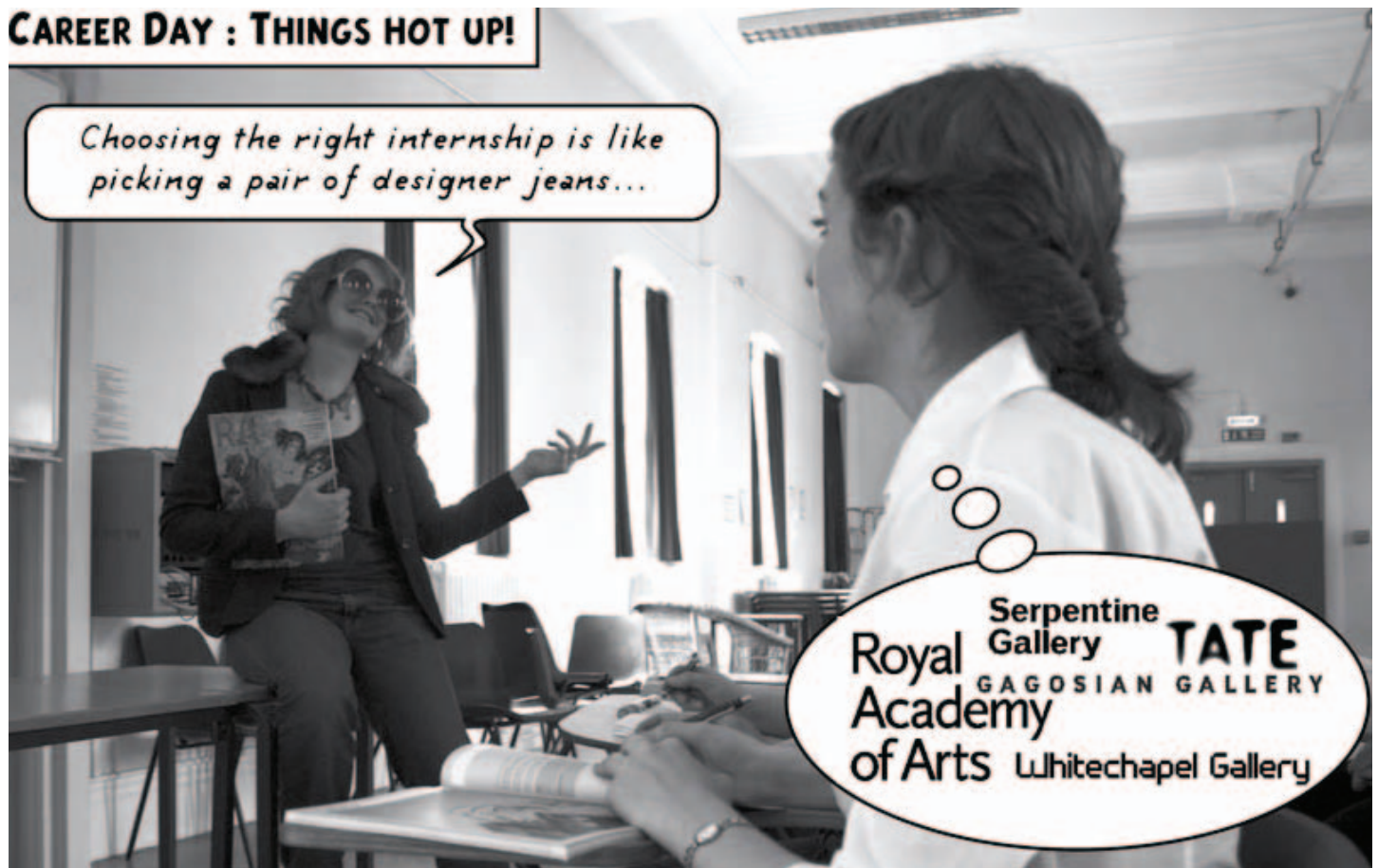
Carrotworkers' Collective: Photo-romance

The deployment of unpaid interns is fast becoming in many cases a structural necessity
for companies and organizations. There is a suspicion that interns and volunteers may
be de facto masking the collapse of the European cultural sector, hiding the exodus of
the public resources from such activities and thus preventing the general public to
perceive the unsusteinibility of the situation.

In the particular case of the UK, it is clear that New Labour's dream of an economical-
ly burgeoning cultural sector is not going to come to fruition. Projections actually
show that the service sector will be the largest employer in twenty years time. Blair
has now suggested that the funding bubble that has supported whatever growth in cul-
ture has occurred (subsidies whose allocations were never anywhere near commensurate
with the ambitions they commanded) is about to burst. The investment in the PPP (public
private partnerships) has not resulted (surprise surprise) in any degree of financial
security for galleries and other cultural institutions, but has rather increased already
toppling workloads and shifted focus to money-making schemes.

In this landscape, interns offer both a solution and a threat. They fill in the ever-
widening gaps between ambitions and dollars, but they also legitimize the exploitative
nature of cultural work — reminding to those who are employed in the sector that there
is always someone ready to do your job for free.

Four initial points of our research
In trying to create a research/mobilisation around this issue, we are pre-occupied with
four central concerns:

a) Welfare and the Living Wage.
We are clearly interested in increasing the ability to live and the absence of the wage
in the internship sets up a series of expectations around non waged labour that infil-
trate the entirety of productive relations. However, in culture, we must also address
the fact that organising around the wage does not allow us to account for the desires
that bring people to work for free in culture. Akin to the question raised for women's
wages in the home, we know that this will not sufficient as a mobilizing strategy.

Precarious Workers Brigade: Bust Your Boss card

Within cultural work there are many lay narratives that align these desires to current labour and wage relations and neo-liberal ideas about freedom and the market. Central to organising then, will the formulation of our desires in relation to another set of possibilities for living in other ways.

b) Affects.
The desire to live and produce creatively, to manage ones own time, to be social, these are all as important bases for organising that are as important as the discourse around the wage and that raise questions of a different nature.

Any mobilization of non-regulated cultural workers will have to account for both the affective conditions and the affective motivations of why people work for free. Here, the micro-political relations between intern and manager/paid worker (both, as Brian Holmes underlines, 'humiliating' in their own way) are a point of possible convergence. The desire to produce the conditions of lived experience creatively is fruitful terrain for imagining a 'to come', both in terms of mobilization and what comes after (Rolnik).

c)My Real Work or The Work I do For Money? — or the relationship with the service sector.
In the 90s, a phenomenon emerged in which, when presented with the ever banal chat up line 'what do you do for a living?', people working across a number of creative areas responded: 'do you mean what I do, or what I do for money?'.

This splitting tells us something about the contingency of free labour on 'unreal' wage labour. In the unreality of this second work — often precarious, based in the service sector — there is an evacuation of all aspiration, which means that this labour group is endlessly exploitable. Any mobilisation around free labour (the real work) will plant the seeds for critical investigation of the 'unreal'.

d) Production of tools/commonware.
Within the production of free labour, the work we do as interns, as entrepreneurs, the work above and beyond waged labour, we are creating tools, networks and sociabilities. Ivan Illich would call these tools for conviviality. How do we re-orient these to serve our own agendas and interests?

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http://carrotworkers.wordpress.com/

PRECARITY AND CULTURAL WORK IN THE SOCIAL FACTORY? IMMATERIAL LABOUR, PRECARIOUSNESS AND CULTURAL WORK

Rosalind Gill and Andy Pratt

Transformations in advanced capitalism under the impact of globalization, information and communication technologies, and changing modes of political and economic governance have produced an apparently novel situation in which increasing numbers of workers in affluent societies are engaged in insecure, casualized or irregular labour. While capitalist labour has always been characterized by intermittency for lower-paid and lower-skilled workers, the recent departure is the addition of well-paid and high-status workers into this group of 'precarious workers'. The last decades have seen a variety of attempts to make sense of the broad changes in contemporary capitalism that have given rise to this — through discussions of shifts relating to post-Fordism, post-industrialization, network society, liquid modernity, information society, 'new economy', 'new capitalism' and risk society (see Bauman, 2000, 2005; Beck, 2000; Beck and Ritter, 1992; Beck et al., 2000; Bell, 1973; Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005; Castells, 1996; Lash and Urry, 1993; Reich, 2000; Sennett, 1998, 2006; *Theory, Culture & Society* has also been an important forum for these debates). While work has been central to all these accounts, the relationship between the transformations within working life and workers' subjectivities has been relatively under-explored. However, in the last few years a number of terms have been developed that appear to speak directly to this. Notions include creative labour, network labour, cognitive labour, affective labour and immaterial labour. While such terms are not reducible to each other (Neilson and Rossiter, 2005), their very proliferation points to the significance of contemporary transformations and signals — at the very least — that 'something' is going on.

In this special section we will address that 'something' through a sustained focus on one group of workers said perhaps more than any other to symbolize contemporary transformations of work: cultural and creative workers. In this context it is important to be clear about the object of our analysis. The cultural and creative industries are part of what is commonly referred to as the service and knowledge economy. Writers who stress the role of creativity (as a source of competitive advantage) point to the injection of 'creative' work into all areas of economic life. By contrast, scholars who are interested in the cultural industries point to the growth of the particular industries that produce cultural outputs. These industries have undergone significant expansion in recent years (Pratt, 2007). The two terms — cultural industries and creative industries — are subject to considerable dispute (Hesmondhalgh, 2002, 2007; Lovink and Rossiter, 2007; Peck, 2005; Pratt, 2005, 2008). We regard the term 'creative industries' simply as a political rebranding of the cultural industries following Miege (1989), Garnham (1987) and Hesmondhalgh and Pratt (2005).

Artists, (new) media workers and other cultural labourers are hailed as 'model entrepreneurs' by industry and government figures (Florida, 2002; Reich, 2000); they are also conjured in more critical discourses as exemplars of the move away from stable notions of 'career' to more informal, insecure and discontinuous employment (Jones, 1996), are said to be iconic representatives of the 'brave new world of work' (Beck, 2000; Flores and Gray, 2000), in which risks and responsibilities must be borne solely by the individual (Allen and Henry, 1997; Batt et al., 1999; Gill, 2007; Jarvis and Pratt, 2006; McRobbie, 1999, 2002; Neff et al., 2005), and, more recently, as we elaborate in this article, they have been identified as the poster boys and girls of the new 'precariat' — a neologism that brings together the meanings of precariousness and proletariat to signify both an experience of exploitation and a (potential) new political subjectivity.

While there has been discussion of the emergence of 'free agents' (Pink, 2001) and of the tensions of the work—life balance (Hyman et al., 2003; McDowell, 2004; Perrons, 2003; Webster, 2004), precariousness, precarity and precarization have recently emerged as novel territory for thinking — and intervening in — labour and life. They come at once from the powerful body of work associated with autonomist Marxist intellectuals in Italy and France, and — importantly — from *post-operaist* political activism, such as that seen in the EuroMayDay mobilizations in the first few years of the 21st century. Precariousness (in relation to work) refers to all forms of insecure, contingent, flexible work — from illegalized, casualized and temporary employment, to homeworking, piecework and freelancing. In turn, precarity signifies both the multiplication of precarious, unstable, insecure forms of living and, simultaneously, new forms of political struggle and solidarity that reach beyond the traditional models of the political party or trade union. This *double meaning* is central to understanding the ideas and politics associated with precarity; the new moment of capitalism that engenders precariousness is seen as not only oppressive but also as offering the potential for new subjectivities, new socialities and new kinds of politics.

The aim of this special section is to bring together three bodies of ideas — the work of the 'Italian laboratory', including Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt, Paolo Virno, Franco Beradi and Maurizio Lazzarato; the activist writings about precarity that have appeared in online journal sites such as *Fibreculture* and *Mute*; and the emerging research on creative labour being produced by sociologists and others (Adkins, 1999; Banks, 2007; Batt et al., 1999; Beck, 2003; Blair, 2003; Blair et al., 2003; Deuze, 2007; Gill, 2002, 2007; Gottschall and Kroos, 2007; Jeffcutt and Pratt, 2002; Markusen and Schrock, 2006; McRobbie, 1998, 1999, 2003; Mayerhofer and Mokre, 2007; Neff et al., 2005; Perrons, 1999, 2002, 2003; Pratt, 2002; Pratt et al., 2007; Ross, 2003; Taylor and Littleton, 2008a, 2008b; Ursell, 2000;). It is striking how little connection, until now, there has been between the theory and activism influenced by autonomous Marxists and empirical research (though see de Peuter and Dyer-Witheford, 2006; Ehrenstein, 2006), and it is this that the articles collected here seek to develop, beginning a conversation between the different traditions. Each of these strands constitutes, in a sense, an emergent field that is in process and not yet stabilized (in the manner understood by sociologists of scientific knowledge). The objective here is not to 'apply' one 'perspective' to another, but rather to bring these ideas into a dialogue in which sometimes difficult and challenging 'high' theory, activist politics and empirical research can raise new questions of each other. In what follows we discuss the writings of the autonomist school together with activist writings, in recognition of them as always-already entangled with political movements, and respecting their desire to move beyond a sociological perspective to a more political engagement with the dynamics of power in post-Fordist societies (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 2004; Negri, 1979, 1989; Virno et al., 2004). (...)

This article is divided into three parts. In the first we introduce the notions of precariousness, precarity and precarization in the context of contemporary autonomist Marxist writing. A number of key terms or themes will be examined — e.g. notions of immaterial labour, the social factory and multitude. In the second the politics of the precarity movement is discussed. In the final part of the article we turn to the growing body of empirical research on creative labour, and highlight several key themes of this work which overlap and resonate with autonomist thinking. These are themes relating to the importance of *affect, temporality, subjectivity and solidarity*. We raise questions and present the following articles in the spirit of beginning a dialogue, some themes of which include: how might the autonomist preoccupation with temporality speak to the experiences of timepressured cultural workers? Does the autonomist emphasis upon the affective dimensions of work contribute to an understanding of creative labour? How might empirical studies of the experience of cultural work speak to autonomist arguments about emergent subjectivities in these fields? What kinds of political organization and resistance are likely to emerge in these profoundly individualized fields, and might precarity offer a point of articulation and solidarity? A short conclusion then draws this introductory article to a close.

Autonomist Marxism and the Multitude
The account of capitalism proposed by autonomist Marxists (see for example Hardt, 2005; Hardt and Negri, 2000, 2004; Lazzarato, 1996, 2007; Murphy and Mustapha, 2005b; Virno et al., 2004; Virno and Hardt, 1996) differs in several key respects from classical Marxism. It rejects the notion of history as a linear progression through a series of different stages, leading to the final and inevitable collapse of capitalism, brought about by declining rates of profit. In place of an account of the power of capital, it stresses the autonomy and creativity of labour, and workers' power to bring about change. From this perspective, capital never shifts of its own accord; workers' movements are the stimulus of development. Rather than seeing wage labourers as (merely)

victims of capital, autonomists highlight their role as protagonists, in a view of capitalism in which a dialectical logic gives way to a revitalized emphasis on the *antagonism* of capitalist relations (though not understood in simple binary terms).

Work or labour has been a pre-eminent focus of autonomist writing and activism, and is understood as representing the central mechanism of capitalism. Autonomist theorist Harry Cleaver defines capitalism as 'a social system based on the imposition of work with the commodity form' (2000: 82), a system in which life is arranged around, and subordinated to, work and becomes the grounds of its mode of domination (Weeks, 2005). Given this understanding, autonomist Marxists do not call for more work, for the right to work or even for less alienated work, but point to the *refusal of work* as a political — potentially revolutionary — act. This is because, as Negri argues, to refuse work is fundamentally to challenge capitalism: 'the refusal of work does not negate one nexus of capitalist society, one aspect of capital's process of production or reproduction. Rather, with all its radicality, it negates the whole of capitalist society' (Negri, 1979: 124).

Autonomist writers are critical of some Marxists for their failure to appreciate the significance of work as constitutive of social life, and for their tendency to romanticize labour. Negri notes that it is sometimes treated as if it were 'a title of nobility' rather than the central mechanism of capitalist domination. He indicts other socialists for their commitment to 'productivism', seeing it both as a retreat from critical analysis and from utopian imagination. For Negri, the refusal of work is both 'a demand and a perspective' (Weeks, 2005: 109ff.). Refusal was a central tenet of *Operaismo*, the Italian workerist movements of the 1970s, alongside the 'leading role thesis' and the 'strongest link strategy', which held that the critique of capital should start from working-class struggles and that energy be focused on the strongest parts of proletarian movements (rather than the weakest links of capital). As a practice, such a challenge may include slacking, absenteeism, wildcat strikes and acts of refusal or sabotage within the workplace, and it articulates an alternative to productivist values in an affirmation of what Kathi Weeks calls 'hedonist Marxism': 'our propensity to want more — more time, freedom, and pleasure', and a 'vision of life no longer organised primarily around work' (Weeks, 2005: 133). This captures autonomists' emphasis on the positive, constructive aspects of refusal, and on a kind of politics which is not only designed to change the future, but also, in its very practice, to bring into existence new ways of being, living and relating. In this sense it echoes the ideas of the situationists (Debord, 1994; Vaneigem, 1972). This is Negri's idea of communism as a 'constituting praxis'. As Hardt and Negri put it in *Empire*: 'the refusal of work and authority, or really the refusal of voluntary servitude, is the beginning of a liberatory politics. . . . Beyond the simple refusal, or as part of that refusal, we need also to construct a new mode of life and above all a new community' (2000: 204). Other autonomists characterize this as 'exit' or 'exodus' — again highlighting less the negative aspects of such terms but rather the capacity to 'reinvent' the rules of the game and 'disorient the enemy' (Virno, 1996).

The *dynamism* of autonomist accounts of capitalism is striking. As Dyer-Witheford (2005) vividly argues, it is 'a story of escalating cut and thrust, a spiral attack and counter-attack':

> Capital attempts to expropriate the inventive, cooperative capacity of workers, on which it depends for production of commodities. But labour resists. The spectre of subversion drives capital on a relentless 'flight to the future', expanding its territorial space and technological intensity in an attempt to destroy or circumvent an antagonist from whose value-creating power it can never, however, separate without destroying itself. (2005: 137)

From this perspective, the working class is 'not just made, but incessantly remade, as *its contestation brings on* successive rounds of capitalist reorganisation' (Dyer-Witheford, 2005, our emphasis), which in turn generate new strategies and tactics of struggle. Hardt and Negri argue that, in the most recent phase of these ongoing cycles of attack and counter-attack, the industrial militancy of the European and North American working class brought forth a devastating 'reply' from capital, in which all the forces of state repression, transnationalization and technological development were deployed to decimate organized labour. The era of Fordist, industrial production was all but destroyed and the mass worker was replaced by the 'socialized worker', bringing into being a new epoch in which the factory is increasingly disseminated out into *society as a whole*. Tronti (1966) writes of the 'social factory' and Negri of 'firms without factories' or the 'factory without walls'. From this perspective labour is deterritorialized, dispersed and decentralized so that 'the whole society is placed at the disposal of profit' (Negri, 1989: 79). It is further argued that the state, in turn, has shifted from a planner-state based on Keynesian economic principles to a 'crisis

state' or 'neoliberal' state which, as Michael Hardt (2005: 10) argues, 'does not mean a reduction in economic and social interventionism, but, on the contrary, a broadening of social labour power and an intensification of the state's control over the social factory'. This is both more intense and more globally dispersed, as centralized programmes of imperialist expansion give way to 'a decentred, transnational regime of production and governance' (Murphy and Mustapha, 2005a: 1).

It is not difficult to discern similarities between autonomist accounts of contemporary capitalism and analyses of post-Fordism (Piore and Sabel, 1984), and in particular the work of the Regulation School (Aglietta, 1979; Lipietz, 1992). Moreover, the periodization adopted by many autonomist intellectuals resonates with several other perspectives in identifying the mid 1970s as a key moment (Harvey, 1988; Jameson, 1991), the site of a temporal shift in capitalist organization. What distinguishes autonomist ideas from these other accounts are two linked themes: first the optimism of this perspective, most notably the resistance to seeing the shift as a terminal blow to the working class, and second the focus on subjectivity. As long ago as the early 1970s Negri posed the question: 'What is the working class today, in this specific crisis, no longer merely as objects of exploitation, but the *subject of power?*' (1973: 105, emphasis added). In more recent writing Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004) focus on the potentialities and capacities of the new post-Fordist proletariat, revisioned to fit their conceptualization of the dispersed social factory, as *multitude*, operators and agents. The notion of multitude, in particular, emerges as a key term for thinking class composition for this new (dispersed, fragmented, individualized) moment, in a way that maintains a stress upon collective forms of subjectivity and politics: 'Multitude is meant to recognize what the class formation is today and, in describing that class formation, to recognize forms of its possibilities of acting politically' (Hardt, 2005: 96).

Informational Capitalism and Immaterial Labour

Perhaps the autonomist term which, more than any other, may be expected to make a significant contribution to understanding the nature and conditions of creative work is that of 'immaterial labour', 'where labour produces immaterial goods such as a service, a cultural product, knowledge or communication' (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 292). Lazzarato (1996: 133) argues that the concept refers to two different aspects of labour:

> On the one hand, as regards the 'informational content' of the commodity, it refers directly to the changes taking place in workers' labour processes in big companies in the industrial and tertiary sectors, where the skills involved in direct labour are increasingly skills involving cybernetics and computer control (and horizontal and vertical communication). On the other hand, as regards the activity that produces the 'cultural content' of the commodity, immaterial labour involves a series of activities that are not normally recognized as 'work' — in other words, the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms and, more strategically, public opinion. Once the privileged domain of the bourgeoisie and its children, these activities have since the end of the 1970s become the domain of what we have come to define as 'mass intellectuality'.

Autonomist writers stress dual processes — on the one hand the 're-Taylorisation' (Galetto et al., 2007) or 'proletarianisation' (Del Re, 2005) of cultural and intellectual work, and on the other the transformation of all work such that it is increasingly dependent on communicative and emotional capacities. As Cristina Morini (2007: 40) puts it: 'cognitive capitalism tends to prioritize extracting value from relational and emotional elements'. The notion of *affective labour* has achieved greater prominence in recent years as autonomous Marxists emphasize the significance to capitalism of the production and manipulation of affect. This is related to a shift in capitalism understood by Hardt and Negri (2000: 291) as 'informationalization' — the notion that lives are increasingly dominated by technologies: 'Today we increasingly think like computers, while communication technologies and their model of interaction are becoming more and more central to labouring activities.' This is leading, they argue, to a 'homogenization of labouring processes' (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 290). However, neither Lazzarato nor Hardt and Negri conceive of immaterial labour as purely functional to capitalism, but also see it as providing potential for a kind of spontaneous, elementary communism. Their writing emphasizes its double face — on the one side the shifts and intensification of exploitation brought about by the acceleration of information, and by Empire's search for ways of realizing 'unmediated command over subjectivity itself' (Lazzarato, 1996: 134), but on the other the release of a social potential for transformation, largely attributable to its affective dimensions and the opportunities for human contact and interaction. This has some echoes of Marx's ideas about the contradictory nature of capitalism. For autonomists, too, capitalism's potential destruction is im-

manent to it. Indeed, nothing is outside — 'there is only trade or war', as the po-
litical slogan has it (quoted by Foti in Oudenampsen and Sullivan, 2004). However,
Hardt and Negri say more than this. For them, workers' use of technology *exceeds* the
capacity of capital to control it (and them):

> Co-operation, or the association of producers, is posed independently of
> the organisational capacity of capital; the co-operation and subjectivity of
> labour have found a point of contact outside the machinations of capital.
> Capital becomes merely an apparatus of capture, phantasm and an idol. Around
> it move radically autonomous processes of self valorisation that not only
> constitute an alternative basis of potential development but also actually
> represent a new constituent foundation. (Hardt and Negri, 1994: 282)

A number of criticisms have been raised of the notions of informational capitalism and
immaterial labour. The image of a society dominated by knowledge and information work
is seen by some as too redolent of the language used by prophets of capitalism and ma-
nagement gurus (Dyer-Witheford, 2005); it also meshes inappropriately with Bell's
(1973) liberal formulation of post-industrial society which underpins the work of Castells
(1996) and Florida (2002). Moreover, the stubborn materiality of most work seemingly
represents a riposte to autonomist claims; just as assertions about 'virtual society'
and the 'death of distance' (Cairncross, 1998; Coyle, 1998; Quah, 1999) led to a re-
surgence of interest in place that highlighted the clustering and embeddedness of Inter-
net companies in specific locales (English-Lueck et al., 2002; Indergaard, 2004;
Perrons, 2004b; Pratt, 2000, 2002; Pratt et al., 2007), so too the emphasis upon imma-
teriality calls for a response that highlights the persistence of all-too-material
forms of labour — even the zeros and ones that make up the Internet's codes have to be
written, and entered, by someone, somewhere.

A further point of critique — taken up by Hesmondhalgh and Baker (this issue) — relates
to the elision of *differences* within this account. While it might be true that most
work today is in some sense impacted by information and communications, the grandiosity
of such a claim obscures profound differences between different groups of workers —
between, for example, the fast food operative with a digital headset or electronic till
in their minimum wage McJob, and the highly educated, well-paid cultural analyst. Both
are touched by the 'information revolution', to be sure, but is the 'interactivity' or
'affectivity' deployed in their work sufficient grounds for treating them as similar
kinds of labouring subject? Put into a global perspective, the argument is even harder
to sustain. George Caffentzis broke with other autonomists on this issue, pointing out
that Hardt and Negri's account was told from the perspective of male white and Northern
subjects, and accusing them of celebrating cyborgs and immaterial labour while ignoring
the contemporary renaissance of slavery: 'the computer requires the sweatshop, and the
cyborg's existence is premised on the slave' (Caffentzis, 1998, cited in Dyer-Witheford,
2005: 149). This opens up the need for a careful consideration of what relationship cul-
tural (or creative) workers may/may not have with 'informational' workers. There is
already a critical literature regarding the tendency to analytically frame manufacture
and services as a dualism (Walker, 1985). Moreover, Hesmondhalgh (2002) stresses the
importance of symbolic production to the distinction of cultural work from other work.
Finally, we need to be cautious about extrapolating the modes and forms of activism
of these groups given their different formations and orientations. Clearly, a range of
empirical work is figured here.

Operaismo to Precarity

Notwithstanding these criticisms, autonomist Marxist writings have proved attractive
and inspirational to many scholars and activists eager for a critique of, and alterna-
tive to, post-Fordist capitalism. In the last decade precarity politics has become one
of the inheritors of the *Operaismo* movements in which many autonomists were involved.
Like the autonomist writing discussed so far, precarity draws attention to both 'the
oppressive face of post-Fordist capitalism' and the 'potentialities that spring from
workers' own refusal of labour' and their subjective demands (Neilson and Rossiter,
2005: 1). The notion embodies a critique of contemporary capitalism in tandem with an
optimistic sense of the potential for change. Initially organized around struggles over
labour, *precarietà* designated all forms of insecure, flexible, temporary, casual, in-
termittent, fractional or freelance work. Precarity became a collective platform and
rallying point for the post- Fordist proletariat. As Neilson and Rossiter put it, in
terms which echo Negri: 'At base was an attempt to identify or imagine precarious, con-
tingent or flexible workers as a new kind of political subject, replete with their own
forms of collective organization and modes of expression' (p. 2). However, precarity
politics quickly expanded to encompass a variety of struggles, including those relating
to migration, citizenship, LBGT and feminist movements. Activism 'transformed precarietà
from being, in the main, an economic category addressing new forms of occupation and

labour relations, to a more open instrument of struggle, enabling resistance and the re-imagination of contemporary politics, lives and subjectivities' (Andall et al., 2007: 4)

The precarity movement has been notable for the sheer energy and inventiveness of its attempts to interrupt the flow of transnational capital. Precarity activism is often 'creative activism' (De Sario, 2007), which uses theatre, cinema, music and stunts to effect political change, deploys visual tools and images extensively (Mattoni and Doerr, 2007) and also draws on situationist-inspired strategies of '*detournement*' (Fantone, 2007). Alongside the mass mobilizations of the EuroMayDay demonstrations, which began in Milan in 2001 and had spread to 18 different European cities by 2005, actions included *derives* (Makeworlds Festival, 2001), precarity ping-pong and incursions by the invented saint San Precario into supermarkets, fashion shows and film festivals. Marcello Tari and Ilaria Vanni (2006) document the 'life and deeds' of this subversive trans-gender saint, patron of precarious workers, whose celebration day — on 29 February — was designed to draw attention to casualization and flexploitation and the takeover of life by work, and to create 'lines of flight according to need, personal inclination and group affiliation' (Tari and Vanni, 2006: 6).

It is useful to think of the precarity movement as geographically and temporally specific. Its origination in Western Europe is significant, as is its association with the politics of 1970s Turin. As many have argued, 'on a global scale and in its privatized and/or unpaid versions, precarity is and always has been *the standard experience of work in capitalism*' (Mitropoulous, 2005: 5, emphasis added; see also Frassanito Network, 2006). As Neilson and Rossiter argue (this issue), it is Fordism and Keynesianism that are the exception, both spatially and temporally, thus the emergence of precarity movements in Western Europe may have their foundation in the 'relative longevity of social state models in the face of neoliberal labour reforms', which meant that conditions experienced by most people, in most places, most of the time during the history of capitalism appeared newly harsh and brutal. For the same reasons precarity politics also (arguably) has a generational specificity, centred around people in their twenties and thirties — the 'precarious generation' (Bourdieu, 1999) identified by many (Beck, 2000; Sennett, 1998) as disproportionately affected by risk and insecurity compared to the previous generation, and with little expectation of work security.

Some have argued that precarity politics are also temporally specific. The precariat is to post-Fordism what the proletariat was to the industrial age, argues Alex Foti (in Oudenampsen and Sullivan, 2004; see also Raunig, 2007). Neilson and Rossiter 'date' the movement more carefully, asking whether and how its ascendance in the first few years of the 21st century may be connected to the aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the subsequent US-led wars on Afghanistan and Iraq. Is this timing mere coincidence or do the mobilizations around precarity tap into more general insecurities and concerns about 'seemingly interminable global conflict'? (Neilson and Rossiter, 2005). This also raises questions about the ways in which the notion may relate to Judith Butler's (2004) discussion of 'precarious life', which has been articulated as an ontological, existential category founded in questions about who counts as human, what is recognized as a grievable loss, and the development of relational ethics. Might the growth of precarization also be connected to the growth and development of the worldwide web and the huge expansion of the cultural industries and cultural production — both areas which are characterized by the degree to which they presume precarious labour?

Debating Precarity
Some of the objections raised to autonomist ideas have also become animated debates within precarity politics. There has been contestation about who best exemplifies the experience of precarity. Laura Fantone (2007: 9) critiques what she sees as the 'imaginary subject' at the heart of precarity politics: the 'single, male, urban artist or creative worker, idealised as the vanguard of the precariat', who is often counterposed to the implicitly more 'backward' and less radical figure of the 'suburban housewife'. This is tied to an accusation of both Eurocentrism and androcentrism which makes 'different precarities' less visible (Vishmidt, 2005). While women have almost always done 'immaterial and affective labour, often with little recognition in both fields', precariousness is only discussed 'at the moment when the Western male worker began feeling the negative effects of the new post-industrial flexible job market' (Fantone, 2007: 7). As the movement has widened in response to such criticisms, other figures said to be emblematic of precarity include the undocumented migrant, female care workers, or sex workers (Makeworlds Festival, 2001; Mezzadra, 2005).

Another debate concerns solidarity across difference. As a site for mobilizations across a variety of issues, locations and experiences, the precarity movement has sought to make connections between diverse groups — artists and creatives, factory workers, undocu-

mented migrants, sex workers, students, etc. The Milan-based organization Chainworkers, for example, attempted to organize both 'chainworkers' (workers in malls, shopping centres, hypermarkets and logistics companies) and 'brainworkers' (members of the 'cognitariat', programmers and freelancers). Alex Foti (in Oudenampsen and Sullivan, 2004) argued that while the former are always 'on the verge of social exclusion', the latter 'might make above-standard wages but if they lose their job they are thrown into poverty' — and thus pointed to *potential solidarity* between them. The appeal of the notion of precarity is precisely in this potentiality, yet it also produces tensions common to all forms of transversal politics: how to deal with differences, how to find 'common cause', how to build solidarity while also respecting the singularity and specificity of the very different experiences of (say) janitors, creatives and office temps? At its best, precarity activism can be a politics of articulation in the Gramscian (see Gramsci, 1971) sense, requiring no pure or authentic subject as its model and resisting the temptation to collapse different experiences of precariousness into a singular form, with a unitary cause, but rather respecting differences and articulating them in struggle. Nevertheless, this politics of articulation (Hall, 1985, 1988, 1990; Laclau, 1979; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) of contingent foundations (Butler, 1992), still leaves everything to fight over. Not least is the question of whether there are *grounds* for such solidarity in a global frame characterized by enormous disparities in wealth and power. Would it *actually* be in the best interests of 'the maquiladora worker to ally herself with the fashion designer?' asks Angela Mitropoulos (2005), pertinently. Do they have common cause or identity of interests? What are the distinct modes of exploitation in operation? Can their different interests be articulated? Then there are questions about what kinds of power dynamics these very different locations/subjectivities might produce within the movement, and the very real challenges of building connections between actors who are positioned in radically different ways. Mitropoulos demands:

> If the exploitation and circulation of 'cognitive' or 'creative labour' consists, as Maurizio Lazzarato argues, in the injunction to 'be active, to communicate, to relate to others' and to 'become subjects' then how does this shape their interactions with others, for better or worse? How does the fast food chainworker, who is compelled to be affective, compliant, and routinised, not assume such a role in relation to the software programming 'brainworker', whose habitual forms of exploitation oblige opinion, innovation and self-management? (Mitropoulos, 2005: 91)

Finally, there have also been debates about the aims (and complicities) of precarity activism and, particularly, the extent to which the movement may look to the (nation) state to attenuate the worst features of the experience of post-Fordist capitalism. Social policies, social welfare and public services (to the extent that they continue to exist) operate on an older social logic which is 'the antithesis of the speed, innovation and flexibility' which are demanded of workers (Fantone, 2007: 6). Should the state provide an 'income of citizenship' or 'income of existence' (Fumagalli and Lazzarato, 1999) for these precarious and insecure times? Feminist precarity activists Sconvegno (Galetto et al., 2007) argue that the movement is situated between on one hand deadening and obsolete calls (from older trade unions) for a return to 'permanent employment' 'all the way to your pension', and the spectre of 'total lack of protection and rights' on the other. In this context, some have argued for a 'social income' or for 'flexicurity'. For others, however, this faith in the state is regarded as problematic, reinforcing securitization agendas and the erosion of civil liberties (particularly in the post 9/11 period). More profoundly, it is seen as resting upon a somewhat naïve understanding of state—capital relations (a position developed by Neilson and Rossiter, this issue). Again, the issue raises significant questions for precarity as a political project.

Precariousness, Precarity and Creative Labour

When Raymond Williams (1976) articulated his two great conceptions of culture — one based on a hierarchy of value and the other on the more anthropological understanding of culture as 'a way of life' — he left little room for consideration of cultural work (or culture as work). As Andrew Ross (Lovink and Ross, 2007) has noted, this is not surprising given the 'labourist' context in which Williams was working in 1960s and 1970s Britain; his aim was to open up a new direction for thinking culture.

Nevertheless, Williams could not have anticipated that artists, writers, filmmakers, designers and others would, only a few decades later, have come to take centre stage as a supposed 'creative class' endowed with almost mythical qualities (Florida, 2002).

> As paradigms of entrepreneurial selfhood, 'creatives', as they are now la-
> belled, are the apple of the policymaker's eye, and are recipients of the kind
> of lip service usually bestowed by national managers on high-tech engineers
> as generators of value. Art products are the object of intense financial specu-
> lation; cultural productions are top hit-makers in the jackpot end of the
> economy; 'cultural districts' are posited as the key to urban New Prosperity;
> and creative industries policy is embraced as the anchor of regional develop-
> ment by governments around the world on the lookout for a catch-up industrial
> plan. In the business world, creativity is viewed as a wonderstuff for trans-
> forming workplaces into powerhouses of value, while intellectual property —
> the lucrative prize of creative endeavor — is increasingly regarded as the 'oil
> of the 21st century'. (Ross, p. 32)

As Ross makes clear, creative workers and the cultural or creative industries more
generally are imbued with an extraordinary range of capacities, which relate to wealth
creation, urban regeneration and social cohesion (Gill, 2002, 2007; Pratt and Gill,
2000; Pratt et al., 2007). The notion of a creative class has been roundly critiqued
elsewhere (Peck, 2005; Pratt, 2008), as has the use of the creative industries in po-
licy discourse, particularly in the context of the 1990s UK New Labour government
(Garnham, 2005; Hesmondhalgh and Pratt, 2005; McRobbie, 1998, 1999, 2003; Pratt, 2005).
Here, though, our focus is on the claims that artists and creatives are 'model entre-
preneurs', the ideal workers of the future. In recent years a number of qualitative and
ethnographic studies have examined the lives of artists, fashion designers, television
creatives and new media workers, and this research has raised critical questions about
the much vaunted flexibility, autonomy and informality of these domains. A clear and
largely consistent picture of creative labour has emerged from this research, particu-
larly that focused on the 'new' micro-businesses in the cultural industries — what
Ulrich Beck (2000) refers to as 'me and company', Leadbeater and Oakley (1999) dub 'the
Independents', and Ross (2003) explores as the 'industrialisation of Bohemia'.

Studies have highlighted a number of relatively stable features of this kind of work:
a preponderance of temporary, intermittent and precarious jobs; long hours and bulimic
patterns of working; the collapse or erasure of the boundaries between work and play;
poor pay; high levels of mobility; passionate attachment to the work and to the identity
of creative labourer (e.g. web designer, artist, fashion designer); an attitudinal
mindset that is a blend of bohemianism and entrepreneurialism; informal work environ-
ments and distinctive forms of sociality; and profound experiences of insecurity and
anxiety about finding work, earning enough money and 'keeping up' in rapidly changing
fields (Banks, 2007; Banks and Milestone, in press; Batt et al., 1999; Caves, 2000;
Christopherson, 2002, 2003; Christopherson and van Jaarsveld, 2005; Gill, 2002, 2007;
Jarvis and Pratt, 2006; Kennedy, in press; Kotamraju, 2002; McRobbie, 2002, 2003, 2006,
2007b; Milestone, 1997; Neff et al., 2005; O'Connor et al., 2000; Perrons, 2007; Richards
and Milestone, 2000; Ross, 2003; Taylor and Littleton, 2008a; Ursell, 2000). Struc-
turally, research has also pointed to the preponderance of youthful, able-bodied people
in these fields, marked gender inequalities, high levels of educational achievement,
complex entanglements of class, nationality and ethnicity, and to the relative lack of
caring responsibilities undertaken by people involved in this kind of creative work
(in ways that might lend support to Beck's arguments about individualization as a 'com-
pulsion', the drive in capitalism towards a moment in which subjects can work unfettered
by relationships or family; see also Adkins, 1999).

There seem to be a number of potentially productive areas of overlap or resonance be-
tween research on cultural labour and the ideas of the Italian autonomist school and
the precarity activism discussed so far. To our mind they coalesce around concerns with
affect, temporality, subjectivity and *solidarity*. Thus we will consider each of these
briefly to open up some possibilities for dialogue.

Affect

One of the most consistent findings of research on work within the creative industries
is that it is experienced by most who are involved with it as profoundly satisfying and
intensely pleasurable (at least some of the time). A vocabulary of love is repeatedly
evinced in such studies, with work imbued with the features of the Romantic tradition of
the artist, suffused with positive emotional qualities (von Osten, 2007). Research
speaks of deep attachment, affective bindings, and to the idea of self-expression and
self-actualization through work. Indeed, such characterizations are so common that
McRobbie (forthcoming) argues that we might dub this kind of labour 'passionate work'.

In this context, autonomous Marxists' emphasis upon 'affective labour' might be thought to offer a way of engaging with this, connecting such emotional investments with 'work as play' to wider transformations within capitalism — as well as the possibility to intervene in them. Yet does it? One of the problems with the notion of affective labour, which was alluded to earlier and is discussed in Hesmondhalgh and Baker's article (in this issue), is the bluntness and generality of its definition. Designed to improve upon and narrow down 'immaterial labour', it lacks conceptual coherence and ends up collapsing entirely different kinds of work and experience. If *all* work has affective dimensions then what does it mean to say that any *particular* job involves affective labour? By what criteria might we distinguish between the hospice nurse and the backroom computer programmer? It is clear from empirical research on work in the cultural field that such labour calls on a whole range of different kinds of affective work (Kennedy, 2008). Hesmondhalgh and Baker (this issue) attempt to unpack some of the emotional skills and qualities involved in work on a TV production, and they also contrast the autonomists' focus on affective labour with Hochschild's (1983) earlier work on (gendered) emotional labour. Perhaps even more troubling than the rather general conceptualization of affective labour in autonomists' thinking is the work the notion of 'affect' itself is called upon to do in their account of contemporary capitalism. As in so much autonomous Marxist writing the notion has a double face — it speaks on the one hand to the extent to which emotions, feelings, relationships are 'put to work' in post-Fordist capitalism, and on the other to the immanent human cooperative capacities and potentialities that may be set free by such labour. However, the former assertion, we contend, is made sotto voce in the context of their loud affirmation of the potentially transformative and transgressive nature of affect. Affect appears largely in its more pleasant guises — solidarity, sociality, cooperativeness, desire — and, importantly, as (largely) always-already transgressive. What this emphasis misses is both profoundly important to understanding cultural labour and for their account of contemporary capitalism. First, it occludes all the affective features of cultural labour that do not involve affirmative feelings. It misses, for example, the fatigue, exhaustion and frustration that are well documented in studies of cultural work. It misses also the fears (of getting left behind, of not finding work), the competitiveness, the experience of socializing not simply as pleasurable potential, but as a compulsory means of securing future work (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2002; Ursell, 2000). Above all, it misses the anxiety, insecurity and individualized shame that are endemic features of fields in which you are judged on what you produce, 'you are only as good as your last job', and your whole life and sense of self is bound up with your work (Blair, 2001). These are not incidental features of the experience of cultural labour; they are toxic, individualized but thoroughly structural features of workplaces that include television production companies, fashion and web design houses, and (not least) the neoliberal university.

These (unpleasant) affective experiences — as well as the pleasures of the work — need to be theorized to furnish a full understanding of the experience of cultural work. To be fair, sociological research (our own included) has fallen short in this respect too, preferring to oscillate between polarized accounts which stress different features of the experience rather than producing an integrated understanding. But what is clear from the emerging research is the urgency of *thinking these together* — a prospect which seems to be foreclosed, rather than opened up, by the autonomists' take on affect.

Second, these ideas rest upon a view of affect that appears baffling to those outside the Nietzschean/Deleuzian tradition from which much autonomist writing draws. It is conjured as a pre-subjective intensity, which exists outside signification, and can exceed power relations and break through them, offering a glimpse of a better world, with new ways of being and relating. Yet why, we might wonder, is affect assumed to be autonomous? How can its essential transgressiveness be defended? How can it be said to exist outside relations of power, as if it were sealed in some pure realm that capitalism cannot reach to taint and corrupt? How, in sum, can it be claimed that affect is somehow outside the social? To be sure, affects can be mobilized in anti-capitalist struggles, as Hardt and Negri have argued (see also Terranova, 2004). Every activist involved in any kind of political organization knows this — it is about 'hearts and minds' after all. But this is a very different proposition from the suggestion that affect is — somehow — alwaysalready transgressive (for alternative formulations see: Ahmed, 2004; Berlant, 2008; Tyler, 2008a, 2008b).

In autonomist writing, affect is called upon partly to critique what is understood as Foucault's overemphasis on the reach and scope of power. Hardt counterposes 'biopower from below' in arguing for an affective dimension which evades, resists and exceeds the new modalities of control. There is not space here to fully elaborate a critique of this position, but we would echo Hemmings' powerful interrogation of the 'affective turn', in which she argues that affect 'often emerges as a rhetorical device whose ultimate goal is to persuade "paranoid theorists" into a more productive frame of mind' (2005:

551). Its affirmatory focus gives little space to affects which, far from resisting or transgressing, seem to collude and reproduce. Where is the ugliness of racism and hate crime, for example? Little space seems allowed for affects that are normative or disciplinary, binding us into structures and relations that may, in classical Marxist terms, not be in our real interests. In relation to understanding cultural labour it leaves us with no way of grappling with the role played by affect in generating consent (or even passion) for working lives that, without this emotional and symbolic sheen, might appear arduous, tiring and exploitative. Moreover, the autonomists' very selective focus on affect does not help to illuminate the 'self-exploitation' that has been identified as a salient feature of this field (McRobbie, 2002; Ross, 2003), and in this respect Foucauldian-inflected accounts appear more compelling in their ability to make sense of how pleasure itself may become a disciplinary technology.

Temporality

When read through the concerns of the recent 'turn to labour' in cultural studies, one of the autonomists' most compelling arguments relates to the takeover of life by work. This is understood by autonomist writers and activists not through the familiar liberal notion of 'work—life balance' but through the radical contention that we all exist in the 'social factory'. 'When we say "work" in cognitive capitalism, we mean less and less a precise and circumscribed part of our life, and more and more a comprehensive action' (Morini, 2007: 44), in which the whole life experience of the worker is harnessed to capital.

For autonomists this claim is largely understood in terms of *time*. Thus it is not so much that work extends across different *spaces* (the home and, with mobile devices, almost everywhere), but that the temporality of life becomes governed by work. Papadopoulos et al. (2008) argue that precarity is a form of exploitation which operates primarily on the level of time, evaporating distinctions between work and leisure, production and consumption. Moreover, in the 'participation economy' of Web 2.0 (Rossiter, in Delfanti, 2008) 'free time' becomes 'free labour' (Terranova, 2000) as people produce and upload content for Facebook, Bebo and YouTube, modify games for giant multinational corporations and leave data trails that are 'informational goldmines' on Google and Safari, etc.

These arguments accord profoundly with the findings of research on cultural work. Time emerges powerfully from such accounts as problematic and difficult in many respects. First, much research points to the extraordinarily long working hours of cultural workers — which are often considerably in excess of working-time agreements and exert heavy costs on — or even prohibit — relationships outside work with friends, partners, children (in ways that are unevenly affected by gender and age). Second, research has pointed to the significant disruption caused by stop-go 'bulimic' patterns of working, in which periods with no work can give way to periods that require intense activity, round-the-clock working, with its attendant impacts on sleep, diet, health and social life (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2006, 2007b; Perrons, 2002, 2007; Pratt, 2000). Moreover, in some industries (for example fashion and the computer games industry) 'crunch times' are becoming more and more normalized (de Peuter and Dyer-Witheford, 2006), such that working hours previously only expected as a collection went to show or a game came to publication become increasingly routinized as part of the job. As McRobbie (forthcoming) argues, this gives rise to health hazards of a different kind from the workplace accidents of industrial work: there may be fewer burns and severed limbs, but the injuries of this highend creative labour include exhaustion, burn-out, alcohol and drug-related problems, premature heart attacks and strokes, and a whole host of mental and emotional disorders related to anxiety and depression (see also Gill, 2009, on the hidden injuries of the neoliberal university).

The blurring of work and non-work time is another feature of cultural labour which seems to fit with autonomist accounts. Research shows that many cultural workers — especially young people — frequently make no distinction between work time and other time. However, while autonomists tend to figure this in terms of the colonization of life and suggest refusal, 'tarrying with time' (Tsianos and Papadopoulos, n.d.), or Temporary Autonomous Zones (Bey, 1985), or the slow movement (Leung, forthcoming) as possible modes of resistance, the empirical literature points to a more complicated and ambivalent picture. Long hours and the takeover of life by labour *may* be dictated by punishing schedules and oppressive deadlines, and may be experienced as intensely exploitative, but they may also be the outcome of passionate engagement, creativity and self-expression, and opportunities for socializing in fields in which 'networking' is less about 'schmoozing' the powerful than 'chilling' with friends, co-workers and people who share similar interests and enthusiasms. Not all cultural workers, it seems, share Hardt and Negri's critique of productivism! Sometimes networking may be 'compulsory sociality' (Gregg, 2008) required to survive in a field; at other times it may be pleasurable 'hanging out'

(Pratt, 2006). Often, of course, it is both. It seems to us that the *meanings* which cultural workers give to this should be central — and this is one area where a productive dialogue could be established between autonomism and sociological work on cultural labour.

Subjectivity

As we noted at the start of this article, one of the things that distinguishes the work of Lazzarato, Hardt, Negri, Virno and others from much other social theory — including other Marxist writing — is its emphasis upon subjectivity. Perhaps more than any other body of scholarship it has been concerned to connect changes in the organization of capitalism to transformations in subjectivity, and this represents, in our view, a bold and important project which resonates with and complements the research of some sociologists and critical psychologists — particularly those concerned with the subjectivities demanded by contemporary neoliberal capitalism (Brown, 2003; McRobbie, 2007a, 2007b; Rose, 1990; Walkerdine et al., 2001).

Yet there are tensions within autonomist thinking about subjectivity, which relate — like those around affect — to the productive and affirmatory focus of their work. On the one hand there is a concern with capitalism's attempt to exercise control over not simply workers' bodies and productive capacities but over their subjectivity as well. Lazzarato (1996: 135) contends that 'the new slogan of Western societies is that we should all "become subjects"'. He argues: 'Participative management is a technology of power, a technology for creating and controlling "subjective processes".' This seems to accord with a Foucaultian tradition of analysis interested in new forms of governmentality (Miller and Rose, 2008).

On the other hand, however, autonomist writers are concerned to stress emergent subjectivities, the possibilities of resistance, the features of subjectivity that exceed capitalist control and regulation. They argue that one's subjectivity does not arise from one's position in the class structure but is produced when the contemporary regime of labour becomes *embodied experience*: subjectivity is not a facticity, it is an imperceptible departure (Papadopoulos et al., 2008). The point of departure of the new social subject is not immaterial production as such but its materialization in the subject's flesh (Negri, 2003).

We would contend, however, that subjectivity is always *mediated* by the meanings which people give to their experience — even 'materialization in the flesh' (which we would understand as embodied ways of knowing) is not, in our view, outside culture. Thus, to understand emergent subjectivities, to understand what Marx would have thought of as the difference between a class in itself and class for itself, centrally requires attention to the meanings cultural workers themselves give to their life and work — not merely, we must stress, for the sake of sociological completeness, but in order to found a political project. Without this, how to account for not only the refusals, but also the compliance, the lack of refusal? To put it back to autonomist writers in a more Deleuzian-infused language, we need to understand not only the possible becomings, but also the *not-becomings*.

Moreover, these tensions generate issues similar to those we raisedabout affect: namely, how is it that parts of subjectivity can resist, evade or exceed capitalist colonization? In addition, they point to a fundamental epistemological question: if contemporary forms of capitalist organization demand 'cooperativeness', 'participation', 'creativity' and other practices that are also — simultaneously — said to be features of an elementary spontaneous communism, then how can one distinguish between those instances that might make capitalists quake in their boots and those which are indices (on the contrary) of capitalism's penetration of workers' very souls? By what kinds of principled criteria might we differentiate between the radically different meanings of apparently similar practices? These are important questions that autonomist writing does not seem to resolve.

Solidarity

Finally, however, it seems to us that one of the most important — yet largely implicit — contributions that autonomists' thinking and precarity activism might make to this field is in putting questions of cultural labour, political economy and social justice on the agenda. The lack of trade unionization both cause and outcome of industries that are individualized, deregulated and reliant upon cheap or even free labour, with working hours and conditions (particularly among freelancers and intermittents) that are largely beyond scrutiny.

This situation has been scandalously ignored by the academic fields of media and cultural studies, which have — with notable exceptions — woefully neglected cultural production, or at times have become caught up in the hyperbole of fields such as web design or fashion, believing their myths of 'coolness, creativity and egalitarianism' (Gill, 2002). In the context of the silence from most scholars about cultural labour, autonomist thinking and activism makes a major contribution in focusing on the role of work in capitalism and drawing attention to processes of precarization and individualization. Moreover, in resisting a purely sociological account in favour of an emphasis upon the political potentials of immaterial labour, this work points to the possibility of change, of re-imagining life and labour, of creating new forms of solidarity.

Conclusion

This article has examined the contribution that autonomous Marxism has made to theorizing the experience of 'immaterial' cultural labour in post- Fordist capitalism, and has pointed to the new forms and practices of politics that are mobilized around the precariousness that is said to be a defining feature of contemporary life. Autonomous Marxist ideas have provided inspiration to many seeking a principled left critique of contemporary capitalism, and their ambition and sweep is little short of extraordinary. The ideas have restored a dynamism to accounts of capitalism and accorded workers a leading role in effecting change, with an affirmatory emphasis o n the potentialities created by new forms of labour. The focus on the dispersal of work beyond the factory gate and the dissemination of capitalist relations throughout the 'social factory' makes a major contribution to social theory, and the autonomist attention to subjectivity and to new or potential solidarities is also valuable.

In this article we have brought autonomist writings together with activist ideas about precarity as a key feature of contemporary experience. For some, the figure of the artist or creative worker has been emblematic of the experience of precarity: negotiating short-term, insecure, poorly paid, precarious work in conditions of structural uncertainty. As we have noted, however, this is contested and precarity might be better thought of as a political rallying point for a diverse range of struggles about labour, migration and citizenship. When juxtaposed with the growing body of empirical research on cultural work, however, the autonomist tradition has both added insights and thrown up tensions. The notions of 'immaterial labour' and 'affective labour' that are so central to this work are rather ill-defined and not sharp enough to see the ways in which cultural work is both like and not like other work. Moreover, the emphasis upon affect as positive, transgressive potential has made it difficult for autonomist writers to see the other roles affect may play — not simply in resisting capital but binding us to it. A fuller understanding needs to grasp both pleasure and pain, and their relation to forms of exploitation that increasingly work through dispersed disciplinary modalities and technologies of subjecthood.

The autonomist and activist focus on refusal and resistance raises questions about the relative absence of labour organization within many cultural workplaces (the film industry being an obvious exception), and this represents a significant contribution. However, to understand this requires a closer analysis than the autonomists provide — one that can engage with the specificities of different industries, workplaces and locations, and attend to the meanings that workers themselves give to their labour. To argue this is not to reinstate 'mere' sociology against the autonomists' explicitly political engagement (though we are not so happy with the 'mere') but to argue, on the contrary (and with a debt to Marx), that this emphasis is necessary not only to understand but also to *change* the world.

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WHEN WORK IS MORE THAN WAGES

Freee art collective

Freee, Protest Drive History, Billboard Poster, London, 2008

Freee have been thinking about what is meant by 'preca-
rity' in terms of labour relations; questioning if it is
a useful term with which to understand and critique con-
temporary capitalism. So today I am not going to talk
about Freee's art practice but I am going to have a go at
a few ideas about precarity, these are things that Freee
have been deliberating over.

So, in this paper Freee attempt to bring economic and
social distinctions to the idea of precarity in order to
better understand the Marxist concept of labour. I intend
to look at how Marx characterizes different types of
labour and compare 'precarious labour' to these defini-
tions. I will be comparing notions of attractive labour,
alienated labour, abstract labour, concrete labour, pro-
ductive and unproductive labour, to the notion of 'pre-
carious labour'. My aim is to consider if the concept of
precarity is consistent with the Marxist theory of labour,
and if not, what is a best suited to an analysis of
contemporary forms of labour under advanced capitalism.

Precarity is typically seen as a *kind* of work, or a
specific *mode* of employment or as *a way* of working. Pre-
carity is framed in terms of work that is irregular,
intermittent, without a permanent contract, insecure,
non-standard employment and bad pay. For example, The
Precarious Workers Brigade (on their website) state that,
'Precarity is an adjective referring to a set of condi-
tions, such as insecurity, instability and vulnerability,
affecting both life and labour of an individual. The ex-
pression has its roots in the notion of 'obtaining some-
thing by prayer'. The condition of precarity plays out
via short-term contracts, no-contract work, bad pay, de-
privation of rights and status, vulnerability to mobbing,
competition and pressure, high rent, lack of accessible
public services, etc. Precarity is not linked to a spe-
cific type of employment status, but manifests itself
through an insecurity whereby one is at the mercy of others,
always having to beg, network and compete in order to
be able to pursue one's labour and life. Precarity is the
paradoxical state of being both overworked and insecure
at once, regardless of being employed or not'.

Typically, then, precarity is understood as a quality
or attribute of labour, work, employment or free-labour.
Intermittent labour, therefore, is said to be more pre-
carious than secure, stable, full-time, well-paid em-
ployment. This is a clear distinction. What's more, *poli-
tically* this is an important distinction, as we see more
jobs threatened, the conditions of work deregulated, the
rolling back of the welfare state and the power of trade
unions to represent their members is undermined. How-
ever, *economically*, the category of precarious labour is
meaningless. In fact there is no such thing as precarious
labour. Let me explain.

Primarily what I mean by asserting that there is not such
thing as precarious labour is this: precarious labour is
abstracted from economic and social relations. In saying
this we are following Marx's concept of 'commodity fe-
tishism' in which Marx warns us against examining the qua-
lity of a commodity and urges us, instead, to examine
its social and economic relations. Precarity is a quality
of the commodity labour-power, but we should examine,
instead, the social and economic relations in which it is
embedded, and which determine its economic character.

For example let's consider the notion of 'working part-
time', it in itself is not a problem as you could for
instance consider part-time work as a utopian endeavour —
personally I think it would be great if everybody were
able to exist by working part-time. In this way striving
for part-time work for all is actually an anti-capitalist
goal, here in this context, there is nothing bad about
working part-time. However part-time work under capitalism
is used as a type of exploitation, to save the bosses
money and resist and avoid certain rights and conditions
that have been established by workers.

Take 'intermittent' as a characteristic of precarity.
We often assume, when talking about precarity that inter-
mittence is one of the qualities of work that make it
more precarious. However, this is not the case for all
examples of intermittent labour. Some kinds of work are
fundamentally intermittent but nonetheless excellently
paid. Some big bosses have a precarious work life, but a
boss might earn in three days, what most workers would
fail to earn in a year or even a lifetime, on a full-time
salary. The problem is not really about intermittent
types of work (it's actually about your class and eco-
nomic status).

So what is the difference between precarious work and
privileged worklessness?

Precarity is indeed a term that attempts to get us away
from the economic argument and it's a term that can
flatten difference — we can all feel precarious to some
extent. In fact, capitalism is a social system built on
precarity at all levels, from the unemployed job seeker
to the risk-taking entrepreneur. There are levels of
precariousness and these can only be understood and arti-
culated by applying economic and social distinctions to
the concept. But this does not mean simply distinguishing
between precarious work that pays well and precarious
work that pays badly.

The problem with condemning 'bad pay' suggests that the
ideal aim is for 'good pay', which is actually a short
sighted form of unionist thinking - and completely within
the capitalist mode of thinking — Do we really want a
bigger share of the capitalist's profit and therefore to
properly join in with capitalism? The trade unions provided
us a way to get better work conditions but now it's clear
that economic conditions that make wage labour central to
capital have to go!

However, there is more to precarity than a Capitalist
preference for work. Think, for instance, of the romantic
avant-garde artist who chooses precarity against a re-
gular job. In this context precarity is the precondition
for freedom, and not only freedom from the academy and
the art market but also freedom from wage labour and capi-
tal. Although this isn't just a special artist thing:
the artist's non wage-labour is one of many examples of
non-wage-labour across class boundaries. Think, for in-
stance, about Gordon Brown's statements, when he was
Chancellor, that he wanted millions of people in Africa
to be brought into the labour market (rather than what?
Labour in village communities for the collective good!)
Also, think of the commodification of childcare today,
which has turned into wage — labour compared with the
care of children by extended families in the past.
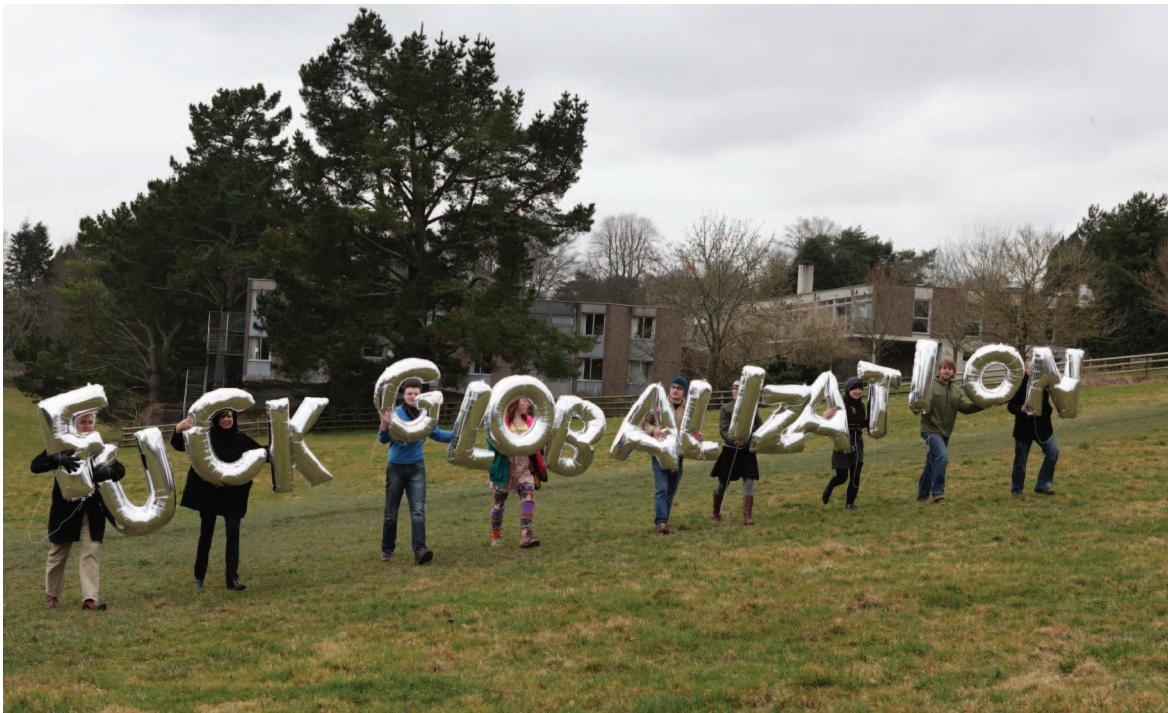
1 Freee, Advertising for all or nobody
at all. Reclaim Public Opinion, Bill-
board Poster, ICA London, 2009.
2 Freee, Whistleblowers Guide to the
Public Sphere, Manifesto Spoken Choir,
Eastside Projects, Birmingham, 2011.
3 Freee, Fuck Globalization, Billboard
Poster, Dartington School of Art,
Devon, 2010.
4 Freee, Revolution is Sublime, Bill-
board Poster, Peckham Space, London,
2009.

Artist are precarious — because artists do not have PROPER capitalist labour relations, artists tend to be self-employed — the problem is then that *all* artists are precarious — even if your parents have bought you a lovely house — because of your labour relations you are still considered precarious — in fact most artists are not living a properly 'precarious' life.

Since artists are *not* wage-labourers — a wage-labourer is a person who sells labour — not for instance, someone who produces goods that are subsequently sold at the marketplace. So artists are not wage-labourers in this way, they are not employed by capitalists, artists own their means of production as well as the products that they produce, therefore we are forced to conclude that *artistic labour is unproductive* labour even if certain capitalists, such as gallerists, dealers and later in the process, investors, earn a profit from trade in the *products* of artistic labour.

Let's take this analysis of wage-labour further. The distinction between productive and unproductive labour was derived by Marx from Adam Smith. Smith's definition of unproductive labour still stands today: *labour not exchanged with capital but directly exchanged with revenue*. There is no such thing as productive or unproductive labour in itself it cannot be abstracted from its social and economic conditions. Productive labour is labour that produces profits; unproductive labour is wage-labour but is nothing but expenditure: so for example you don't make a profit from paying the window cleaner! This is the fundamental difference: productive labour is the labour that produces surplus value for the capitalist/multi national company and unproductive labour is labour that doesn't produce surplus value.

Normally, unproductive labour does not produce products that are luxury goods; normally the unproductive labour is the luxury good itself. Art is unusually unproductive labour that is not a luxury in itself but produces luxuries without first producing commodities. Studio assistants are wage-labourers, but if they are unproductive labourers, like domestic servants, then they do not produce surplus-value.

Precarity embodies distinctions; being precarious as a working –class wage labourer is rotten; choosing a lifestyle of cultural work that is never secure is a different matter. Differences in kinds of paid and unpaid work must be discussed, not in terms of the work that you are doing, for example immaterial creative work versus working in a call centre, remember that this labour is not economically different, but a good job — attractive labour — is more to do with your working conditions and union representation than with the type of thing you are doing. Being a doctor and working with ill people is not necessarily a nice activity, but the conditions are good so this makes it a desirable job.

According to Marx, Attractive Labour is done for its own sake or for the value derived from it intrinsically; also, it is varied not monotonous, and it is engaging not alienating etc. Attractive Labour then, is not just attractive or preferable work it is linked to the conditions in which it is carried out. In contrast Alienated (Estranged) Labour is firstly, not yours — i.e. it is wage-labour owned by another; secondly, it is not organised by and for workers — i.e. not the best way to make something but the cheapest; third it is just done for money.

Does the concept of precarity fit Marx's notion of Abstract Labour? — which suggests that labour under capital is considered in relation to quantities and is lacking qualities; measurable, exchangeable and equivalent. For example, in business plans workers are referred to as the labour force and the quantities of hours are calculated. Abstract Labour occurs as soon as we ask, "how much work is necessary to produce something?", Contrast this with Concrete Labour — which is defined by use value as opposed to exchange value as in Abstract Labour. Concrete Labour is different from person to person and occasion to occasion (so contingent and not universally applied as in Abstract Labour); over and above exchange; not what is bought and sold but what is experienced and done. We must remember, however, that all Abstract Labour is also concrete labour — it is just that within Capitalism all Concrete Labour is reduced to abstract labour — measurable, exchangeable, commodifiable and so on. The distinction between Abstract Labour and Concrete Labour is echoed in the concept of precarity, but the social and economic relations that convert concrete labour into abstract labour are missing from the theory of precarity. This is a clear case of fetishism.

Precarity is a quality of labour, as we have seen Marx examines social and economic relations. This means precarity is an abstraction. It is ideological. Just as art's particularity does not belong to it as a quality but rather only as a social relation, the lack of particularity of precarious labour does not belong to it but is only a result of its social and economic relations. For example no matter how much you look at something you can't tell what type of labour went into it or what it is worth — to understand a commodity you need to know all of these attributes and you just can't get it from looking at it — think of an object as a specimen — like a butterfly. Specimens are brutally extracted from their contexts, their ecologies, from which they derive their meaning, significance and value.

The particularity of artworks — their non-economic value, their use-value, their materiality, and so on — is not one of the 'pseudo-singularities' to which Alberto Toscano alerts us. 'Pseudo-singularity' has to be avoided not because of the singularity in it, but because of the speculative abstraction in it. Antonio Negri is right that "art is anti-market, inasmuch as it counterposes the multitude of singularities to uniqueness reduced to a price". Or, as he says more directly, "art cannot accept capitalist power".

On their website the Precarious Workers Brigade state four demands: EQUAL PAY: no more free labour; guaranteed income for all. FREE EDUCATION: all debts and future debts cancelled now. DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS: cut unelected, unaccountable and unmandated leaders. THE COMMONS: shared ownership of space, ideas and resources

These demands are important in relation to the current economic and political situation, and particularly in terms of our current working rights and conditions. However I have concerns about these demands, in particular I have a problem with number one, 'no more free labour' as a slogan, it suggests there is no other kind of labour than labour that you get paid for, this immediately reduces our alternatives. Freee think that it is actually at the point of free labour that workers have a type of agency. I am not adverse to all types of wage labour as paying someone directly for a task can be a fair exchange — it is surplus wage labour that we have problems with.

And when we talk about free labour we are not talking about volunteering according to the Lib — Con's idea of big society, which is a call for voluntary groups to run public services, activities that previously commanded wages. They describe a world in which we all participate in public life by running post offices, libraries, transport services and initiating and administrating new schools. I don't think that free labour should be a substitute for proper jobs I do however think there are many ways to 'work' other than as a wage labourer. For example you don't get paid to go on a demonstration — actually it would be awful if you did — you don't get paid to protest but it still involves some type of labour.

In Bruno Gulli's book 'The Labor of Fire' he argues for a subjective idea of labour as part of the ontology of labour so what *IS* part of / what constitutes labour is something subjective as opposed to a purely economic idea of labour (i.e. political economy). He believes in the necessity for such a critique of political economy because political economy suggests a totality of labour and he wants to challenge this — to define further the difference between subjective labour and productive labour — he is trying to describe a idea of labour that is not simply negative. He wants to demonstrate that this subjectivity of labour is objective — to prove a way to say that it does exist and critique this existing totality set up by political economy.

Gulli refers to Marx's early ideas of subjective labour, which Marx seems to drop later on — but I think there maybe some opportunities in thinking about labour in this way.

Gulli aims to demonstrate that Marx's subjectivity of labour is objective — he wants to prove a way to say that it does exist and critique this existing totality set up by political economy. He says — "Even when the worker is working he or she is also, not working is also not a worker. Concretely during the labor process the worker may choose to spend time daydreaming or organising the next struggle implementing an act of sabotage agains production itself." So political economy believes that the essence of the worker lies in her labour power. Gulli concludes, "The rest of the time is of *no* concern to Political Economy".[1]

I like the idea of capital being destroyed by a different type of labour and I think it highlights the importance of the proposal of the subjective nature of labour. The idea that we can think about labour as a sensuous human activity is a way to undo the totality of capital. This enables a space for rebellion and revolt. From the political economy of capital (how it uses and constructs notion of labour) — productive labour to ontology what is actually labour, the full *IS*ness of labour.

Political economy takes the bit of labour it likes for production and ignores the rest, to the point of creating a totality of labour — which equals productive labour. Gulli says we can only arrive at a ontology of labour by ruining the system of estrangement and alienation. I like this understanding of labour as it gets labour back for us, it aligns labour with freedom, that labour is ours and labour is ultimately ontological, it is part of existence and it is also essence (Marx), or the subjective dimension of the ontological concept of labour, so there *IS* something subjective about labour not only productive, it doesn't only belong to the bosses it belongs to each person,

1
1 Bruno Gulli,
*The Labor of Fire:
The Ontology of
Labor between Economy and Culture*,
Temple University
Press, Philadelphia, 2005, p. 18.

and it isn't only brought about or enabled via the notion of production but by a need.

Is precarity a term or political device developed by post Marxists to extend the reach of Marxism, a way to include others in addition to the proletariat? To make the struggle against capital more inclusive?

To isolate labour from its economic and social relations creates all the problems that I have attempted to describe.

So to conclude I think precarity is an abstraction, it is the isolation of labour from its social and economic context. There is a problem with precarity, as it is used as a quality of labour; it is in this way it is abstracted from economic and social relations, the problem arises when it can therefore be seen as autonomous. But precarity cannot have a quality in itself, its quality is determined by its concrete economic and social relations, it's like saying an artwork is beautiful suggests that the values inheres in the work rather than seeing the works as being charged by an economy on which it ultimately depends.

A lecture by Mel Jordan on behalf of the Freee Art Collective for the Precarious Times, symposium and PhD workshop, as part of the FINALE SYMPOSIUM for the British Art Show 7 Constellation Programme. Speakers included Franco Berardi Bifo, Malcolm Miles, Stevphen Shukaitis, Ubermorgen.com. Date: 01 December 2011 — 03 December 2011. Location: Plymouth College of Art, Studio Theatre, and Plymouth University, United Kingdom.

THE ART SCENE. A CLEVER WORKING MODEL FOR ECONOMIC EXPLOITATION?

Pascal Gielen

In sociology, the 'scene' is barely taken seriously as a form of social organization, but sociologist Pascal Gielen sees the scene as a highly functional part of our contemporary networking society and thus worthy of serious research. Were the current success of the creative industry to result in the exploitation of the creative scene, however, the level of freedom enjoyed could quickly become a lack of freedom. When a Kunsthalle, an experimental theatre, an international dance school, an alternative cinema, a couple of fusion restaurants and lounge bars — not to mention a sufficient number of gays — are concentrated in a place marked by high social density and mobility, the result is an art scene. 'What's there? Who's there? And what's going on?' are what American social geographer Richard Florida calls the three 'W questions' (Florida is a fan of management jargon). These questions have to be answered if we want to know if ours is a 'place to be'.[1] A creative scene like the one described is good for the economy, the image of a city and intercultural tolerance, it would seem.

Although the art scene has become an important economic variable and a popular subject of study, the term is not exactly thriving in the sociological context. The classic sociologist does know how to cope with concepts like 'the group', 'the category', 'the network' and 'the subculture', but 'the social scene' is relatively unexplored as an area of research. Obviously, there are exceptions, such as work done by Alan Blum.[2] Yet the lack of scholarly interest is surprising, since the scene is perhaps the format best suited to social intercourse. Within the prevailing post-Fordist economy — with its fluid working hours; high levels of mobility, hyper-communication and flexibility; and special interest in creativity and performance — the scene is a highly functional social-organizational form. Moreover, it is a popular temporary haven for hordes of enthusiastic globetrotters. Why is the scene such a good social binding agent nowadays? To find a satisfactory answer, we should start by taking a good look at the curious mode of production known as 'post-Fordism'.

Paolo Virno-Style Post-Fordism

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

But how does an industry based on signs and symbols affect the workplace and the manufacturing process? What characterizes immaterial labour? According to Italian philosopher Paolo Virno, current focal points are mobility, flexible working hours, communication and language (knowledge-sharing), interplay, detachment (the ability to disengage and to delegate) and adaptability.[3] Consequently, the person performing immaterial labour can be 'plugged in' at all times and in all places. Yet Virno's conception of immaterial labour is surprisingly refreshing when he links it to such notions as power, subjectivity (including informality and affection), curiosity, virtuosity, the personification of the product, opportunism, cynicism and endless chatter. Admittedly, his conception initially appears to relate to a string of seemingly heterogeneous characteristics applicable to immaterial labour. Presumably, the idea is to select with care a few key aspects from the list. Virno starts with the better-known aspects of the social phenomenon before adding his personal adaptation.

Physical and Mental Mobility

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

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

2
See, for example,
Alan Blum, 'Scenes',
in Janine Marches-
sault and Will Straw
eds., *Scenes and
the City*, Public,
No.22/23, 2001.

3
Paolo Virno, *A
Grammar of the Mul-
titude. For an Ana-
lysis of Contempo-
rary Forms of Life*,
Semiotext(e), New
York, 2004.

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

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

The foregoing outline makes rather a depressing impression, but many a person who does immaterial work experiences it as such, as evidenced by the increase in work-related stress and depressions. One cause of depression is an ongoing sense of having too much on one's mind and of being constantly reminded of this fact by the working environment. Perhaps a creative idea is still nestling somewhere in the brain: a conclusion based more on a socially conditioned criterion than on anything psychological. The knowledge that you can go on looking, that you may be failing to utilize a possibility still lodged in your brain, can lead to psychosis. Burnout is not necessarily the result of a person feeling that his ideas have not been fully exploited. On the contrary, it is rooted in the frustration that an unused, passive zone exists within the cranium that can still be activated. The worker who can no longer stop the introspective quest for inventiveness may find himself falling into an abyss or looking for escape routes, such as intoxication, to momentarily halt the thinking process. He deliberately switches off his creative potential.

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

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

The paradoxical characteristics of that working power — that potential which is bought and sold as if it were a material commodity — presuppose 'biopolitical' practices, according to Virno. The employer, preferably aided by the government, has to develop ingenious mechanisms for optimizing, or at least guaranteeing, immaterial labour. Since physical and intellectual powers are inseparable, these mechanisms should focus on the life of the immaterial worker: hence the term 'biopolitics'. 'When something is sold that exists merely as a possibility, it cannot be separated from the living person of the seller. The worker's living body is the substrate of the working power, which in isolation has no independent existence. "Life", pure and simple "bios", acquires special importance since it is the tabernacle of dynamis, of the more-or-less possible. Capitalists are only interested for an indirect reason in the worker's life: that life, that body, contains the talent, the possibility, the dynamis. The living body becomes an object to be managed... Life is situated at the centre of politics as the prize to be won and is the immaterial (and not present in itself) working force.'[4]

Communication, Linguistic Virtuosity and Informality

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

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

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

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

Scene to Be Seen

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

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

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

These are the very characteristics that make the scene an ideal form of social organization in the present network society. Local scenes are proving to be familiar focal points within a worldwide network. They generate just enough, but not too much, intimacy for global nomads. Whether you enter the art scene in Shanghai, Tokyo, New York, London, Berlin or Brussels, you find a familiar frame of reference despite what may be a totally different cultural context. If, six months ago, you had mentioned the name Damien Hirst in any of these art scenes, you would have instantly created a common ground for socializing, whether participating in an intellectual debate or chatting in a pub. The scene provides a safe, familiar, yet admittedly temporary home in a globalized world. Or, as Alan Blum puts it: it offers a kind of urban intimacy that enables a person to survive in a chilly urban environment and anonymous global time. The reason, to some extent, is that professional and public activities within a scene affect the domestic domain. Professional and private activities, work and personal relationships, often merge seamlessly. Although it may sound facetious, the hotel lounge, vernissage and fusion restaurant are settings for both informal chatter and professional deals. But professional deals may well depend on gossip, and informal chatter may prompt professional deals. Thus the scene is the place where formality and informality effortlessly intersect. And, proceeding in that vein, the scene is the ultimate place for biopolitical control.

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

Freiheit macht Arbeit: Freedom Creates Work
Events like biennials and buildings like a Kunsthalle or museum are ideal semi-public venues for the art scene and for the circulation of creative ideas. You could say they form the concrete infrastructure of the scene or make the scene more visible: the non-seen scene becomes the seen scene. This applies primarily to artists whose work is displayed by the organizations in question or is on display in the buildings. The concrete infrastructure literally scenarizes the art scene, thus making it a more or less permanent creative scene. This displaying of the scene, incidentally, takes place in complete accordance with the rules of post-Fordist art. As a result, a person works under a temporary contract or, in the art world itself, often without a contract in what is always a vitalist, project-based setting; the work — flexible and invariably at night — is done with irrepressible creative enthusiasm. In short, it involves a work ethic in which work is always enjoyable, or should be; in which dynamism is boosted unconditionally

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

by young talent; and in which commitment outstrips money. These factors determine the spirit of the art scene. If you try to rationalize this great, spontaneous desire and freedom to work (by means of rigid contracts or labour agreements, for instance) or to bureaucratize or routinize it, you are in danger of letting the metaphorical creative genie out of the bottle. However, we should not forget that creative work as described here is always a form of cheap, unstable work, which makes the art scene of great interest to outsiders like company managers and politicians. Not only does it boost the local economy and introduce the city to the world market; it also, and especially, reveals a biopolitical ethic that benefits today's economy. Rather than believing that Arbeit macht frei, as announced on gates to Nazi concentration camps, protagonists of the creative scene seem to think that Freiheit macht Arbeit (freedom creates work). The type of accepted flexible work that marks artistic projects would make gratifying advertising for a temp agency. Considering the rhetorical reversal, it is better to offer no opinion as to whether or not the concentration camp has become the central social structure of all society, as Giorgio Agamben claims.[5] If the crossover involving professional, public and domestic activities — and particularly the interplay between formality and informality, on the one hand, and seeing and being seen, on the other — is exploited on a rationally economic basis, the cultivated freedom of the art scene edges uncomfortably close to the inhuman lack of freedom of the camp. Making a link between scene and camp is undoubtedly going a step too far. The point, however, is that the freedom of the art scene within the capitalist mise en scène can be no more than a false freedom, because it inevitably stems from a well-defined (or un-free) finality, primarily the pursuit of profit.

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

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Komar & Melamid, Asian Elephant Art and Conservation Project
(1995-2000). Courtesy of Vitaly Komar. Photo: Jason Schmidt.

FOR THE DE-INCAPACITATION OF COMMUNITY ART PRACTICE

Marc James Léger

We had escaped the unbearable weight of being artists, and within the specialization of art we could separate ourselves from site-specific artists, community artists, public artists, new genre artists, and the other categories with which we had little or no sympathy.
Critical Art Ensemble[1]

In 1984 the artist Krzysztof Wodiczko wrote a broadside against the Canadian cultural state bureaucracy titled "For the De-Incapacitation of the Avant-Garde."[2] The article addressed the contradictions of incorporating "left" and "libertarian" ideas into a centralized state bureaucratic system. Having come from Poland, where artists at that time feared assimilation into the technocratic rationality of the state apparatus, the "parallel" institutions supported by government grants appeared to him to pose a similar danger. In both cases, he considered the function of the state to be the appropriation of those critiques it could use to reinforce its legitimizing functions. Ostensibly, this could be achieved by financing radical-cultural magazines, film and video.

The problem with avant-garde artists in the West, Wodiczko argued, was that they had begun to accept their own productions as ideology and had conflated political ideology with artistic utopia. In this context, artists who mistrusted their avant-garde forebears were caught in an endless rehearsal of the critique of formalist modernism, forging new idioms that could ostensibly escape a linear account of art's immanent unfolding. With the advent of postmodernism, art's privileged position within the division of labor, the sign of non-alienated production, became a bulwark against further radicalization of the sphere of cultural production. Rather than radicalize cultural production as a product of capitalist social relations, postmodern pluralism concluded that the avant-garde is dead and withdrew to what Hal Foster calls a

relativistic "arrière-avant-gardism" that considers itself liberated from the teleological framework of History and the determinations of ideology.[3]

Wodiczko also recognized that artistic and political avant-gardes did not share the same attitudes toward the degradation of art; where one called for art's destruction, the other wished to salvage its compensatory effects. In the absence of a revolutionary situation, the embattled artistic left could not know itself from the liberal state bureaucracy that supported it; it appeared serious and militant, but did not dare unmask itself. The solution to this impasse, he argued, could be found in a critical public discourse on the aims of an avant-garde programme that would lead to the de-ideologization of its processes and a confrontation with the "enemy," which included the culturally conservative political left. In this sense, the left could liberate itself from itself. It could do so if it was

1
Critical Art Ensemble, *Digital Resistance: Explorations in Tactical Media*, Autonomedia, Brooklyn, 2001, p.7.

2
Krzysztof Wodiczko, "For the De-Incapacitation of the Avant-Garde," *Parallelogramme* 9:4, 1984, pp.22–25.

3
Hal Foster, "Against Pluralism," in *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics*, Bay Press, Seattle, 1985, p.23. See also Hal Foster, "The Funeral is for the Wrong Corpse," in *Design and Crime (and Other Diatribes)*, Verso, London, 2002, p.125.

involved in cultural action that challenged the system of national culture as planned bureaucratic administration.[4]

What might Wodiczko's ideas mean for us today in the context of the neoliberal administration of creative labor and the growth of what the radical collective BAVO refers to as "embedded" forms of cultural activism?[5] As Nina Möntmann has also argued, recent models of community-based art need to be considered against the background of the dismantling of state-organized social infrastructure in the Western world.[6]

Within some circles of advanced cultural theory and practice, there is often little tolerance for the idea of an avant-garde and cultural authority itself is mistrusted. In the context of a late capitalist post-politics, the political vanguard is often subsumed under the pluralism of liberal multiculturalism.[7] Because of this, a multitude of decentralized practices appears to be both the promise of a post-identity politics as well as the legitimizing grounds of the neoliberal state, which works to produce and manage cultural conflict. At the same time, however, the counter-globalization movement, referred to in Europe as "the movement of movements," provides a clear message that there are alternatives to capitalist hegemony.[8] What forms of socially engaged cultural practice can we envision that refuse complicity with the current ruling order?

Dictatorship of the Precariat

The project of a contemporary avant-garde cultural practice entails an anti-essentialist re-examination of the question of universality as an inevitable level of political emancipation that is subject to hegemonic operations. Within the state apparatus, a great deal of attention is now being given to the administration of art in terms of "creative industries" that rationalize "immaterial" cultural production according to flexible production strategies that benefit capital accumulation. Post-Fordist or post-industrial capitalist production are the terms used to describe the development of markets that involve cultural, intellectual and biogenetic property. In this context, the left's emphasis on social and economic precarity within a flexible labor market has become an important point of collective resistance to neoliberal governance. However, the critique of the state disciplinary apparatus has been obviated by Michel Foucault's influential description of the way that human beings become subjects through forms of self-government that are based on how people perceive what is desirable and what is possible. Precarity can thus be explained as part of a self-precarization that is produced by conditions of productivity, discipline and security. State power is dematerialized and is replaced with self-interest and the management of open markets. A concomitant entrepreneurial view of the self complements the management of economic liberties, producing what Foucault refers to as biopolitical subjectivity.[9] The power of labor is thus subsumed by the neoliberal view that a flexible market logic completely determines the relations of production. In relation to creative labor, the autonomy of the market replaces the avant-garde notion of the critical autonomy of the work of art as part of a critique of economic determinism and class inequality. Thus, the position of the precariously employed artist figures not only as the product of hegemonic market relations, but as what Slavoj Žižek describes as the universal exception, the particularistic example that embodies the truth of the contemporary art world as a whole.

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Wodiczko, cit., p. 25.

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In numerous publications, BAVO have decried the role of community art and cultural activism in the context of the neoliberal dismantling of progressive social policy. Embedded, or NGO art, as they call it, limits the scope of cultural agency to "softening the 'collateral damage' caused by [capitalist] restructuring and inventing humanitarian, compensatory measures or 'ways of dealing with', as opposed to radically contesting the neoliberal and neoconservative measures as such." Cited in BAVO, "Neoliberalism with Dutch Characteristics: The Big Fix-Up of the Netherlands and the Practice of Embedded Cultural Activism," in Rosi Braidotti, Charles Esche and Maria Hlavajova, eds. *Citizens and Subjects: The Netherlands, for Example*, JRP/Ringier, Zürich, 2007, p. 61. See also, BAVO, ed., *Cultural Activism Today: The Art of Over-Identification*, Episode Publishers, Rotterdam, 2007.

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Nina Möntmann, "Community Service," *Frieze* No. 102, October 2006 http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/community_service/ (consulted July 17, 2007).

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A more promising alternative is the discourse on the multitudes, which in some respects recovers the Marxist idea of the proletariat but now transformed by the expansion of service provision and "immaterial" forms of production. On this subject, see my essay, "Art and Art History After Globalisation," *Third Text* No. 118, September 2012, 515–527.

8
See Oliver Ressler, ed. *Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies*, Wyspa Institute of Art, Gdansk, 2007.

9
See for instance, Isabell Lorey, "Governmentality and Self-Precarization: On the Normalization of Cultural Producers," *Transversal*, January 2006. http://eipcp.net/transversal/1106/lorey/en

On this score, artists are not alone in their struggles.[10] The level of competitiveness and inequality that structures the field of immaterial, creative and cognitive labor is similar to the unevenness that is subsidized by neoliberal governments in almost all spheres of biopolitical production.

One immediate solution to post-Fordist economic precarization has therefore been to name it. Demonstrators at the 2004 MayDay Parades in Milan and Barcelona, for instance, referred to themselves as, variously, the precariously employed, precariats, cognitive workers, cognitariat, autonomous activists, affectariat, etc., and proposed flexicurity — rights and protections for the precariously employed.[11] As Angela Mitropoulos has remarked, the demonstrators were alert to the fact that the quality of precarity belongs to both labor and to capitalism. Whereas Fordism sought to cretinize the worker, she writes, post-Fordist decentralization and flexible accumulation harnesses the productive capacities of desire, knowledge and *sociality* itself.[12]

In some ways the problem of the artworld precariat might be summarized with Gregory Sholette's recently proposed concept of "dark matter."[13] Dark matter describes the work of autonomous and participatory cultural production by amateur, informal, unofficial, autonomous, activist and non-institutional workers. This dark matter is largely invisible to those cultural administrators — curators, directors, collectors, critics, historians and artists — who are the gatekeepers of large cultural institutions. However, the same institutional art world is dependent on this dark matter as well as the resources of its members who purchase magazines and books and who attend exhibitions and conferences. What, he asks, "would become of the economic and ideological foundations of the elite art world if this mass of excluded practices was to be given equal consideration as art?" The situation we are confronted with today is one in which, as Sholette argues, dark matter is no longer invisible but is being recovered by private interests. Politicized micro-practices are given specific designations, meanings, and use-value as they are directly integrated into the globalized commercial art matrix. Sholette argues that the capitalist valorization of creative labor is as much a problem for politics as it is for culture because it "forces into view its own arbitrary value structure."[14] The affective energies of those who are excluded from the inner circles of the transnational culture industries, he concludes, need to be linked to actual resistance to capital, patriarchy and racism, and block the art world's mediocrity from appropriating their histories.

This situation, as I see it, can benefit from a reconsideration of the traditions of avant-gardism, which many cultural producers and theorists dismiss or distinguish sharply from activist and community-based practice. Because of the resistance to avant-gardism, radical artists are treated to a number of double standards that we could define as liberal cultural blackmail. Artists are expected to provide constructive critiques of the system but not threaten public institutions, class hierarchies and other legacies of bourgeois liberalism; to intervene in culture but not appear aggressive or be seriously prepared to fight for political equality — which would result in being dismissed as masculinist, intolerant of people's differences, or else submitted to ironic commentary on the inability to keep a critical stance without appearing to be something else; to understand the complex history of aesthetic and cultural radicalism and to incorporate this into intelligent forms of collaborative practice, but to stand back or compromise when the situation requires that you assume a dominant position of authorial integrity. It is not surprising that all of the withdrawals from avant-gardism and from a radical criticism of disciplinary societies are accompanied by what, on the surface of things, is their opposite: sociability, collaboration, dialogue, consultation, etc. These modalities and methods, according to Hal Foster, today "risk a weird formalism of discursivity and sociability pursued for their own sakes."[15] However, this is precisely where the radicality of formalism should be acknowledged and the identity of the opposites be considered. Why, we should ask, is socially engaged community art considered to be among the most vanguard forms of contemporary art and, if so, in what ways does it renounce formalism? The blackmail situation provides two obvious solutions: either one defends the socially maligned space of autonomy, but, if successful, risks having one's work recuperated as capitalist investment, or, one plays the disciplinary culture industries at their own game, sublating the opposition between art and life, art and society, thus producing complex forms of critical autonomy and risking, if successful, being ignored or even becoming invisible as an artist or an art collective. Many of the most challenging artists of the last two decades have chosen the latter. But we can see here how the path of self-precarization is not only overdetermined — not least by the kinds of capital that are associated with criticality — but full of contradictions. The most vanguard direction is the one that in today's late capitalist world of multi-culturalism and poststructural identity politics also demands a withdrawal from avant-gardism as *passé*, modernist, masculinist, totalizing, utopian, etc.

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As Žižek himself puts it: "Politics proper thus always involves the tension between the structured social body, where each part has its place, and the part of no-part, which unsettles this order on account of the empty principle of universality ... Politics proper thus always involves a kind of short-circuit between the universal and the particular; it involves the paradox of a singular that appears as a stand-in for the universal, destabilizing the 'natural' functional order of relations in the social body. *This singulier universel* is a group that, although without any fixed place in the social edifice (or, at best, occupying a subordinate place), not only demands to be heard on equal footing with the ruling oligarchy... but, even more, presents itself as a the immediate embodiment of *society as such*, in its universality, against the particular power interests of aristocracy or oligarchy." Cited in Slavoj Žižek, "A Leftist Plea for 'Eurocentrism'," in *The Universal Exception: Selected Writings, Volume Two*, Continuum, New York, 2006, pp. 183–4.

11
See Gerald Raunig, "Anti-Precariousness, Activism and May Day Parades," *republicart*, http://eipcp.net/transversal/0704/raunig/en. For more information see http://www.euromayday.org. For a report on precarity in Canada, see the April 2007 issue of *Fuse* magazine.

12
Angela Mitropoulos, "Precari-Us?," *republicart*, http://www.republicart.net/disc/precariat/mitropoulos01_en.htm

13
Gregory Sholette, "Dark Matter: Activist Art and the Counter-Public Sphere," *Journal of Aesthetics and Protest*, vol.1, No.3, August 2003, http://www.journalofaestheticsandprotest.org/3/sholette.htm.

14
Sholette, cit.

15
Hal Foster, "Chat Rooms," in Claire Bishop, ed. *Participation*, MIT Press/Whitechapel, Cambridge/London, 2006, p. 194.

Komar & Melamid, Asian Elephant Art and Conservation Project
(1995–2000). Courtesy of Vitaly Komar. Photo: Jason Schmidt.

This kind of liberal cultural blackmail, inasmuch as it comes from progressive artists, theorists and historians, is especially harmful given the economic pressures that come from cultural institutions. According to Andrea Fraser, current trends within the culture industries have contributed to a wholesale devaluation of avant-garde aesthetic autonomy. She writes:

We're in the midst of the total corporatization and marketization of the artistic field and the historic loss of autonomy won through more than a century of struggle. The field of art is now only nominally public and non-profit institutions have been transformed into a highly competitive global market. The specifically artistic values and criteria that marked the relative autonomy of the artistic field have been overtaken by quantitative criteria in museums, galleries and art discourse, where programmes are increasingly determined by sales — of art, at the box office and of advertising — and where a popular and rich artist is almost invariably considered a good artist, and vice versa. Art works are increasingly reduced to pure instruments of financial investment, as art-focused hedge funds sell shares of single paintings. The threat of instrumentalization by corporate interests has been met in the art world by a wholesale internalization of corporate values, methods and models, which can be seen everywhere from art schools to museums and galleries to the studios of artists who rely on big-money backers for large-scale — and often out-sourced — production. We are living through a historical tragedy: the extinguishing of the field of art as a site of resistance to the logic, values and power of the market.[16]

The market indicators that drive so much cultural production today would merely be supplemental if artists and critics themselves had not conceded so much cultural and intellectual ground to the logic of the end of history. In the following I take this manifestation of the prohibition against avant-gardism as symptomatic of contemporary cultural theory and practice, and further, as a probable explanation for the growing salience of the discourse on precarity.

The Elephant in the Room
One of the abiding characteristics of the avant-garde, and this is partly what helped create the sphere of modernist autonomy, was its distrust and dislike of market relations. Having been created by those same market relations,

the avant-garde wished to subvert them from within, both through strategies of formal reflexivity and medium specificity as well as through infusions of socially and politically radical content. However, believing in the efficacy of art to change life, the avant-garde sometimes ignored the ways that aesthetic practice serves to reproduce power relations and class antagonism.[17] Whereas modernist artists sought to challenge and transcend the given standards of cultural production, thereby reproducing the field, the historical avant-gardes did this with the goal of politicizing the sphere of cultural production itself. The avant-garde artist, in Peter Bürger's well-known formulation, sought to contest and transform the institution of modernist aesthetic autonomy, and in the process, to transform social relations.[18] For an avant-garde work to be successful, it had to function in terms of what Bourdieu calls "dual-action" devices, both reproducing and not reproducing the field of culture. One of the means with which this could be achieved was by radically separating art from taste and habituated sense perception. This strategy of resistance also contributed to avant-garde art's estrangement from audiences, eventually leading to a game of agonism and provocation, and, on the

16
Andrea Fraser, response to the questionnaire "How has art changed?" *Frieze* No. 94, October 2005 http://www.frieze. com/issue/article/ how_has_art_changed/, consulted September 28, 2007.

17
On this subject, see Pierre Bourdieu's landmark study of the field of cultural production, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste,* Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1984.

18
Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde,* University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1984.

part of liberal culture, anticipation and commodification. Contemporary art resorts to milder versions of this story, working with concepts of critical collaboration or complicity as alternatives to the stormy weather called forth by the concepts of alienation and repression. The sociological determinants of cultural appreciation and the distribution of cultural wealth, however, are misconstrued when contemporary socially engaged community artists presume to perform benevolent acts of redistribution.[19] Neither can art escape its conditions of determination, nor can it be reduced to them. Beholden to a liberal model of the needy public or a multicultural model of diversity, much contemporary art refuses to challenge audiences in ways that are associated with avantgarde resistance. In two of its most recent manifestations, Nicolas Bourriaud's "relational aesthetics" and Grant Kester's "dialogical aesthetics," political claims and social protest are to be renounced in favour of dialogical interaction (a word entirely denuded of its basis in the class analysis of the Russian formalists) where the artist is expected to renounce all claims to authority and authorship.[20] These critics not only seek to transform the way that artists interact with audiences, but decry the sort of activism that takes the form of militant struggle, whether in the form of agitational work or utopian projection. What is proposed instead is ambient conviviality, reformism, and interaction. Consequently, many forms of socially engaged community art lack an adequate theory of social and cultural politicization. While contemporary community art practices are obviously concerned with politicization, many artists hold that this should not come as the result of a confrontation with the public. Artists may seek to solve particular social problems, but the singularity of these problems is separated from their universal determinations. As a result, a kind of therapeutic pragmatism calls for artists to collaborate with institutions, avoiding the kinds of risk that would be required to challenge the ruling order of neoliberal capitalism. And yet, the overcoming of the distinction between art and life perseveres as the *leitmotif* of advanced practice. What is it then that contemporary community artists seek to overcome?

The following considers the symptomatic nature of the prohibition against avant-gardism and even the prohibition of the prohibition itself as a serious topic of discussion. The example I wish to give is Komar & Melamid's *Asian Elephant Art and Conservation Project* (1995-2000), which I take to be a serious satire of contemporary community art. The type of community art I have in mind is best represented by Mary Jane Jacob's well-known curatorial venture *Culture in Action*, the 1993 instalment of the annual *Sculpture Chicago* summer festival.[21] *Culture in Action* was dedicated almost entirely to community-based projects, for which the artists worked with communities and created pieces that emphasized dialogue, participation and interaction. Notwithstanding of the merit of many of the individual projects, what concerns me here is the manner in which the curatorial framing was decidedly anti-avantgarde. The rhetoric of *Culture in Action* was that art provides a redemptive, therapeutic healing of *social* divisions. In contrast, what Komar & Melamid are interested in is precisely the problem of the integration of living labor within a global capitalist mode of flexible accumulation.

Briefly stated, Komar & Melamid's *Asian Elephant Art and Conservation Project* (1995-2000) is a complex work that enlists the participation of Thai elephants and their trainers (mahouts).[22] After the ban on rainforest timber in 1989, the elephants and the timber workers became

unemployed, forced to engage in tricks for tourists, panhandling and illegal work. Malnourishment led to the decimation of the mostly domesticated elephant population. By training some elephants to paint "abstract expressionist" canvases and then selling their paintings, Komar & Melamid raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for their care and that of their trainers. Paintings were auctioned off at Christie's and bulk sales were organized with hotel chains, thus raising awareness of the elephants' circumstances.

Elephant Project provides a clear indication of what Slavoj Žižek has explained as the truth of community, the fact that the deepest identification that holds a community together is not an identification with the written laws that regulate normal, everyday routine, but an identification with the transgression or suspension of the Law, an identification with an obscene secret code.[23] For our purposes, we could say that the deepest identification that structures the field of contemporary art production is not the particularistic political transgression of the new art of community, relationality and dialogue, the official art of our times, but an identification with the prohibition of avantgarde radicality. Komar & Melamid's elephant project is an avant-garde work — not because it defies or parodies the politically immaterial mandates of relational aesthetics and the new community art, but because it exposes the obscene underside of so-called dialogical collaboration. How so?

Like the post-Fordist precariat, the elephants/artists are out of work. And what is the secret code, the unwritten law that gives artistic transgression its specific form if not the momentary *political* suspension of art for the sake of art's renewal? Is this renewal not also the admission of the pure symbolic meaningless of the aesthetic as a mea-

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For a brilliant analysis of community art's participation in the moral economy of capitalism, see Grant Kester's "Aesthetic Evangelists," *Artforum*, January 1995, pp. 5–11.

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See Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Les presses du réel, Dijon, 2002 and Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community + Communication in Modern Art*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2004.

[21]
See Mary Jane Jacob, Michael Brenson, and Eva M.Olson, *Culture in Action: A Public Art Program of Sculpture Chicago,* Bay Press, Seattle, 1995.

[22]
See Komar & Melamid, *When Elephants Paint: The Quest of Two Russian Artists to Save the Elephants of Thailand,* Perrenial, New York 2000.

[23]
Slavoj Žižek, "Why Are Laibach and *Neue Slowenische Kunst* Not Fascists?" in *The Universal Exception: Selected Writings,* Volume Two, cit., p. 64.

sure of human value, in particular in the face of abjection, poverty and unemployment? This same fact is what constitutes the truly obscene side of this unwritten law; obscene because ever since Kant necessity has been ruled out as a hindrance to aesthetic judgement, and ever since Marx, enjoyment itself was transmuted into necessity. This is why in contemporary liberal multiculturalist discourse the term avant-garde remains unspoken — not because its logic has been exhausted, but because avant-gardism continues to structure modes of enjoyment. And why not understand this in its full Lacanian sense as surplus enjoyment, the *plus de jour* that signals the moment of flight from the analyst's couch?

What *Elephant Project* showcases is a realist art that is fully reflective of and integrated with the ideological apparatus of community art as the official art of neoliberal capitalism where political rule is not exercised directly through police control but through the manipulation of popular opinion — represented here by paintings tailored to accommodate the taste for the generation of reality. *Elephant Project* unashamedly reveals how its very modes of procedure are drawn from the kinds of pre-existing practices that are commercially successful, in this case, from the success of "Ruby," the painting elephant of the Phoenix Zoo. For artworld audiences, however, the key referent is not elephant paintings but community art. On a basic level, and in an avant-garde sense, the artists attempt to make the 'form' (the conceptual contours of the work) the specific characteristic of the work within the more general and overarching category of 'content' (the organization of means of subsistence for unemployed elephants in the context of both ecologically sensitive de-industrialization and the permutations of contemporary art within the culture industries). This critical use of realism allows the obscene prohibition against avant-gardism to come to our consideration. It does so by associating relationality, dialogue and collaboration with relations of class power. This point is brought home by the way that *Elephant Project* involves not only the representation of disenfranchised communities, not only the avid participation of artworld insiders, but also the determining power of collectors, including Thai royalty.

As with their previous poll-based projects, Komar & Melamid manipulate the range of responses that one can anticipate in reaction to the work. These sociologically 'typical'responses are treated like readymade components of the work, engineered in advance as means to engage viewers in an extended reflection. The photograph of the two artists teaching a baby elephant and its trainer about the work of Marcel Duchamp provides a glimpse of this intentional, authorial approach. The elephants are not so much producing abstract expressionist canvases but are part of an extended materialist strategy to re-conceptualize community art. The ideational and psychological aspect is crucial here. Among the readymade structures of feeling that Komar & Melamid activate are the responses that viewers may have about the project: "Do Komar & Melamid think that people will actually be moved by the paintings, or the project as a whole?"; "Does the public appreciate all of the ironic references to Marcel Duchamp, Jackson Pollock, etc.?"; "Aren't they merely creating another investment opportunity for the art market?"; "Aren't they merely reproducing the structures of neocolonialism?" What happens, then, when people take their antics seriously?

The critical aspect of this project is that Komar & Melamid not only take their work seriously as community public art, they simultaneously engage in an over-identification with the ideological structure of community art that is capable of exposing the links between cultural activism and the class function of cultural production within the new neoliberal "creative" economy. The project does so in part because it makes use of the lessons about ideology developed by the two artists in response to Socialist Realism. The name I give this kind of practice, following Žižek's interpretation of Lacan, is a *sinthomeopathic* practice in which subjects hold on to their deepest libidinal attachments. By both learning from the public what it wants and making this the subject of the work (the symptomatic aspect of public opinion), *Elephant Project* reveals the meta-rules of community art as part of the creative industries. This aspect of over-identification is what Žižek refers to as the "manipulation of transference," a situation that begins with the "subject supposed to know." The artists put in place the function of "the subject supposed to know" through a strategy of interpassivity; by listening to what the public wants, they are relieved of the superego injunction to be amused by the spectacle of elephants painting. Their role resembles what television provides in the form of canned laughter. However, in this case, the canned laughter is foregrounded in order to provide a Brechtian defamiliarization. This allows for a shift from belief to knowledge. For Lacan, the function of the symbolic order, an impersonal set of social regulations, refers to belief rather than knowledge. The assymetry between the subject supposed to know and the subject supposed to believe reveals the reliance of belief on a big Other (a sort of impersonal superego) that relieves us of responsibility for what we desire. In terms of psychoanalytic

transference, the unconscious desire of the patient can
be viewed inasmuch as the analyst is considered the
subject supposed to know (to know the unconscious desire
of the patient). As viewers of the work, then, we are
caught in a transferential confusion of belief and know-
ledge. With whom are we expected to identify: with the
members of the public who are confounded by the full
panoply of Komar & Melamid's avant-garde exposé, or with
those of us whose libidinal investments are most fully
constituted by fantasmatic identification with contempo-
rary art? With what are we expected to identify: with
art's exceptional power to transcend and heal social divi-
sions within actually existing global capitalism, or with
the utopian possibility of a critical autonomy that can
reconstruct and alter the field of cultural production?

Before we seek answers to these questions, however, psycho-
analytic ethics requires that we attend to the trans-
ferential reversal that defines the psychoanalytic cure.
Because the function of the subject supposed to know is
here occupied by elephants and not "kids on the street,"
it is easier for us to see how our ideological obsession
with the desire of the Other locates the truth in some-
thing or someone that exists *as such* and that is to be
brought into political representation by the poetic sub-
tleties of the public artist, or, the not so subtle phi-
lanthropy of state and corporate granting agencies, and a
few collectors. If what takes place at the end of psycho-
analytic transference is the shift from desire to drive,
then what an effective para-public art practice like
Komar & Melamid's can do is shift the coordinates of both
art producers and the public towards the understanding
that desire (defined by Lacan as the unconscious rules
that regulate social interaction) has no support in the
symbolic law that separates art from politics, pleasure
from necessity. In other words, psychoanalytic ethics
requires that we subjectivize the field of social rela-
tions, that we think for ourselves rather than follow the
dictates of the obscene unwritten law. This law, as I
have argued, is the injunction against avant-gardism that
informs the current manifestations of much socially en-
gaged community art. The injunction itself, as a symptom
of our cultural condition, needs to be brought into re-
lation with the official art of our times. *Elephant Pro-
ject* does this by identifying with community art as one of
the most advanced forms of cultural and biopolitical pro-
duction within neoliberal societies.

Komar & Melamid's strategy of learning from what the people
want should inform and not hamstring our relation to a
critical community art. It underscores the role of colla-
boration as a symptom of ideological and psychological
relations. The problem for the avant-garde of public art
in the age of neoliberal globalization, then, is not that
of collaboration *versus* antagonism, of contingency *versus*
universality, but the enabling of a radical subjectivi-
zation of politics. The incorporation of various community
contexts into the frame of art and thus within the flex-
ible production strategies of the creative industries is
not, strictly speaking, a form of mass deception, but also
a self-deception. We are and we are not that community.

'EVERYONE IS CREATIVE': ARTISTS AS NEW ECONOMY PIONEERS?

Angela McRobbie

"What do you do?"
"I'm a writer."
"Oh really — which restaurant?"
(1980s New York joke)

One of the central features of the modern urban economy is the explosive growth in the numbers of people making a living through culture and the arts. The old supports of employment — manufacturing and public services (teaching, health, civil service) — are in numerical decline or losing their former status, and along with them have disappeared the reality and expectation of lifetime employment with a single organisation. And as these sectors have been hollowed out, new sources and patterns of employment have arisen — whose common point of reference is often the spreading category of "culture".

Amidst radically redeveloped urban space, on the back of recurrent metropolitan consumer booms, and in the interstices between corporate office blocks and luxury apartments, a generation of young, mobile, and international people are making their living in existentially different ways from their parents. They work (and play) around the clock in a myriad of galleries, fashion outlets, clubs, studios, bookshops, themed restaurants, theatres, media, publishers, internet start-ups and cafes. They are obliged, and aspire, to be multi-skilled. And they resist easy categorisation — while in one dimension they may be described as artists, designers, musicians, actors, writers or photographers, in another they are gallery or shop assistants, temps, proofreaders, and — yes — waiters. By circumstance, they are simultaneously operating in "creative" and "business" modes — both motivated by the desire to make a mark creatively, yet ever alert to the career possibilities of network, publicity and sponsorship.

The "post-industrial" economy is increasingly a "cultural" economy — with the very understanding of culture itself being appropriated by the enlarged provision of (and longing for) meaningful "experience". In his major contribution to the City & Country debate on planning, Charles Landry approaches this epochal shift from the perspective of urban development and the "creative city"; here, I am concerned to register its impact on the lives and working conditions of young metropolitan men and women.

How is this transformation to be understood? Is it an enlargement or diminishment of freedom, both for society as a whole and for individuals? Are these individuals best seen as the free-floating, shiny urban sophisticates depicted in TV adverts (and, increasingly, dramas) and in lifestyle magazines? Or are they being ricocheted between placement and short-term contract, forced to become multi-taskers, with no time that they are not working?

A new model of culture
In the UK, New Labour thinks it has the answers. One way to clarify the issue is to examine the arguments presented by this self-consciously "modern" government, which since 1997 has attempted to champion the new ways of working as embodying the rise of a progressive and even liberating cultural economy of autonomous individuals — the perfect social correlative of post-socialist "third way" politics.

The government's green paper of April 2001 (entitled *Culture and Creativity: The Next Ten Years*) is a concise outline of its approach to the cultural economy. It sees the arts and culture, and the new patterns of freelance work and self-employment associated with being an artist, becoming a model for how economic growth is to be pursued. Deeply influenced by the writer Charles Leadbeater — a quintessential New Labour intellectual who moved from the *Financial Times* to Demos and authorship of a book with the title *Living on Thin Air* — the paper opens with his stirring words, "Everyone is creative": It goes on to argue for the further expansion of education and training in the arts and cultural

fields, for children and young people from all social backgrounds. There is special emphasis on the poor and socially excluded, those who in the past felt that the arts were "not for them".

What is distinctively new in this ostensibly democratic opening up of relationships between the worlds of art, culture, and work? In the past, the arts and culture were in a sense overlooked by government and of relatively little interest to big business. They were consequently under-funded but still possessed degrees of autonomy. In the post-war years these realms came to be increasingly associated with social and political critique. But nowadays culture is of the utmost concern to commercial organisations, and art seemingly no longer "questions the social".

Meanwhile, in the universities, the study of arts, culture and humanities flourishes, but the findings of research are of little interest to government. It is as though the two sides are speaking a different language. Few academics will bite the bullet and comfortably inhabit the unambivalent commercialisation of culture as government practice. This leaves policy debate to be monopolised by "young gun" arts administrators desperate for funding from any source, and by "gurus" like Leadbeater.

While there might well be a good deal of energy and enthusiasm from the new entrepreneurial cultural managers, the social effects of these changes and the emerging inequities are swept aside. Instead the creative sector is seen as vibrant and exciting. From Shoreditch and Hoxton to Notting Hill, artists are now, it seems, able to reinvent themselves for the increasingly global market. They can be successful, sell their work; they no longer have any reason to be angry social critics. This is the New Labour classless dream, a high-energy band of young people driving the cultural economy ahead, but in a totally privatised and non-subsidy-oriented direction. The dream merges with the new meritocracy of the Blair government, which with the power of the visual media is further burying the social democratic vocabularies of workplace protection, job security, and sickness pay.

About those outside the loop, and far away from London and the other metropolitan centres, no questions are asked. Over the hill in age terms? Too unconfident to manage the presentation of self? Then, as Anthony Giddens argues, there are only privatised and therapeutic solutions.

Tensions within "individualisation"

One way to understand the government's strategy for education and promotion of arts and culture — evident in several other recent documents of the Department of Culture, Media, and Sport — is as a process of "cultural individualisation" which brings together three elements: the individual, creativity (now extended to mean "having ideas") and freedom. The aim is to cultivate self-sufficient individuals whose efforts will not be hindered by the administrations of the state.

The government sees the cultural industries themselves, from film and TV to design and publishing, as thoroughly part of the global economy. And its "ideal local labour market" is one that frees individuals from dependency on state subsidies, creates a thriving entrepreneurial culture and a new work ethic of self-responsibility.

"Self-employment" is the mantra. Set up your own business, be free to do your own thing! Live and work like an artist! You can make it if you really want! And this "selling" of creative work (or a creative attitude to work) is particularly appealing to youth because the implied emphasis on uncovering talent feeds off young people's proximity to the fields where the space for creativity seems greatest: popular music, film, art, writing, acting, fashion, graphic design.

This sector, the argument runs, provides Britain with the possibility of re-invigorating a distinctive national economy of pop music, fashion and the arts by drawing on both indigenous and migrant traditions of popular culture which have gained currency since the early 1960s. In a talent-led economy, the individual alone is to blame if the next script, film, book or show is not up to scratch. Or as Anthony Giddens puts it (*Modernity and Self Identity*, 1991), individuals must now "be" their own structures.

There are three obvious tensions in the way that this conception of cultural individualisation impacts at the level of individual life-experience. First, it relies on impossible degrees of enthusiasm and willingness to self-exploit, and requires an unhealthy degree of belief in the self. What Bauman calls the "must try harder and harder" ethos results in a punitive regime.

Second, the logic of a Treasury-driven government policy is to withdraw the social supports of creative life in a way that reinforces its intrinsic insecurity. There is a new template of a "normal" urban existence: one where architects double up as online editors, novelists work as proofreaders, arts administrators are employed as freelancers on short-term government projects. By this means, new patterns of creative work are established. Far from being "independent" they are frequently sub-contracted, almost wholly dependent on the bigger companies for whom they provide creative services. By encouraging this kind of regime, government establishes ideal conditions for companies requiring a cultural workforce without having to actually employ them.

Third, cultural individualisation is inseparable from a business ethos which, as it pervades the cultural world, imposes its own brand of "fast capitalism". While creativity has traditionally been nurtured in interiorised, slow and quiet mental and physical spaces, in the new cultural economy it is encouraged to be increasingly populist, noisy, easy, thin: in the words of Scott Lash, "flattened out". Where there is little or no time for thinking, the art-work itself can hardly be thoughtful.

All this has profound implications not just for the quality of artistic work, but for the career possibilities of a generation of young people, and ultimately for the economic viability of the government's model even in its own terms. If, as Zygmunt Bauman suggests, capitalism now "travels light", then much of what is produced will be "art lite" (see *In the Culture Society*, 1999).

Artists increasingly create works that are merely extensions of what is all around them in popular culture, in the tabloids and talk shows. In cultural worlds, there is an endless flow of what Ulrich Beck describes as "biographical solutions to systemic contradictions" (*The Risk Society*, 1997). Artists, too, join in the rush to confess. The constant temptation is to drain artistic work of complexity, confining it instead to a cliched and commercially conformist vocabulary of personal experience, pop song lyrics and (often female) pain.

Taking "individualisation" seriously

Cultural individualisation throws up real and pressing problems that require us to "think beyond" the present settlement rather than to take comfort in backward-looking and false solutions. It is too easy (and itself something of a fashion) to disdain the new intimacy between culture and commerce. The tendency is often for (predominantly) old left critics to bemoan a litany of losses and fail to look at what is actually happening. The result is an analytical collapse of two distinct trends — individualisation and neo-liberal values.

The key point here is that changes in the workplace — the end of fixed location, duration of employment and visible hierarchies of power and responsibility — do not necessarily have a unitary political meaning. On the contrary, it can be argued that individualisation, as manifest in the working practices of the cultural sector, must be separated from neo-liberalisation. It is only by investigating individualisation-as-lived that we can recognise the possible spaces it opens up for challenging the government-led neo-liberal model of arts and culture.

The fast-moving and precarious careers in the modern cultural economy exhibit the dynamic transition to what Giddens has called "reflexive modernisation". There are dimensions of release and empowerment as well as insecurity and pressure. But the contradictions of being expected to self-monitor and self-evaluate as a matter of course, possibly on a daily basis, yet with no immediate access to a social/sociological vocabulary for understanding failures and shortcomings, are palpable. In addition, in a connected and networked global economy, the government's idea of plugging into individual creativity as though it alone will suffice is short-sighted, if also strategic. What the new creatives need are clubs that provide old-fashioned social services.

The question, then, is not how to reverse cultural individualisation but rather to think both with and beyond it. This will require defusing the timebomb of a fully freelance economy, by broadening the social capital underpinning creative work, and by galvanising the capacities among young people for self-organisation.

A utopian dynamic?

It is not difficult to articulate a "domination model" of this ferociously competitive economy — a society of lonely, mobile, over-worked individuals for whom socialising and leisure are only more opportunities to do a deal. But although the "talent-led" economy has indeed facilitated the emergence of new inequities, there is an alternative imagining.

It works by recognising the utopian dynamic which lies buried within these novel ways of working — that is, the potential for turning the desire to make a living in an enjoy-able and rewarding way, into a desire for creating a better society. This cannot be the project of a mass collective, nor of groupings of atomised individuals; but it will depend on the energies of "social individuals" which the inequities and failings of the cultural economy are themselves creating.

Such action is difficult to specify at present. But there are energies from below already visible in the form of "sub politics" (Beck) or "life politics" (Giddens), which may be better designated as a pressure group politics that relies on a sophisticated know-ing — reflexive use — of media to push towards greater accountability and equity in working and life conditions.

One challenge for such groups is over language: to invent a new vocabulary for engaging with cultural individualisation that sees possibilities beyond neo-liberalism winning every battle. Another is to nurture alliances of "new labour" (what an irony!) on a fluid, international basis — connecting the fashion designer "self-exploiter" sweating at home over her sewing machine and the Gap seamstress in south-east Asia. A third is to build information and resource networks that are free of political and corporate manipulation.

Ulrich Beck argues that reflexive modernisation gives rise to a critique of both self and society. But the subjects of late modernity (or late capitalism) must have access to information and analysis in order to be reflexive. Here is one area where the ac-cumulated campaigns of the post-1960s generations seriously inform the intellectual land-scape. From academia (Richard Sennett) through radical analysis (Naomi Klein, George Monbiot, Michael Massing) and the creative work of subversive counter-currents, access to alternative modes of thinking and feeling is within the capacity of even the most time-poor hyper-individualists. There is no shortage of older social scientists and feminists willing to partake in a dialogue with young people who want to improve the world of new cultural work.

The more or less complete neo-liberalisation of the cultural economy under New Labour, with its power relationships and trends of development, seems likely to sustain the new cultural model for some time to come. And yet the myriad freelancers, part-timers, short-termers, and contract workers who sustain the model — who have nothing to lose but their talents — know that their way of life and work is, over the long term, utterly unsustainable. It is up to them to recombine the individual, creativity, and freedom with a fourth value — equity — in order to recover for the arts and culture the indepen-dence which alone can make it a vital, valuable and critical element of a democratic society.

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BIOGRAPHIES

Carrotworkers' Collective is a London-based group of current or ex interns, cultural workers and educators primarily from the creative and cultural sectors who regularly meet to think together around the conditions of free labour in contemporary societies. They undertake participatory action research around voluntary work, internships, job placements and compulsory free work in order to understand the impact they have on material conditions of existence, life expectations, subjectivity and the implications of this for education, life long training, exploitation, and class interest. Recently, the group has enlarged and broadened its focus to conditions of precarious work and life. Carrotworkers' Collective is affiliated now with the Precarious Workers Brigade http://precariousworkersbrigade.tumblr.com/

Anthony Davies is a London based writer, organiser and educationalist. He has published articles on art, activism and economics for a range of journals including Mute, Texte zur Kunste, Variant and Art Monthly and taken part in various artist-run and self-organised initiatives from Copenhagen Free University to the more recent 10th Floor Archive and MayDay Rooms. In addition he has contributed to a number of radical and experimental educational programmes at Central Saint Martins (University of the Arts, London) and the School of Walls and Space (Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts), amongst others.

Zoran Erić is an art historian, curator, and lecturer. He holds a Ph.D. from the Bauhaus University in Weimar. He is working as curator of the Centre for Visual Culture at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade. His research fields include the meeting points of urban geography, spatio-cultural discourse, and theory of radical democracy.

Dave Beech, Andy Hewitt and Mel Jordan work collectively as the **Freee art collective**. Freee is concerned with the publishing and dissemination of ideas and the formation of opinion, or what Jurgen Habermas describes as the 'public sphere'. Freee's recent projects (2008-2011) include: Petition to ban all Advertizing! (No more renting out of the public sphere), for 'We are Grammar', Pratt Manhattan Gallery, New York, 2011; Every Shop Window is a Soap Box, for 'Touched' Liverpool Biennial 2010; You Can't Buy a New World for 'When Guests Become Hosts', Culturgest, Porto, Portugal, 2010; Fuck Globalization II for 'Dorm', The Model, Sligo, Ireland 2010; Fuck Globalization, a residency at Dartington College of Arts, UK, 2010. Revolution Road: Rename the Streets commissioned by Wysing Arts, UK. For more from Freee on art and economics read their latest manifesto 'Economists are Wrong' (www.freee.org.uk)

Pascal Gielen lives in Antwerp (Belgium), but is professionally based in the Netherlands at the Groningen University as associate Professor sociology of art. He is also director of the research center Arts in Society at the Groningen University and of the research group and book series 'Arts in Society' (Fontys College for the Arts, Tilburg). Gielen has written serveral books on contemporary art, cultural heritage and cultural politics. In 2009 Gielen edited together with Paul De Bruyne the book 'Being an artist in Post-Fordist Times' (NAi) and he published his new monograph 'The Murmuring of the Artistic Multitude. Global Art, Memory and Post-Fordism' (Valiz). In 2011 De Bruyne en Gielen edited the book 'Community Art. The Politics of Trespassing' (Valiz).

Rosalind Gill is Professor of Social and Cultural Analysis at Kings College London. She is author of numerous publications including Gender and the Media (Polity, 2006), Secrecy and Silence in the Research Process (edited with Roisin Ryan Flood, Taylor & Francis, 2009) and New Femininities (with Christina Scharff, Palgrave 2011). She is currently writing a book about creative labour, entitled "Creatives": Working in the Cultural Industries.

Adrienne Goehler is a former Senator for Science, Research and Culture in Berlin and one of Europe's foremost cultural debaters. She studied German and Romance literature and languages in Freiburg and Psychology in Hamburg. During 1986-1989, Adrienne served as a deputy in the Hamburg Parliament as part of the women's fraction of the GAL (Grüne Alternative Liste). And after that, for 12 years, she headed The Academy of Fine Arts (Hochschule für bildende Künste) in Hamburg. In the years 2002-2006, she was the curator for the Hauptstadt Kulturfonds (Cultural Capital Fonds) of Berlin. She is the author of the book "Verflüssigungen: Wege und Umwege vom Sozialstaat zur Kulturgesellschaft, published by Campus Verlag and of "1000 € für jeden, Freiheit Gleichheit Grundeinkommen". In her books Adrienne Goehler shows that the experts of change and the specialists for transitions and ambivalences work in the area of art and science and how the basic income grant could radically change society. Since 2006 she has been working as a freelance curator and a publicist in Berlin. With her traveling exhibition "Examples to follow Expeditions in Aesthetics and Sustainability" she shows how important artistic concepts are to make the world a better place".

Marc James Léger is an artist, writer and educator living in Montreal. He has published essays in cultural theory in various journals and magazines, including *Afterimage, Art Journal, Creative Industries Journal, Etc, Fuse, Inter* and *Third Text*. He is editor of *Culture and Contestation in the New Century* (Intellect, 2011) and and author of *Brave New Avant Garde: Essays on Contemporary Art and Politics* (Zero Books, 2012).

Angela McRobbie is a Professor of Communications at Goldsmiths College, University of London. She has written extensively on young women and popular culture and about making a living in the new cultural economy. McRobbie is the author of *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* (2009), *The Uses of Cultural Studies: A Textbook* (2005), *In the Culture Society: Art, Fashion and Popular Music* (1999), *British Fashion Design Rag Trade or Image Industry?* (1998) as well as of numerous articles and essays. Her upcoming book *Be Creative: Precarious Labour in Art and Cultural Worlds*, London, Berlin, Glasgow, undertakes a theorisation of precarious labour drawing on the work of Michel Foucault. It examines the world of freelance, casualised creative work in three cities, it pays particular attention to micro-enterprises of creative labour including fashion design, art-working, multi-media, curating, arts administration, and so on.

Andy Pratt is Reader in Urban Cultural Economy at the London School of Economics. He has written extensively about the concepts, theories and practices of the cultural industries and cultural economy. His empirical work has been carried out in North America, several European countries, West Africa, Japan and Australia. He has published across several disciplinary areas in the academic field. He has also made direct interventions to policy debates at local, national and international levels in both governmental and non-governmental spheres.

`Andrew Ross` is Professor of Social and Cultural Analysis at NYU. A contributor to *the Nation*, *the Village Voice*, and *Artforum*, he is the author of several books, including, most recently, *Bird on Fire: Lessons from the World's Least Sustainable City*. Other titles include *Nice Work if You Can Get It: Life and Labor in Precarious Times*, *Fast Boat to China — Lessons from Shanghai*, *Low Pay, High Profile: The Global Push for Fair Labor*, *No-Collar: The Humane Workplace and its Hidden Costs*, and *The Celebration Chronicles: Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Property Value in Disney's New Town*. He has also edited several books, including *No Sweat: Fashion, Free Trade, and the Rights of Garment Workers, Anti-Americanism*, and *The University Against Itself: The NYU Strike and the Future of the Academic Workplace*.

`Stevan Vuković` is a theorist and curator, based in Belgrade, Serbia. His texts on cultural production are written in a Lacanian and Post-Marxist manner. He is currently employed as Filmforum editor in the Student Cultural Center in Belgrade.

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