ephemera:
theory & politics in organization

FREE WORK

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Free work

Armin Beverungen, Birke Otto, Sverre Spoelstra and Kate Kenny

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Free work

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Freedom and work relate to each other in peculiar ways. Sometimes, they are considered opposites, since it may be only once we get rid of work or have the luxury of a life of leisure that we can be truly free. This was Marx's view, for whom – at least most of the time – a clear incompatibility existed between the realm of freedom and the realm of labour. If labour is determined by sheer necessity in the sphere of production, which we can only hope to organise collectively, then true freedom, defined as 'the development of human powers as an end in itself', necessarily stands against it (Marx, 1991: 959). It is this view that drives hopes for a freedom *from* work, in a leisure or post-work society (Aronowitz et al., 1998; Weeks, 2011).

In other places and at other times, work is deemed a gateway to freedom, and freedom is only to be gained *through* work. In Max Weber's (2002) Protestant work ethic, it is precisely work that saves us; through hard and honest work we can prove that we are worthy of redemption in the afterlife. The promise of redemption through work is perhaps even more prevalent today, albeit in a secular sense. Redemption is no longer understood as something for the afterlife, it offers itself within work. One of the forms in which this promise offers itself is through the notion of play; the knowledge or creative worker is thought capable of finding freedom from earthly demands in a realm of pure expressivity where work cannot be distinguished from play (Butler et al., 2011).

'For those who are truly liberated, i.e. those who are free in spirit, work actually becomes play' (Dahl, 1972: 114), is an early expression of the promise of redemption in work/play – and one which reverberates widely in the new spirit of capitalism (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005). Work disappears magically as it morphs into playful self-expression. Play becomes the model for work, and – paradoxically – the laws of playful self-expression (rather than the laws of

business) provide for the supreme form of business (maximum profit) and the ultimate form of living (maximum freedom).

What such corporate and entrepreneurial celebrations of playfulness demonstrate is the deep entanglement of contemporary forms of knowledge work with ideals of freedom. For example, authenticity, the holy grail of existentialist philosophy, and one of the firmest markers of freedom, is today promoted as a palliative for the ills of work (Murtola and Fleming, 2011). If one takes this promise of instant freedom through work at face value, one may conclude that Marx can finally rest peacefully in his grave; true freedom has become available to us through contemporary forms of work.

Putting freedom to work

But there are, of course, good reasons not to take this promise at face value. While employees do expect to 'be themselves' at work, this desire is made productive and 'put to work' in the interest of the organization. Some companies deliberately use the leisure activities or lifestyle choices of their employees for branding (Taylor and Land, 2010), while social media allow companies to benefit from the engagement, creativity and reputation of their users and consumers (Arvidsson, 2007; Böhm and Land, 2009). The work of creative urbanites is deployed to brand the 'creative city' and attract new investments (e.g. Harvey, 2012), and national governments contribute to this development, for example by promoting voluntary work to compensate for massive cuts in public services.

From a managerial standpoint, here freedom in and through work is the maximization of human resources, from the subjugation of the body to the subjection of the soul. Through self-work the worker transforms him or herself into an unlimited resource, no longer recognizing his or her own limits (Costea et al., 2007). In the way that authenticity, sociality and creativity are put to work, work has also become much more intimate, especially for those working with digital technologies wherein workers take their social networks to work and their laptops to bed (Gregg, 2011). The costs of this unlimited human resourcefulness and this intimacy of work are often stress, burnout and disillusionment.

For some, workers are only able to cope with these consequences via a 'masochistic reflexive turn', which allows us to enjoy the symptoms that work inflicts upon us (Cederström and Grassman, 2008). For others, a bleak picture emerges wherein our 'dead' bodies continue to work while our estranged souls have already left the factories of unhappiness (Berardi, 2009; Cederström and Fleming, 2012). In contrast, the knowledge workers that Susanne Ekman

researched were reluctant to accept disappointment, as she puts it in the roundtable discussion of this issue. They still believed in the fantasies of freedom at work and continued their self-work. The consultants researched by Jana Costas, on the other hand, were also concerned with resisting the regime of work and finding ways of refusing it by trying to draw clear boundaries or to remain invisible to managers (see the roundtable).

The dangers of neo-normative control, and the burnouts that it causes, perhaps require less pity or worry than other aspects of the contemporary regime of work. Freedom and work have, after all, been short-circuited in a freedom *to* work, which today manifests itself in workfare regimes and demands for employability. With austerity another opportunity for states to cut social securities, employability is even more forcefully presented as a cure for unemployment and precarity. Today employability is a prescription for dealing with labour market realities where subjective desires meet capitalist desires in its quest for work (Cremin, 2010). Much like Marx's labourers that are free as birds, today we are even more 'compelled to sell [our]selves voluntarily', while 'the silent compulsion of economic relations' sets the rules of the game (Marx, 1990: 899).

Examples here are manifold. One could discuss, for example, the kinds of labour management practices going on in India's IT industry, which Xiang (2007) describes as 'global "body shopping"', where increasingly disembedded markets allow for a severe flexibilisation of labour and the management of labour flows across continents. Or one could explore the mappings of labour in the creative industries in Asia that the *Transit labour: Circuits, regions, borders*[1] project completed, where 'market, border and zoning technologies' are used to organise and manage the mobilities of precarious labour. In both cases the freedom to work is mediated by production regimes which produce economic relations enforcing the further precarisation of work.

Antonie Schmiz, in her contribution to this issue, provides an example of migrant labour: Vietnamese migrants in Berlin working as self-employed shopkeepers. These have to an extent been forced into self-employment because other options of employment remain barred. Yet migrant workers do appreciate the status, autonomy and flexibility gained through self-employment, which allow them to combine work and family duties in the same place. At the same time, this form of freedom is accompanied by a great deal of self-exploitation (especially long working hours) and sometimes little financial reward. The compulsion of economic relations and the promise of freedom at work here are hard to keep apart.

1 See http://www.transitlabour.asia/about/.

Antinomies of unpaid work

Schmiz's case of shopkeepers and their self-exploitation points to another aspect of the contemporary work regime: unpaid labour. While an entrepreneur perhaps accepts overtime as a self-inflicted condition, in employment overtime is one example of the ways in which labour today occurs out of hours, out of the office, or even in one's sleep (Lucas, 2010). The term 'free labour' gained prominence through Terranova's study of 'netslaves' whose labour she characterised as being unpaid and 'willingly conceded' (2000: 48). Free labour is certainly not a new phenomenon, as the majority of human labour in history has remained unpaid (Ross, 2012), but it has become even more widespread in the digital social factory, and through arrangements such as internships.

In her contribution to this issue, Joanna Figiel, through a personal ethnographic account, explores the exploitative aspects of the unpaid work of internships in the creative sector. Where internships at galleries or other cultural institutions have become a necessary step for a career in the arts, Figiel highlights the vacuity of many of the promises of value-added for the CV that internships make. Interns often rely on an extended support network of parents who provide subsistence, or friends who offer accommodation, so that free labour here means that organizations can feast on unpaid labour and the social wealth it draws on. In her case, Figiel also observes that interns are hardly used effectively, but perform a kind of affective labour that dissipates the 'negative affectivity' produced by organizations. Free labour here patches up contemporary organizations.

Yet unpaid work can also be performed explicitly as a protest or counterpoint to paid work. Abigail Schoneboom, in her note on 'working through the allotment', explores unpaid work which nevertheless cannot be considered separate from paid work. Allotment users see their work in the garden in opposition to an 'intensified labour process'. Demonstrating the fluidity of boundaries between work and leisure, paid and unpaid work, the allotment represents a relaxing alternative to demanding jobs and care-taking responsibilities while at the same time posing new challenges to managing full and stressful urban worklifes. The promises of work articulated in the work ethic – freedom, enjoyment, self-expression – are here enrolled to contest the work regime (Weeks, 2011: 75). The space of the allotment here must be thought in relation to work's dominance as society's organizing principle, but one which proposes more sustainable kinds of social interaction.

This vision of a society beyond the wage labour/consumption binary is also what drives the authors of our last contribution to work for free as Committee members of the Free University Liverpool (FUL). The contribution is to be read

as an art performance as well as a protest against working conditions in higher education in the UK. The FUL is part of a growing movement of alternative higher education practices in the UK and part of the Free University Network (FUN) resisting the 'marketisation, instrumentalisation and dehumanisation' of higher education. As all people involved in the project are working 'for free', the FUL committee reflects on their own free labour in their protest to achieve free education in the form of an artistic dialogue between three voices.

The work of art

Figiel's contribution leaves a bleak image of the realities of (unpaid) work in the arts, and an image of art and artistic circuits that offers little hope for a critical or free space outside of the contemporary regime of work. Curiously, Figiel was not the only contributor to the conference (held in spring 2011) concerned with the conditions of production of art. That might be because the conference was held at the *Senatsreservespeicher*[2] in Berlin-Kreuzberg, a former storehouse for emergency rations of West-Berlin but today a lively cultural centre for Berlin's urban art and music scene – enabled by the free and voluntary work of its many users. The murals opposite the entrance by the graffiti artist Blu on the cover of this issue, showing a beheaded white collar worker with gold chains connecting his golden watches, already point to art's reflections on work and the limits of work's promise of freedom.

Considering the way creativity, authenticity and self-expression have become hallmarks of contemporary work, it is perhaps no wonder that in turn art has been captured by the regime of work (Raunig et al., 2011). Yet that is not to say art will not turn to the conditions of its own work, or offer itself as a weapon to question the imposition of work. The work of Santiago Sierra, discussed by Andrés Montenegro in his contribution, is one example of art that openly takes the art industry as well as the wider conditions of work as its object. In a provocative act, Sierra hires cheap labour in the form of migrant workers that he pays to perform 'unproductive' work (e.g. to sit in a box) as part of his performance. Montenegro points out that this raises two issues: Sierra 'blatantly' profits from cheap labour and its exploitation, all the while delegating work and thereby reducing his role as artist to a mere administrative act. Here art tries to challenge working conditions precisely through its complicity, rather than its distancing, from the regime of work and the kind of working conditions it involves.

2 See http://www.artitu.de.

The theatre plays of René Pollesch, explored in Brigitte Biehl-Missal's contribution, also explicitly take the neoliberal conditioning of worker subjectivity as their object. In contrast to Sierra, both Pollesch and Biehl-Missal allow for artistic intervention outside the business context yielding critical ideas and reflections. Pollesch's theatre plays negotiate modern work life demands of self-actualization, devotion and creativity with effects like self-exploitation, financial frustration and emotional burnout. Exploring such critical artistic interventions, Biehl-Missal argues, may provide a lens to criticise contemporary concepts of work in academic scholarship. Art, despite its usurpation in work, is here offered as critical practice pointing to ways of contesting and changing work.

Turning from artistic interventions to 'material interventions' or the agency of objects, Lisa Conrad and Nancy Richter look at the spatial and material aspects of 'free work'. The article shows how desks as a material artefact can reduce or expand workers' autonomy. The authors disrupt the taken-for-granted notions of desks as omnipresent and universal work devices. Instead, they discuss different kinds of desks (sales counters, reception desks, work benches, writing desks, bargaining and negotiating tables, mobile desks, conference tables, etc.) in relation to various theories and approaches. They state that the table as a specific object in the world of work is far from passive; it intervenes in human interaction by structuring or promoting certain activities and restraining others.

To free oneself from freedom

The final contribution to this issue is a dialogue between Valentina Desideri, a dancer and performance artist, and Stefano Harney, a professor in strategy. In their dialogue they develop the concept of 'fate work', which they understand as an engagement with practices that go against the way capitalism seeks to organize us. Fate work, they emphasize, is not to be seen as strategy: it experiments with forms of living in the present, instead of trying to shape life after an image of a projected future. Strategy, they argue, takes up time and space 'in the name of the future', whereas fate work seeks to free ourselves from the strategies that absorb us and prevent us from acting in and upon the here and now.

What kind of freedom is reached by 'freeing oneself from' something? This must be a form of negative freedom: a place where one is not hindered by that something. But as Desideri and Harney are quick to point out, such a place must not itself become a projected future that we strive towards, which would bring us back to strategizing. Nor should it tempt us into defending a 'free' territory, which would amount to a defensive strategy. Could it make sense to say that one

should strive towards freeing oneself from (projected) freedom? Is this the challenge that one constantly faces, and never overcomes?

There is a passage in Pessoa's *The book of disquiet* where the protagonist questions his dream to be free of all of the necessities of (working) life, and we may read it as a warning against the dream to be freed (from work, in work, after work, etc.). It's a beautiful passage, worth quoting at length:

> Even I, who have just expressed my desire to have a hut or a cave where I could be free from the monotony of everything, that is to say of the monotony of being myself, would I really dare to go off to this hut or cave, knowing and understanding that, since the monotony exists in me alone, I would never be free of it? Suffocating where I am and because I am where I am, would I breathe any better there when it is my lungs that are diseased and not the air about me? Who is to say that I, longing out loud for the pure sun and the open fields, for the bright sea and the wide horizon, would not miss my bed, or my meals, or having to go down eight flights of stairs to the street, or dropping in at the tobacconist's on the corner, or saying goodbye to the barber standing idly by? (Pessoa, 2010: 10)

There is always this danger of longing for a hut or a cave, for a place of freedom outside of work – a place that is sheltered from working life. But like Pessoa's protagonist realizes, we could be fooling ourselves with this fantasy of freedom. Today, we may be fooling ourselves even more when we ask for freedom *within* our working life. As Costas suggests in the roundtable discussion in this issue, perhaps we should try to live without this fantasy of freedom, without the idea of redemption in work.

But can we free ourselves from the prospect of freedom? Perhaps this is as naïve as longing for a hut or cave. Perhaps there is nothing wrong with our lungs to begin with.

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Roundtable: Free work

Jana Costas, Susanne Ekman, Christian Maravelias and Sverre Spoelstra

Introduction

This panel discussion took place at the *ephemera* conference on Free Work, in Berlin, May 11, 2011.[1] Three speakers, who each have conducted extensive research on the relation between freedom and work, were invited to briefly present their work and to engage in a discussion about the relation between freedom and contemporary work. The discussion focuses in particular on the alleged freedom of knowledge workers. To what extent is their freedom an imagined freedom? Is their (un)freedom a new phenomenon? What do or can they do to resist new forms of control that present themselves as offering freedom? What is freedom to begin with?

Sverre Spoelstra: Before I introduce the speakers on the panel to you, I would like to start with two quotes that, I think, may help us to think about the relation between freedom and work. The first comes from Pessoa's fabulous novel *The Book of Disquiet*, which was written over a long time span in the early twentieth century. In one of the aphorisms of the book, the main character, an assistant bookkeeper, leaves his job two hours earlier than normal for some personal business in town. This doesn't take as long as expected, so he soon finds himself wandering through the streets of Lisbon, overwhelmed with a 'feeling like regret

1 For this transcription of the discussion, we have asked the participants to refine their answers to the questions and to add references where this may be useful for the reader.

for not knowing what to do with himself' (Pessoa, 2002: 166). To end his suffering, he decides to go back to the office:

> I returned to the office, which was still open, and my colleagues were naturally astonished, as I'd already bid farewell for the day. What? You're back? Yes, I'm back. There, alone with those familiar faces who don't exist for me spiritually, I was free from having to feel. It was in a certain sense home – the place, that is, where one doesn't feel. (Pessoa, 2002: 167).

Pessoa's bookkeeper finds a certain freedom in work, but it is a freedom from feelings. I find this passage interesting because it sounds both so familiar and so foreign to contemporary discourse on freedom in work. It sounds familiar because it speaks of a blurring of home and work, well known to any knowledge worker today. But it also sounds foreign: when we think about freedom at work, we tend to think of work/home as a place where we are free to feel, not as a place where we are *freed* from feeling.

This passage also made me think of Hochschild's (1983) classic study of flight attendants. In her book *The Managed Heart*, Hochschild argues that contrary to many traditional professions, flight attendants are forced to manage their feelings in their job. She writes:

> Cheerfulness in the line of duty becomes something different from ordinary good cheer. This applies much more to the flight attendant, who must try to be genuinely friendly to a line of strangers, than to the commissary worker, who can feel free to hate packing the three-hundredth jello cup onto a lunch tray. (Hochschild, 1983: 189)

The flight attendant, in contrast to Pessoa's bookkeeper, but also in contrast to the way we normally think about the knowledge worker, is neither freed from feeling nor free to feel. Feelings have a place in their work, but only as an object of self-management.

I wonder to what extent Pessoa's bookkeeper and Hochschild's flight attendant may resemble today's knowledge worker. Could Pessoa's bookkeeper, who is free from feeling, be seen as an image of the ideal knowledge worker? One can get easily get this impression when one reads a self-help book such as *Getting Things Done* (Allen, 2001), where the ideal worker is portrayed as being freed from thinking and feeling (and thereby stress) to make room for a painless flow of productivity. But perhaps today's knowledge worker is closer to Hochschild's flight attendant than we may suspect. Far from experiencing a blissful state of freedom and self-realization in their work, perhaps they are also obliged to tame the freedom that comes with the growing importance of affect in work? Perhaps

the knowledge worker is not so much set free from the management of the heart, but the heart manager par excellence?

Our three panellists may be able to shed light on these and related questions. Each of them has extensively studied knowledge workers in different empirical settings. Susanne Ekman, from Lund University, has studied organizations in the creative sector in Denmark, focusing especially on authenticity and autonomy in their work. Christian Maravelias, from Stockholm University, has studied knowledge workers in various Swedish organizations, looking at potentiality and health in particular. Jana Costas, from Freie Universität Berlin, has studied consultants in the United Kingdom, looking also at authenticity as well as at self-alienation. We have invited them to kick-start a discussion on freedom and work that we will hopefully be able to continue in the days to come. To get us started, I will ask each of the three panellists to briefly tell us something about their research on the theme of freedom and work.

Susanne Ekman: For my PhD I studied two creative knowledge work organizations in Denmark. (I think it's important to stress that it is in Denmark because, as someone recently pointed out to me, it is a country with one of the most extensive welfare systems in the world, and in addition it is renowned for its so-called 'flexicurity model'.) My studies were about authenticity and autonomy in this line of work, and I was specifically interested in how this plays out in micro-level interactions between managers and employees. So basically, I studied how people manage people who are supposed to be authentic and autonomous. I was also interested in the theme of freedom, which I studied in a completely different kind of setting in my master thesis, namely in post-communist Romania. What I found was that creative knowledge work was extremely dominated by fantasies of freedom. And if I should try to describe the nature of these fantasies, they concern a form of freedom that is best characterized as 'having your cake and eating it too' or, as Boltanski and Chiapello (2005; see also Ekman, 2013a) have called it, opportunism or never having to choose. Freedom is understood as having no limits: you never have to choose A at the cost of B. Being free means that you can find a way of getting both A and B, even if they are technically mutually exclusive.

I found this fantasy in many different forms, and both managers and employees subscribed to it. Employees wanted their managers to be coaching, caring and personal, not reducing the relationship to rules and asymmetry. But at the same time they wanted their managers to be authoritative, steering and boundary-drawing. Similarly, the managers wanted the creative, limit-breaking and flexible employee, but they also wanted predictable, reliable, traditional, rule-following and obedient employees. And they shifted back and forth depending on what

their purpose was in the specific moment. I encountered this strong fantasy about having your cake and eating too in many places. A classic example was an employee with a highly challenging position. He fantasized about being a famous radio host two weeks a month, a receptionist one week a month ('all I have to do is say "hello" and push the right button'), and then have time off the final week of the month (for self-actualization projects such as travelling, writing books, etc.). His fantasy about being a receptionist was spurred by the anxieties and insecurities of his demanding job as a radio host. But rather than finding a way to moderate his current job, to make it more realistic (yet maybe also less glamorous), he fantasized about a working life which offered the best of self-management and the best of predictability, without including any of their respective costs (see also Ekman, 2013b). Even when his manager suggested concrete measures to implement moderation, the employee declined. The moderate, middle ground was somehow too antithetical to his notion of freedom.

Christian Maravelias: I have also studied freedom at work empirically, especially in two fields. First in relation to knowledge intensive companies and the new forms of self-managed work that we tend to associate with such companies; second in relation to occupational health services industry and the so called 'worksite health promotion' programs that this industry increasingly offers companies and their employees.

Let me briefly elaborate on how I approached the issue of freedom at work in the first of these empirical fields, i.e. with regards to knowledge intensive companies. I studied consultancy firms and firms that have adopted principles of teamwork, project based work, etc., that is, principles that we have come to associate with terms such as post-bureaucracy and post-industrialism. Just like many others before me I found that such companies give their employees considerable autonomy in terms opportunities to choose how to work, when to work, with whom to work, etc., and that individuals freely choose to work very hard and long hours even though no one seems to force them to do so. Yet, I also found that the culture of such companies promote employees that were able to act professionally with a very personal touch, as it were. Successful employees were not only freely hard working, they were also – or at least they were able to make it seem as if they were – authentic and personally involved in their work. One of the catalysts of such authentic and personally engaged behaviour seemed to be the unclear and ambiguous roles that the employees were given. One of the companies formulated an explicit policy saying that new employees should not be given a clear professional role. They should be given a chance to stroll around in the organization for a while in order to get to know the people and to gradually develop their own organic role in one or perhaps two of the companies' work teams. Now, employees' attempts to cope with the level of autonomy and

ambiguity that such a policy implies seemed to revolve around trust. Or to be more precise, employees either explicitly or implicitly asked themselves who they can trust, and in that connection, how they should act and who should they be in order to be trusted by others? The general answer that employees found to these questions was that people tend to trust employees that reveal who they really are, i.e. individuals who do not hide, as it were, behind a formal role or façade, but who express their personal standpoints and act spontaneously. So what I found was that employees' freedom at work resulted in an intense focus on trust, or differently put, it resulted in a general feeling that trust was in shortage of supply. This lack of trust, in turn, resulted in employees who were driven, not by their managers, but by themselves and their colleagues to include their whole authentic selves in their work – or to develop a competence of making it seem as if they were very personally and authentically involved in their work.

I published a paper some years ago (Maravelias, 2009), where I elaborated on these empirical findings in relation to Foucault-inspired research focusing on disciplinary power and panopticism. As you all know a basic point that Foucault makes is that discipline is based on that individuals are aware of that they are always potentially observed and thus always potentially caught if they 'misbehave'. In such situations individuals will tend to internalize the discipline and thus become their own masters and slaves – they become subjects in Foucault's sense of the term. The findings from my empirical studies pointed in a different direction. What drove individuals towards disciplining themselves, or to be more precise, towards disciplining a particular identity that were perceived as trustworthy by colleagues and superiors, was not the fear of being 'caught misbehaving', but the fear of being taken no notice of, the fear of not being seen and thus of being left behind. Individuals in these knowledge intensive companies tried to make themselves visible all the time because otherwise they felt that they risked being left in a corner somewhere without friends, colleagues, projects and plans, i.e. with nothing to do and no one to do it with. They did not fear the spotlight, they did not seek to avoid the risk of being seen, they feared the dark, i.e. the risks associated with not being taken any notice of. I think this notion of post-panopticism can be of further use for instance in relation to social media, which as I see it very much revolve around how individuals freely place themselves in a spotlight which then governs them.

Jana Costas: My research has been concerned with knowledge work and particularly consultancy firms. I have been especially interested in the kind of knowledge work lifestyles that these companies promote. Both companies I investigated are amongst the biggest management consultancy firms world-wide. They see themselves and are regarded as the elite, and they recruit consultants from the elite universities in the UK, e.g. Oxford and Cambridge. Interestingly,

when you look at the website of any of these companies, they do not provide you with much information about the work they do. What they tell you much more about are the freedoms that you can enjoy working for them: you will read about the freedom to move around, namely how you can travel around the world, how you can work flexible hours and, more generally, how you can be free to express yourself at work, for instance in one of their sport initiatives, corporate responsibility and diversity projects and so forth. It is this kind of image of knowledge work that constitutes a certain ideal of work today. What interests me is to look at the ways in which this ideal is lived in everyday work life and, specifically, what happens when this ideal collapses, namely when knowledge workers enjoying this lifestyle start experiencing a sense of emptiness and self-alienation (see Costas and Fleming, 2009).

In order to investigate this ideal and related experiences of self-alienation, I have studied three kinds of freedoms around work that constitute its building blocks (in this sense, my focus differs from Susanne's as she looks at freedom *within* work). First, freedom in relation to the ways in which the corporate culture promotes discourses and practices of authenticity. The idea is that you can be yourself at work by engaging in all sorts of non-work activities within corporate life. This is exemplified in the corporate culture emphasis on fun, play and leisure, such as drinking and sport. Second, freedom in relation to discourses and practices of mobility (see also Costas, forthcoming). The idea is here that in being mobile knowledge workers – that is individuals of the so-called kinetic elite – are no longer spatially constrained. This ideal is typically constructed against the idea of a boring bureaucratic lifestyle where one is stuck to a certain place and cannot freely move around. Third, and closely related, freedom in knowledge work in terms of temporal flexibility, namely the idea that individuals can choose to work anytime – again this is constructed against the image of a boring nine-to-five job.

Now I asked myself where does this ideal collapse for those knowledge workers enjoying these freedoms around work. Of course, I should stress that it does not collapse for everyone; many consultants love this kind of lifestyle. But some realized, at least in the moments when I interviewed them, a certain emptiness and meaninglessness of this lifestyle: the authenticity schemes were then experienced as inauthentic (e.g. sitting with your boss and drinking and trying to be funny, can seem quite fake). These knowledge workers expressed uncertainty, instability and even a certain feeling of deracination given the constant need to move around. The temporal 'freedom' to work anytime turned into a life where people worked all the time. More generally, these freedoms around work mean that people's lives outside of work seem to vanish. As a result, knowledge workers express the sense of living an empty and meaningless life. Such an

experience, which makes it difficult for them to simply dis-identify from corporate life (as the latter defines more and more their lives) may be seen as a form of self-alienation.

Sverre Spoelstra: One of the things that seem to be central to the work of all three of you is the notion of authenticity. I wonder if you could say a bit more about this. For example, how do the people that you have been studying negotiate the demand for authenticity?

Susanne Ekman: Well, first of all, it is not only a demand from their work place; it is also a demand that they bring to work. At least in my case study, they are only willing to work to the extent that they can be 'authentic'. In the mind of the creative knowledge worker, meaningful work should never be boring, banal or tedious. They consider access to stimulating assignments as their prerogative. It is their *right* to be authentic, so to speak. And obviously, then it suddenly backfires when they are faced with the invasive and all-consuming demands about authentic all-in commitment. It is a mutually constitutive pattern between work places and workers. Hence all parties jump back and forth: neither managers nor employees want the shadow side of authenticity. Once they encounter the costs of authenticity, they seek resort in more bureaucratic ideas of the workplace.

Jana Costas: I agree with Susanne – the demand for authenticity is placed upon the knowledge worker, yet is also one that they bring to work. What is interesting here is the ways in which this emphasis on authenticity collapses in corporate life, as the ways in which companies address it become too managerialistic and hence inauthentic. For instance, this takes place when individuals experience the social events the companies organize, such drinking sessions with the bosses, as too staged. Despite the emphasis on fun, informality and leisure, actors feel the need to act in certain ways (e.g. be always friendly and funny) and, indeed, to attend such events in the first place. This clearly reminds of Hochschild's management of the heart, which Sverre mentioned. Consultants also noted that through the emphasis on authenticity their life and self outside the corporate world was vanishing. Thus, there can be not only a sense of inauthenticity but also of loss (e.g. the giving up of social activities outside of work) resulting from the emphasis on authenticity.

I have seen two main ways in which organizational members respond to this. First, they engage in distancing, that is dis-identification. They express that the corporate authenticity schemes are fake and inauthentic. They cope with this and, indeed, still engage in these schemes, as they feel able to be themselves outside of work, e.g. on the weekend when they meet their friends. A more

troubling response is that of the self-alienated knowledge worker. They realize that this weekend-self, i.e. what they regard as the more authentic or real self, doesn't exist anymore (e.g. when they find the time to actually live it out). So these people feel stuck and experience a sense of meaninglessness and emptiness – something that leads to a search for meaning and can make them in fact turn back to corporate life.

Christian Maravelias: I like the idea of seeing authenticity as a fantasy or unreachable ideal. I think the interest in authenticity is part of a cult, which has formed around everything that is perceived as Pure, Real, and True – just because nothing is in fact perceived as or believed to be Pure, Real and True. Is that not what Baudrillard means by 'hyper reality' or Debord means by 'the spectacular society'? In general I think we focus on those values that we lack. The reason everyone seems so interested in authenticity today is not because people are authentic or because organizations promote authenticity, it is because organizations promote people who are able to make it seem as if they are authentic and true, when actually they are just cynically playing along.

Sverre Spoelstra: It is clear from what you are saying that this prospect, or fantasy, of authenticity at work holds a promise of freedom: when you manage to be yourself, you have also managed to transcend some of the constraints of social life. Perhaps I can ask you to elaborate on the concept of freedom in this context a bit further? Christian, you published and article in *ephemera* (Maravelias, 2007), in which you distinguish two different concepts of freedom: freedom as autonomy and freedom as potential. Perhaps you can say something about this distinction?

Christian Maravelias: One reason why I wrote this paper was that I had read quite a number of critical management studies that made the case that post-bureaucratic management merely seems to provide employees with more freedom, when in actuality it takes away people's freedom. The enemy in most these works is of course North-American pop-management literature, which is seen to promise freedom while luring employees into almost totalitarian subordination.

The problem that I saw with these studies was that they discuss new forms of exercising power against a taken for granted notion of freedom. So I wanted to explore whether it was possible that these new post-bureaucratic ways of exercising power also configured new forms of freedom. When exploring this idea I came across something which I found quite interesting, namely that in comparison with European languages the notion of self-consciousness is understood and evaluated very differently in American English. In Europe there

is a long tradition in seeing self-consciousness as intimately related to freedom in the sense of autonomy from power. The self-conscious individual is able to step aside and look upon him- or herself and the situations he or she is part of with an autonomous distance. That is, in Europe self-consciousness is seen to imply the ability to step aside, to locate oneself elsewhere, which in turn is seen as the precondition of the very idea of freedom. So this close tie between freedom and self-consciousness implies that freedom is understood primarily as autonomy, autonomy from power. Yet, if you look up the word 'self-conscious' in an American English dictionary you typically get the meaning 'uncomfortable about yourself and worried about disapproval from other people'. That is, self-consciousness tends to mean awkward, fake and inauthentic. Maintaining a critical distance (autonomy) towards oneself and others is thus associated with something not very positive. What is instead valued is the idea of being free to take a hold of opportunities, seizing the moment and being able to move through it smoothly, instinctively and authentically, like a fish moving through water.

When exploring this idea I found that one reason why critical management studies, which is primarily a European affair, is on a collision course with popular management literature, which is primarily an American or Americanized affair, is that they look for and treasure very different forms of freedom; freedom as autonomy as opposed to freedom as potential.

So, this distinction was not just a recapitulation of Berlin's distinction between positive and negative freedom, it was also meant to capture two different ways of relating to the world: where freedom as autonomy would imply the ability to step aside from power through our self-conscious distance, and where freedom as potential would imply the freedom to seize opportunities, to get things done, to be provided with opportunities. That is, it would imply a 'just do it' mentality, a more instinctive way of getting about things. What I then did in this paper was to analyze bureaucracy and post-bureaucracy against the background of these two forms and ideals of freedom.

Sverre Spoelstra: Does this distinction between freedom as autonomy and freedom as potential also speak to your work, Susanne?

Susanne Ekman: Yes. You know what – I find that those two approaches to freedom have something in common, namely the reluctance to accept disappointment. The freedom of potential promises that the expansion and intensification and amelioration of the individual can always reach new heights. Possibilities are endless. The freedom of autonomy is driven by the same fantasy, I would argue. Only, it approaches it from a defensive position: nothing or no one should be allowed to limit me. So both freedom fantasies are based on a

notion of the individual as unlimited somehow. Both have as their constitutive outside 'limits' or 'disappointment'. Now, if we look at the knowledge workers that I studied, they relate to freedom as the antithesis of disappointment. To them, freedom means a way of life which is devoid of disappointment; if you encounter disappointment, you haven't lived your freedom in the right way. An interesting line of research in this context is Ian Craib's work on disappointment (1994). He is a psychoanalyst and sociologist drawing on both Freud and Giddens. He quotes Freud for arguing that disappointment is what makes us human. That's where we face the reality principle and that's where we enter the world and commit to it – precisely through the maturation and tolerance for ambiguity that disappointments engender. Furthermore he says, in line with Giddens, that in our times it has become extremely dangerous to be disappointed because you are expected to have endless potential. As the functional differentiation in society increases, we must be able to operate in so many and diverse fields that it requires a certain degree of megalomania to take it on. Consequently, the humbling lessons of disappointment would endanger our ability to function in this excessive society. On top of that, we increasingly outsource all experiences of powerlessness to welfare institutions such as healthcare, childcare, etc. We can pass on the most encompassing sources of disappointment and helplessness in life to professionals. Craib even says that his own line of business, namely psychoanalysis, has happily contributed to this trend by offering years of therapy to promote self-realization, all the while shunning lessons of 'authentic powerlessness'. So, yes, I can certainly see the parallel. But my point is that mainstream popular management and critical management studies have more in common than they would like to think. They both draw upon a romantic notion of freedom, namely as the opposite of limitations and disappointment.

Jana Costas: Rather than starting with a philosophical conception of freedom (and thus thinking of freedom as potential or autonomy), I have been primarily interested in the question of how freedom is discursively constructed in contemporary corporate and social life. I have looked at the particular ways in which freedom is constructed as an ideal today (e.g. in terms of authenticity, mobility and flexibility) and the kinds of performative effects this gives rise to. Following poststructuralist insights and Lacanian psychoanalysis, I would argue that there is no freedom without power: the free self, like the idea of the authentic self, remains an unrealizable fantasy. This is a fantasy that people invest in as it provides them with a sense of unity and fulfilment, but which is also bound to fail. Perhaps a first step towards freedom is therefore accepting its very impossibility, namely that striving for a free self is an illusion that in fact can have controlling effects.

Sverre Spoelstra: I like Christian's reminder that notions of freedom have a strong cultural component, which may be reflected in differences between North-American and European management thinking and research. I understand from Susanne that these two different notions of freedom also have something in common: a denial of disappointment. The next question is how these notions (or fantasies) of freedom play out on a more empirical level, as they clearly do not only haunt management researchers. Jana's suggestion to accept the impossibility of freedom without power already takes us into this direction. So how do people resist the tempting discourse of finding freedom in work in practice? And did you encounter coping strategies that you thought were interesting?

Jana Costas: In my empirical studies I observed Hirschman's response of 'exit', i.e. of leaving the firm, as the most prevalent form of resistance. Other than that, I believe that one interesting way to resist the seemingly irresistible knowledge work lifestyle could be in engaging in some kind of refusal. It may be interesting to look at individuals who refuse to enter these kinds of corporations and live this knowledge work lifestyle in the first place. Thus, resistance through refusal and not entering the corporation may constitute an interesting strategy. This also links to the idea that individuals refrain from constantly expressing themselves, that is being visible to others and providing information to corporations (just think of Facebook and so forth). In other words, the reintroduction of boundaries, refusal and invisibility might constitute important strategies.

Sverre Spoelstra: Have you come across people who are leaving their organizations, or refusing to take a particular job?

Jana Costas: Yes, in the companies I have looked at there were consultants who had plans to leave the firm and go to what they call a nine-to-five job. Here it is important to note, however, that this nine-to-five job is an illusion too. As I mentioned, it is part of the construction of the knowledge work lifestyle to set itself against so-called nine-to-five work lives, namely by depicting the former as exciting, creative and free and the latter as boring, dull and constraining. But who works nine-to-five today? That is, especially in the UK where the working hours are the highest within the European Union, I wonder who actually has these nine-to-five jobs.

Susanne Ekman: Yes, fantasies about security and predictability are very common. Again, it becomes the extreme anti-thesis to self-management and high involvement, rather than a moderation of it. In that sense, I would claim that the people, who have made the most interesting move away from this tendency, are those who dare strive for moderation and a humble middle ground.

There is something about this logic that keeps us in the extremes, either as intensely authentic or intensely bureaucratic with nine-to-five, strictly rule-based jobs. I my opinion, the truly challenging and difficult form of resistance (if that is what we should call it – I am critical of that concept) would be to reduce intensity. That's a really difficult thing. It is about moderation and moving into the middle ground as the place where you accept ambiguity. There is so much polarization, so I would find it very impressive if a worker makes that humble move out of the intensities, and into temperance. If she says: 'Yes, I have knowledge work that requires a certain amount of personal investment. But I will turn down the intensity a little, and turn other things in my life up, so my work is doable on a day-to-day basis'. That's a very moderate thing, but maybe moderation is the toughest thing to do. We are so afraid of missing opportunities that we would rather be imprisoned by our hunt for them.

Christian Maravelias: I agree, this is very difficult to achieve in practice, and it reminds me of a study I recently conducted at Scania, the large producer of busses and trucks. Scania began a profound transformation of its once Tayloristic factories along the lines of Lean production about 15 years ago. The change to Lean production at Scania meant that each individual worker and each production team of workers received a lot more autonomy than before. In that respect, Lean production was viewed positively not only by Scania's management, but by workers and union representatives as well. Yet, Lean production was still highly problematic to implement, because it proved to require a new type of worker. A worker that was communicative, cooperatively minded, active and energetic and thereby able to switch between on the one hand, doing the work according to set routines, and on the other hand, reflecting upon that work, trying to improve it. In very short terms, Scania responded to this problem by investing heavily in facilities and expertise dedicated to help employees improve their lifestyles in the direction of more activity, self-discipline and health. Through health coaches, therapists, fitness trainers, and so on, Scania basically thought to help employees develop themselves to better employees and better individuals. Even though this implied that employees were helped to instrumentalize even their lifestyles to fit with the criteria of Lean production, it happened without arousing much resistance or conflict. One reason for this lack of resistance, I think, is that the whole transformation concerned things that are generally seen to be positive – more autonomy, better health, more activity, more opportunities, and so on. How and why should you say no to that? When Scania decided to break with its Tayloristic heritage and somewhat later began to invest in resources dedicated to improve employees' health and wellbeing, this was in many ways what the union had been fighting for, for decades.

Sverre Spoelstra: The appeal of freedom, as an unrealizable fantasy or not, is also very much present within academia. Nick Butler and I recently interviewed a number of critical management professors about the desire and temptation to be 'excellent' according to managerial criteria. Many of them spoke of 'buying yourself freedom', by means of pleasing the system through top tier journal publications. Academic freedom is here no longer seen as the condition for academic success, but as the reward. But for most academics this freedom never arrives: we think we play the game to own benefit but end up being played by the game (Butler and Spoelstra, 2012). I wonder to what extent your observations about knowledge workers also apply to academics: do you recognize parts of yourself, as an academic, in the knowledge workers that you have interviewed and observed?

Jana Costas: Yes, in some ways I can see similarities. First, there is also the idea that we are free to express our interests and ideas in our work. Second, there is the idea that academics are mobile and global (indeed, some people constantly travel from one conference, presentation to another). Third, the academic lifestyle is also celebrated as one where individuals can choose when and where to work. In terms of self-alienation, I believe that those moments of emptiness and meaninglessness do arise, e.g. when you feel that the publishing/journal process is random and contingent or you realize that the majority of publications are not read and have little, if any, impact (within academia and outside). It is then that you wonder whether what you do is worthwhile, that is meaningful for you and others.

Christian Maravelias: I can also recognize myself in all this. But that is not particularly surprising because in many ways I think academia is idealized in contemporary working life. From an employer branding point of view Google is perhaps the company that is the most famous and attractive employer among younger people. And what is Google famous for? Well they have established some kind of campus environment where employees are 'free' to be themselves, to develop themselves, work in cafes and so on. The model for that environment is to a large extent at least academia. So in that sense it is no surprise that we can recognize ourselves in studies of knowledge intensive companies and so called freedom at work.

Sverre Spoelstra: But perhaps it also works the other way around? There is more and more pressure on university departments to look like knowledge intensive firms.

Susanne Ekman: Yes, I would say there is a strong similarity in the sense that in academia it is a constant struggle for all of us not just to succumb to an

opportunistic attitude. I mean there is so much in the structure that calls for opportunism. One of the interesting things about this discourse of freedom in work is that it is so closely linked to opportunism, and that's probably also why it's so closely linked to a feeling of emptiness: there's something about this celebration of freedom that doesn't fit with commitment beyond sheer personal satisfaction. And in academia, this kind of opportunistic freedom is enhanced structurally.

Christian Maravelias: This makes me think of Shoshanna Zuboff's book *In the age of the smart machine* (1988) where she distinguishes between blue-collar workers that use their bodies to act upon materials and the white collar workers that use their bodies to act with; presenting themselves is a large part of their work. That is, whereas blue-collar workers use their bodies as tools in the process of producing things, white-collar workers use their bodies both as means and ends. At this point, maybe we resemble the blue-collar worker more than the white-collar worker? As long as the work that we produce is good, it does not really matter what we look like, if we are social or not, do sports or not, etc. It is what we write.

Sverre Spoelstra: The disturbing part, of course, is that the 'goodness' of academic work is increasingly defined by journal rankings. One may even say that the management scholar is even free to produce bad work, as long as the 'quality' outlet ensures that it counts as good. This is perhaps a good time to open up to the floor, but let me ask one final question first: what is in your view especially important to discuss over the next few days?

Susanne Ekman: I think it is important to discuss the question of opportunism, and also whether we might miss important issues if we get stuck in the classical distinction between managers *versus* employees. I think there are some very important distinctions to be made within these two groups. So maybe we miss something if we're only interested in what happens between managers and employees. Maybe important stuff happens inside those categories: vulnerabilities and new distributions of power.

Christian Maravelias: I think much of what we have discussed so far is related to the concept of self-management, and that raises the question about the management of self-management. And the authorities that are supposed to manage people to manage themselves: what kind of authority is that? This issue relates to the blurring of the boundaries between work and life in a general sense. We often hear that management tries to use more of our potential by exploiting our full and private selves. Yet, I think this idea implies that management is in a state of crisis: because when reaching beyond the

professional sphere it reaches beyond the sphere in which it has authority, and that raises questions about other sources of authority. Who are the managers of self-managing employees?

Jana Costas: There are three things that I can think of. First, I believe it would be interesting to see how far the issues we talked about apply to individuals outside of knowledge work. Ross (2009) has made an interesting point, namely that after the financial crisis, on an experiential level, a lot of these uncertainties that elite knowledge workers expressed, to some extent, resembled those of individuals working at the lower end. This is something that I also observed in relation to consultants' experiences of mobility – in many ways, these were similar to those Christina Garsten (2008) refers to in her study of temporary workers. Of course, one has to be very careful in making such connections (there are massive socio-economic differences), but I think it is interesting to point to such bridges between different kinds of groups of individuals. Indeed, it is only in this way that forms of solidarity can arise (see also Costas, forthcoming). The other point, which I have already mentioned, is the idea of resistance as not entering the corporation in the first place. Lastly, I think it is important to think about ways in which we as researchers and academics can have an impact on students and their construction of the knowledge work ideal. When I ask my students where they would like to work, a great number of them typically responds that they want to become consultants or at least start as consultants. In other words, all these people with great minds, full of ideas, want to work for these companies (this shows how effective these companies are in constructing an idealized image of what it means to work for them). So I think we play a huge role in educating people and showing them what the ideal of the knowledge work lifestyle can entail.

[Question from the floor] Armin Beverungen: Thanks for the interesting presentations and discussion. I was curious about something in all of your presentations. There is this thing that people get thrown into a situation, and figure out how to be free, right? It's a very individualized moment I find in what you describe in their experiences. Now if we take a step back it is clearly a case of them being thrown in the labour market, being separated from the conditions of their own production, and a consequence of an extremely individualizing force of neoliberalism. And given a certain way of thinking about themselves and their own freedom, they seem to struggle with this. But one thing that I think might happen is to challenge the way we are told to be free, the kinds of freedom we have or are given. But what seems to be missing, and maybe you have more to say about this, is there any kind of collective response? Part of dealing with the individualizing response is to call to do something collectively. I mean for me the only way we could ever be free in any kind of way would be collectively; all things

I do in my life are collective things and not me self-reflecting whether I am authentic or not, whether I can have my cake and eat it. So I'm wondering if these people also have responses that aren't embracing this individualizing power or this discourse?

Susanne Ekman: In my study I found quite powerful discourses about collectivity existing alongside the discourses about authenticity, freedom and self-realization. Several employees told me that they had previously stayed in relatively boring workplaces because they were so happy with their colleagues. And vice versa, many employees also told me that they would leave prestigious workplaces if they did not get along with the colleagues. So the social element of work is certainly important and can effectively challenge the norms about self-actualization and individualism. There was also an idea about craft, doing your work properly, not in order to promote yourself, but in order to do something for somebody. In these cases, the Self gives way for external and collective concerns, and work becomes a vehicle for serving something Other rather than developing one's personal potential.

Jana Costas: This does not apply to the knowledge workers who I have studied. They tend to have a very strong individualist outlook – something that is fostered by the companies' cultural configurations. I suppose one example that comes to my mind concerns the ways in which one of the firms I investigated fostered a friendship culture (Costas, 2012). Here management wanted to instil an atmosphere of equality, playfulness and openness. Whilst this friendship culture very much emphasized informal relations between management and employees, some analysts became very close friends amongst themselves. Through this friendship they undermined some of the company's rules, such as that consultants were not supposed to share their bonuses. In this sense, there was a little bit of a collective moment. However, there was still a lot of competition (some consultants even reported how this was particularly prevalent with respect to their work friends). But I agree with Armin's point: there needs to be some kind of solidarity.

Susanne Ekman: I'd just like to add that some of the researchers on youth in Denmark have noticed how young people, in universities or high schools, find it increasingly difficult to work in groups, because they have this ideal that everybody should be free to have their own extremely unique opinion, and that it is oppressive when you try to create a collective movement. You become oppressive because everybody should be free to be themselves. So the very notion of some kind of consensus becomes problematic and I think that's maybe also what we're up against here: that everybody should be so free to be themselves that it is viewed as a form of violence to create a consensus. And so we are back

at the romantic notion of freedom which popular management research and critical management studies have in common. Now, who will be able to resist that?

[Question from the floor] Steffen Böhm: I am interested in the historical ruptures or continuities that we're talking about here. So, for me, the question is: is the phenomenon you're talking about really so different from what's been going on before, because you seem to be saying that there is something new here. In the call for papers there is a reference to Marx, because we wanted to point to the concept of 'freedom' in Marx, which, for him, has a double meaning. On the one hand, the peasant is freed from the landowner (feudalism), and hence he or she can freely sell their labour power in the marketplace – that's Marx's free worker. On the other hand, this very freedom is also a non-freedom, as the worker has no option but to sell their labour power to the capitalist if they want to eat and feed their family. So, for Marx, there is a non-freedom in freedom. Also, Jana mentioned Lacan: Taking a Lacanian line, one could even say that this dialectic – between non-freedom and freedom – is the very stuff of how the subject is created, whether we talk about capitalism or not. For Lacan, the freedom of *jouissance* has to be supplement by the non-freedom of the symbolic, and vice versa. So, what I'm trying to ask is: what's so really new about this?

Jana Costas: In terms of self-alienation I think there is something new. I totally agree with you that this tension between freedom and unfreedom has always been there, but if you look at Marx's critique of previous forms of work, and particularly early industrialization, it is concerned with unfreedom. Specifically, alienation is related to the ways in which labourers cannot be themselves at work, cannot find themselves in the products they produce, and lose the connection to the production process and also to fellow men and women. In today's 'new spirit of capitalism' (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005) we see a certain shift; the ideal I have been referring to celebrates those very freedoms that Marx to some extent called for (of course in an individualistic manner). For instance, knowledge workers are depicted as completely identifying themselves with their work and what they 'produce' as they have autonomy, can be creative and so forth. The same applies to the ways in which people are seen to be able to be themselves at work today (thus they are no longer dehumanized robots). Whilst alienation, for Marx, related to a *lack* of being able to be oneself, express oneself in one's products, etc., today's idealized knowledge work lifestyle celebrates the fact that people can be themselves at work, express themselves and so forth. In this sense, the kind of self-alienation I am interested in derives from a reverse logic, namely the very emphasis or *excess* of having to live out those 'freedoms' of authenticity, mobility and flexibility.

Christian Maravelias: It is obviously a very relevant question, but also a very difficult one. With regards to Marx I think there are a lot of things that we could discuss. For instance how his analysis of capitalism points in the direction that capitalist production and capitalist development results both in a steady increase and intensification of the exploitation of workers and thus in less and less freedom and in a progressive development of capitalist production, which presses for a more developed and social worker whose freedom is not so obviously shrinking. Particularly in the famous 'fragment on machinery' (Marx, 1993: 690-712) Marx develops the idea that as modern industry develops what will eventually be the source of surplus value is not labour in a traditional sense, but the sociality of (particular) individuals. Maybe that is where we are today.

But let me try to give another answer to this question, which relates to how Foucault's work has been used within organization studies. A lot of studies have been conducted, which make use of Foucault's notions of disciplinary power and pastoral power, especially in relation to ideas about self-management, coaching, etc. The idea that I developed in my paper in *ephemera*, that new forms of post-bureaucratic work are managed not by distributing obligations which open for certain degrees of autonomy but by distributing opportunities (potential) based on judgments of employees' abilities of using these opportunities, indicates something which goes beyond disciplinary and pastoral power. Because even pastoral power is still a matter of providing individuals with self-knowledge, a certain form of self-conscious distance (autonomy) to oneself and to ones work and colleagues. What I think we see more and more often is not pastoral power but more of a reprogramming of individuals. I am thinking, for example of the sports trainer: in sports, thinking about what you do while you do it is bad because you break movements apart that need to be whole and you lose the ability to react instinctively. Yet, at the same time you have to know what you are doing in order to improve yourself. In sports the role of the trainer is to set things out in such a way that you as an athlete don't have to think. The trainer is someone that tries to reprogram you, so that you do not think, but 'just do it' and act instinctively. I think this relates to work as well. The manager of self-managing individuals, whoever that may be, does not simply provide some knowledge about yourself, but tries to help you to become instinctive in relation to your work or the world in which you live. So the manager of self-managing individuals as someone who does not provide individuals with an ability to self-consciously (autonomously) step aside, but as someone that reprograms individuals.

[Question from the floor] Martyna Sliwa: This is a question for Susanne: how do the people that you have studied make distinctions between authenticity and intensity, and how does this relate to freedom?

Susanne Ekman: I think that they pretty much conflate these two concepts. Authenticity equals intensity which in turn equals freedom. So non-intensity is taboo in this discourse. Moderation and the unspectacular routine of daily work are associated with a sense of loss, namely the loss of potential. To most of my research participants, routine was synonymous with an unsuccessful working life. This was because the Self practising the routine became relatively inconspicuous, whereas the concrete assignments took centre stage. My research participants expected it to be the other way around: concrete work assignments should serve the purpose of enhancing the spectacular Self and its continuous realization of potential. This was their notion of freedom. Consequently, the most difficult thing to accept was banality. But maybe some degree of reconciliation with our own banality is one of the highest forms of freedom we can achieve?

[Question from the floor] Stevphen Shukaitis: This makes me wonder, perhaps this is an even more fundamental question: why do we have this assumption that 'being yourself' has something to do with work? Or to put it another way, why do we assume that there is, or should be, some necessary connection between work and authenticity? Why does authenticity have anything to do with working, as opposed to any other sphere of activity or form of interaction? That's why it's important to remember that the 'refusal of work' does not just refer to particular forms of refusal, but also of displacing this ubiquitous assumption and association of almost any positive value with working.

Susanne Ekman: I think that one of the pitfalls in critical management research is the notion that work per se is alienating. This is a perfect illustration of the symbiosis between critical research and mainstream research: they each take their polarized stance and thus become two more sets of intensity promoting the same romantic ideal about freedom and having a hard time moving into the moderate middle.

Sverre Spoelstra: This strikes me as an important point, and perhaps a good one to end this discussion with. I am sure that the coming days will provide a great opportunity to overcome the fallacy of thinking the relation between freedom and work as either good or bad, as either a humanization of work or as a new mode of controlling employees. I think the discussion has showed that there is much more going one, which calls for both conceptual and empirical carefulness. Please join me in thanking our three speakers for a great start of this conference.

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Work experience without qualities? A documentary and critical account of an internship

Joanna Figiel

Going internal

Internships and unpaid work placements are today touted, even celebrated, as necessary steps on the path towards gaining employment. They become increasingly normalised and recommended as an essential means of boosting the contemporary art-culture-service worker's chances of accumulating the given 'experience' valued by potential 'industry' employers. In doing so, internships and placements appear to offer perhaps the best chance of securing that perceived 'dream job' for those seeking to progress in, or more usually to enter, the so-called creative sector. Unpaid labour for future prospects sounds like a great idea, or at least at first glance it does.

There has been much public discussion in recent years on internships and their place in the contemporary economy,[1] and there is always a success story to be heard, maybe rightly so, since the nature of the professions in question means they may require hands-on experience and practical, technical skills. In the creative and cultural industries in particular, however, these modern fables

1 For example, in the UK in early 2011, there was a flurry of widely publicised political commentary regarding social mobility, much of which was concerned with the comments made by the Prime Minister, David Cameron and his deputy, Nick Clegg. As the latter criticised the idea of 'unpaid internships, which favour the wealthy and well-connected', and announced a new scheme promoting the maxim of 'what you know, not who you know', the PM candidly announced that he was fine with the idea of giving internships to friends and neighbours; in fact, he was 'quite relaxed' about the issue. See Stratton's coverage of the debate in the Guardian newspaper (2011).

frequently follow a familiar pattern. From bold proclamations to furtive whispers, such tales are regularly united in their assertion that a 'friend of a friend' has done it, loved it, invested in their future and has now reached the heady heights of their desired entry-level job. But of course, as one might suspect, often these stories ring hollow, turn out to be urban legends, producing what? Internal, experiential outcomes? Directly productive ones? The normalisation of exploitative, yet concealed forms of production?

I have a confession to make. I am an intern, or at least I was until recently. There is a slight embarrassment in the admission, but why? Do I feel of lower value as a person because I wasn't paid for my work? Do I feel exploited? Am I ashamed of this? Bitter and disaffected? What did I learn? In this text, I want to develop my own experiences of working as an intern in order to potentially cast light upon the specific conditions contained therein, to leave the noisy sphere of media commentary, where everything takes place on the surface, and, if I might be permitted to somewhat playfully adopt the celebrated phrasing, to 'enter the hidden abode of production', literally.[2]

What I discovered during my placement allows me to begin to sketch a tentative image of the contemporary experience of apparent non-work within the neoliberal 'creative industries' as it was contained and expressed within this internship. I will relate my own experience, an experience that along the way opened up a whole gaudy Pandora's box of theoretical trinkets inclusive of affective labour, precarity and well-rehearsed discussions on immateriality. Although internships are easily and often condemned by voices on the Left, the relative lack of empirical and experiential evidence of what it is to be an intern leaves such theoretical threads free-floating somewhat above the actual experience of such work.[3]

2 Marx (1990: 279). That is if we can even call the situation in which I interned 'production' in a classical economic, or indeed Marxian sense? Just what it was that was being produced here, or how my labour, or the labour in this situation in general, fitted within a complex, interconnected tapestry of production, reproduction and circulation was something that I continually attempted to assess and indeed never truly resolved during the course of my internship. However I call it loosely 'production' here, following post-workerist observations on so-called immaterial production, for example Hardt and Negri (2000: 365).

3 For more on internships and unpaid labour policies see Hope and Figiel (2012). For more information on current organising around internships, look to the activities of the following collectives: The Precarious Workers Brigade (http://precariousworkersbrigade.tumblr.com/), The Carrotworkers' Collective (http://carrotworkers.wordpress.com/).

What I attempt to do, in an admittedly limited, amateur-ethnographic and contingent fashion, is to provide a documentary and critical account of the three months I spent at one of many not-for-profit contemporary art and culture organisations while working as a 'curatorial' intern at their offices and gallery space. In what follows I develop a critical ethnographic account of the internal politics of the gallery and my experiences there, relying upon a form of insider investigation, a participant observer in the anthropological sense. I choose to articulate my experience by adopting an experimental narrative style of presentation, integrating the theoretical resources that I drew upon in order to make sense of my experience, as a critical commentary where appropriate, or by way of footnotes.

Unfortunately, due to a particularly pernicious potential threat of legal proceedings, the organisation in question must, for the purposes of this reflection at least, remain anonymous. Regrettably this can only contribute to a perpetuation of the very conditions of obfuscation that I recognised in the gallery, permitting a continuation of the situation in which 'unremunerated and mystified work… ensure the lopsided distribution of profit and prestige.'[4]

To expand upon my position as participant-observer briefly, as a participant I was partaking in the everyday actions of the gallery's employees, whilst qualitatively observing my surroundings, paying attention to significant visual details, listening to what was said and, at times, simply doing my job, but with a critical awareness of the specific activities I was undertaking. This method likewise involved contributing to workplace discussions, analysing relevant documents, conducting conversations and interviews, as well as recording my personal experiences of the work and social environment at the gallery. I did what I thought any intern was meant to do; I worked, I watched and I learned. Of course any commentary from a participant's perspective will be partial, but by using this method I hope to provide descriptions of selected events and situations that took place during my placement so as to set out a descriptive account, that might also begin to point towards the place of internships within the contemporary cultural economy more broadly.

So, if it is not just tea making and photocopying, what really does go on behind closed doors, when the intern goes internal?

4 Vishmidt (2005: 39).

Entry level playing fields?

After three exhausting months of applications and interviews, I eventually managed to secure a 'curatorial assistant' intern post at a gallery space in London. It is perhaps interesting to note the relative difficulty in obtaining a placement in the first place and that on a number of occasions my applications for internships were rejected on the basis of me being seemingly overqualified. As I was to learn, internships for those not from well-connected, privileged backgrounds, perhaps unsurprisingly, remain a relatively closed game in the UK. Another problem that I faced in accessing the field was the difficulty or rather near-impossibility of doing unpaid work on top of studying full-time and additional paid work. Like many students, I found myself in the situation of seemingly 'paying' twice for the privilege of gaining experience – firstly for the course/university fees and secondly by giving up my labour time to the organisation where I interned.

However, my situation was somewhat different in that the specific placement was actually undertaken through a university course itself, as a carefully marketed dimension of a specialist MA culture industry programme, in a university careful to display its 'radical' and creative credentials. Many students, already working to support themselves through degrees, cannot count on financial help from their family in order to be able to give up work and become an intern. This was indeed the case in my own situation, and added to this, like many overseas/migrant students, I faced an additional disadvantage of having no opportunity to stay, rent-free, with parents or relatives. It struck me that even beginning an internship assumes an unrecognised and informal support network, drawing an unacknowledged foundation of wider social cooperation into this relation between intern and employer. I wasn't simply working for free; resources from elsewhere were being used to enable this to happen, which certainly appeared to place me in a very precarious position, fundamentally weakening my direct relation to, and in turn my power in relation to, my employer. In my case these resources took the form of saved up money from earlier paid work, and the indirect and emotional support of friends – but to be honest, I struggled. Ultimately, I survived on less, working elsewhere for extra hours. The result, of course, was exhaustion. The short-term thinking displayed by employers in such a failure to adequately provide for the reproduction of labour not only showed where the power lay in this arrangement – I was evidently disposable – but in the way it attempted to keep me disposable through this lack of investment, it also hinted at a certain systematic stupidity that was only to become more apparent as time went on.

The barriers to undertaking an internship that I personally struggled to overcome, it would appear, are prevalent more broadly, excluding many from gaining the experience offered through such placements. The fact that gaining and undertaking an internship is dependent upon an individual's relation to a number of support structures, both those that are and are not considered directly productive in classical political economy, is something that began to become apparent to me from the outset, through my own struggles with access. What also became clear was that the means to be able to draw upon such structures is also highly socially differentiated.

Having eventually obtained entry into the 'hidden abode', or so I thought, initially I was happy, excited and relieved to have finally secured a placement. Having been appointed, I was told that my daily duties would include assisting in assembling and executing the exhibitions programme, supporting the installation of artwork and liaising with exhibition partners, as well as working on information and promotional materials complementing the exhibitions, administration and general office support. This came with the promise of gaining 'valuable experience of working directly on projects' and 'insight' into the administration and organisation of the artistic programme. The position sounded highly promising, yet when I received an email confirming my appointment I noticed that the position of 'chief curator' had morphed overnight, into that of a 'gallery manager'; the word 'exhibitions' now substituted for 'events'. Could the change of the wording have been an insignificant slip of the tongue? During that interview, the word 'curating' was mentioned for the *very first* and the *very last* time in the three months I spent at the gallery. Such a slippage at the time seemed innocent enough. On later reflection, however, such a shift in terminology neatly encapsulated what I observed to be a highly managerial, logistical and opportunistic approach to creativity within the internal operations of the gallery and the incongruence of this with the outward facing appearance that the gallery presented in the form of its public image.

Whilst not wishing to ascribe too much significance to a simple change in wording, the observation for me was revealing, in that it potentially pointed towards a wider shift with the organisation of artistic production and the way that public perception, or even language, has often perhaps failed to keep pace with this change. I was immediately suspicious: was it a mistake? An accident? Was it even perhaps something to do with ideology? The shift from curator to manager elided by such a change in terminology might be a minor but telling indicator of a broader, and deeper, transformation in the composition of labour at play within this field.

With such apparent shifts it is no surprise that interns don't always know what they are signing up for, or that we can be tricked with promises that turn out to be less than gold. Of course I would have been naïve to expect that unpaid work would be a dream job. The romantic notion of an artistic Cinderella, gaining fame after several years working in a garret, has morphed in the 21st century by way of Endemol's *Big Brother*, celebrity culture and the tabloids; artistic 'discovery' is now arguably more 'magnus fratronage' for those without contacts, whilst a magnanimous patronage persists for the privileged and connected. Was I not following just such a path when I touted my way into the internship with three years of 'media career' experience and my newly minted Goldsmiths panache? This too is the school marketed with viral t-shirt slogans ('so fucking Goldsmiths') and an entry alongside Ray-Bans, MTV and Apple in the CoolBrands annuals.[5]

A cynical agent of precarious labour, I marketed a worker's identity, honed my brand, peddled my human capital for all it was worth. As just such a walking, talking, emailing and phone answering accumulation of experiences, I assumed that the gallery would want to nurture me, develop me, in short, invest in me.[6] I was wrong.

Free time marketplace

Early in my internship I was asked to participate in a visitor analysis project. The task was to be carried out during Thursday late nights and other late events. Those were also days when due to longer opening hours extra invigilators were needed. Gradually I came to realise that the data was not intended to be used in any way – the purpose of the project was getting an extra night of free work out

5 Goldsmiths has been named one of the 'coolest UK brands' in 2008. See Goldsmiths' reporting of the award (http://www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/cool-brand/).

6 Appropriating Marx's observations in *Grundrisse* on the 'general intellect', Hardt and Negri (2000) and Virno (1996), amongst others, have contended that fixed capital is not merely locked within the machinery of production, but inherent within general social knowledge and the development of the individual; cf. 'this *fixed capital* being man himself' (Marx, 1973: 706-11). As an accumulation of my experiences, I touted myself to the gallery, which in turn, touted its 'valuable experience' to me, I invested myself in them to allow this transaction to take place: the barely acknowledged understanding was that, rather than receiving direct remuneration, I was augmenting my own experiential capital as a speculative investment. If we are to agree with this understanding, the gallery, and the cultural sector more broadly, could therefore invest in my development as both an 'immaterial' producer, but also a consumer, i.e. in this sense as 'fixed capital' – although such would require a sustained and mutually beneficial relationship that was absent from the conditions of the internship, certainly in my case.

of the interns, so that the gallery space could be covered at no extra expense. Instead of hiring an extra person to work late nights at the gallery, the institution decided to convince one of the unpaid staff (interns) to come in and do the work (invigilating the gallery space) under the pretence of conducting visitor research. This task would entail following around the gallery audience and those who purchased tickets to an event, such as a lecture, with a clipboard, hassling them to discover how they found out about the show/event, whether they had visited before, and whether they wished to become a member/patron of the gallery. However, this banal exercise was in fact totally unnecessary because those who came to see the show were actually asked these questions already, on arrival or departure, by the receptionist; those who purchase tickets were asked, as detailed in the sales script, when they made their purchase. To avoid being (further) exploited, I told my manager that due to an evening class I was unable to attend. Later, I looked on, as the other interns competed for the opportunity to volunteer to carry out the project.

My first thoughts when observing such a blatant use of interns as a source of cheap (free) labour was that it amounted simply to exploitative cost saving from the gallery. If this was the case however, by assigning us 'non-jobs' such as this, the gallery was short-sightedly failing to invest in its own potential productive assets, not equipping us with experiences that could be drawn upon in future. It was a triumph of short-term thinking and a failure to properly understand what was at stake in the labour at its disposal. Avital Ronell's description of stupidity comes to mind:

> Stupidity can be considered as something related to shutdown, to closure – a closure that confuses itself with an end. Closing a matter 'once and for all', it appears to be bound up with the compulsion of the Western logos to 'finish with', to terminate. [It] is best viewed as the refusal of undecidability. Stupidity, for its part, has decided, it thinks, it knows and has passed judgement; it is always ready to shoot, and shoots off its mouth readily.[7]

The questionable practice of replacing paid staff with desperate jobless graduates in order to cut costs is something that lies at the centre of the recent debates on remuneration for interns, debates that in this sense at least seem to miss the point. The way in which the made up 'visitor analysis project' appeared to be merely a façade for just such savings pointed to a wider misunderstanding of what was at stake in the internship and the failure of the gallery to properly take into account the nature of such labour. In this sense it also pointed to something of the systematic stupidity at the heart of the UK Government's intern strategy, and of their so-called Big Society agenda beyond this. In general, while interns

7 Ronell (2003: 70).

(often ineffectually) cover tasks that would normally be fulfilled by actual employees (part-time, temporary or agency workers), or still worse, undertake made-up non-jobs that are a waste of everyone's time, the principle of 'mutual benefit' on which internships and work placements are allegedly fundamentally based becomes invalidated.[8] The flexible yet precarious model of a purely functional management of logistics replaces long-term strategy – the result is a closure of possibilities, in other words stupidity.

Was my employer amongst the one in five British businesses that admit using interns as '*cheap*' labour?[9] Where a paid position could have been created, perhaps even *cheaply*, but a free substitute is drawn upon instead? This work could be anything, but even if it's 'just making tea and photocopies', it is still *work*. And it is not 'cheap'; it is actually 'free'. In many cases, where there was a job position, there is now a rotating intern seat, further weakening the workers' position, making organising difficult and driving down wages in general. I began to wonder about my own position, had I replaced a paid role? I began to feel guilty, but I wasn't sure, I still hadn't quite worked out exactly what my role here even really was.

Matters were further complicated by the fact that the majority of non-tasks I was assigned produced no tangible goods – they appeared to fit into the bracket of so-called immaterial or affective work. This is often the case with internships within this sector and makes it far more difficult for interns to argue, in line with the national minimum wage legislation, that when in such a position we are in fact a *worker* and should, legally, be paid.

In the creative and cultural sectors, severe funding cuts coupled with increasing numbers of graduates mean higher than ever competition for even low-paid, entry-level jobs: for every three employees in the arts there are now two interns and one freelancer. According to recent figures from Arts Council England, its regularly funded organisations 'are increasingly turning to volunteer staff rather than paid staff', whilst potential employees are more and more willing to accept a deterioration in conditions and pay, even to the extent of becoming unpaid in the hope of future benefit.[10] Meanwhile a new corporate bureaucracy has emerged to administer (and profit from) the increasingly precarious class of

8 Such an investment might, as I have speculated, be seen as a potential investment in 'fixed capital'.

9 See, for instance, Malik (2011).

10 There has also been a 30 per cent increase in volunteering in the sector and only a three per cent increase in employment between 2008-2009. See, *Arts Professional* (2011).

un(der)employed creative aspirants such as myself. In the US, there is an entire industry dedicated to catering to the unpaid work economy, described recently and in great detail by Ross Perlin in his book *InterNation* (2011). Despite Perlin's estimation that the UK's 'internship problem' remains five years behind that of the US, there are already companies soliciting unpaid, UK-based internships for a fee.[11]

I felt robbed, and I was being. Not only was I not being paid for my labour which was bad enough in itself, but the deal that I thought I'd struck was that in return for giving up my current means of sustaining myself, relying on other precarious forms of social cooperation instead, I would be given the opportunity to obtain a better means of survival in future. I had essentially believed I would be invested in. I had not been. Rather, I was mortgaging my own present for a less than a certain future. The experience I was gaining was quickly becoming little more than disaffection.

'Active' internalising

Thinking it might shed light on the apparent stupidity I was encountering, and upon the opaque workings of the culture industry with which I was now faced, I initially reached for Adorno to help me make sense of it all. However, I could only imagine him saying that my fixation on my own experiential acquisitions and my internal responses to this would ultimately amount to little more that an empty inwardness, that the introspective self-critical reflexivity by an inmate interned in the culture industry is merely a pseudo-critical reflexivity.[12] This is the inwardness of the voluntary critic, just as ready to obey as the next assembly line worker in the new autonomous republic of art. And, all for a good cause – if we can find one! All of my introspection was perhaps, it occurred to me, mere pseudo-activity that mirrored all too readily the pseudo-activity of the tasks that I was set as an intern.

11 See, for instance, Coughlan (2009).

12 For Adorno, the inward, self-criticality that dogged me throughout my internship, that was only amplified as the placement progressed, and that indeed seemed endemic and inherent to its systematic processes, might be itself an ineffectual reaction to my position within those very relations of production that confronted and so troubled me. The result of my reflection however, would be ultimately empty:

> Inwardness served to cultivate an anthropological type that would dutifully, quasi-voluntarily, perform the wage labour required by the new mode of production of the autonomous subject. (...) Inwardness thus becomes increasingly shadowy and empty, indeed contentless in itself. (Adorno, 1997: 116)

Robert Musil's *Man without qualities* came to mind, particularly the way in which he depicts how the emptiness of this kind of pseudo-activity is raised to an art form within a workplace:

> Count Leinsdorf [had] ... the conviction that what he was engaged in was practical politics. The days rocked from side to side, running into weeks. The weeks did not stand still, but wreathed together into chains. There was continually something happening. And when there is continually something happening, one easily gets the impression that one is achieving something real and practical.[13]

Why Musil's text kept intruding into my thoughts as I went about my business in the gallery I wasn't sure. Perhaps it was that one of the first things that struck me upon beginning work there was the way in which this strange emotional landscape of introspection and pseudo-activity permeated the space? I had noted that even the architecture itself seemed to augment this generalised atmosphere of inwardness and emptiness.

During the first few days at the gallery I had mostly tried to find my way around its vast – over 35,000 sq. ft. – bright, concrete and pure white interiors. On the whole, it was a fitting example of an impressively pure, and yet overwhelming, type of white-cube exhibition space, of the kind so ubiquitous across the contemporary art world. It was furnished at a considerable expense, yet without being noticeably over the top. All the details, despite being custom made and of the best quality, were discreet and tasteful – I noticed made-to-order doors and door locks, designer chairs and lighting fittings, best quality liquid soaps decanted into minimalist containers and so on. All in all: suave, and sterile. 'Unshadowed, white, clean, artificial, the space is devoted to the technology of aesthetics'[14] – a perfect whitewashed gallery space; a space, which despite its seeming transparency, is designed to meet the eye first, framing perception ahead of the artworks on display. It was engineered to encourage a quiet, contemplative, introspective mood that mirrored that of those employed within. It also felt cold and empty.

This introspective atmosphere was blended with one of obfuscation and uncertainty, echoing the many pseudo-activities with which workers seemed to be continually busying themselves. Again the architecture only added to such a perception, the staircases all looked the same and there were hardly any signs aiding movement through the space. I kept losing my way to the offices, situated on the first floor and separated from the rest of the space by two sets of glass security doors. I needed a swipe card to get in, but I was not given one

13 Musil (1979, vol. 2: 174).

14 O'Doherty (1986: 15).

straightaway. Eventually – after two weeks – I was given a temporary card, only however, a restricted access one. Each time I tried to get in I was forced to spend a considerable amount of time knocking on the door. If no one noticed me, I hung around until someone else showed up with a card. The office itself was cold, bright, and very quiet, around 1000 sq. ft. and divided into four separate (seemingly) state-of-the-art offices, with desk spaces for a dozen people. An appropriately Kafkaesque setting, one guarded by distant and inaccessible masters, where the ultimate dream (recognition? judgement? access? a paid gallery assistant role?) was debarred by a combination of bureaucratic sloth and empty, banal architecture. The architecture could not help but evoke for me both the vagueness and inwardness that I identified as strongly characterising the nature of many of the activities undertaken here. Perhaps it was the very so-called 'immateriality' of the activities that I was to undertake that contributed to this atmosphere of vagueness and inwardness? It was an indistinct thought that hovered somewhere in my mind, although I did not express it at the time.

In my second week of work, I was invited to the weekly staff meeting; I was looking forward to it. For days I had been trying to figure out what was it that everyone actually did. In fact, I had been pathetically following whoever seemed to be doing something of any significance, in order to get involved. Although everyone had seemed so busy and stressed all the time, all my offers of help had been politely – yet icily – declined. The fact that no one seemed to be talking to each other about what they were working on at any given time, each remaining rigidly fixed and focused on their own task, their own desk, made finding out about their duties nearly impossible. I hadn't been given access to any of the tasks that the description of the position offered; I was rapidly losing enthusiasm and felt an obscure edge of suspicion – an eerie, unacknowledged mood.

Although the gallery manager stressed how important these staff meetings were, on the day of the meeting I was told to cover the receptionist's desk while she went to the meeting, meaning that of course I myself could not go. While performing this job of another, paid employee at the gallery, I discovered, on the reception's computer, the following email:

> Dear all,
>
> Although *they* [the interns] have signed Confidentiality Agreements we should be very cautious about what we discuss with them. They are support staff. Their *first priority* should be to handle the most basic tasks for us: answering calls, sending correspondence, preparing mailings, distributing fliers and covering lunch breaks. I do not want interns to be involved in our staff meetings. If the interns are

> working on a project this should be *done in spare time* or, at times when we are pressed for additional assistance, as and when needed.[15]

Needless to say it was the very same person who stressed in conversation with me how significant it is for the interns to partake in staff meetings who had sent this email. I had indeed signed a Confidentiality Agreement; in fact, it was the very first thing done on my arrival at 'work'. It sounded like a variation on Dr. Faustus' pact with the Devil (who wears Prada). I had to promise that, neither throughout nor ever after my internship, would I make any comments on any aspect of the placement:

Save that you may inform your immediate family members (upon whom you will impose a like condition of confidentiality) of the nature of your employment you will not thereafter, whether during the course of the employment or at any time, make (for whatever reason, directly or indirectly) any derogatory statements or comments to any person, whether oral or in writing and whether directly or indirectly about the Gallery, the Company, the Employees, the Employer, or any member of her family or household or guests or any other person at or in the vicinity of the Gallery. You also agree not to compose, publish, or cause to be published any (...) book, article, novel or other written document of any kind whatsoever whether fictional or non-fictional that relates directly or indirectly to the Gallery, the Company, and the Employer.[16]

I still cannot tell if the document, in its entirety, would be legally binding or not. It does sound a little extreme. I think it is safe to assume that, were all companies offering internships forcing all interns to sign such documents, plans to make the internship and voluntary work sector more transparent, fair, and accessible would definitely be hindered. The message in question was not addressed to myself and it is ironic that I only came across it because I was in fact, trying to do some actual work, which of course I should not have been doing unpaid. But because an email account still had not been set up for me I had to use the reception email. The message was titled explicitly *'*Guidelines *for* interns' (sic!). Of course I do not confess with too much guilt since in a competent security system such a message could have been sent to the receptionist's separate, personal account. The message was telling however, confirming my earlier assessment that I was performing nothing more than a logistical function to the gallery management, that they had no intention of investing in me, and investing me with experience that might have ultimately rewarded them and the cultural sector more broadly with increased productivity in the future. Instead I appeared

15 Internal email, my italics.

16 Internal confidentiality agreement.

to be wholly abandoned to non-productivity, even in a logistical sense. I was puzzled; just what was my purpose of being here if not to train, but not really to work either? Assigned almost entirely to pointless non-jobs as I was, what was I missing, where was the sense in this arrangement? The impression of a systematic stupidity only began to grow further.

On a Friday afternoon in the week preceding the private view of a new show, organised in conjunction with another gallery, the elusive owner's assistant showed up at the office. Everyone became immediately tense. People started cleaning up their desks and no one left early. Apparently the owner hates unhealthy things, so someone cleared out all the junk food from the fridge. When I announced that I was going out to have a cigarette break, the concerned receptionist whispered to me that I should make sure I go somewhere where I could not be seen. The owner never arrived, but everyone behaved as if he was right there in the office.

Every day, in every conceivable way, everyone seemed to be trying to do everything within their power to make sure the boss *thought* his vision was being put into practice, as if he was there, and everywhere. In fact the 'vision', never really *was,* and realistically it *could not ever* be put into practice. He had an idea of saving – not only disadvantaged groups of people in particular areas – but the whole global population through projects such as bringing the art of opera to the starving children in Africa or implementing Chinese culture in Tibet, all in the spirit of embracing cultural difference. The boss believed this could be done – in part at least – through the programming of events and exhibitions at the space. Such a vision was surely at best a delusional utopian project, but more likely it was a cultural cover for other commercial interests. Though fairly vacuous and insensitive, this vision was of course to be achieved by the grandest means possible, so that the gallery gained publicity, and its shows sold out to newly acquainted Chinese and Russian buyers.

Even an intern could tell that here we had an example of a purely commercial project, fronted by benevolent staff and those pretending to be doing a great deal for worthy causes. I could not help but be reminded again of Musil's brilliant description of the paralysingly vague actions undertaken by the Collateral Campaign Joint Committee in his epic *Man without qualities*. The Campaign – a brainchild of Count Leinsdorf, a man blessed with 'a complete absence of doubts'[17]– takes hold of the lives of those involved in a total way, all for a cause that can/could never come close to fruition. The absurd aim of the Campaign, though it remains undefined, is the subject of countless sessions of the

17 Musil (1979, vol. 1: 101).

'organisation created to prepare the way for the framing of suggestions leading towards this aim'.[18] The members of the Joint Committee remain entirely unable to settle on the very aim they are working towards, and ways in which to implement it; however, they seem to be constantly doing something:

> Again the whole thing was gone over, with a repetition of all the proposals that had been put forward in the hope of giving the Collateral Campaign a content and a meaning [...] There was always something to do. There were, besides, innumerable little minor considerations to be borne in mind. [...] One had to take account of certain persons and social connections: in short, even on days when one did nothing in particular, there were so many things one must avoid doing that one had the feeling of being very active indeed.[19]

Meanwhile, at the gallery, the 'advocates' of culture and creativity cluelessly tried to deal with the reality of organising things, liaising with artists and gallerists, all in the harsh reality of a credit-crunch city, deprived of private jets, limos, corporate entertainment budgets, and so on, as well as the bureaucratic necessities of running a gallery space. Conversely, across the Atlantic and far removed from the (financial) reality of day-to-day activities, the owner exercised a perfectly hands-off attitude. He had no concerns for the basics, which seemed to be constantly inadequate – from the lack of credit on the franking machine (each top-up required approval from the finance director based in New York), through lack of petty cash for scissors (needed for a children's' workshop scheduled to take place), to the staff who were forced to pay for their stationery supplies themselves, and then patiently wait for reimbursement.

Of course, no one dared to protest – there was no discussion with the boss. We might call this a textbook of stupid behaviour, at least in light of Ronell's description. Kant however, whom both Musil and Ronell reference with regards stupidity, saw stupidity in 'precisely that which fails to judge'.[20] I wondered how, in the grand scheme of running a multi-million pound facility aiming to overshadow London's Institute of Contemporary Arts, some of the cost-cutting initiatives could ever be justified. Could these be seen as anything other than the mangled judgements that Kant talks about? Actions such as increasing the prices of food in the café by up to thirty percent (while the café, the only decent place for food in a mile-radius, attracted a great host of local office workers whose word of mouth increased visitor numbers), or axing the entire education department that organised talks, lectures, school visits and other endeavours vital for an art

18 Musil (1979, vol. 1: 201).

19 Musil (1979, vol. 2: 357).

20 Kant (in Ronell, 2003: 71).

organisation, and at the same time provided the only outreach point connecting the foundation to the local community.

Perhaps these actions could be justified, businesswise. Yet to me it seemed that short-sighted decisions of this sort only proved the boss's incompetence as a businessman, philanthropist, and as CEO. It seemed to me that he was trying to build his empire forgetting about the very foundations that were meant to support it. If things were not working on the basic level, how could the overall product be successful? It all appeared to be about the ideological façade of the gallery – all grand goals and claims, and behind it, waste. What was the product anyway? All I saw was the empty vacuum of PR-speak and unrealisable projects, a Kafkaesque Castle where non-workers come for non-job/internships, where like Count Leinsdorf, everyone is very active and indeed in a state of anxiety, doing exactly nothing. Here we had compromise on a daily basis, being out of touch with reality, a cynically constructed edifice. Those working at the gallery (including, for that time, myself) were treading a very thin line in order to keep the owner satisfied; they negotiated an extremely limited space where reality and idealism overlap, meaning that neither functioned well. The product often seemed little more than the maintenance of this façade, in the form of the gallery's brand: a pseudo-commodity within which our work was concealed, frozen and indeed, interned.

'Biens internes?'

One particular exhibition at the gallery was to be a group show organised jointly with a major West End gallery. By this point, the gallery had changed the model of organising its shows entirely. In the past, the owner would choose big-name artists himself. They were specific artists, creating art responding explicitly to particular issues from his personal agenda for the 'save the world' project. They created pieces concerned with sociological and political histories and the resulting psychological outcomes for society, or with issues such as conflicts of interest within foreign policy, or exploring new solutions for the challenges of the 21st century and other similar subject matter. This new model of working saw a partner gallery provide a curator and install the exhibits, essentially hiring out the space. The gallery was responsible for liaising with potential buyers and running of the show (shop); if pieces sold, the profits were divided between both parties. As a result the subject matter began to seem only vaguely related to the gallery's hitherto prevailing agendas.

I took part in the installation process – for two weeks I covered the reception desk, as the receptionist was on annual leave. My main task (apart from answering the phone) was to liaise between the owners of the partner gallery, some of the artists who were there to install their pieces, and the gallery and project managers. The guests seemed to be amazed at the lack of involvement of the hosts in the process, at how corporate-like and formal the ways in which they worked were, and the lack of any visibly 'creative' people among the employees. The host managers were clearly not used to working with artists or such a curator either – they questioned their 'unusual' working hours and had trouble accepting the fact that the show was not just shipped in and placed around the gallery like all previous shows according to a plan devised beforehand with the use of the floor plans and a lighting architect. Chaos and conflict swiftly ensued. The artists refused to work within the set 'opening hours'; pieces arrived from abroad that, not having been measured properly by either of the parties, did not fit through any of the doors. It got to the point that when one of the artists wanted to borrow some black gaffer tape, and the project manager instructed me not to give it to them but to send them to the shops instead.

Stupidity is, as Ronell suggests, 'the indelible tag of modernity, (...) our symptom. Marking an original humiliation of the subject, stupidity resolves into the low-energy, everyday life trauma with which we live. It throws us'.[21] This sort of behaviour is rampant in the wasteful consumer circuit. Adorno would have railed against this kind of farce. Here, vacuity joins precarity at the two ends of a new class formation – the bosses with no idea, the workers with nothing to do and no access to the doing.

Meanwhile, the most energetic, and reasonable person in the team was the show's curator, yet even she didn't seem to get on well with the gallery staff. So I was ordered to mediate, and for the next ten days I found myself being told off, in equal measures, for everything and anything, by just about everyone. Despite trying to solve the problems (arising from both sides) myself so as not to aggravate anyone, for the next ten days the gallery workers accused me of being unprofessional, and the guest workers of being unhelpful. I was reminded of Jennifer Allen's article comparing gallery assistant's job to that of a hapless flight attendant.22

My contribution was invisible, but as it turned out, not unproductive after all. Finally my apparent non-job, what I was actually doing here, began to become clear to me. I was here to intern, but I was also here to internalise. The gallery's

21 (2003: 11).

22 See Allen (2009).

production, such as it was, was a collective effort; my role within this was simply to absorb and internalise everyone else's negativity. As a dumping ground for complaints, minor irritations, conflicts and contradictions, I was here to smooth things over, absorb the anger and disappointments, in short, to take the blame. I was a point around which the staff could collect, united by their willingness to lay the contradictions of the situation at my door. My contribution was it seemed negative, and yet it became increasingly apparent, integral to the productive functioning of the gallery.

In the end all of the simmering animosities came to an explicit face-off at the private view party, attended by about four hundred people. The host gallery went ahead, despite earlier arrangements, with charging guests for the drinks. The guest gallery owners were infuriated and embarrassed that their employees, friends, as well as collectors were forced to pay at the bar. The alcohol was, according to one them, of such bad quality that it should not even be served at all (earlier in the day, I had personally ordered, as instructed, the cheapest brands from a budget supermarket). In the end, the guest gallery agreed to foot the bill for all the drinks (at retail, not wholesale, price) and the party went on. I negotiated this, as a mediator in the unknown, unstable and immaterial space of affect. The affect I managed was a negotiated truce, nothing to show. In a way, the position of the intern conforms to the condition of precarious workers (of all kinds) more generally, expected to solve – for nothing – the inherent contradictions of the neoliberal labour market.23

But of course, this was always going to be abortive and almost perfectly stupid – throughout the preparations for the big opening there were ongoing discussions

23 Hardt and Negri, amongst others, see contemporary capitalism as increasingly characterised by what they understand as immaterial labour, particularly concerned with the production of affect (e.g. Hardt and Negri, 2000). However, internalising contradictions as negative affect and the mitigation of such affects as a reproduction of labour power has long been the role of unpaid (often female) labour before notions of precarity and unpaid labour were identified as characteristic of labour within the arts. Accounts of precarity that see the generalisation of the condition of artistic work within labour practices more generally in this respect occlude the originary, persistent and everyday 'precarity' of informal, reproductive and affective labour, often on the part of women (see for example Vishmidt, 2005). However, in the apparent unproductive non-work assigned to an intern such as myself a similar productive functionality is at play. Social interaction and cooperation can be seen as productive activity, regardless of the recognised labour time expended in them (Marx, 1973: 706). Where post-workerists saw this as underpinning a universal notion of immaterial labour, dissolving the separation between labour and free time, a similar status might be ascribed to my labour as an intern. My apparently unproductive activities were in fact reproducing the very conditions of productivity through a mitigation of negative affect.

about what text was to go on the walls – not only in terms of actual labels providing the details of each exhibited piece, but mainly what 'block quotes' were to be placed on the two remaining, prominent wall spaces. One of them was the wall opposite the entrance, immediately next to the title of the show, the other in the main gallery space. The gallery manager found what must be the one single most incomprehensible quote by his boss, and went ahead with placing it in the main gallery space, but come the day of the opening, he clearly changed his mind. (The laminate could be removed, but a spare copy had not been ordered). He seemed to realise that perhaps the other location for the quote would be better, as it would be impossible to miss; and by that point the show's curator was demanding a short blurb from her essay about the exhibition, as well as her name, be put up as well. At four in the afternoon, when everything else was prepared and ready to go, the courier arrived with the other laminate. The gallery manager told me to hide it and pretend that it has never been delivered. When the curator arrived, he made me tell her that it was never received and apologise on the gallery's behalf – my job was reduced to mediation for negative affect. The curator was devastated as she realised that her input into the show was not acknowledged on any of the promotional materials, nor anywhere throughout the display. I spent the night handing out the hastily Xeroxed copies of her curatorial statement, along with the press release for the exhibition. As they walked through the door, the guests cast confused glances at the empty space in the middle of the wall.

When Henri Storch coined the term 'immaterial labour', it was to counter the Smithian assertion that the intellectual activity of the 'higher social orders' was unproductive. Storch determined '*biens internes*' – 'inner goods' such as health and knowledge as the product of intellectual labour,[24] but one might argue, as Huag suggests, Storch's '*biens internes ou les éléments de la civilisation*' are in fact a primary social foundation of production in general.[25] Though he rejected the terminology, and saw Storch's failure to grasp the subject historically as ideologically compromised, Marx critically developed on Storch's work to efface the distinction between manual and intellectual work, showing that such 'inner goods' are in fact productive of wealth. I could imagine Marx noting that my labour here, though it had a social rather than physical output, was likewise not necessarily unproductive.

The telling etymological congruence of '*biens internes*' with 'intern', suggests more than the fact that they share a Latin root. The internality expressed here instructively illuminates my own experience in the gallery. But it was not an

24 Storch [1823], in Haug (2009: 182).

25 Haug (2009: 180).

'inner good' in Storch's sense that I was producing – that was what I had initially thought I had signed up for, and been disappointed. Rather I was productive, and to be sure in an economic sense, precisely through the internalising of negative affect, internalising the inherent contradictions of the relations of production of which I was part. My role as intern, as an appendage to the social body of the collective worker, was precisely to internalise.[26]

What have I produced? A precarious labourer, paying for the privilege of working for free, I slowly discerned the hierarchical code of the culture industry and ended up – throuh h a mix of deceit and chutzpah – brokering a détente of missed opportunities. Stupid. As a volunteer drone in the new precarious class, I have made my 'immaterial' contribution and it is negative affect.

My work was internalisation of the conflicts and uncertainties – its outcome was more or less a calming routine. My affective labour addressed the other side of positive evaluation – sure, I have averted and inverted all out art war, but I remain caught in a bind, and this means in all likelihood the gallery will stumble on as stupid as ever. If it is true that the main outcome of my productivity at the gallery was participation in their regime of inverted affect, this is because I had the choice of either being complicit in its production and distribution, or of internalising the negativity and attempting to minimise its consequences for the others involved. At the same time, I highlighted, through my own participation, the ways in which the pertinent issues of social exclusion, class composition and questionable practices on the part of employers' affect the learning and working processes of interns in the UK's cultural and creative sector, especially now – at a time when workplace appears to be reconfiguring and the numbers of interns is growing. I have highlighted what I believe to be a subject in urgent need of serious and sustained academic attention, as well as a continued public debate – if the current British government seeks to develop the unpaid labour (internship) model throughout all the major industries for the next generation of youth facing unparalleled debt and unemployment, then scholarship should attend to the fact that a proportion of these time-consuming positions are indeed stupid, involve little work, and generate a new middle-class boredom. A system of patronage favouring the wealthy emerges. The task of the new non-workers is to convert boredom into something entirely creative. But of course I cannot complain – I have also produced this text, and I was not exactly bored – although ironically, I certainly am disaffected.

26 Marx's concept of the 'collective labourer' (Marx, 1990: 643) arguably makes redundant the conceptual division of so-called immaterial and material labour, i.e. cognitive/affective and manual. The notion of collective worker describes how value emerges from an ensemble of social activity, not all of it immediately obvious as productive in a physical sense.

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Migrant self-employment between precariousness and self-exploitation*

Antonie Schmiz

Abstract

This paper contributes to theoretical debates around migrant economies. I explore how migrant entrepreneurs are affected by the precarisation of independent workers in local labour markets in the processes of globalisation and neoliberalisation. The paper focuses on how migrant entrepreneurs, as service providers in metropolitan areas, take over parts of the retail trade, gastronomy and personal services. It scrutinises aspects relating to neoliberal labour markets such as declining regulations and protection for self-employed people as well as the need for high flexibility. Theoretically, the paper aims to bridge the gap between debates around precariousness – so far mainly discussed for non-migrant entrepreneurs or employees – and self-exploitation occurring in migrant economies. I explore in how far migrant self-employment can be conceptualised as a form of self-exploitation. Empirically I draw on the example of Vietnamese migrants in Berlin and their position on the urban labour market. Based on a qualitative explorative research including interviews with Vietnamese entrepreneurs in Berlin, I provide an outline of different economic strategies. Thus, I draw conclusions on the precariousness of such labour arrangements.

Introduction

Over the past decade the EuroMayDay movement, whose aspirations are rooted in the legendary 2001 Milan movement, has expanded its scope to a global scale.

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The movement draws attention to the precarious conditions of employees and their claims for long-term employment and decent working conditions. Migrants had played an important role in initiating EuroMayDay campaigns and 'freedom of movement' was another central claim put forward (Standing, 2011: 1f.). In many cases migrants are among the first to be affected by precarisation. They are forced to accept the lowest wages (Bourdieu, 1998) and incomes respectively. However the agenda of the EuroMayDay demonstrations suggests that the struggles of the objects of my paper – migrant entrepreneurs – were not directly addressed. Hurdles to access labour markets are one of the most significant challenges migrants face in receiving countries. Most European countries recognise highly qualified migrants as a welcome solution to shortages of skilled labour. At the same time, qualifications from countries of origin often stay unrecognised and a significant number of migrants in Germany lack professional qualifications altogether. Since access to the first and regulated labour market is restricted, unskilled migrants often choose to apply more precarious strategies such as self-employment. In this paper I argue that, when approached from this angle, debates around migrant self-employment are one-dimensional. Further perspectives highlighting the advantages of self-employment should be added. This way my paper contributes a critical perspective to current migrant entrepreneurship research.

In Germany, half of all self-employed slip under the poverty line (in 2006: 14,000 EUR), defined as 50 per cent of the average household income of the German population (Pongratz and Simon, 2010: 35). Most forms of self-employment can only satisfy basic needs if they are combined with the income of a second household member. Incomes of self-employed people with employees differ significantly from those of sole proprietorships[1] who constitute the lowest income group (ibid.: 36; Bögenhold and Fachinger, 2010). Most migrant entrepreneurs can be found among the latter group, although they are rarely mentioned in debates and academic literature on precariousness.

I suggest to conceptually expand the theoretical framework of current research on migrant entrepreneurship. Linking the theoretical debates around migrant entrepreneurship research and independent workers allows us to shed light on a newly emerging precarious labour force. This approach may be supported by insights emerging from critical post migrant research (Kosnick, 2010; Langhoff, 2011). The latter rejects approaches to migration as a separate system at the margin of Western societies. Instead representatives of critical post migrant

1 The terms 'sole proprietorship' and 'independent workers' are used synonymously in this text. Both describe self-employment as work arrangement without employees.

research suggest that migrant economies constitute an integral part of the host society's labour market.

Many Vietnamese migrants in Berlin are unable to find employment in the first and regulated labour market because they lack the necessary qualifications. Drawing on their networks and special skills, they establish enterprises such as import-export businesses, snack bars, nail shops, retail and wholesale businesses instead. This form of self-employment seems to be an attractive alternative for migrants. It offers a prospect of higher income and an enhanced social status. Those running such businesses are required to be highly flexible and part of a dense social network. Long working hours (12-14 hours/day) as well as the (unpaid) employment of family members are not only common among Vietnamese entrepreneurs but also necessary to support their families.

In this paper I explore why the self-employment rate among Vietnamese is relatively high. I am particularly interested in the motivations that lead people to work under such precarious conditions. Following a brief historical placement of Vietnamese migration to Germany, I will focus on the period after the German reunification in 1990. Empirical findings suggest that there is a mismatch between the integration of skilled and unskilled migrants in Germany. The high share of self-employed people among Vietnamese migrants is closely connected to the difficulties migrants in Germany face when it comes to professional integration. Income differences and unequal opportunities on the labour market exemplify structural disadvantages. I argue that migrant economies are one way to avoid structural hurdles.

From workers to entrepreneurs

The former Vietnamese contract workers and their families form the majority of the 125.000 people of Vietnamese origin living in Germany (Wolf, 2007: 7, Federal Statistical Office/Destatis, 2009). With nearly 13.000 registered people in 2011, Berlin hosts the highest number of Vietnamese among all German Federal States (Amt für Statistik Berlin-Brandenburg, 2012). Between 1980 and 1990 about 60.000 Vietnamese came to work in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) as a result of bilateral contracts between the GDR and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. To prevent their inclusion into the Eastern German society, contract workers were recruited according to a rotation system and accommodated in isolated residential areas (Hillmann, 2005: 88). While it was difficult to establish contacts with the host society or acquire German language skills, they maintained strong family ties to Vietnam. This early-stage marginalisation has had feedback effects on the integration of Vietnamese

contract workers into the German labour market. Over the time, a niche economy, dominated by tailoring services, emerged (Weiss, 2005: 83ff.). It allowed people to boost the income they received from official employments. Economic activities of this kind can be considered as a preliminary stage of gradually expanding Vietnamese entrepreneurship.

After the German reunification about 26.000 former contract workers stayed in Germany. They faced a new socioeconomic situation and struggled to obtain a legal status. From 1990 to 1997, most of them stayed on the basis of an exceptional leave to remain. Many former contract workers tried to make a living from running small market stands or working as mobile traders. In 1995, a representative study of former Vietnamese contract workers found a relatively high proportion of 55 per cent to be self-employed (Ascheberg, 1996: 512). About 36 per cent of the self-employed Vietnamese worked as mobile traders and 43 per cent owned a shop. Only 22 per cent worked as regular employees (ibid.). Over the time textile and grocery businesses were upgraded to small shops and by the late 1990s many business people started to engage in wholesale trading. During the 1990s, legal arrangements pertaining to rights of residence changed several times. As a result Vietnamese migrants lived in uncertainty and were reluctant to make sustainable investments in businesses. From 1997 onwards, Vietnamese migrants who could make a living were granted unlimited residence permits. Since the German reunification, the legal status had a persistent influence on their labour market situation.

More recent estimations reveal that among the adult population of Vietnamese origin 55 per cent are self-employed, 30 per cent work as employees and 15 per cent are unemployed (Dao, 2005: 120). This means an increase of Vietnamese employees from 22 per cent in 1996 to 30 per cent in 2005. It can be assumed that only those who are not able to open up their own business due to financial restrictions work as employees (ibid.). A significant share of self-employed Vietnamese entrepreneurs officially operates as sole proprietors. This reflects the general trend towards a higher share of self-employment in Germany. Over the past two decades numbers have risen from about 3 million self-employed in 1991 to about 4.3 million in 2010, i.e. around 11 per cent of the total labour force (Bispinck and Schulten, 2011: 13).

Research questions and design

Based on a case study carried out in Berlin from 2007 to 2009, I explore what motivates Vietnamese migrants to become self-employed. My assumption is that self-employment often constitutes a reaction to structural disadvantages in labour

market access. But self-employment may also be the result of individual choice. To support my first assumption, I looked at decision-making processes during the phase of peoples' labour market inclusion. I was interested to understand to what extent Vietnamese migrants make an active decision to work in precarious labour market sectors. Subsequently, I will highlight some of the implications of such types of work with a particular focus on aspects relating to self-exploitation. I contend that self-employment as a prestigious professional position among Vietnamese migrants offers a chance for a social, professional and economic advancement. However, the risk of self-exploitation among self-employed Vietnamese migrants is high, especially if they work independently.

This paper is based on a broader research project, in which a qualitative, explorative approach was applied. Data was collected by means of participant observation in Vietnamese grocery shops in Berlin. This approach allowed me to explore operational sequences, daily routines and client-vendor relationships, as well as occasionally occurring informal arrangements. In total, 45 interviews were conducted with Vietnamese working in retail and wholesale trade, in gastronomy and as service providers. In the interviews I raised biographical questions, and explored motivations for shop openings, addressed family circumstances and more informal aspects like working conditions. I also conducted interviews with key personalities of the Vietnamese community in Berlin. Among them are heads of migrant organisations and migration commissioners. Additionally, consultants, scientists, heads of entrepreneurs' associations, small-and-medium-sized enterprise associations, German-Vietnamese and German cooperations were interviewed. These interviews helped to complement my knowledge of my research object and to situate and discuss the outcomes of my fieldwork.

Theoretical remarks

The public and scientific discourse on precarious work primarily focuses on employees and independent workers (EC, 2005). It is based on the assumption that the ongoing transition to flexible labour markets and deregulation incurs higher risks for the majority of the labour force. In precarious working arrangements, risks and responsibilities are shifted from the employer to the worker (ILO, 2011: 5). These precarious working arrangements can be defined as all types of insecure and flexible work (Gill and Pratt, 2008: 3), often referred to as 'atypical' or 'non-standard work' (ILO, 2011: 5). Working arrangements under this broad term reach from illegalised and temporary labour to home working, piecework and freelancing (Gill and Pratt, 2008: 3).

Although precarious work is often described as 'atypical', 'insecure' or 'unstable' work (EC, 2005: 40), such categories only make sense when referring to clearly defined standards. Such standards can be empirical – measured with reference to data and statistics – or normative. The German collectively regulated employment relationship ('Normalarbeitsverhältnis'), for example, is an outcome of the national employment protection legislation (EC, 2005: 40). Besides general discussions of precariousness, there are different national discourses about the precarisation of work. In Germany, it is discussed as an erosion of the collectively regulated employment relationship. Conversely in the UK, but also in Spain and Italy the discourse evolves around issues like flexibility, productivity and efficiency (EC, 2005: 34).

Much of the literature about precarious working arrangements focuses on the new creative class, such as artists, fashion designers and new media workers. These jobs are characterised as temporary, intermittent and precarious. They involve very long hours and an erosion of the boundaries between work and leisure time. Poor pay and experiences of insecurity arising from uncertain and unsteady amount of work, a lack of career prospects and a limited access to social security (Gill and Pratt, 2008: 14; Bispinck and Schulten, 2011: 12, 14) frequently mark such working arrangements as well. The extent of these implications, however, depends on firm size, labour union coverage, hourly wages, benefits and working conditions (Cranford and Vosko, 2012).

Research has drawn on various indicators to measure the level of precariousness. These include i) family status and 'family responsibilities', ii) the percentage of household-income from self-employment and ways of coping with financial difficulties resulting from self-employment (social transfer payments, family support) and iii) the work context (sector and the place of work) (Cranford and Vosko, 2012). While approaches to precarious work were primarily developed for employees and free lancers, they can be extended to the field of entrepreneurs. I draw on a definition of entrepreneurs as self-employed people who employ paid employees or unpaid family members. The degree of precariousness of self-employed is defined by i) control over work schedule and content, ii) social insurance coverage and retirement preparation, and iii) adequacy of income or economic hardship (Cranford and Vosko, 2012).

This paper aims to extend current debates of precariousness in self-employment to migrant entrepreneurship as one special type of entrepreneurship. The above-cited indicators for precariousness in dependent working arrangements are common features of migrant entrepreneurship. Research findings suggest that in the case of migrant entrepreneurs, precarious working conditions primarily result from high degrees of economic dependencies, lacking formal

qualifications and language skills. Although superiors cannot exploit self-employed people, the latter can exploit themselves, as relations between work load and income often suggest. So far studies of self-exploitation were largely restricted to sole proprietors (Pongratz and Simon, 2010: 28). For independent workers, the capital stock is too limited to serve as 'real capital'. Consequently, they compensate for capital deficiencies by effectively exploiting their own labour force (Candeias, 2008: 73).

Migrant self-employment was subject to academic interest since the 1970s. Although the reasons for migrants working in certain branches are widely studied, the side effects of self-employment, like precariousness and self-exploitation, have not been paid much attention. Self-exploitation is marginally brought into the picture as a matter of long working hours and low salaries (Waldinger et al., 1990; Boissevain et al., 1990: 147). While drawing on such general definitions Waldinger points out that migrants engage in markets where economies of scale are low so that high levels of efficiency can only be achieved under conditions of self-exploitation. This leads Waldinger to consider self-exploitation as a core strategy of migrant business owners to deal with intense competition (Waldinger et al., 1990: 26, 47).

A very early remark on self-exploitation in migrant entrepreneurship stems from Blaschke and Ersöz (1986; 1987). The authors see Turkish migrant businesses in Berlin as 'products of an "economy of poverty", which can only be sustained through a high degree of self-exploitation and the exploitation of family members' (cited in Kontos, 2007: 450). Similarly, Pütz (2004) points out that self-exploitation and the assistance of unpaid family members are the only possibility for migrant entrepreneurs to retain the business (in Pütz et al., 2007: 496). Self-exploitation and the exploitation of family labour occur among migrant entrepreneurs in different professional sectors (Wilson, 1998: 110ff., Valenzuela, 2003). Until now research on migrant entrepreneurship has not come up with a precise conceptualisation of the term 'self-exploitation'. Also the notion 'precarious(ness)' has not been brought into the debate. My research, however, has revealed that the precarious labour arrangements of Vietnamese entrepreneurs incur high risks of self-exploitation. Consequently I argue that research on migrant entrepreneurship research would benefit from paying more attention to instances of self-exploitation and precariousness.

The concept of exploitation has been developed in the 19th century to critically reflect the relationship between worker and capital owner who keeps a surplus value and leaves an imbalanced wage for the worker. Marx interpreted the stretching of a working day beyond the level of self-supply for the single worker as an accumulation of wealth and a form of exploitation. The profit a capitalist

makes for himself by means of wage labour is unjust (Blunden, n.d.). Self-exploitation is specific to self-employment. Exploitation is a relative concept and involves two sides: an exploited and an exploiting side. Consequently self-exploitation is measured as working hours in relation to profit. When considering profit in relation to working hours, it becomes evident, why the group of entrepreneurs, working more than 60 hours a week, is heterogeneous with respect to self-exploitation. Profits of entrepreneurs with a 60-hour working week vary greatly among sectors, degrees of entrepreneurial autonomy, firm sizes and other characteristics. This represents inadequate economic output in relation to labour (Cranford and Vosko, 2012).

I define self-exploitation as a condition in migrant self-employment that is highly precarious. It involves long working days, a weekly work load of more than 60 hours, marginal working shifts, a lack of free time and breaks during work as well as the unpaid support of family members. Working conditions of this kind are likely to incur working on weekends and rarely allow for holidays (Apitzsch, 2005: 84). Consequences of such working conditions are exhaustion and ill health. In sum self-exploitation results from precarious working conditions and is connected to low earnings, indebtedness and financial insecurity.

Changing motivations for Vietnamese self-employment

My empirical findings suggest that the reasons for Vietnamese people to become self-employed changed over time. Initially self-employment was a reaction to the restrictions of the German labour market but gradually turned into a prestigious professional position among Vietnamese migrants. Self-employment offers chances for social, professional and economic advancement (Exp. B5; Floeting et al., 2005: 10) and thereby provides opportunities to accommodate work and family life.

To structure my analysis I explore the changing motivations of Vietnamese migrants to become self-employed. Therefore, I look at three different periods of time. In the aftermath of German reunification, people started engaging in entrepreneurship because their legal status restricted their access to the regular German labour market. A study conducted in the mid 1990s shows that 68.2 per cent of the self-employed chose this mode of employment because they were unable to find other work. Before taking up self-employment nearly all of these Vietnamese migrants had been unemployed – the majority of them for more than one year (Ascheberg, 1996: 519). Self-employment in this period can thus be seen as the only way for people to satisfy their economic needs. Only 19.4 per cent considered self-employment as an opportunity of earning more money

compared to being employed or expressed a genuine interest to be self-employed (ibid.). The author of the study concludes that the Vietnamese motivation for self-employment emerges in conjunction with economic necessities (see also Bührmann, 2010: 278). However this only applies for the early stage of Vietnamese entrepreneurship in the 1990ies.

The second period, lasting from 1997 to 2003, was a time of economic expansion for many Vietnamese entrepreneurs. Most of those who ran market stands or worked as mobile traders set up retail or wholesale shops in this period. Continuous demand for low priced consumer goods helped people to stabilise their income. In the light of changing conditions, experts in the Vietnamese community began to interpret self-employment among Vietnamese migrants as a preferable working arrangement (Exp. B5). Based on their entrepreneurial skills – gained since the German reunification – Vietnamese migrants experienced a social and professional advancement.

The third period is shaped by the rise of globalisation and increasing competition that threatened many entrepreneurial endeavours. Since about 2004 competition became more intense and particularly affected the textile branch – partly because of newly emerging discounters in this sector. Incomes in many branches declined in this period, and the global economic crisis starting in 2008 additionally fortified this trend (Schmiz, 2011: 207f.). At the same time, the Internet, new telecommunication and transportation technologies led to a decline of several advantages Vietnamese entrepreneurs had enjoyed because of their knowledge of the Vietnamese market, culture, language and wide-ranging professional and family networks (Schmiz, 2011: 208). Over the time, however, English as a global business language has become more important for Vietnamese entrepreneurs (see also Light, 2007). In parallel the service sector within the Vietnamese economy in Berlin grew and diversified over the third period. New branches include freelance insurance agents, consultants, lawyers, interpreters and driving schools. Many enterprises in these sectors are sole proprietorships. Recently there has been a remarkable expansion of import-export-business, grocery as well as nail and cosmetics studios (Exp. B5; Schmiz, 2011: 207).

Self-employment as advancement

Experts suggest that the motivation of Vietnamese migrants to become self-employed lies in their ambition to achieve higher incomes. Being self-employed Vietnamese entrepreneurs earn more than their qualification would allow for in an employee's position (Exp. B5; see also Schmiz, 2011: 239). This observation echoes the emphasis researchers have placed on upward mobility as driving

peoples' motivation to become self-employed (see e.g. Light and Rosenstein, 1995; Bates, 1997). A grocer's shop owner reflects her motivation to become self-employed:

> I just wanted to make a living, to earn money to be able to feed my family [...]. I wish to have a well-ordered life and a regular income. If my children attend school and find a good job and if they cope with appealing to their social surrounding, then I am happy. (E8) [2]

Self-employment of Vietnamese entrepreneurs should also be discussed as a way of 'climbing the social ladder'. Vietnamese migrants choose self-employment to gain acceptance within their own community and beyond. This is reflected in the following . ert statement:

> Firstly, self-employment is relatively strongly anchored in [Vietnamese] tradition. You can experience that when you come to Vietnam. That is like... the own shop, the own business is just something very desirable...and very positive. (Exp. 3)

Through self-employment, self-realisation may go hand in hand with an enhanced social status. This is one of the main reasons why none of the interviewees expressed the wish to work as an employee instead. Self-employment is seen as reputable within the Vietnamese community in Berlin as it implies success (Schmiz, 2011: 244).

Being one's own superior (see also Pongratz and Simon, 2010: 44, 46; Candeias, 2008: 67) facilitates the compatibility of work and family life. Entrepreneurs control their own working life and benefit from *freedom at work* on a small scale. Previous studies suggest that people who achieve a higher quality of life through self-employment had difficulties going back to dependent work relationships and preferred to stick with more precarious arrangements in self-employment (Pongratz and Simon, 2010: 47; Lorey, 2005).

Combining work and family

The paper not only aims to highlight the social and economic advancements that are connected to self-employment. I am also interested in the motivation to become self-employed in order to reconcile work and family life. Reasons for the increasing numbers of family businesses can at least partly be derived from the higher flexibility family with business allows for, compared to regular employment. For women, sole-proprietorships offer a possibility to re-enter professional life after the reproduction phase. The possibility to reconcile work

2 Interviewees' quotes were interpreted from Vietnamese into German language directly in the field. Afterwards, they have been translated from German into English by the author.

and family life is one of the central explanations for the increase of sole proprietorships, especially those run by women (Pongratz and Simon, 2010: 44f.).

In the case of a Vietnamese family in Berlin a business was created in reaction to family- or life-cycle-related circumstances. Before her children were born, the interviewee worked in two different jobs. As an employee, she could not earn enough money for her family while her newly arrived husband struggled to find work because of his poor German language skills.

> I had a job, but my husband did not. After applying everywhere... but since he cannot speak German... and then I found work. Then I earned money by myself and my husband did not have any income. This did not work, because we have children and so on. We have to pay the rent. Everything has to be paid. And with my single income it was too little. Then we said I stop my job because I earned too little and we try to work here, both. This is hard, too. These days, everything is hard. Not so easy... (E6)

In order to make a living the family opened a corner shop. Living and working under the same roof, the woman could help out in the shop for several hours a day. At the same time she took care of the children, while her husband managed the business. It seems that self-employment is especially reasonable when reproduction implies spatial and temporal work constraints (see also Pongratz and Simon, 2010: 42).

Managing even small businesses, however, is demanding as peoples' social and family life has to be integrated in the working day. For this reason the co-existence of parallel management structures is characteristic for small businesses. Most shop owners have to buy goods from wholesale centres several times per week. Normally, they purchase goods in the early morning so they are able to prepare their shops before opening. They often share their shifts with their spouses. Often the revenues of such small enterprises do not suffice to pay additional personnel and cover social insurance costs. Family members are then employed informally, as they work without social insurance cover and receive no salary (Exp. B10).

A participant observation conducted in a Vietnamese corner shop in Berlin reflects this type of teamwork of a Vietnamese couple. It revealed that their working days are strictly organised. In between they manage their household and take care of three children. Many Vietnamese in Berlin live in spatial proximity to their working places (Schmiz, 2011: 199, 335) and the shop of this couple is located across the street from their apartment. The children often do their homework in the shop or carry out small duties in the business. On one day of

my participant observation, the two daughters, in the age of 7 and 12, helped to re-stock goods on the shelves:

> The shop owner's wife enters the shop to help a little. During a short conversation, she tells me about her three children in the age of 3, 7 and 12 years and that she cares for them at home. Her husband came to Germany in 1988 and she came nine years ago. They operate the shop for 8 years now. Her husband shops at the wholesale market in the Berlin district of Wedding three times a week and therefore rises at 3 to 4 am. Since he is tired then during the daytime, she displaces him for two hours in the midday while he carries up on sleep. They live vis-à-vis the shop. The shop is open until 8 pm. Afterwards clearance needs one hour. During the weekend, the owner shops Asian food and products in the Vietnamese wholesale centre in Berlins Hertzbergstraße with his own van. [...].
>
> The shop owner's wife is alone in the shop. She tells me that her husband is staying in Vietnam for a month. In this time, she manages the shop on her own and is responsible for the children. Her sister in law supports her in childcare. Colleagues do the purchase at the wholesale centre. (Extract from author's field notes)

This observation exemplifies the double burden of entrepreneurial migrant families. Still I assume that the couples' decision to become self-employed is based on a strategic choice in order to reconcile work and family life.

From precariousness to self-exploitation

In this section I draw on the case of Vietnamese migrants to illustrate migrant self-employment as a precarious labour arrangement. I argue that self-employment, especially in the dominant form of sole proprietorship, is often precarious because it incurs high risks of self-exploitation.

The majority of Vietnamese enterprises in Berlin fall under the EC category of micro enterprises. Micro enterprises are businesses with up to ten employees and an annual turnover of max 2 million EUR (EC, 2003). Sole proprietorships, falling under the category of micro enterprises, make up a part of 57 per cent of all self-employed work arrangements in Germany (Koch et al., 2011: 13). A study on former Vietnamese contract workers in the federal state of Brandenburg reveals that after the German reunification 19 per cent of the sample were never unemployed. 51 per cent were unemployed once and 30 per cent were unemployed several times. The study also drew attention to significant differences between the weekly working hours of employees and those of the self-employed. 83 per cent of the self-employed worked 40 hours per week or more, of whom 51 per cent worked 60 hours a week or more. Only 8 per cent of the self-employed worked less than the regular 40-hour working week (Mäker, 2008:

20). Such findings support my assumption that Vietnamese entrepreneurs face a high risk of self-exploitation.

A study of Vietnamese entrepreneurs conducted in 1996 reported weekly workloads of more than 60 hours for 37 per cent of the respondents (Ascheberg, 1996: 521). The percentage of Vietnamese with a weekly workload of more than 60 hours has risen from 37 per cent in 1996 to 51 per cent in 2008. In many cases enterprises not only depend on entrepreneurs working long hours but also require the (often unpaid) support of family members. Considering the low incomes of Vietnamese entrepreneurs, such working arrangements should be seen as a case of self-exploitation. In the 1990s 48 per cent of self-employed Vietnamese considered their incomes as just about sufficient but 60 per cent of them preferred to remain self-employed (Ascheberg, 1996: 524f.).

In the German federal state of Brandenburg, Vietnamese sole-proprietors account for 59 per cent of all self-employed Vietnamese (Mäker, 2008: 20). However, among Vietnamese entrepreneurs some incidents of polarisation can be observed. Some entrepreneurs opened up businesses in new branches or changed their concepts. A wholesaler complains about her situation while she points out her prospective economic strategy:

> Well, business has been slow lately. I have to ask around until the end of this year because now I am doing everything for nothing, working for nothing. 100 sqm, 2000 € rent, nothing remains. But I am thinking about moving to a smaller shop with a lower rent where I can maybe go on [...]. New labour functions are needed; new clients are there. This means, one has to test what is working out, what is well received and then one has to go on. And what is not working, one leaves out. (G14)

The respondent suggests that the revenues her small enterprise generates do not even suffice to pay for the rent. Such concerns can be found among several Vietnamese wholesalers who interpret their rental agreement as an adhesion contract. Similarly, another wholesaler speaks about her plans to move from a declining outskirt wholesale centre to a new Vietnamese trading house that is located in a representative building in the city centre:

> Is it not like not working out, this branch, but I am moving. I am moving with my commodity here to the Viethaus. And there, I will directly sell to German clients. And there, the contact is more direct and it is closer [...]. And many even do not know that this [centre] exists here. (G11)

Both quotes underline that the location of businesses can lead to the economic marginalisation and spatial marginalisation of these wholesalers. But both wholesalers already made plans to get out of this precarious situation.

Currently, a large number of Vietnamese micro enterprises is not profitable or even indebted. Business revenues are declining, often as a result of the economic recession in the late 2000s. The trade of luxury goods like for example flowers has been hit particularly hard:

> I am not content with my earnings but I just have to work. In the years before, it worked out. In Germany, so many taxes and concession taxes have to be paid, thus little remains. (E9)

Another flower seller complains about her declining income and identifies the economic downturn in Germany as the main reason for her problem:

> Well, the sales volume certainly declined. Yes, for sure this is connected to the wages paid to the people here and with the overall economic situation in Germany. Well, three to five years ago, selling flowers worked out but now things turned more difficult. (E2)

Two other flower sellers describe their problematic situation in different words:

> It doesn't work that well but not really badly. But I don't care [...]. It is fun, sometimes it doesn't work and sometimes it works [...]. It is because of the economy, because of the German economy. Many come here and tell me they don't have money. (E4)

> Of course, there are difficulties. Peoples' loans declined and it is harder to sell. (E3)

Both respondents point out that flower sellers tend to search explanations for their decreasing income in macro-economic structures, but do not blame microeconomic structures or their own decisions. Neither competition in Berlin's highly saturated flower market nor low investment rates of these mostly small-sized firms were mentioned to explain their situation. As a consequence, parts of the owners close their shops while others continue to operate at the margin of subsistence (Exp. B3). For the latter, Pichler coined the term 'survival economy' ('Überlebensökonomie'), referring to the extreme precariousness of parts of the migrant economy (Pichler, 1997: 106, 119). When asked for the competition in the sectors of textiles and mixed commodities, the owner answers:

> Well, the shop is fairly running... not that good but there is no competition around here [...]. Well, it isn't enough for the family [...]. My wife cannot work, thus we get social welfare [Hartz IV]. (E7)

Seen in the light of earlier theoretical reflections this quote reveals the income of the shop in relation to the family income is really low. In order to cope with this situation, the entrepreneurs' wife receives social transfer payments.

In different interviews as well as through participant observation, gender specific structures explaining the precarious situation of women could be identified. The aforementioned study shows that 85 per cent of the respondents engage in paid work. But there seem to be gender specific differences. 79 per cent of male respondents were self-employed and 20 per cent worked as employees. Among female respondents the self-employment rate was 41 per cent while 56 per cent of them were employees, including 19 per cent employees in family businesses (Mäker, 2008: 17-18). Overall there is a very high share of male Vietnamese shop owners as opposed to a 19 per cent share of women who help informally in family business. This legal situation of women makes them more vulnerable in case of professional or private crises and they depend more on their husband than husbands depend on their wives. While women perform a balancing act between work and reproduction, their situation is relatively insecure (Schmiz, 2011: 175). Due to this vulnerability, women are often caught in the enterprise and lack security networks that could support them in cases of divorce or death of their husband. The situation of women in migrant entrepreneurship is especially precarious when women remain in the role of 'helpers' in family business arrangements (Light and Gold, 2000: 146).

Gendered structures and precarious entrepreneurial conditions are particularly prevalent in flower retail and in the manicure business. A flower retailer portrays her situation as follows:

> In the beginning, I hardly had any customers. In this time, I really worried about my employees and my shop. I earned only 20-30 € a day, which is really little. (E2)

Compared to German entrepreneurs, Vietnamese tend to resist economic ups-and downs. This can be explained by a high tolerance for long working days of 14 to 16 hours. Also most Vietnamese entrepreneurs work six to seven days a week. The flower seller cited above states that she works 17 hours per day, from 3am to 8 pm. A lack of free time, often combined with limited scope for holidays and weekend work, is a typical case of self-exploitation (Apitzsch, 2005: 84). Managing such enormous workloads, which imply a direct exploitation of body, strength and force, long-term exhaustion and negative health effects are likely to occur (Bispinck and Schulten, 2011: 50).

For many Vietnamese shopkeepers wholesale centres are the only place and opportunity to maintain contacts to other migrant entrepreneurs. A flower seller reports that she meets other Vietnamese retailers in the early morning at the flower wholesale centre. But she does not have the capacity necessary to get organised in an entrepreneurs' association (E2) or in a labour union. Low levels of affiliation among Vietnamese entrepreneurs mirror the generally low

numbers of union members among precarious entrepreneurs (Cranford and Vosko, 2012).

Most Vietnamese talk about long working days although they do not always explicitly state the number of their working hours. The example of a flower seller, however, suggests that working hours often exceed the opening hours of shops. Flower sellers go to the wholesale centres between 2 am and 4 am, twice or three times per week. In this case, the shop is open from 9 am to 9 pm (E4) but working days are much longer:

> Oh, I'm working long days, from early until 10 pm. (E4)

She states the need for long working hours referring to her low business revenues. But she also expresses her wish to have a higher income so that she can rest on one or two days per week or to go on holiday (E4). The interviewee draws a direct connection between workload and profit. In a similar way, another flower seller reports:

> Well, I get up at 1.30 am and at 3 am I am in the flower wholesale centre. Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday are the main days. And the others [other flower retailers; *authors note*] are already there at 2.30 am and I come only at 3 am, which is already late. (E2)

The interviewee's quotes show that working long hours combined with low profits is common among Vietnamese entrepreneurs in Berlin. An expert described such working conditions as self-exploitation, emphasising the precariousness of this kind of work:

> Small and smallest enterprises, family enterprises with a permanent tendency to self-exploitation – well, extreme working hours, extreme investments of force and mind; there is little time left for the family. And the family is finally included into the labour process. (Exp. B3; see above)

This statement makes direct reference to self-exploitation and also mentions two defining elements of self-exploitation: the extreme physical investment and the inclusion of the family into labour processes (see also Cranford and Vosko, 2012; Bispinck and Schulten, 2011: 50). My data contains many further statements concerning working hours. The respective respondents were wholesalers who work 10 hours per day (G15), 9 hours per day (G9), 8.5 hours per day (G2) and 8 hours per day (G8). The accounts of these respondents show that a high workload is a widespread phenomenon among Vietnamese entrepreneurs, although not every Vietnamese entrepreneur works a significantly longer working day than the German legal basic daily work load of 8 hours.

Another wholesale trader refers to high seasonal differences in working hours. Workloads may vary from 6 to 15 hours per day depending on the delivery of commodities. During seasonal peak times, wholesalers work up to 21 hours per day.

> Now, you came off-season, when we have little to do. Then nobody is coming here and I only go to work at 2 pm or 1 pm [...]. But, like mentioned before, there are times... in season we already come at 5 am and work until 10 pm [...]. Off-season is always late and in season always early [...]. Then it is sometimes running until 1 or 2 am and then we have to be here again at 5 am. (G1)

Long working hours occur not only in the wholesale sector but also in retail trade. The wife of one of the grocers seems to take the long working days of independent workers for granted:

> I only assist if my husband is doing the purchase or so [...]. If self-employed, my husband has to work about 15 hours daily. (E6)

All interviewees express a very high tolerance for long working hours. Also a Czech radio station reported about an averagely weekly workload of 57 hours among Vietnamese in Prague (Radio Praha, 2012).

Self-exploitation through long working days and opening hours is widely seen as a consequence of high competition (Boissevain et al., 1990: 145ff.; Waldinger et al., 1990: 46f.). My empirical research supports this assumption. This pertains especially to the low-skilled sector, like for example flower selling:

> Well, there is a lot of competition around here, in the metro station, in the side street another two and over there another one. But I have to survive on the basis of my strategies. (E2)

A tailor describes a similar situation in her highly competitive field:

> Here and there [are] alteration shops and over there, too. My shop is in the middle. Well, there is a lot of competition in this sector, of course. I am situated in the middle and to the right, to the left, up and down, well, there are four shops and in Germany there is competition everywhere. But when I do a good job, people will just come again. (D2)

Despite severe competition, there is a low fluctuation of Vietnamese shops. There seems to be sufficient scope for resilience although earnings from retail trade are at the margins of subsistence. An expert argues (Exp. B2) that the relatively low fluctuation of Vietnamese enterprises can be explained by the lack of alternative economic opportunities as a result of limited resources. A substantial number of Vietnamese entrepreneurs can be considered as 'working poor' (Pongratz and Simon, 2010: 44). Also Vietnamese entrepreneurs seem

more prepared to take risks than other groups of entrepreneurs (Exp. B2). This is reflected in a wholesaler's statement:

> Yes, like I mentioned before, this is only a family enterprise here [...]. Sure, everybody wants to fly at higher game, but we just want to remain constant. Some are growing on and on but take a high risk. We just want to remain constant, so that we will have enough to make a living, so that we may fulfil our desires. (G1)

Risk tolerance varies according to age, level of education, and household size (Xiao et al., 2001: 310). My findings indicate that wholesalers who are better educated and more experienced were more tolerant towards risks than retailers and service providers (Schmiz, 2011: 201). As part of precarious working conditions of employees, risks and responsibilities are shifted from the employer to the worker (ILO, 2011: 5). Similarly, in the case of wholesalers, the risk is shifted from the retailers to them, selling commodities on sale or return. This can be seen as a result of intense competition as well.

The Vietnamese economy counts high numbers of business start-ups, which are connected to the insufficient payment of temporary personnel. Those who can afford to set up a new business use the skills they gained from 'training on the job'. 'Training on the job' is common in branches where specific techniques are required, such as flowers and manicure (Schmiz, 2011: 165, 309; Schmiz, 2012). However, the decision to become an entrepreneur is a decision in favour of higher risks and enormous work efforts. Ultimately it is a decision for a higher precariousness with a risk to self-exploitation.

Conclusion: Free work?

Throughout this paper I have argued that the decision of Vietnamese migrants to become self-employed cannot be explained in a one-dimensional way. Since the German reunification, former Vietnamese contract workers were affected by socio-political developments which had impacts on their residence status and working permission. While a 'free choice' of work was not an option during the first half of the 1990s many Vietnamese opened mobile businesses or market stands which they later transformed into shops.

The trend towards more self-employment reflects the status enhancement as well as the higher income this working arrangement incurs. At the same time Vietnamese entrepreneurs have to cope with a marginalised status on Berlin's labour market. Most of the former Vietnamese contract workers are not in a position that allows them 'free choice' of their working arrangement. Insufficient German language skills and low levels of formal education are primary reasons

for this impasse. As employees Vietnamese migrants struggle to find positions, which come along with income prospects similar to those of self-employment. Based on empirical evidence I showed that for most Vietnamese migrants in Berlin, self-employment is the only way to earn enough to support themselves and their family. The prospect of achieving a higher income seems to be a key factor underlying the high share of self-employed Vietnamese in Berlin.

By distinguishing three different periods of Vietnamese business development, I reconstruct their careers in self-employment as a way of economic and social advancement. To date, self-employment remains the preferred working arrangement and continues to generate higher incomes than working as an employee. Being an entrepreneur can hence be interpreted as one form of self-realisation. Nonetheless, success in Vietnamese enterprises tends to come along with extremely high workloads and with a high tendency to self-exploitation.

Which new insights can be gained through the distinction of different motivations for self-employment and the historical description of Vietnamese labour market inclusion since the German reunification? I contend research on migrant entrepreneurship could open up new and insightful perspectives by borrowing from approaches and findings from the field of precarious labour market research. This could help to better explain why migrants find themselves in entrepreneurship to such a high degree.

Further research is needed on the future of migrant entrepreneurship. The case of Vietnamese entrepreneurs shows that the second generation chooses other professional careers than their parents. A relatively high share of second-generation Vietnamese attends secondary school or studies for a university degree. Subjects like engineering, economic and business sciences, medicine and pharmacy are particularly popular. Academic qualifications promise a way out of the precarious structures created and endured by first-generation Vietnamese immigrants (Schmiz, 2011: 248ff.). I suggest that the second generation's aspiration to work under different conditions than their parents and to earn higher incomes can be seen in the light of intergenerational reciprocity. Intergenerational reciprocity provides old age insurance for the majority of the first generation, who never paid any contributions to the German social security fund. For the next generations, self-exploitative structures seem to be far less desirable than a more sustainable professional solution that allows them to be part of social security schemes. Future research would be well placed to explore if second-generation Vietnamese in Germany follow a similar path like the South Asian community in the UK (Jones and Ram, 2003; McEvoy, 2002). In the latter case a generational shift was observed, with the second generation rather opting

for higher education in the receiving country than 'follow(ing) their parents into onerous self-exploitation' (cited from Barrett and McEvoy 2007: 350).

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'And if I don't want to work like an artist...?' How the study of artistic resistance enriches organizational studies*

Brigitte Biehl-Missal

abstract

An increasing number of artists, from theatre makers to painters, critique recent aesthetic developments in organizational life. One of their topics is the relation between work and freedom, as employees, like artists, are required to bring fully into work their subjectivity and emotional motivation. This paper presents several contemporary examples and a case of the theatre maker René Pollesch whose plays show the dark side of these role models, leaving the audience to draw its own, bitter conclusions. It is proposed in this paper that organizational studies should consider these forms of 'artistic resistance' more systematically. Artistic resistance goes beyond extant critical intellectual approaches to organization studies: Its presentational form provides an aesthetic experience, and conveys both embodied and tacit forms of knowing in fuller, richer and stimulating ways. The paper discusses implications for organizational theory building (for example with regard to work models and the use of arts for organizational development), and research methods (scholarly applications of arts-based methods for the generation and presentation of research findings).

Introduction

> And if I don't try to live like an artist, if I don't want to work in such a way, being a PREY, AND IN SELF-EXPLOITATION! And if I don't even think of self-actualizing myself constantly WHAT WILL HAPPEN THEN?! (theatre play by René Pollesch)

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Organizational life and the economic world are increasingly imbued with aesthetic and artistic elements (Böhme, 2003), and concepts of work have changed correspondingly. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (2005) explore how concepts from the world of the arts were integrated and instrumentalised in line with the 'new spirit of capitalism'. Contemporary work models which include promises of freedom through work are often related to the world of arts and artistic concepts. Leadership may be considered 'as an art' (Ladkin and Taylor, 2010) and many employees too, particularly in the services industry, are required to behave like artists. Yet it is a counter-movement from the world of arts that is the focus of this paper. Art is a mirror of both society and the business world, and, for example in theatre, reflects a current trend of 'dedicated intervention' (Höbel, 2009) and organizational criticism. This paper deals with the critical reaction of artists, the 'artistic resistance' to economic developments, including notions of 'free work'.

It is argued here that artistic resistance provides something that goes beyond extant critical intellectual approaches to organization studies: Its presentational form provides an aesthetic experience that is able to convey embodied and tacit forms of knowing in fuller, richer and potentially stimulating ways which have implications for organizational theory building. In this vein, the modus operandi of artistic resistance can furthermore inspire scholarly applications of arts-based research methods that are increasingly advocated to get hold of and express this aesthetic experience (Knowles and Cole, 2008; Strati, 2009).

Work, freedom and people's existence in organizations are largely determined by tacit forms of knowing (Polanyi, 1958) which roughly correspond to aesthetic knowing (Taylor and Hansen, 2005: 1213). Aesthetics is understood here as sensible knowledge and aesthetic judgement, whose forms of embodied, tacit knowing go beyond rational understanding and are essential drivers for behaviour in and the understanding of organizations (Strati, 1999). My epistemological perspective pertains to the intricate nature of the 'aesthetic experience' in organizational life and to the challenge for academic inquiry to get hold of and appropriately represent findings about these embodied and emotional elements that are different from and complementary to intellectual knowing (Strati, 2009). Thinking from this epistemology, the inclusion of artistic resistance in research on organizations is about getting hold of a powerful form of critique that uses aesthetic and presentational forms to negotiate organizational critique.

Although the world of arts is a genuine habitat of aesthetics, the art world's responses to organizations have not yet been systematically included in organizational aesthetics research as 'artistic resistance'. The next section of the

paper will review research on organizations and art (organizational aesthetics) to illustrate how the consideration of 'artistic resistance' provides an area of fruitful inquiry. This is followed by section in which I attempt a definition of 'artistic resistance', by including examples from different art forms.

This is followed by a case study from the world of theatre. I chose theatre art, because theatre is the metaphor *par excellence* for human life and for organizations as well (Mangham and Overington, 1987; Nissley et al., 2004), sharing its ephemeral nature (to which is journal is also devoted) and a presentational form. René Pollesch's plays provide a dark impression of work, that generate desperation and hopelessness – forms of aesthetic, embodied and tacit knowing brought to life by the artistic form. In this section of the paper I will also provide a personal account of my engagement with this form of theatre to support the theoretical issues raised. Finally, I will discuss implications for organizational research.

Organizational aesthetics as a gate to artistic resistance

Work, freedom and our existence in organizations are often linked to artistic concepts, and I use these to show that the inclusion of artistic resistance can be fruitful for several areas of organizational inquiry. Researchers concerned with the 'art of organizations' have chosen different structures to map the field of 'organizational aesthetics'. Several seminal works, discussed briefly below, provide the basis for my proposal that artistic resistance is a fruitful field of inquiry, not least for enabling the development of existing theoretical approaches. The consideration of artistic resistance also offers new insights into still under-researched areas that already have been highlighted by the aesthetic approach. These questions revolve around aesthetic and artistic inquiry into organizational life and the use of representational forms to provide a richer understanding of organizational life.

In the first seminal work on aesthetics and organization, Strati (1999) divides the field into areas which include organizational imagery, physical space of the organization, physical artefacts, and more conceptual segments with metaphorical approaches (manager as an artist) and lessons from the arts for management. In *The aesthetics of organization,* Linstead and Höpfl (2000) emphasize critical aspects and develop aesthetic theory by drawing on interdisciplinary and philosophical perspectives to address issues of control, ethics, and identity. In *Art and aesthetics at work*, Carr and Hancock (2003) develop these approaches and distinguish between the theory and practice of aesthetics both in organizations and in ways of critique.

None of the approaches explicitly suggested that artistic resistance be included as a field of inquiry. More recently, a couple of studies emerged that are concerned with the analysis of phenomena related to it (e.g. Barry and Meisiek, 2010b; Beyes, 2006; Biehl-Missal, 2010, 2012b, 2013; Murtola, 2012). The consideration of artistic resistance can be viewed as a development of the field in general. I argue that this area also provides inspiration for researchers who already are expanding traditional intellectual forms of inquiry by developing artistic and aesthetic approaches. To clarify this line of thought, I will draw on Taylor and Hansen's (2005) review article of the organizational aesthetics field. The authors differentiate between theoretical (intellectual) approaches, developed substantially over the years, and aesthetic/artistic approaches, which remain under-researched despite having a strong potential for organizational inquiry. The latter topic can serve as a bridge to artistic resistance.

Artistic forms of aesthetic organizational inquiry

Artistic forms of aesthetic organizational inquiry (Taylor and Hansen, 2005: 1223) transform research findings into a variety of art forms such as theatre plays (Taylor, 2003b; Taylor, 2003a), quilts (Rippin, 2006) or poems, songs, and multi-media tracks (Brearley, 2002). These presentational forms, due to their multi-layered aesthetic nature, are able to convey a more holistic understanding of and feeling for organizational life. Strati (2009: 236) calls this process the 'artistic' approach, one which 'envisages the hybridization of artistic creative energy and rationcinative capacity in the performative conduct of both research and organization.' The 'artistic' approach is considered to be an innovative method rooted in the arts, and an addition to 'intellectual' approaches that are more common in the social sciences (Strati, 2009: 243). The latter include the so-called 'archeological', 'empathic-logical' and 'aesthetic' approaches which make sense of the symbolic qualities of organizational phenomena by either adopting the stance of an historian of art using qualitative methods, or by anthropological immersion followed by empathic and logical interpretation using methods such as empathic understanding, imaginary participant observation and aesthetic judgement. These methods have in common that researchers activate their perceptive-sensory faculties, also the very things they would need to analyze forms of artistic resistance that are the focus of this paper.

Artistic forms of academic inquiry are strongly related to artistic forms of resistance, and they give us something that is missing from other intellectual and critical approaches. Whilst explicit knowledge can be represented through discursive forms in journal articles and books, aesthetic knowing requires a more intricate, emotional and multi-layered form (Taylor and Hansen, 2005: 1214).

Consequently, the typical methods used in academic works which analyze for example the 'dark side' of organizations (Warren and Rehn, 2006) can and should be complemented by forms of artistic resistance that have distinctive ways to reveal the these issues. The strength of art forms is that they provide an intricate aesthetic experience and a richer, fuller, more embodied understanding. There is a gap between traditional academic forms of research and the aesthetic condition of organizational life, and it is this that poses a direct challenge to organizational aesthetics research, namely: find innovative ways of representing and understanding the aesthetic dimensions of organizations.

The consideration of artistic forms of resistance is one way of identifying such innovations. Artistic resistance and academic forms of aesthetic/artistic organizational inquiry are not so different after all. The latter typically require an intellectual framing via articles or conference panels to go beyond 'merely' doing art about organizations. However, boundaries are increasingly blurred when it comes to the use of aesthetic and artistic artefacts in qualitative organizational research methods (Vince and Warren, 2012) and hybrid forms of art and research (Schwab, 2011). These include almost academic approaches of theatre makers who – in an act of artistic resistance – turned a corporate meeting into a theatre play (Biehl-Missal, 2012b), incorporating hour-long semi-structured participant interviews and publishing a detailed brochure and documentation on the project. This raises the question as to just how formal art about organizations needs to be understood. For example, Taylor's (2003b) plays, even when performed as staged readings in academic settings rather than as full productions, still can be seen as artistic resistance by either the author, participants or spectators. Whilst I do not attempt to deliver another contested definition of art at this point, I think most people would accept that 'doing art' does not require for its legitimacy an institutional arts setting, since many contemporary art forms operate outside such a setting. Instead, it is the artist's/ author's intention and the resulting reception that determine whether the work is 'resistant' in an artistic way or merely entertaining, discursive or educative.

The use of artistic forms in organizations (arts-based interventions)

The consideration of artistic resistance complements another extant, yet still young area of inquiry, namely: the use of artistic forms in organizations. The emergence of this area is linked to changing models of work and to ideas of 'free work' which, to create value, require corporations to target the emotional, motivational, creative and aesthetic potential of their employees. So-called 'artistic interventions' (Berthoin Antal, 2009; Berthoin Antal et al., 2011), 'arts-based interventions' (Biehl-Missal, 2011b), the 'workarts' (Barry and Meisiek, 2010a) or 'arts-in-business' methods (Schiuma, 2009) are used as tools for

workforce development and organizational change. Artistic interventions can be broadly defined as bringing people, processes or products from the world of the arts into the world of organizations for the purpose of supporting processes of employee development and organizational change (Berthoin Antal, 2009: 4). These encompass paintings, theatre, poetry, literature, music, sculpture and other performative methods. Theatre for example is used to enhance presentation and communication skills, to support team building, and sometimes may enable employees to contribute to change processes (Nissley et al., 2004). Many practitioners try to learn theoretical and leadership lessons from the arts, for example from Shakespeare's plays (Augustine and Adelman, 1999). These arts-based interventions mark a new organizational interest in the potential of the arts world that is different from, and goes beyond the long tradition of organizational sponsorship, patronage and cultural citizenship.

'Artistic resistance' is an opposite and complementary development to these instrumental 'arts-based' interventions. Among the world of artists we find not only those who are co-operating with organizations but increasingly others who are putting business issues, including the aesthetic developments (such as theatrical environments, emotional labour, storytelling, etc.), at the centre of their work without being asked by companies to do so. The intermingling of the arts and organizations involves reciprocity: the arts may be used to serve the interests of organisations; but so might organisations be used for artistic purposes (including for resistance to the organisations themselves). Identification and analysis of the complexities that turn on this reciprocity provide a promising avenue for future research.

Defining artistic resistance

The term 'artistic resistance' will be used to describe artistic works (mostly by artists and potentially by others such as researchers) that respond to aesthetic and artistic developments in organizational life. Artistic resistance in the present paper can be understood as a wide continuum of critical artistic works including: presentational forms used by academics, institutional theatre makers, individual painters and others; and performance art used by social activists. When considering artistic resistance, the focus is on artists who pick up business issues without being asked to do so by the business organizations involved – in contrast to other forms of artistic involvement in organizations, e.g. design or arts-in-business. Albeit many forms of artistic resistance are analyzed in academic studies, for example in theatre studies (Perucci, 2008), there is sparse organizational literature about artistic resistance.

In organization studies, the discussion of art works or artistic performances is not too common and displays a variety of aims. The works of Shakespeare have been used as an inspiration for leadership (Augustine and Adelman, 1999). Other studies on the analogy of *Leadership as an art* (Ladkin and Taylor, 2010), have used the world of arts as a mirror to better understand contemporary developments: Barry and Meisik (2010b) discuss art about leadership, Biehl-Missal (2010) refers to theatre plays as a critical lens on leadership. Beyes (2006) and Beyes and Steyaert (2006: 102) also draw from the most recent and postdramatic forms of theatre to theorize about organizations, criticizing the 'often unproblematic way in which theatre is used in organisational analysis for instrumental purposes and metaphorical interpretation', predicting that a reflective 'meeting between theatre and organisation will be an uneasy one. It will be quite a mess.' Such an uneasy and messy, yet intellectually and aesthetically fruitful involvement will be illustrated by discussion, below, of the case study.

Another example is Costas (2009), who in her *ephemera* article, considers Lars von Trier's film *The boss of it all* as a humorous and creative response to contemporary developments which allows for a critical insight and understanding of organizational dynamics. The paper by Guillet de Monthoux (2000) deduces more theoretical principles of value creation from Marina Abramovic's theatre performances. Ian King (2007) examines two medieval paintings and the role of the straight line in perspectival art to show that, similarly to a picture corresponding to scientific practice, management studies today cannot produce a complete view of reality. The rather unusual method to regard paintings as a means of understanding organizational studies is chosen because they 'offer us a view that is somehow more vivid and penetrative', invoking our visual sense in a persuasive, yet powerful way (King, 2007: 226). Not surprisingly then, critical visual analyses have used paintings as point of reference to show persuasive strategies in contemporary advertising (Schroeder, 2008), and also considered the artistic appeal in practices of culture jamming (Harold, 2003), where consumer movements disrupt or subvert mainstream cultural institutions, including corporate advertising. In this vein, it can be suggested that other examples of contemporary artistic practice may yield manifold insights into theoretical research questions.

More and more artists react to the 'increasing economization of society and of individuals', and *Kunstforum International* (Buchhart and Nestler, 2010) has recently devoted two issues to this theme. At this point, I shall briefly present some milestones for a better understanding, without attempting a detailed history. This development goes back to artists like Otto Dix, who, after World War I, painted the dark side of the economic system and its potential threat to the

future. Andy Warhol being the artist dealing with capitalism in new ways, creating ready mades, and becoming a master of business arts and the arts business. This is related to Marcel Duchamp's earlier engagement with economic, cultural and social processes and the anti-capitalist activities of artists such as Hans Haacke, Cildo Meireles, Marcel Broodthaers and Öyvind Fahlström in the 1960s and 1970s, triggered by the Vietnam War, Watergate and the developments in 1968. With the globalized economy and the rapid development of information technologies, the spectrum of artistic activities became much broader. Artists like Oliver Ressler, Alice Creischer and Andreas Siekmann work on the presentation of alternatives to global capitalism, artists like Andrea Fraser, John Bock, Thomas Feuerstein, Superflex or Carey Young expanded artistic observation into political and social action. The painter Verena Landau (2010) for example illustrated her view on cold and repressive corporate events (Biehl, 2007), and contributed to the initiative *Kunst gegen Konzerne (Art against corporations)* which addresses the complexities of corporate sponsorship and the mechanisms of the arts market (Biehl-Missal, 2011b: 167-170). Collectives like etoy or UBERMORGEN.COM use virtual spaces for critical art works and political activism. Additional examples of critical artistic feedback can be found in those Hollywood films which respond to the business world, for example *Wall Street* (financial markets), *Super size me* (fast food) or *The social network* (Facebook). Examples from the theatre are Nobel Laureate Elfriede Jelinek's (2009) recent polemic about the financial crisis, and Rolf Hochhuth's play *McKinsey kommt (There comes McKinsey)* which presents the world of business consultants as an unworthy, almost morally criminal task.

Sometimes artistic resistance can take the form of concrete interventions. There is a trend for theatre directors, writers, and painters in contemporary projects to intervene and even invade organizations. One example is Rimini Protokoll, a group of theatre directors, who used Daimler's 2009 Annual General Meeting as a ready-made event and constructed it as a theatre play entitled *Hauptversammlung* (Biehl-Missal, 2012b). Two hundred theatre spectators were imbedded, against the will of the company, into the carefully-staged event. The event received high public awareness via features in the media. The intention was to provide an opportunity for everyday people to 'experience' these massive shareholder meetings, and thereby make people attentive to the theatrical nature of organizational events and to the intricate aesthetic means which corporations use to influence participants, re-negotiate meaning, and prevent or dispel resistance in organizational settings (Biehl-Missal, 2011a).

Another example is Reverend Billy and the Church of Earthalujah (formerly: Church of Life after Shopping Gospel Choir) who, with semi-ironic preacher performances, invade retail spaces and banks. The performance activist Bill

Talen has been sentenced to jail for initiating theatrical preacher performances in his role of 'Reverend Billy' in Starbucks stores (Perucci, 2008), criticizing these aesthetized places as 'theatrical environments' which make one forget about the exploitation of workers including coffee farmers and baristas. Only recently, from an organization studies perspective, Anna-Maria Murtola (2012) argued that Reverend Billy uses strategies of parody and overidentification to interrupt the dominant capitalist ideology. The pivotal element of this artistic form of critique can be found not only in the intellectual critique, but in the aesthetic experience provided by the singing and shouting which differs from the inoffensive and persuasive atmospheres in typical consumption environments (Biehl-Missal and Saren, 2012).

Figure 1: Reverend Billy / What Would Jesus buy; Canary Mason, Mason Wendell.

Case study: the theatre of René Pollesch

This case study is from the world of theatre and further illustrates how artistic resistance may deal with organizational issues such as 'free work'. I have chosen the work of theatre director René Pollesch for a number of reasons. First, it has wide public awareness and acclaim, with Pollesch winning the most prestigious prize for new writing in the German theatre, the Mühlheimer Dramatikerpreis in 2001 and 2005. His recent play *Kill your Darlings! Streets of Berladelphia* is regarded as one of the most innovative German plays of 2012, and it deals with the lack of gemeinschaft in capitalist societies that merely consist of an 'addition of individuals' without emotional ties, in Pollesch's view (Kirsch, 2012). The recurring motif in his work is the emergence of success-oriented networks in capitalism which replace friendships and emotional bonds. The issue of emotional emptiness is representative of almost any existence in organizational environments, according to Pollesch.

For this article, fragments from earlier Pollesch plays are analysed. The works chosen have a particular aesthetic form that is of interest to organizational researchers, and also have an interesting intellectual base. Pollesch is an author-director (like a singer-songwriter) and writes his own text so as to include a contemporary critique. With a strong theoretical background and a degree in applied theatre studies, the director draws on avant-garde publications, poststructuralist theory, Marxist writings and critical theory, starting from Agamben, Baudrillard, Brecht, through Derrida, to Žižek. In this paper I am not

attempting a textual analysis, but when confronted with Pollesch's theoretical mix other academics may feel inspired to delve into specific ideas and writings that could be used for further organizational studies. I was thinking of the rise of poststructuralist writings more than a decade ago, and newer attempts to use Bertolt Brecht or Heiner Müller to theorize, for example, leadership as an art (Biehl-Missal, 2010). In such ways does artistic resistance open new theoretical avenues for researchers. Most importantly, this form of contemporary theatre particularly fits with the topic of 'free work' as the theme of the *ephemera* conference and the starting point for the theoretical considerations presented in this paper. The concept will be outlined in the following section.

Figure 2: From *Kill Your Darlings*: The actor Fabian Hinrichs stripped off his shirt and "supported", or carried away, by the athletic choir representing the capitalist network, in dollar bill clothing. © Thomas Aurin

Freedom and work in Pollesch's performances

Pollesch's theatre revolves around questions such as: 'How can I maintain my personal goal of self-actualization [and 'free work'] in the job, even if the conditions are precarious? Is that even possible?' (Rakow, 2008). These questions apply for people in many different contemporary working conditions, with limited contracts, unpaid over-time, low wages, or self-employment. Theatre plays of Pollesch that explicitly refer to these issues in the title include: *Tod eines Praktikanten (Death of the intern*, 2007); *Liebe ist kälter als das Kapital (Love is colder than capital,* 2007); *Sozialistische Schauspieler sind schwerer von der Idee eines Regisseurs zu überzeugen (Socialist actors are not so easy to convince by the director,* 2010). I have already pointed to Pollesch's idea of critical resistance to these developments, as expressed for example in an interview statement: 'Resistance in

yourself starts when you experience and understand that you are nothing but an order, i.e. controlled by the order of others' (Raddatz, 2007). It is about raising people's awareness of being not self-actualizing but alienated and exploited. Pollesch employs specific aesthetic means to reach this goal, as explained in the following paragraphs. As argued earlier, it is the aesthetic dimension that makes artistic resistance of special interest to organization studies.

The notion of 'free work' that is pursued in this article is based on Pollesch's understanding of the topic of contemporary labour. Pollesch's perspective is critical of capitalist conditions and, when outlining dilemmas surrounding work, he uses Marxist and critical theory that present the spheres of freedom and labour as incompatible. Pollesch's theatre is even pessimistic with regard to the words of Marx (1991: 959) that true freedom, defined as 'the development of human powers as an end in itself', can 'only flourish with this realm of necessity as its basis'. Pollesch's plays do not illustrate any opportunity for freedom in today's society. We find a similar idea expressed much earlier in Horkheimer and Adorno's ([1947]1973: 137) dictum that there is not space for freedom in capitalism with consumption pervading the entire system. In a continuation of critical theory, Gernot Böhme (2003) states that with the aestheticization of the economy, people are seduced to focus on the intensification and heightening of life via consumption. This involves forms of alienated consumption and alienated labour (Biehl-Missal and Saren, 2012), motifs that are central to a number of Pollesch's (2002, 2012) plays on the increasing replacement of authentic feelings by empty masks in working situations, and in private situations as well. Pollesch's theatre explores the effects of global and aesthetic economies on subjectivity and personality. It commonly is suggested that theatre is a mirror of society, and characters presented by Pollesch are dark shadows of bright idealistic concepts in the business world. Pollesch's plays can be read as a negative dialectics in that they are 'dark', not 'grey' and ambivalent towards the topic. There is glimpse of freedom gained through work as expressed by Weber (2002) and later theories of self-actualization in work, rather in the performances of Pollesch the situation is clearly desperate and hopeless because capitalist power is everywhere around people and even tackles people's inner subjectivity. René Pollesch would even say that there is no scope for real creativity and therefore no point in working when someone has to do what is asked for, for example when a theatre maker has to deliver a 'mere service' on a subject chosen by others (Raddatz, 2007).

When referring to desperation and hopelessness, I am referring to forms of embodied, tacit knowing in people. I argue in this paper, that it is precisely the aesthetics of the artistic form that can 'bring to life' these understandings of work for spectators and organizational researchers.

The Aesthetics of artistic resistance

Artistic forms of resistance can provide an aesthetic experience that extends beyond forms of intellectual critique. This is particularly true of theatre performances which are always more than a dramatic text, being the mise en scène, the staging of a text that speaks to all senses. The aesthetic experience gains even more emphasis in cases of theatre where there is no dramatic text and no presentation of a holistic story line. Pollesch's theatre is a form of so-called postdramatic theatre (Lehmann, 2006), that differs from the earlier forms of classical dramatic theatre (e.g. Aristotle) and epic theatre (e.g. Brecht). In postdramatic performance, common strategies include a preference for collage and montage rather than linear plots, and a redefinition of the performer's function in terms of being and materiality rather than appearance and mimetic imitation. Consequently, the aesthetic experience and overall atmosphere becomes more relevant than intellectual arguments presented in a coherent text.

In Pollesch's performances, the text is still relevant. Pollesch's theatre often is referred to as discourse theatre because performers mostly speak rather than move. In regard to linguistic content, Beyes (2006: 252) calls it the theatre of entrepreneurship: 'Regardless of the topic [Pollesch's] actors grapple with, they cannot avoid falling into managerial and entrepreneurial semantics, throwing fragments of 'business speak' at each other, ... questioning their life through excerpts from recent social theory, but in the end unable to escape the seemingly all-encompassing enterprise discourse.' Whilst Beyes (2006) puts his focus on the apocalyptic and exemplary tales in this play, the present paper will focus on the aesthetic experience that is central to my argument. From the perspective adopted here, it can be emphasized that this all-encompassing enterprise discourse is turned into an emotionally-moving aesthetic experience via different theatrical techniques in the performance.

In Pollesch's earlier plays, performers often speak very quickly, sometimes almost hysterically shouting their lines, making the audience feel their desperation towards the contemporary demand for authentic feelings and emotional commitment to work. In Pollesch's *Heidi Hoh* play, actresses speak about their 'irregular lives' in deregulated markets. They echo the romantic notion of art and life falling into one as they are required to bring fully into work their subjectivity and feelings, to self-actualize in the job, exploiting the most private spaces as economic resources.

> *Insourcing des Zuhause. Menschen in Scheiß-Hotels* (René Pollesch, 2002)
> TINE: In dieser Fabrik, die Zuhause produziert, müssen bezahlte Tätigkeiten wie eine persönliche Anteilnahme wirken.
> CLAUDIA: Und wer will das kontrollieren?

TINE: Der Bladerunner.
NINA: Irgendein Androidenjäger kontrolliert, ob deine persönliche Anteilnahme hier in diesem Hotel und an deinen Gästen ECHT IST!
CLAUDIA: Ja, gut, dann lass jetzt eben den Bladerunner oder Personalchef kommen, und dann werden wir ja sehen, ob die Emotionalität, die ich hier performe, echt ist oder nicht.
NINA: Performe Emotionalität, die echt ist.
TINE: Formen von Arbeit, die Fähigkeiten einsetzen, die der Persönlichkeit und Subjektivität zugeordnet werden.
NINA: Und das ist doppelt produktiv: Zum einen erwirtschaften sie Profit, zum andern zementieren sie gesellschaftliche Normen über Sexualität und Geschlecht.
TINE: Performe Zement!
NINA: Du performst hier Emotionalität und die zementiert gesellschaftliche Geschlechterdifferenzen.
TINE: Performe Emotionalität!

Insourcing of home. People in shitty hotels (Pollesch, 2002, translation by the author)
TINE: In this factory, that is producing a home, paid services must look like personal involvement.
CLAUDIA: And who is there to control this?
TINE: The Bladerunner.
NINA: Some android-hunter controls whether your personal involvement here in this hotel and towards these guests IS REAL!
CLAUDIA: Well then, let him in, the Bladerunner, or head of HR! Then we will see whether the emotionality that I am performing here is real or not.
NINA: Perform some emotionality, perform some emotionality that is real.
TINE: Forms of work that use skills related to personality and subjectivity.
NINA: And there is a double effect: firstly they generate economic profit, secondly they reinforce and set in cement social norms of sexuality and gender.
TINE: Perform cement!
NINA: You are performing emotionality and you are setting in cement gender differences in our society.
TINE: Perform some emotionality.

In this scene, characters illustrate how they are required to perform emotions on the job – emotions that have nothing to do with their inner feelings. The reality of their work lives is somewhat unreal. Characters that are presented onstage became what they themselves call 'globalized subjects'. They are not role models for successful self-actualization.

This scene deals with issues of self-exploitation which do not automatically lead to success, rather to failure. Addressed is the connection between emotional work and widespread female discrimination, since in service and care professions women typically are expected to produce personal feelings.

Not only is the content of importance for the artistic presentation, the aesthetic form is of particular relevance. Performers with their loud, hectic demeanour generate an insecure and irritating atmosphere for all people in the audience. The atmosphere makes them experience doubts and resentment not only on a

rational level, but also via the corporeal, bodily experience. Theatre in this sense also helps to understand what Beyes and Steyaert (2006) pointed to when they argued that such forms point to the carnivalesque in organisational analysis and support the focus on the messy and the ephemeral of organisational life. Pollesch employs compelling aesthetic methods that give the audience a particular 'feeling' for contemporary concepts of work. The aesthetic experience enables a more embodied form of understanding of the tacit and aesthetic emotional dimensions related to work in today's organizations.

With their increasing desperation and rising resentment, being fed up these characters express their resistance: 'Und wenn ich versuche nicht wie ein Künstler zu leben, wenn ich so nicht arbeiten will als BEUTE UND SELBSTAUSBEUTERISCH! Und nicht daran denke mich selbständig zu verwirklichen WAS DANN?!' ('And if I don't try to live like an artist, if I don't want to work in such a way, being a PREY, AND IN SELF-EXPLOITATION! And if I don't even think of self-actualizing myself constantly WHAT WILL HAPPEN THEN?!') (Pollesch et al., 2001, translated by the author) (Biehl-Missal, 2010). Audiences experience a negative presentation of the cliché of the 'manager as an artist' or the 'individual employee as an artist'. Addressed are issues of self-exploitation, expressed are hysteric frustration and anger.

Performers onstage express their doubt, screaming sentences such as: 'Dieses organische Kapital HIER IST BEUTE! ... Das hier ist Müll! Die SCHEISSE!' – 'This organic capital here IS PREY! ... This here is waste! This SHIT! [Performer pointing towards herself]. What is presented to the audience is a bitterly ironic distortion of contemporary management concepts which include notions of 'human capital' – being transformed into 'organic' 'shit' onstage.

Pollesch's fast, staccato voices display the artificiality of emotions and personalities. Theatre here becomes a political space where common experiences are articulated in uncommon ways, in order to be reflected upon and discussed by the audience. Performers actually express what these concepts mean to themselves, are hence not only professionally but personally involved in their performance. This issue will be outlined in the following paragraphs.

When artistic form is used for aesthetic inquiry there is typically a personal involvement because of aesthetic and tacit forms of embodied knowing. That applies for researchers into the aesthetics of organizations as well (Taylor, 2004; Rippin, 2006; Strati, 2009: 240). Consequently, at this point, I explain where I myself am positioned in this study, to outline some principles of personal aesthetic knowing and its artistic expression via 'artistic resistance'.

My interdisciplinary research in organization studies often uses the lens of aesthetics and theatre studies – a discipline from which I graduated at Frankfurt University, Germany, where I also studied at the Institute of Social Research that is the home of Frankfurt School's critical theory. For the last decade or so, I was involved in a couple of socio-political performances. Simultaneously, I was 'at home' in another world, the world of business and finance because I worked in student part-time jobs with the corporate communications departments of the stock exchange and other financial institutes. I felt 'mesmerized' – obviously by ways of tacit, aesthetic knowing – by the world of finance that presented itself via impressive scenery and architecture (Biehl-Missal, 2012a). At the same time I experienced competitive organizational cultures where people voluntarily and involuntarily worked overtime and pressurized each other. These motifs were the topic of a performance project with the director René Pollesch in co-operation with Frankfurt university's institute of theatre studies. Pollesch at the time and attempted a second edition of his successful play *Stadt als Beute (City as spoil/ City as prey)*, which is about the privatization of a city's public space by corporations as well as the coincident take-over of individuals' inner subjectivity by the demand for emotional forms of work. We performed the play after several months of text creation and rehearsals.

My personal experiences with this form of creative work were that the director did not approve of distanced fictional accounts, but encouraged the expression of personal experiences with 'free work'. One day, I wrote him an email with a draft for a text fragment attached, just to figure out in our next meeting that the fragment was rejected and replaced by the my entire personal account (!) in the email. Initially, I felt irritated because personal borders were crossed by publishing these lines without consent, on the other hand I found it ironic that my own subjectivity was appropriated by this form of artistic work, so I felt it was somehow fitting. More generally, I was satisfied that my lines were taken for the play. (Sadly, this should be familiar to most of today's academics in the journal treadmill.) Personal access became also relevant in terms of performing. I remember Pollesch repeatedly telling the performers: 'Do not just *cite* the text. Make me *experience* that the text *means* something for you!' This indicates that it is not just about a distanced re-presentation of contemporary social developments, but the creation of a shared experience of these issues. So, one of my personal paragraphs which entered the play *Stadt als Beute 2* (*City as spoil 2)* (Pollesch et al., 2001) involved some of my aesthetic knowing of fear towards the system that hooked on some observations of self-abusive behaviour (line 1-5), being extended by another two lines with the motif of shopping:

T: Ich habe ein Jahr in einer Presseabteilung von einem größeren Konzern gearbeitet, und die haben da teilweise rumgelogen und alles schön gehätschelt ohne Ende.
E: Die waren total im Stress und nach einer anstrengenden Woche ist ein Pressesprecher immer groß Einkaufen gegangen und hat sich mit Krawatten oder ähnlichem belohnt. Und das beschäftigt mich auch heute noch. Hoffentlich trifft mich dieses Schicksal nicht selber mal.
J: AHHHH!
C: Ja, das wär irgendwie dumm, die Scheisse.
S: Nachdem alle andern in deiner Selbstverwirklichung herumgeshoppt haben, kaufst du jetzt durchgeknallt ein in durchgeknallten Unternehmen.
E: Kauf in dir Krawatten ein!
T: Hoffentlich trifft mich dieses Schicksal, irgendwo Krawatten einzukaufen nicht selber einmal.
S: Ja, das wär dumm.

T: I worked for a year in the press department of an international company, and they were lying about and verbally beautifying everything without end.
E: They were totally stressed and at the end of the week, one of the spokesmen used to go shopping and recompensated himself with ties and other fashion treats. And still today I am wondering and pondering about this. Hopefully, this destiny will not be mine one day.
J: AHHHHH!
C: That would be fuckin' uncool, wouldn't it
S: After all the other people shopped around in your self-actualization, you are freaking out and shopping around in freaked out companies
E: Buy yourself ties!
T: Hopefully, this destiny will not be mine one day.
S: That would be gross.

Lines like these are not used to develop individual characters onstage but are presented by multiple voices in an acoustic assemblage, filling the space atmospherically. The content should be easy to understand for spectators, also because the 'tie' is often used as a metaphor for attitudes and job contexts. For example, Taylor (2003b) in his play *Ties that bind* presents an energetic situation where academics hit each other with their ties, symbolizing the aggression in academic discussions about epistemological and methodological positions. In the example presented above, the acquisition of another highly priced tie marks the mastery of another week of strenuous work, another step on the ladder of successful work experience, and another turn in the spiral of alleged self-actualization. Shopping for (beautiful) stuff for personal compensation is a widespread consumption pattern, and this motif returns in the organizational communications department's efforts to create pleasant appearances (Line 1 and 2). Intellectual discussions about the disguises of today's economic aestheticization are made by critical theorists, for example Gernot Böhme (2003), and by research on the dark side of organizations (Warren and Rehn, 2006). Also in the theatre performance, spectators get an idea that below the surface,

things are less beautiful and rather ugly – to employ a different aesthetic category. Again, this apprehension is transmitted not only on the symbolic textual level, but via the experience of the artistic form on an aesthetic level.

In my presentation of an earlier version of this paper at the *ephemera* conference in Berlin (in the Wrangelkiez quarter that struggles with gentrification and issues of freedom and work and provided a fitting framework to the conference), I tried to give the colleagues a feeling for this issue by attempting a staged reading of some of the text fragments. I projected an English translation of the lines and asked that attention be paid to the rhythm, the sound and energy in my reading, just to provide a small glimpse of what professional performers may achieve.

Performers onstage present their weaknesses and express their inabilities to fulfil the demands of contemporary work lives. They express difficulties of embodying concepts of the emotionally committed employee. Theatre stages tauntingly, deprecatingly and hysterically echo demands like 'Performe Emotionalität!' ('Perform some emotionality!'). Pollesch's performances make aesthetically and ethically irritating statements about the downside of such suggested role models, and may encourage spectators to reflect about their own work and personality (Biehl-Missal, 2010). Spectators may question who they are, in their work lives, an 'artist of work' or rather a victim of slogans and management concepts. The audience is left to draw their own, bitter conclusions.

Conclusion and implications

'And if I don't try to live like an artist, ... And if I don't even think of self-actualizing myself constantly WHAT WILL HAPPEN THEN?!' Contemporary theatre art deliberately neither answers this question, nor provides us with an emotional catharsis to carry on. The theatre play used as a case study in this paper provides spectators with an aesthetic experience that goes beyond rational and academic discourses. It provides an opportunity for spectators to delve into dark desperation and hysteric hopelessness when considering the notion of freedom and work and the combination of 'free work', emerging dazzled and potentially desperate.

Research into artistic resistance is still young, but constitutes a promising avenue for future research, given the increasing attention to aesthetic and embodied forms of knowing and behaviour in organizations, and researchers' own use of artistic forms for critical organizational inquiry. I will now sum up the possible contributions of this perspective, and address limitations of the study as well as alternative readings of the arguments I made around art and resistance.

Studies concerned with 'artistic resistance' can provide new theoretical insights for research on the aesthetics of organizations and for other areas of organizational research such as, for example, organizational behaviour more generally. Listening to critical 'feedback' from the world of arts, organizational researchers can learn a lesson. When (theatre) art is a mirror of society, its characters may also be dark shadows of the bright concepts created by the business world. This tension may be an inspiration for further critical reflection on organizational reality and metaphors of 'artistic' self-actualization. I am referring to the notion of 'reflection', because art cannot be considered to provide answers and solutions and be the saviour of people. It does not even claim to do so. There is no revolutionary impact, rather some small contributions, for example when the Church of Stop Shopping puts public pressure on organizations to change contested work practices (D. and Reverend Billy, 2011). Theatre in institutional settings in this paper was considered to be 'artistic resistance' as well, although it is not active consumer resistance, and does not even claim to engender permanent social changes, rather it may or may not provoke critical perspectives as a reaction to fugitive aesthetic experiences in individuals.

I focused on the aesthetic experience as the most relevant aspect of artistic resistance for organization studies. It was outlined that artistic resistance as presentational forms can provide something that intellectual analysis fall short of: the lived experience, a richer and fuller understanding. The case study has further illustrated how theatre performances on the dark side of 'free work' create atmospheres that differ from most presentational situations in organizational life where leaders and employees perform, or are forced to perform, self-confident personalities (Biehl-Missal, 2010). In the case of Pollesch's theatre the spectator instead might lose her or his own self-confidence, irritated questions are raised and not answered, and she or he remains in a state of excitement and even rejection. I have chosen to put an emphasis on theatre, but future research can develop these tentative beginnings and also explore many other artistic forms that take place in social life, in institutional arts contexts, and even online.

The consideration of artistic resistance also allows for a better understanding of a related topic in organizational theory: the use of artistic interventions in organizations for change and development (Schiuma, 2009). For example, a consideration of Pollesch's theatre may question the normative function of theatre in organizations when role-playing is used for the enhancement of presentation skills and for making people stick to their roles rather than, in an emancipated manner, questioning their roles and screaming out their anger. More generally, it can be suggested that artistic resistance uses different and

more challenging aesthetic means which can help to see more clearly the aesthetically-reduced nature of instrumental arts-based interventions. Theatre for example in its long tradition may be offensive, shocking and disrespectful towards spectators' feelings. Theatre in organizations on the other hand is still often controlled by managers and addresses second-order issues such as communications rather than challenging extant hierarchies (Nissley et al., 2004). These interventions employ aesthetic means in inoffensive and persuasive ways rather than challenging, provoking or irritating audiences. However, arts-based interventions cannot be fully controlled and need trust and openness and may, at their blurred boundaries between instrumentalization and opportunity, open up spaces for real participation by organizational members, and thus, for artistic resistance by employees. These unexpected aspects of arts-based interventions in organizations in particular require further research (Berthoin Antal, 2009; Biehl-Missal and Berthoin Antal, 2011). Comparing arts-based inventions with artistic resistance can help to understand better their manipulative potential and their potential both for interaction and possible change that arises from aesthetic experience and expression.

As regards the involvement with aesthetic experience, research on artistic resistance can be a training of researchers' aesthetic skills. This option is grounded in the open and challenging nature of art. The performance studies theorist Lehmann (2006: 187) is right in concluding that theatre art is an important answer to rationalization because it deals with transgression of taboos, i.e. issues that do not find space to be voiced in everyday and organizational life: 'Part of its constitution (is) to hurt feelings, to produce shock and disorientation, which point the spectators to their own presence precisely through 'amoral', 'asocial' and seemingly 'cynical' events. In doing so, it deprives us neither of the humour and shock of cognition, nor of the pain nor the fun which alone we gather in the theatre'. The Pollesch case study supports many of these arguments. It can be suggested that this form of arts is critical and political by *not* providing an answer, by rejecting the 'rules' of the social 'game' via the presentation of disrespectful, hysteric desperation. The reception of theatre art and other forms of artistic resistance in this sense can be assumed to play an important role in organizational research as well, because it may provide an additional education of aesthetic judgements by offering a space that is not controlled by rational preconsiderations but open to playing with own thoughts and dealing with emotional affects without pressure. This training of skills seems particularly useful for researchers dealing with tacit and aesthetic forms of knowing in organizations.

Resistant arts-practice can in this vein also inspire and develop researchers' use of aesthetically sensitive methods of data collection and analysis which require

new forms of understanding and the joint discussion of aesthetic artefacts, including pictures and photos (Warren, 2002; Vince and Warren, 2012). Even visual artefacts require not only semiotic, but aesthetic approaches of analysis because they are felt and experienced (Biehl-Missal, 2012a). The use of arts-based research methods does not require genuine artists, but may benefit from respective analytic trainings.

Artistic resistance can be an inspiration for academic studies in the organizational field that use artistic forms of inquiry and for the innovative presentation of research findings. There are not many studies in this area: Darmer (2006) for example uses poetry to convey research findings: the rhythm, style, tempo of his poems creates an aesthetic experience in readers and gives them an idea of the emotional dimensions of the topic. Taylor's performance of a theatre play uses aesthetic form to communicate in a 'gut-to-gut way' (2003a) which adds to the intellectual framing of research findings. The case study has illustrated how to generate aesthetic experiences for audience members that create not only an intellectual understanding. Also with regard to the hybrid tendencies of art and research where artists use structured interviews and research techniques (Biehl-Missal, 2012b), future studies could further explore the promising use of aesthetic form for intellectual inquiry and the compelling presentation of research findings, gaining concrete ideas from contemporary arts practice.

Research on artistic resistance may be insightful for artists as well. Although there is a steady increase of artistic resistance (Burchhart and Nestler, 2010), artists like Mari Brellochs and Henrik Schrat (2005: 12) for example have suggested that many artists reject business issues and may lack a well-informed understanding of ambiguous matters. This implies the limitation that not every artistic project can be taken as a serious account of organizational issues and researchers need to have enough humour to deal with provocative and biased accounts and make them useful for their research. In this vein, research on contemporary artistic resistance can may be directed to artists as well to encourage mutual learning. Artists do not have the same knowledge about economic issues as specialist business researchers but still present complementary insights.

Why not go even further. This perspective can yield new and innovative opportunities for co-operations between artists and scholars aimed to create projects which not only criticize the status quo but open up new perspectives for 'free work' or, more generally, for our existence in contemporary capitalism. With regard to the title of the paper, scholars might put it the other way and take it literally: 'And if I *want* to work like an artist, what will happen then…'.

There is increasing interest among artists – in the theatre, in the area of painting, sculpture, performance and film – in 'artistic' and aesthetic economic and organizational developments. Artistic and aesthetic means are used not only by organizations to create profit, but also by artists to deal with and to 'mirror' socio-economic developments. It is now the task of organizational researchers to respond and to creatively 'play along'.

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Locating work in Santiago Sierra's artistic practice

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abstract

This paper closely analyses Santiago Sierra's understanding of the relationship between work and freedom in contemporary society. By focusing on a series of works where the artist hired someone to perform a specific activity (often involving labour or a contractual working agreement), this essay explores the location(s) of work in Sierra's artistic practice. In these pieces, the artist delegated or subcontracted a part of the artistic event, either to remain still, hidden inside a box or in a humid, hot compartment in a ship under the sun. At the same time, he remained as a 'director' or 'coordinator', dictating the conditions of possibility for these actions, the ensuing documentation and its posterior commercialisation. This implies that we can find, at least, two moments where work can be located in Santiago Sierra's practice. On one level, work (manual labour associated with a paid wage in a determinate economic context) happens at the moment of the actual performance by the hired employees. At the same time, work can also be located at the moment when the artist records and produces an artwork (as intellectual labour). In this sense, the artist uses the work of others in order to produce his own, blatantly turning the workers from a means to an end. This duality suggests that work can be clearly antithetical to freedom for some in a system of advanced, corporate, capitalism while deceitfully emancipatory for a select few. By carefully examining the complex networks of work displacement in Santiago Sierra's practice, it is my intention to lay bare the premises that support his vision of *work* as a site for constant struggle between freedom and subjugation.

Introduction

On many occasions, Santiago Sierra's pieces have fallen under heavy criticism.[1] Accused of being unethical, exploitative or authoritative, many of his works have shocked both audiences and art critics alike. As exemplified by *245 cm3* (2006), a work that was closed prematurely due to the pressure exerted by the local media, in many cases his constant provocation has even resulted in outright censorship. In this case, the pressure exerted by several media groups led to the eventual cancellation of the show based on the claim that Sierra had built a literal gas chamber in a Synagogue in Germany. Similarly, he's been accused of using and exploiting underprivileged people with the intention to make a profit by selling their effort as artworks and, therefore, endowing it with value beyond the actual cost of materials and actual labour. Under this interpretative frame, Sierra's practice is viewed as nothing else but the unscrupulous exploitation of generally underprivileged situations by a historically privileged subject. This implies a vertical power relation, where the artist is located in a superior subjugating position casting a moral judgement on a specific situation. Under this perspective Sierra's work only reproduces the methodologies of economic exploitation as configured by the current capitalist system. As a result, Sierra's art is viewed as an expendable non critical re-enactment of power, worthy only of derision and cynical commentary, and used only as a counterpoint to laud artistic practices that seek the cohesion of the human tissue or a revolutionary, pseudo-activist engagement with political issues.

One of such tendencies, what became known as relational aesthetics, theorised on 'the extent to which art has become, more immediately and above all else, a matter of its social constitution' (Martin, 2007: 370). Understanding art as social experiments, Nicolas Bourriaud's theory promoted works of art that, in his opinion, 'outlined...hands-on Utopias', based on a desire to 'prepare and announce a future world' (Bourriaud, 1998: 4). The desire to 'model possible universes...', to 'inhabit the world in a better way' (1998: 5), drives Bourriaud's account of artists such as Felix González-Torres, Rirkrit Tiravanija or Carsten Höller. These artistic practices are lauded for offering a range of 'services' or 'models of sociability' which aim at 'fill(ing) in the cracks in the social bond', to '...patiently re-stitch the relational fabric' between individuals (Bourriaud, 1998: 16). Bourriaud's description of several 'relational aesthetics' projects state:

> Rirkrit Tiravanija organises a dinner in a collector's home, and leaves him all the ingredients required to make a Thai soup. Philippe Parreno invites a few people to pursue their favourite hobbies on May Day, on a factory assembly line. Vanessa

1 For images of the works discussed and further information see www.santiago-sierra.com.

> Beecroft dresses some twenty women in the same way, complete with a red wig, and the visitor merely gets a glimpse of them through the doorway. Maurizio Cattelan feeds rats on 'Bel Paese' cheese and sells them as multiples, or exhibits recently robbed safes. In a Copenhagen square, Jes Brinch and Henrik Plenge Jacobson install an upturned bus that causes a rival riot in the city. Christine Hill works as a check-out assistant in a supermarket, and organises a weekly gym workshop in a gallery. Carsten Höller re-creates the chemical formula of molecules secreted by the human brain when in love, builds an inflatable yacht, and breeds chaffinches with the aim of teaching them a new song. Noritoshi Hirakawa puts a small ad in a newspaper to find a girl to take part in his show. Pierre Huyghe summons people to a casting session, makes a TV transmitter available to the public, and puts a photograph of labourers at work on view just a few yards from the building site. One could add many other names and works to such a list. Anyhow, the liveliest factor that is played out on the chessboard of art has to do with interactive, user-friendly and relational concepts. (Martin, 2007: 370)

Although never mentioning Sierra directly, the ameliorative, palliative and restorative rhetoric that characterises much of Bourriaud's *Relational aesthetics* reverberates through other current accounts of contemporary art[2]. In *Deconstructing installation art*, for example, Graham Coulter-Smith criticises Sierra for 'promulgating what might be called a politics of cynicism' (2009: 276). In his account, Sierra's practice is 'arrogant', 'derisory' and 'pretentious' (2009: 278), treating both public and hired performers as subordinate to the artist's will. Articulating what he calls the 'antithesis of participation', Sierra is criticised for producing *artworks* out of the 'exploitation' of generic others that, in the public circuit of art, act as a 'chic species of ethical credibility' (Coulter-Smith, 2009: 277). Additionally, Sierra's 'contempt' for the viewer is interpreted as a sign of smug, 'contemporary art star' behaviour that is deeply compromised with the institutional frame of the artworld (ibid.).

Similarly, in *Social works*, Shannon Jackson criticises Sierra's practice for being artist-centred and inextricably bound to the artworld. According to her, Sierra's projects rest heavily on the importance of his 'authorial name, one that receives artistic commissions, fees and royalties from an artworld network of biennial, public art commissioning, museum, and gallery-collector systems' (Jackson, 2011: 43). However, Jackson's biggest issue with Sierra's practice is that they eclipse the 'voice' of the hired performers, turning '... "collaboration" into a hiring relationship' that denies the identification of the participants and mentions 'little' of the 'histories of the participants' or even their names (2011: 68). For Jackson, Sierra's anonymisation of the worker, of his hired performers, not only neutralises, instrumentalises and rejects the individuality of his waged labourers, but also reinforces the power of the author and the economic circuit

2 For a more detailed discussion of Bourriaud's disregard of Sierra's work, see Bishop (2004).

that defines it. Grant Kester, in *Conversation pieces*, also criticises Sierra's approach for denying the possibility of 'dialogical exchange' between the participants and the artists. In his view, Sierra's practice offers no ethical or aesthetic critique for it does not seek to initiate or mobilise a new, particular social interaction; on the opposite, in Kester's account, Sierra's works try to 'teach us a lesson', through disruptive, destabilising, quasi-avant-garde gestures that judge the viewer to be ignorant about the realities of the artworld and society at large. By deploying the very same conflicts and contradictions encountered in our contemporary life, Sierra's works seek to 'enlighten' the public, to offer a 'cathartic' moment of socio-economic reality-check (Kester, 2004: 73).

Contrary to these opinions, this paper claims that there is a particular critical edge in Santiago Sierra's artistic practice. In the following pages I will argue that Sierra's work critically engages, not only the artworld, but the imbrication of this system with the larger schema of capital exchange and control. Here, I will argue that his works enact a tactic that could be described as criticality by complicity where the reproduction of economically determined mechanisms is aimed at unmasking the power relations implicit in a specific situation. Accompanied by a very negative, almost pessimistic, understanding of the current state of affairs, Sierra's complicity engages a series of notions fundamental to our times. Issues such as the supposed moral superiority of art, the role of contemporary art in the system of globalised capitalism, the relationship between work and freedom, are constantly addressed by works that focus on the politics of a particular space within a specific context. Under this frame, Sierra's work does not simply reproduce methodologies of exploitation but critically appropriates its procedures to bring to light the conditions – both social, economic and political – that configure a specific situation.

Standing against Bourriaud's advocacy for a 'positive' renegotiation of human relations, against Coulter-Smith belief in 'new-media' art as the solution to the worlds problems, against Jackson's 'testimonial' model and against Kester's ameliorative 'dialogical' practice, Sierra does not seek alternatives formations to the current state of affairs. One could argue that one implication of Sierra's practice is the *un-stitching* of the social bonds through the extreme re-enactment of its, also extreme, realities. Sierra's work does not seek a new alternative because it believes that under our present conditions it is impossible to conceive of worlds beyond the one we inhabit; not only impossible, but, perhaps, a waste of time. His practice does not point towards a different future but brings us back to one of the main premises of contemporaneity, the promise of *freedom* through *work*. As a result, his practice questions the premises on which many, less 'fatalistic' accounts are based; that is, the *possibility* of freedom and the role that labour, be it material or creative, plays in this process. Sierra's work does not

posit emancipatory networks of participation because it denies that the conditions of possibility permit such imaginations. His work ushers a demand to re-evaluate the founding presupposition that, perversely, link *work* and *freedom*, and simultaneously, to re-evaluate the position that art plays in relation to that discourse.

Delegated labour

One of Sierra's favoured artistic mechanisms is to hire a person, or a group of people and have them perform a determined task. As the art critic Claire Bishop has argued: '... "subcontracting" or "externalising" the work towards badly remunerated workers in developing countries' (2010), the artist has employed people to perform a series of activities which range from physical, manual labour to self-exhibition, invisibilisation and even tattooing.

Paid labor: Manual work

It is important to mention that, although relatively new to mainstream performance art, using others is not a strategy 'original' to Santiago Sierra. Arguably, audience participation is now a given, if not a founding premise, for much of contemporary art. What makes Sierra's practice categorically different is the inclusion of an economic transaction, in the form of a contractual arrangement, as the organising principle for his pieces. In this sense, the artistic event is reduced to an exchange of goods (money) for services (delegated performance). The most significant historical referent for this performative method can be found in The *working class family* (1968-99), by the Argentinian artist Oscar Bony. Conceived for the exhibition *1968 Experiences*, sponsored by the Instituto Torcuato di Tella in Buenos Aires, Bony's piece elicited strong rejection from the public. According to Ana Longoni's description:

> The piece featured a worker, his wife, and their ten-year old child sitting on a platform, on public display during the opening times of the show. They were accompanied by a soundtrack the artist created with recordings from sounds of their daily life at home. A sign announced, 'Luis Ricardo Rodríguez, a machinist by profession, is earning twice his normal salary for staying at the exhibit with his wife and child for the duration of the show'. (Longoni, 2008: 92)

Bony's piece was characterised by publicly displaying the private life of an industrial worker. Incorporating the worker's child and his wife (along with the soundtrack), the piece staged a private setting in the public realm. The work was, also, accompanied by a text that described the situation in clear terms and divulged the economic agreement behind the performance. By clarifying that the worker was being paid double as he would have in his regular job, Bony hinted at

the economic disparities that separated the working class family from the elite artistic audiences. At the same time, the duplication of the wage elevated the artistic activity (the public self-exhibition) and suggests that industrial, manual labour is an abject kind of work, at least not as profitable.

Like Bony, Santiago Sierra has also hired people to perform his pieces. In 1999, in Los Angeles, USA, Sierra produced *24 blocks of concrete constantly moved during a day's work by paid workers* (1999, hereafter *24 blocks*). As the title suggests, for this action the artist hired ten workers 'of Mexican or Central American origin..., of the type that usually offer to work in public places in Los Angeles' (Sierra, 2011) and commissioned them to continually displace the 24 forms along the gallery space. Using manual elements, such as crowbars and other metal props, the employees were meant to exert the maximum amount of effort for very little visible results, except for traces in the form of 'damage to the floors and walls of the gallery' (ibid.). After this repetitive action, Sierra decided to only exhibit the marks left by the workers such as food wrappers and drink containers, along with the metal bars assigned for this burdensome task. In works like these, Santiago Sierra retracts the body of the artist to an administrative role, saving it from having to undergo excruciating physical labour. In this case, a contractual economic agreement stipulated that the person had agreed to participate in an exchange of services, regardless of what these might have been. *24 blocks* is different from *Working class family* in two fundamental aspects: contrary to Bony's work, Sierra does not bring an intimate mood into his works. In his pieces, the workers are treated as units, isolated from their families and their personal lives. If, for Bony, the worker had an identity named 'Luis Ricardo Rodríguez', in Sierra's pieces they are devoid of any identification; they are nameless, public service-providers. At the same time, and perhaps even more importantly, Sierra's workers are not overpaid for their labour; they receive the minimum amount as stipulated by local laws. If Bony's piece elevated the artistic task of performing while deprecating industrial work, Sierra's works debases both. In this sense, performing for an artwork (being the work) is equated to working in a construction site; neither forms of labour elevate or emancipate the worker, not socially nor economically. On the contrary, they contribute towards its subjectification and domination. In Sierra's practice, art *work* debases and objectifies the person through its mercantilisation.

There are, however, many similarities between *Working class family* and *24 blocks*. Sierra's practice is characterised by being accompanied by a short text that describes the conditions of possibility for each piece. Similar to the format used by Bony in his label, Sierra makes explicit where the workers came from, how they were hired and how much they received for their work. The text accompanying *184 Peruvian workers* (2007) serves as a perfect example of the

structural and grammatical similarities between Bony's and Sierra's statements. It says: 'The workers were hired for 7000 Chilean pesos – around 15 dollars – and a meal to pose for this photographic series and to be part of a piece performed in the same place' (ibid.). Just like Bony, Sierra clarifies how much exactly he is paying his performers and states the worker's purpose (in Bony's case to 'just be exhibited', in Sierra's to 'pose for a photographic series and to be part of a piece performed in the same place') (ibid.).

Hidden workers: immaterial work

Sierra's strategy of hiding hired performers can be traced back to *8 people paid to remain inside cardboard boxes* (1999, hereafter *8 people*). For this piece, Sierra created eight boxes of residual cardboard and installed them according to a strict grid in the exhibition space (the top floor of a semi-occupied building in an industrial zone of Guatemala City, Guatemala)(Sierra, 2011). Confronted by the viewer, the boxes seemed to be, at first, parodied, precarious minimalist forms. What the public did not know, however, was that Sierra had hired several workers to remain seated inside these cardboard geometries. They had been put inside the boxes prior to the opening of the exhibition to the public, and were meant to remain silent and still for four hours, receiving 100 quetzals, about 9 dollars, per hour (ibid.). In this work, Sierra equated the tedious task of sitting in a still position under excruciating heat to the work carried out by a worker paving the streets or a university professor. In this sense, *8 people*, highlighted silent, excruciating labour as one materialisation of the concept of work.

Unsurprisingly, this work has had to undergo several changes in its program according to the contextual conditions of a particular exhibition space. For its Berlin version, *Workers who cannot be paid, remunerated to remain inside cardboard boxes* (2000, hereafter *Workers who cannot be paid...*), for example, Sierra hired Chechen political exiles in Germany who, because of their migratory status, are not allowed to work according to the country's legislation. With a similar temporality of six weeks and four hours a day, the workers had to collect their wages in secret as working for a salary could be understood as a breach of migratory regulations and could be a legal cause for deportation. Similar to the Guatemala piece, *Workers who cannot be paid...*, highlighted an unproductive task as economically productive labour. At the same time, and contrary to the Guatemala version, the piece also brought to light the economic limitations imposed upon migrant, underprivileged communities as it is articulated in a city like Berlin. By hiding the 'illegal' workers, Sierra underscored their condition as marginalised, secluded and economically disadvantage. Similarly, the New York iteration of the piece also emphasised marginalised sectors of capitalist society. In this case, the majority of the people who answered Sierra's call were women of

either black or Mexican origin. Different from *Workers who cannot be paid...* and *8 people,* for *12 workers paid to remain inside cardboard boxes* (2000, hereafter *12 workers paid*), Sierra had to create a completely new binding agreement because of the strict employment laws specified by the US. In order to avoid 'formal complaints being made about the working conditions, that is remaining locked up for four consecutive hours' (Sierra, 2011), Sierra hired these performers as extras, not as direct participants, 'due to the fact that legislation is permissive in this case' (ibid.).

Locating *work* in Santiago Sierra's practice

In 2001, in Barcelona, Sierra produced *20 workers on a ship's hold* (2001). The piece was simple; it consisted of a hired cargo boat that picked up 20 passengers at different points along the port. The passengers were to remain hidden in the cargo compartment of the vessel for the duration of their stay. They received 4000 pesetas – about 20 dollars – for three hours of their time. A year before, in *12 workers*, the artist hired several workers, the majority being black women or of Mexican origin, and paid them the minimum wage – 10 dollars an hour – to remain seated inside individual cardboard boxes. For this pieces, the artist delegates or subcontracts a part of the artistic event, either to remain still inside a box or in a humid, hot compartment in a ship under the sun. At the same time, remaining as a 'director' or 'coordinator', the artist also dictated the conditions of possibility for these actions, the rules of the contract, the ensuing documentation, the art object, and its posterior commercialisation, as an artwork. This implies that we can find, at least, two moments where *work* can be located in Sierra's practice. On one level, *work* (manual *labour* associated with a paid wage in a determinate economic context) happens at the moment of the actual performance by the hired employees, either the sitting in the boxes or the hiding in the ship. At the same time, *work* can also be located at the moment when the artist records and produces the *artwork* (as intellectual, symbolic *labour*). Work, in this sense, is located in two different subjects, the performers and the artist.

Contrary to many artistic products, where *work* is centralised in the figure of the artist as producer of an artistic object or idea, Sierra's practice posits a complex network of *work* displacement, not only in physical terms, but also in terms of meaning, where the semantic unit *work* refers to very different actions with different significations and implications. For the hired performers, *work* seems to imply a contractual agreement where a specific fee is exchanged for a service, which, in most cases, is demeaning, humiliating or unproductive. *Line of 30cm tattooed on a remunerated person* (1998), or *A person paid for 360 continuous working hours* (2000), exemplify how *work*, for Santiago Sierra's performers,

means subjugation justified by an economic transaction, a wage. Freedom, in this scenario, is completely surrendered to the working mechanics of advanced capitalist societies in two ways: in the first place, freedom is denied at the level of opportunity and necessity, which means that the basic conditions of capitalist societies do not provide the conditions of possibility for a true free individual. At the same time, freedom is conditioned by the desires and necessities of the context that surrounds the individual, and in this manner, limited to the expectations and perverse needs of an outside. As Vilela Mascaró argues: 'What he [Sierra] is saying over and over again is that he is able to sell thin-air, bus-rides, pictures of empty buildings, blocks of shit, or gold necklaces because *someone, somewhere* (as the poor scavengers from India) was forced – usually through violent means – to work for a pittance, and someone somewhere else, was willing and able to pay a lot of money for them' (2008a: 23).

For the artist, however, *work* means something different. As demonstrated in the section dealing with his artistic practice, Sierra's role is usually that of a distanced director, not an involved, direct participant. As exemplified by pieces where he subcontracts the main actions (such as the tattooing pieces or the hired group performances), Sierra avoids explicit involvement in the enactment of the piece. This does not mean, however, that he is completely absent from the pieces – quite the contrary, as *245m3* exemplifies, the works develop and abide following his careful instructions. *Work*, in this sense, means an activity that is less physical than moving blocks or being tattooed, for example, and more intellectual or symbolic. Operating in the realm of cultural labour, *work* for Sierra implies much more freedom than for his hired performers. As his pieces demonstrate, it is not him who is hidden at a party or exposed according to the colour of his skin. Instead, he triggers and documents a particular situation remaining tangentially implied (through documentation) but directly involved (by setting up the project).

Work also means differently in terms of economic remuneration. Whereas for the hired performers *work* means a wage that, more or less, corresponds to the socially convened minimum payment for someone's labour, *work*, for Santiago Sierra, implies an enormous economic gain. Operating in the privileged site of the artworld, Sierra's *work* is worth much more than the work of an illegal street vendor in Venice or a political refugee in Germany. Whereas for the hired performers the wage resulting from their work may be enough for their basic sustenance, the artist's pay-cheque (and in this specific case Santiago Sierra's), is much more than the earnings of the actual labourer. Under this perspective, Sierra's *work* has a higher economic value than the manual labour of an unprivileged individual, which also implies a higher status than the workers'. In this sense, *work* is rendered as a means to economic betterment which, in our contemporary capitalist society, also implies individual betterment and freedom.

Sierra's practice articulates two opposing understandings of *work*. On the one hand, *work* implies the individual's direct subjugation to an economic system that fosters and maintains the conditions of possibility that condition its subjectivity. On the other hand, *work* entails the possibility for betterment and for the achievement of some degree of economic emancipation. This duality suggests that *work* can be antithetical to *freedom* in a system of advanced, corporate, capitalism while at the same time emancipating to a select few. Although these perspectives might seem contradictory, their ultimate implications are very similar. The artist's *work* is not an activity that is performed outside a particular framing system, in this case capitalist. As a result, the artist's work is also imbricated in the overarching structure, being subject to its expectations and demarcations. As a result, the symbolic *work* carried out by Sierra is only deceptively liberating as, in the end, it also reproduces mechanisms that subject the artist to the conditions imposed by the system itself. These conditions are expressed through the mechanisms of circulation and reception generated by the system itself that tend to be articulated only according to its interests in an exclusive configuration. As a result, the *work* of the artist is just as subjugated and subjugating as the *work* of the hired performers, regardless of what their actual value, bot economic and social, may be. *Work*, therefore, is configured as a site of constant struggle between individual freedom and economic, systemic subjugation where the winner is, unsurprisingly, the established order.

In-visibility

In terms of *work*, it is clear that Sierra's pieces invite the spectator's gaze to oscillate between two contingent understandings of the word. These meanings, and their ensuing implications, are determined by the societal locus occupied by the *workers*. The delegated performers are characterised as underprivileged subjects and, therefore, *work*, in their case, entails a subjugating, demeaning practice. For the artist, however, and given its placement within the elite circle of contemporary art, *work* implies a means for emancipation and personal betterment, albeit the deceitful character of the economic transaction. By not offering a stable site where the audience can successfully recognise where *work* happens, the pieces constantly shift perspectives and in its perpetual movement, render the original sites of *work* invisible. By this I mean that in the constant displacement of *work* from one context to the next, the spectator never fully grasps the existence of a subject(s) that generates the work. In Sierra's pieces, often what ultimately matters is the end product of a particular action, not so much the protagonists of it. In *250cm line tattooed on 6 paid people* (1999), for example, the importance is placed on the tattooed line at the end of the artistic action, not in the stages, or the performers, or even the tattooer. What matters

here is that an actual 250cm line was inscribed in the backs of 6 paid individuals, not the individuals themselves, nor the executioner of the line.

Similarly, in *Workers who cannot be paid...*, or *24 blocks,* the artist also emphasises the 'product' over the sites of its production. In the case of *Workers who cannot be paid...*, the emphasis is placed on the actual hiding of the participants, not on the particularities of the individual sitting in the boxes. Here the *participants* or the *delegated performers* are rendered socially invisible, devoid of any identitarian features, lacking of any sense of individuality. In the case of *24 blocks,* the actual *artwork*, as described by the artist, consisted of the static blocks placed in the gallery space surrounded by detritus, candy wrappers and soda containers, left behind by the workers. The piece, therefore, highlighted the traces of the *work* performed by the delegated spectators yet in no way addressed the workers, or their *work*, directly. Quite the opposite, in this *work* the workers are not even present or mentioned, all we have are the indexical traces left by their *work:* the *artwork*. Under this understanding, the *work* carried out by Sierra's workers, underlines their existence while simultaneously stripping them from any sense individuality. This way, the delegated actors are always physically present in Sierra's pieces (as means to an end) yet always absent in their specificity (as particular, individual, named, subjects).

A similar process of invisibilisation also happens at the level of the artist's *work*. As we have seen, the majority of his pieces do not include the artist: in many cases, they don't even mention his existence unless it is revealed through the conventional method of gallery labels. In his description for the pieces, for example, he successfully removes himself from any direct action, either to be tattooed or to participate in the constant displacement of concrete blocks. In the cases where he is mentioned, as in *Obstruction of a freeway with a truck's trailer* (1998), the artist's participation is described as a premise for the realisation of the piece but not as the piece itself. In this sense, the artist is located in a suspended space beyond the actual work of art, outside of the artistic action. But what is it, exactly, that Santiago Sierra does as an artist? As mentioned before, his role is better understood as that of a coordinator or director who is involved in the project from a distance. By determining the instructions for the pieces, he provides the general conditions for the work according to his needs and desires. As a result, Sierra, the artist, is located as a necessary premise for the realisation of a particular work, as the provider for the structure of its development and enactment, but not as a necessary actor in the piece. Sierra's *work* also happens during the fulfilment of a particular task assigned to a hired performer. At this stage, the artist wears the hat of documenter, maintaining a critical distance from the ephemeral action and registering in posterity. Here, the artist's role, although

more physically involved with the realisation of the piece, still remains outside the work, detached from its intrinsic operations and implications.

Yet, in Sierra's practice, there is still another kind of *work* performed by the artist. This kind of *work* is carried out after the documentation of a delegated action and implies the actual, physical, production of the *artwork* as finished merchandise ready for economic circulation. This kind of work is much more 'conventional', as it requires the selection of images, the editing of a video, or the production of a photograph. In this case, the artist's role is fundamental for the actual production of a finished *artwork*, given that neither the delegated performers, nor the spectators of the live action, are the ones producing the commercial product that is an *artwork*. At this stage, the artist is directly involved in the completion of an artistic object, either a photograph, or a video or archival material; furthermore, it is constituted as essential for the successful completion of a piece. As a result, the role of the artist seems to be emphasised when the artistic product needs to be validated as an object of symbolic value worthy of widespread circulation and completely disregarded as 'setting up' the conditions of possibility for the enactment of a piece. The *work* of the artist is rendered as ambivalent or phantasmagorical, ignored at the beginning of the process of creating an artwork yet highly recognised at the end. Similar to the actual individuals in *Workers who cannot be paid...,* the artist, in Santiago Sierra's practice, is hidden yet his presence felt throughout his pieces. As Pilar Vilela Mascaró argues: 'In this case, the crux of the statement is that the value of this particular thing is not a result of the work of the person who has been directly hired to do it (her, here, now); but of the work of *some one, somewhere* else who, by definition, within capitalism, and in relation to commodities, becomes invisible' (2008a: 23).

Art/iculating a critique of capital

If the role of the artist and the performers constantly fluctuates between an active participant and a disenfranchised instrument, what, then, is at *work* in Sierra's practice? The strategy of invisibilisation of the subjects that are required for the production of an artistic object conceals the real intentions behind Sierra's pieces, that is, the revealing of the economic conditions of possibility that frame and characterise a particular situation as directly correspondent with practices of individual subjugation. In his practice, certain contextual situations, such as unemployed immigrants in Germany or unemployed Tzotzil women in Mexico, are treated as 'readymade' elements; as given units within the current state of affairs. By this I mean that 'Sierra's work does not make "real issues" visible, because it counts on the visibility of the issues that it deals with as being already given, as determinate configurations' (Vilela Mascaró, 2008a: 31). As argued earlier, everybody knows that there are large sectors of unemployment, not only

in Germany or Mexico, but throughout the world and that, for the most part, the people that compose this sector are immigrants. For Sierra, these underprivileged situations are highly 'formed and codified spaces and situations' (ibid.), which are instrumentalised by the artist (he, literally, objectifies them), and uses them a tool or a mechanism for questioning the larger logic of capital exchange.

For example, *Sumisión (formerly word of fire)* (2006-2007), addresses its immediate surroundings, by identifying a problematic zone in Anapra, while at the same time addressing the larger economic relationship between Mexico and the United States. Furthermore, the piece also commented on the hierarchical relation established between the Global North and the Global South and the exclusionary practices enacted by the dominating party. In this sense, the situation in which Sierra operates, whatever lies outside of the artwork and the artworld, the contextual social, economic, racial specificities of a site, for example, are appropriated and refabricated as 'something (al)readymade' (Vilela Mascaró, 2008a: 21); as something 'real', already given, that instead of being analysed in its intricacies should be deployed for the critical analysis of the macro-narrative that created, maintained and validated it. As Vilela Mascaró says in reference to *21 anthropomorphic modules made by the people of Sulabh, International* (2005-2006): 'The scavengers were already scavengers and the shit was already shit before and independently of the *21 Modules*' (2008a: 21).

Understanding contextual conditions as 'social readymades', allows the artist to critically engage the way in which these are articulated and configured by a more pervasive, yet deceitful, system of control: capitalism. For Sierra, advanced capitalism provides the frame for the operation of all realms of life, from *work* to *leisure*. In this sense, his practice tries to trace the ways through which capitalist interests and desires are transformed and transplanted into other realms, be it social or artistic locations. Understanding art as a merchandise, his works activate the different locations where they are enacted and circulated (micro-context and macro-narratives) and make evident their symbiotic imbrication with the prevailing economic system.

Capitalism, according to Sierra, is a violent, exclusive, repressive, hierarchical, alienating (Martínez, 2003: 17), exploitative, pervasive and all-encompassing system of control (Wagner, 2006: 31-33). *Economical study on the skin of Caracans* (2006, hereafter *Economical study*) is a good example of the artist's exploration into the reach and power of money. For this work the artist photographed the back of 10 persons who claimed to have zero dollars, the back of 10 persons who claimed to have a thousand dollars, and the back of 10 persons who claimed to have a million dollars. From each group, the artist extracted a medium tone in a

greyscale that represented the average amount of money owned by the average person in each group. From this average, the economic values of pure black and white were calculated; the value of 'true' black was -2106 dollars while the value of 'true' white was 11,548,415 (Sierra, 2011). Exhibited for the Sala Mendoza, a neuralgic site for contemporary artistic practice in Venezuela, the piece brought into the gallery space a sociological and statistical strategy (San Martín, 2007: 71) reminiscent of Conceptual Art practices such as Hila and Becker's study of rural United States that deconstructed the relationship between race and economic access. In the case of Caracas, Sierra demonstrates the privilege associated with white skins and the underprivileged connotation of darker skins in actual financial terms. As a result, *Economical study,* on the one hand, bears witness to the permeating and extensive character of capital in a determined society. Everything and everyone can be classified according to bank statements, from the most dominant to the most underprivileged. On the other, it reveals the hierarchical nature of capitalist exchanges where, through its historical configuration, there are clear racial divisions between the economically, and therefore socially, powerful and the powerless. *Economical study*, critically engages the prevalence and ubiquity of money as a symbol for larger capitalists exchanges. As San Martín argued:

> 'the one in Caracas (*Economical study on the skin of Caracans)* pointed at the whitening ability of money and the self-exclusion of the economic elite from reproductive exchanges. It was a document that dismantled the Creole lie of a perfect racial integration in Venezuela and highlighted the actual presence of an excluding chiaroscuro in the life of Caracans. (San Martín, 2007: 71)

Hiring and arrangement of 30 workers in relation to their skin colour (2002), carried out a similar exploration to *Economical study*. Instead of focusing on the context of Caracas, this piece critically engaged the economic specificities of a city in the so-called 'developed world', the city of Vienna. As mentioned before, for the piece the artist hired and arranged 30 workers according to their skin colour and staged a live racial palette in the gallery space. Contrary to the Caracas piece, the Vienna work emphasised the various degrees of skin colour of the underprivileged sector of Viennese economic life. In this sense, the work was not aimed at denuding the 'whitening ability of money', but of demonstrating how in Vienna, the economically marginalised are not a group easily recognised by a particular race but that, in the context of the city, the work 'documented the variety and width of the "palette" that immigration has made available for Austrian business persons, from the clear Caucasians coming from the Slavic countries to the darker hues from sub-Saharan Africa' (San Martín, 2007: 71).

As a result, the work problematises the assumption that economic marginalization has a direct racial correspondent (non-white) and asserts that, at

least in the conditions imposed by Vienna, the problem of economic exclusion has more to do with illegal migration and border-crossings than with skin tonalities. In this sense, the work demonstrates how Capitalism created underprivileged sectors that are completely site-specific but that are configured following a universalist, all-encompassing capitalist logic. In that sense, the excluded presented by both works are different social groups, one characterised by race and the other one by illegal immigration, that have been, paradoxically, framed and nurtured by the same rules of exploitation determined by the current system of global capitalism. Although very different in terms of interests and characteristics, both groups are located in the same place in relation to capitalism: at the margins and underneath.

Unlike many contemporary artists, Santiago Sierra's practice is not concerned with alleviating or bettering a conflictual situation. Unlike many of his peers, artists who believe that art can offer a glimpse outside of the state of affairs, or a poetic pause in our depressing everyday, Sierra explicitly denies art's potential as social activism and acknowledges art's complicity with the current system of capital exchange. In his practice, the spectator and the artist are not effectively disassembling or dismantling any hierarchical or exploitative systems, nor deploying an emancipatory mechanism, nor involved in processes of activations of political agency. By avoiding to 'give a voice to the underprivileged' or to 'propose new modes of sociability' (Vilela Mascaró, 2008b: 9), Sierra's works strip art of its supposed 'moral superiority' (Schneider, 2004: 38); they 'undo(ne) the halo of humanist moral purity around the making of art' (Medina, 2009: 187). Sierra argues: 'Art is like a pretentious furniture store or a complicated jewel. It might be a complex jewel, but first and foremost it is a luxury object' (Mircan, 2006: 17).

To understand art as directly collaborative of economical and cultural coercive practices has deep implications for both the societal locus of the artist, as a producer of consumer goods, and the spectator's location, as a receptor of those economic products. The fact that art is described as the practice that produces and circulates luxury objects, implies that both the artist and the spectator have access to these products and circulatory platforms. This, in its turn, entails that they belong to a specific social group with access to, both, the spaces and the objects 'pushed' by this cultural industry. In this sense, both artist and spectator are located within a specific social group that, according to Sierra, 'is not the whole of society, but only its superior body - let's call it the most favoured classes, the ones that offer employment.' (Mircan, 2006: 17). Under this rubric, both the producer and receptor of the artistic object or event, are described by the artist as 'well-educated people, people who belong, at least, to a cultural elite'(Wagner, 2006: 17); or as 'the social group that is on top. On top globally, and on top

locally' (Wagner, 2006: 17). Art, under Santiago Sierra's perspective, circulates only in the highly specialised elites of contemporary capitalist society. As a result, and because of this direct complicity with the system of commodity exchange, art, for Sierra, has absolutely no potentiality for changing, altering or subverting the current state of affairs of, either, a particular micro-context, or the hegemonic, universal macro-narratives.

Given that art is created and circulated within a very exclusive field, both economically and intellectually, it is limited to this particular location, the geography traced by the circulation of both artistic products and ideas surrounding it. Under this understanding, art's limits are constructed and delimited by the displacements of both objects and art ideas within a field. Art, therefore, cannot offer a perspective beyond the conditions that construct it: it cannot provide an emancipatory function if it is configured by subjugating procedures and mechanisms. This means that, for example, given art's deep connection with capitalist interests, in the form of collections, auctions and institutional/national support, art is condemned to repeat the same exploitative relations that had previously configured it. In this sense, art, even the most radical art, only feeds into the cycle of insatiable cultural consumption fostered and maintained by a very small elite. This implies that art plays no political role in the pursuit of emancipation and freedom, and therefore, that Santiago Sierra's works are nothing but the confirmation of a current state of affairs, not a possibility for a new system, or a hope for a better, or different, present and future. In his pieces reality, the artworld, are understood as being configured and delimited by economic transactions that are ultimately physical expressions of subjugating ideological relations.

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Materiality at work: A note on desks

Lisa Conrad and Nancy Richter

abstract

In the course of the material turn in social sciences, the material precondition or *fabricatedness* of practices increasingly comes into focus. In this article we explore what happens when applying some of the current notions of material power to the analysis of economic and business settings. We do so by focusing on one specific, omnipresent and taken-for-granted object: the table. Different manifestations of the table in the context of work, management and retail will be outlined and analysed with regard to the respective status of materiality.

Introduction

Work is taking place in spaces and with the help of objects. This is the case no matter if we are confronted with a classical open plan office or with the workplaces of a neoliberal regime of labor mobility and flexibility where work has slipped into formerly work free zones such as trains, cafés or the home. Materiality is central to work and organization. This is why some workplaces turn into objects of conscious design efforts that are believed to support the achievement of certain business goals. The manipulation of space appears as an integral element of capturing the hearts and minds of employees. Reshaping their spaces of work is an organizational attempt to manufacture organizational culture and appropriate employee identities (Dale and Burrell, 2008). But it is not only the intentionally fabricated spaces and objects that affect the character of work and performance: it is also the apparently neutral setting, the unnoticed arrangement or the practical appliance going beyond being subject for discussion that interact with the working people:

> Materiality communicates and shapes. It consists not only of physical structures but is part of the inter-subjective and subjective realm that makes up our social relations. And in turn, the physical world made social comes to constitute people through its very materiality. The spaces and places around us construct us as we construct them. (Dale and Burrell, 2008: 1)

Seen this way, materiality is socially produced and at the same time produces social relations. It is therefore important to understand the nature and effects of materiality, also for our understanding of the relation between freedom and work. However 'free' and self-governed a working environment presents itself, for example a Google Lab or an artist's studio, it is still manufactured space. Both, intentionally designed spaces and seemingly undesigned working contexts, affect the activities taking place.

According to Henri Lefebvre space is a complex social product which is based on a social production of meanings affecting perceptions and spatial practices. His focus is on the process and the political character of the production of space, which is also a means of control and therefore a means of domination and power (Lefebvre, 1991: 26). The production of space is a threefold determination: material production, the production of knowledge and the production of meaning. Space emerges in the interplay between all three (Goonewardena, 2008: 41). Lefebvre further punctuates that every society and every mode of production produces its own space. In modern neo-capitalism there is a double interaction between the social relations of production and reproduction:

> Social space contains – and assigns (more or less) appropriate places to – (1) the social relations of reproduction, i.e. the bio-physiological relations between sexes and between age groups, along with the specific organization of the family, and (2) the relations of production, i.e. the division of labour and its organization in the form of hierarchical social functions. (Lefebvre, 1991: 31)

We follow the discrimination between the space of reproduction and production, but center on the relations of production so as to localize the material conditions of work. Concentrating on the otherwise often taken-for-granted materiality of work is central to our argument. In order to research it, we decided to focus on a specific object: the table. As more or less universal work devices, tables and desks are omnipresent in workplaces, organizations and business settings. They occur in form of sales counters (e.g. Fig. 6), reception desks, work benches, writing desks, bargaining and negotiating tables,[1] conference tables (e.g. Fig. 1, 2, 4, 5) and diverse variations of these, such as mobile office car desks (e.g. Fig. 8). We will sample different understandings and theories of materiality and apply them

1 cf. Documentary *Nothing ventured* by experimental filmmaker, clipping available at http://youtu.be/kOLdRSDWvRo (as of 06/01/2012).

to different table scenarios. Our proceeding is structured by an enumeration that might seem rather arbitrary. The different sections are labelled: (a) tables belonging to philosophers and poets, (b) round tables, (c) rectangular tables, (d) tables to stand at, (e) mobile tables, and (f) no tables at all. Our enumeration is intended to remind of the rather exotic taxonomy of a Chinese dictionary entitled 'The Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge' cited by writer and librarian Jorge Luis Borges.[2] According to the dictionary, animals can be divided into:

> (a) those belonging to the Emperor, (b) those that are embalmed, (c) those that are tame, (d) pigs, (e) sirens, (f) imaginary animals, (g) wild dogs, (h) those included in this classification, (i) those that are crazy-acting, (j) those that are uncountable, (k) those painted with the finest brush made of camel hair, (l) miscellaneous, (m) those which have just broken a vase, and (n) those which, from a distance look like flies. (Borges, 1992: 115-116)

Borges uses the mind-boggling list to spell out to what extent every classification and 'logical' order of things and thoughts are always arbitrary and only provisional. By tentatively following this gesture we would like to point to the established conventions of how to research a certain subject. Referring to the title of the present issue "Free Work" we will look into different ideas and lines of analysis in an affirmingly contingent way. The selected material is neither delimited to specific disciplinary areas nor to methodologically established usages. We drew form market sociology, organizational behaviour, science studies, literary studies, cultural studies, architectural theory, media theory, management, art, photography and literature. The heterogeneous material was interwoven in a way that appeared appropriate for the advancement of comprehension. This approach allows for very different questions to be followed up and brought together in one paper while focusing on the object of the table.

(a) Tables belonging to philosophers and poets

A few philosophers, such as Platon and Edmund Husserl, studied the table, though not the table itself, but something deriving from its contemplation, such as the relation between thing and essence: 'Using the example of the table, Platon elaborately expatiates on essentialism – without paying the least attention to the table or even the nature of the table.' (Seitter, 2002: 72) The rather short history of knowledge about the table shows that putting an object as banal and quotidian as the table in the centre of a reputable scientific inquiry is beyond occidental paradigmatic order. At last an explicit 'turn to physics' (*ibid.*: 75) can be found in the writings of 20th century French poet Francis Ponge, namely in his works *Le parti pris des choses* (1995) and *La table* (1982). Towards the end of his

2 The list is well known from the preface of Foucault's *The order of things: An archeology of the human sciences* (1966).

career, Ponge starts to busy himself with the most accurate descriptions of common things framing this undertaking as follows:

> I reflect today that, generally speaking, I write only for my own consolation (if I'm not commissioned to write) and that the greater the hopelessness, the more intense (necessarily so) the fixation upon the object (in linguistics the referent); (...). (Ponge, 1982: 11)[3]

This turn to objects allows him not only to cope with his despair, but also to address an object like the table directly and to explore it for its own sake. With Ponge it sounds like this:

> Table, you who were (and still are) operating table, dissecting table (cf. The Anatomy Lesson), or a wheel upon which I break (if you like) the bones of words, how am I to break you down in turn? (I cannot break you down without at the same time calling on your support.) (*ibid.*: 57)[4]

Media theorist and media physicist[5] Walter Seitter follows Ponge in carefully studying the medial properties of the table starting from its materiality. What is a table? According to Seitter a table is first and foremost an elevated floor, a floor differentiation or a floor terrace (Seitter, 2002: 69) creating the eye-hand-zone appropriate for handling things. The table as a medium enables the presentation and realisation of things as well as information transmission, procession and registration, which altogether constitutes 'the radical power of the table' (*ibid.*: 77). He concludes by stating that fundamentally a table is not only an instrument of presentation, but additionally of traffic in the sense that an 'airspace' (*ibid.*: 79) arises from the firm and even surface. As a transport depot within events of traffic, the table retains things for a certain period of time until their removal (*ibid.*: 86). Its medial qualities hence lay in the translation between the vacuum and the firmness – a characteristic that, according to Seitter, the table shares with some other media, such as the chair and the house.

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3 'Je réflechis aujourd'hui que d'une façon générale j'écris pour ma consolation (si je n'écris par sur commande) et que, plus le désespoir est grand, plus la fixation sur l'objet (on le nomme en linguistique le référent) est intense (nécassairement intense); (...)' (13 August, 1968).

4 'Table, qui fut (et reste) la table d'opération, de dissection (cf. la leçon d'anatomie), ou (si l'on veut) la roue sur laquelle je mis les mots à la question. Comment t'y mettre toi-même? (je ne peux t'y mettre toi-même sans que tu viennes encore à mon appui.)' (3 October, 1973).

5 In the monography Physik der Medien, Walter Seitter extensively and painstakingly describes the strictly material properties of particular artefacts/media such as the street, the house, paper, air, vehicles, the hand and so forth adopting a point of view 'that is neither fascinated nor illusioned by the so called New Media' (Seitter, 2002: 86).

(b) Round tables

In business contexts, round tables can most likely be found in meeting rooms, conference rooms or boardrooms. The works *The table of power* (1993-1995) and *Banks* (1995-1996) by conceptual artist Jacqueline Hassink assemble photographs of Europe's forty largest multinational corporations' boardrooms often displaying round tables (cf. Fig. 1 & 2).

Figure 1: Round table (Société Général).[6]

Hassink's work directs the attention to the materiality of the executive board. Her perspective allows to conceptualize its actions without the taken for granted actors, instead she focuses on the discursively neglected non-human actors thereby suggesting that those noted as things[7] take part in the action. In our reading of *The table of power* and *Banks* they refer to the idea that the executive board's activity can be described as originating not only from its members but from an assemblage of human and non-human actors, a so called actor-network consisting of the very board members, tables, board members' deputies, chairs, consultants, carpets, secretaries, microphones, service staff, coffee pots and many more. The fact that this listing is so difficult and staccato-like to read gives

6 Photographs in *Banks* (1995-1996) by Jaqueline Hassink, in Lachmayer and Louis (1998).

7 The concept of non-human actors strongly gains in scientific popularity commensurate with the widespread reading of different texts by Bruno Latour, Michel Callon and other scholars summarized under the label actor-network-theory (ANT).

further evidence to Bruno Latour's hypothesis that the separation between humans and things is central to the modern view of the world. The modern, strictly disaggregating view hides the factual existence of hybrids: composite beings between nature and culture, thing and human (Latour, 2008: 19). According to Latour 'we have never been modern', meaning that the separation between humans and things has at no time been fulfilled. Instead the fundamental hybridity of human existence and action was discursively concealed, just like the notion of the executive board as an assemblage of human and non-human actors.

Figure 2: Round table (Dresdner Bank)-[8]

But the conference tables not only testify for the material condition and the hybrid character of the executives board's activity, they also draw attention to the fact that they are round tables. In his article titled *Round tables and angular tables*, literary scholar Nils Werber points to the not accidentally so called round table as a format of agreeing on something and resolving or avoiding conflict. Werber outlines a long planned and haggled over meeting between the leaders of the Irish catholic party Sinn Féin and the British protestant Democratic Unionist Party in March 2007. One of the central questions while organising the meeting concerned the seating: were they to be seated opposite or next to each other? Neither seemed appropriate respectively realisable. In the end, the two politicians

8 Photographs in *Banks* (1995-1996) by Jaqueline Hassink, in Lachmayer and Louis (1998).

were seated adjacent to each other around the angle of a diamond-shaped, hence poly-angular table. Nevertheless, news coverage unanimously labelled the encounter as 'round table' celebrating the miraculous rapprochement. This word choice points to a victory for the organisers and middlemen of the meeting, namely Peter Hain of the British ministry of Northern Ireland (Werber, 2009: 114). At a round table, agreement is presupposed to such an extent that the table itself turns into its signifier. The round table appears to already anticipate the outcome of the interlocution held and can hence be seen as a rhetorical form or – following Bruno Latour – as a non-human actor, as something actively constraining the amount of possibilities of what is happening on a table. It advances comprehension not only because it is the intended result, but also through its materiality that seems to constitute comprehension already in itself: it leads to the situation that a group of people is gathered around a table, there is no head and no end, every member appears equal and equally important in creating a certain integrity (*ibid.*: 121). Werber therefore considers the round table to be 'a cultural technique of producing consent' (115).

(c) Rectangular tables

In *Space is the machine*, architectural theorist Bill Hillier notes, that behaviour at a table appears to us as a spatio-temporal event. But according to Hillier, it is given order and purpose by an 'unconscious configurationality' (2007: 28). This configurationality prevails in all areas 'where we use rule systems to behave in ways which are recognizable as social' (*ibid.*). For Hillier it is a form of social knowledge which creates order in everyday life. This knowledge is about habits of doing and there is no need for them to be brought to conscious attention. In this sense certain table shapes like other spatial structures shape human behaviour. How people interact on a round table differs significantly from the behaviour patterns emerging at a rectangular or square table. According to Hillier shapes can be represented as a regularly constructed mesh of cellular elements or tessellation (*ibid.*: 80). This conceptualization allows measuring the grade of integration of each table shape.

The starting point is to create a circular tessellation of small square cells. It is then possible to calculate the mean depth of each cell from all others. After that the results are expressed in a distribution of dot densities for the square elements. The higher densities (darker colour) stand for greater integration, the lower densities (lighter colour) stand for less integration. Compared to a circular shape, a square form is less integrated. 'It has greater average universal distances per tessellation element' (*ibid.*: 81). The overall form of a rectangular table is even less integrated.

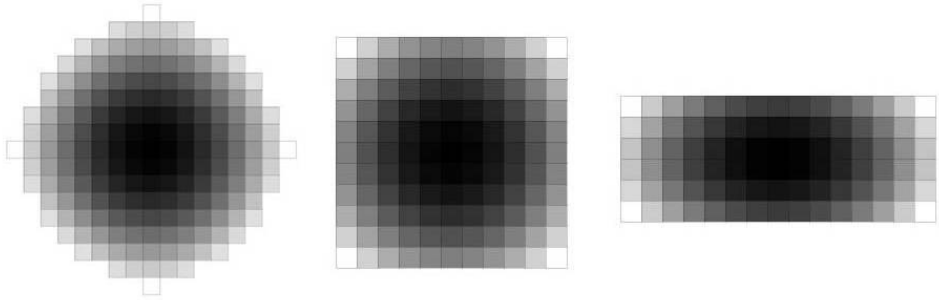

Figure 3: Table shapes.[9]

Hillier notes that 'the correspondence between these structures of "shape" and the ways in which shape is exploited for social purposes is intriguing' (*ibid.*). In cases where interactive status is more critical, table shapes follow the pattern of integration. In cases where symbolic status is more critical, table shapes also follow the pattern of integration though with opposite tendencies (*ibid.*). He illustrates this as follows:

> For example, on square dining tables the centre side is more advantageous than corner locations, because it is a more integrated location. Similarly, the English prime minister sits in the centre of the long side of a broad rectangular table, maximizing this advantage in integration. (*ibid.*)

Hillier notes that the opposite is the case where symbolic status is more important: 'Where status rather than interaction is the issue, caricature dukes and duchesses sit at opposite ends of a long table, maximizing proxemic segregation but also surveillance' (*ibid.*). How do spatial configurations like table shapes symbolize or influence collective behaviour in different economic environments? Looking at the meeting tables of the board of directors of Nestlé (Switzerland) or the meeting table of the Executive board of Barclay's Bank (England) suggests symbolic status to be more important than interaction. Hence table

Figure 4: Rectangular table (*Nestlé* Switzerland).[10]

9 Computer generated graphic by Sven Schneider (Informatics in Architecture, Bauhaus University Weimar), inspired by Hillier, B. (2007: 80-1).

shapes could be analysed as aspects of corporate culture.

However the pictures demonstrate that tables are not only representing the core of corporate culture but also the centres of economic power. Tables are the center of globally operating corporations where a small number of people are making decisions which affect us all. To make this table visible is tantamount to making economic power visible. Since 2008 and during the 'Great Recession' the world's economy has changed sweeping away some of the heretofore largest companies like Lehman Brothers. In the USA and Europe a large amount of corporations had disappeared. Others face decreasing revenues and react with reducing or reorganising their employees. But is this economic and also cultural change related to boardroom design? Certainly space and materiality cannot only be seen as tools for inducing cultural change or as crucial parameters in changing organizations. Space may also be seen as an indicator for a changing society producing its space in a complex interplay between materiality, knowledge and meaning.

Figure 5: Rectangular table (Barclay's Bank).[10]

(d) Tables to stand at

Tables to stand at can be found in form of work benches, reception desks and sales counters. The stand-up table appears as intermediary in retail-costumer

10 Photographs in *The table of power* (1993-1995) by Jaqueline Hassink, published at IVASFOT [http://www.ivasfot.com/?p=6224].

interaction (cf. Fig. 6). In this aspect it differs from the other table manifestations assembled in this paper that are solely intervening on the production side of business.

The counter can be cited as the basic example of a 'market device' (Callon et al., 2007). The term refers to the notion that market interaction is never and has never been independent of certain vehicles or expedients that enable and compose interaction thereby fulfilling a constitutive role in the formation of markets. It is about a perspective that focuses on 'the role of objects, technologies and other artefacts' (Cochoy, 2007: 109) in framing and generating transactions. In his contribution titled *A sociology of market-things: on tending the garden of choices in mass retailing*, market sociologist Franck Cochoy argues that the 'laissez-faire'-principle of liberal markets does not exist out of itself but has to be fabricated. The setting up of commercial transactions, the art and science of 'faire laissez-faire' (115) relates to a sort of pragmatic management skill distinct to the professions of shop designers or aisle managers (cf. Barrey, Cochoy, Dubuisson-Quellier, 2000). Sales counters are one of their central fields of action and attest to the ineluctable material quality of market operations.

Figure 6: Sales counter.[11]

Following again Seitter, who evokes the 'desire for the standing desk' (Seitter, 2002: 75) in philosophers' circles, the high desk ('middle high plateau' *ibid.*: 77), just like any other desk, presents a bearing that withstands the action of engraving. But aside of this, a sales counter proves to dispose of further crucial qualities. Drawing from his spatial theoretical study of supermarket objects, Cochoy makes the case that consumer preferences do not antedate the act of shopping, but that they are generated during the encounter with goods: '(...) we learn that preferences, far from preceding the act of purchase, are largely constructed along the immediate interaction with products' (2007: 119). Applying this perspective to the sales counter, it appears to

11 Photograph published in E. Mass (1987) *Tische: Deutschland 1900 - 1945*. Nördlingen: Greno Verlag.

not only represent the commercial offers, but also to determine the frame within which possible consumer choices and subsequent transactions will take place. Preferences can only be generated alongside the offer displayed on the table. More generally speaking, access to and participation in a certain market is materially governed (cf. accessing the market of E-bay demanding a computer, internet connection, software, registration). It is an object like the sales counter in its ability to assemble retailers, products and customers that determines or even constitutes a market by acting as an agent between offer and demand. Without an artefact like the sales counter neither offer nor demand are able to unfold. They can hence be understood as a phenomenon of translation (Latour, 2006) and not as existing beyond any material configuration.

(e) Mobile tables

Leon Trotsky, the people's commissar for the military of the Soviet Union, can be considered as ranging among the today so widely discussed workers of mobility and flexibility. From about 1918 until 1922 he organised the constitution of the Red Army from a train. Consequently, life and work on the train demands a whole chapter of his autobiography:

> During the most strenuous years of the revolution, my own personal life was bound up inseparably with the life of that train. There I received those who brought reports, held conferences with local military and civil authorities, studied telegraphic dispatches, dictated orders and articles [...]. In my spare time I dictated my book against Kautsky, and various other works. In those years I accustomed myself, seemingly forever, to writing and thinking to the accompaniment of Pullman wheels and springs. (Trotsky, 1930: chapter XXXIV)

In a rather similar way, management Guru Charles Handy gives an account of the rampant discourse of work being liberated from the constraints of space and time:

> People can work from the place and at the point in time, that makes most sense to them. They can be spread around the globe or start their labour hours at any time of the day, they can work at home, on the plane or on the train (Handy, 1998: 286).

Handy envisions the office spaces of the future, one of their main characteristic being the lack of 'staticness' and sense of place. Describing the London based advertising agency St. Luke's, Handy gives an example of how an organisation can incorporate and adapt to the new logic: At St. Luke's employees do not dispose of proper personal tables but install themselves at collective tables every morning anew (non-territorial office). These tables are organised in different project rooms each devoted to a specific client. Personal working materials such as currently dealt with documents or files are collected in the so called *5:30 p.m.*-

boxes: at closing hour they are stored backstage in order to be picked up again the next day. They are designed to prevent employees from 'sitting' themselves to an informally acknowledged personal worktable (*ibid*.: 285).

At a closer and media theoretically informed look it becomes clear that within a new order of mobility and apparent placelessness, space is not substantially disposable but it changes in character and in its medial properties. To an increasing extent, the important exchange and collaboration between people does not occur in fixed offices and commonly bent over the table anymore, but is generated through other means (e.g. of telecommunication). Investments in stationary offices might be substituted by investments in notebooks, collaborative software, smartphones, common and meeting rooms or stopovers at conference hotels. Following Handy, the proper office (desk) 'will vanish within the next century, even though many will grieve for it' (*ibid*: 286). Instead the computer desktop, a digital and mobile desk, assumes the capacities of a stationary office: assembling, storing and processing data. Cultural theorist Hartmut Böhme conceptualises the office as a relay of streams of information where materiality is relevant only insofar as it serves as carrier medium of sign processes (1998: 97). The phenomena of the world are turned into office suitable procedures and thereby adapt a second, two-dimensional and emblematic existence within documents, files or data sheets. The computer imitates the office architecture of information processing and world phenomena transmission to the point that it graphically and semantically features a desktop, files, registers, post-its and so forth. The phenomena of the world take on a second existence in discrete values. It is manifest, a notebook replaces an office – placed on the lap it even makes an analog chair-table-combination superfluous by forming that constellation in itself (Seitter, 2002: 88).

However, according to Karen Dale and Gibson Burrell, who relate materiality at work to questions of identity and power, the imaginary transformation of the workplace is probably more significant than its material one:

> The traditional associations and construction of "work" are being disassembled, to be replaced with symbols and resonances from other social arenas: those of the community (village pumps, neighbourhoods, townscapes), the domestic (an imagery of the family), leisure (fun, art, workplace gyms) and consumption (streets,

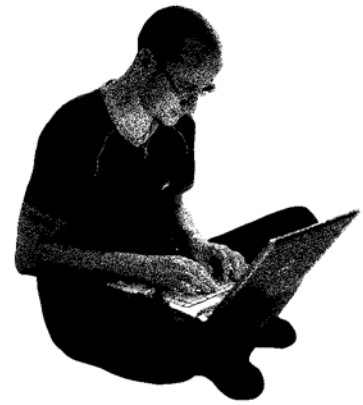

Figure 7: Lap-top-office.[12]

12 Computer modified image by Cornelius K. Donat.

> employee shareholding). (Dale and Burrell, 2008: 116)

Reshaping the imagery and materiality of workplaces is dedicated to bring pleasure and self-fulfilment, that employees are supposed to experience outside their working life, into the realm of management control. Management discourses of the 80s and 90s underline that pleasure could be managed to maximize business returns. For instance they ask: 'How is it that you have the most enthusiastic, most committed, most talented group of employees – except for the eight hours a day they work for you?' (*ibid*: 117) Tom Peters was one among many engaged in describing how the pleasurable parts of capitalism could be integrated in the workplace in order to support people's positive feelings and shape their imagination of work (cf. Dale and Burrell, 2008). Today, organizations concentrate on injecting fun into workplaces. Therefore workplace design has become big business and architecture or design consultancies (e.g. DEGW or NTW) emerge as organizational change appointees for reconstructing or even constructing buildings intended to be agents of organizational culture. Organizations like Google, Microsoft or the BBC invest a lot of money in designing workspace aimed at capturing the hearts and minds of employees as well as shaping an imagery of the organizational identity. Considering capitalism as being about gaining the highest possible return for its investment in people and maximizing the extraction of surplus value, the changing notion of workplace can be seen as highly effective. Following Dale and Burrell, the material and the imaginary disappearances of the workplace are closely linked. In this sense, identity construction can be taken with the employees through whatever spaces in which they are working, also into spaces that are usually not defined as working places: 'The confluence of work and identity was not solely to remain in the workplace, but was to extend workplace out into the rest of the individual's life.' (*ibid*: 117) The extension of the workplace to other arenas like the car is only one remarkable example for this (Fig. 11).[13]

Figure 8: Mobile office car desk.[13]

13 Photograph *Roadmaster Car Desk* [http://www.comfortchannel.com/prod.itml/icOid/17459].

(f) No tables at all

One of the things most certainly mentioned when referring to the legendary RAND Corporation, the 'prototypical think tank' (Brandstetter, Pias, Vehlken, 2010: 11) set up in 1946 by the U.S. Air Force, is the story about its employees gathering in groups and sitting or lying on the floor while reasoning and discussing about some scientific problems. This picture was conveyed through different media coverage, one of them being Leonard McCombe's pictorial essay titled *Valuable batch of brains: An odd little company called RAND plays big role in U.S. defense* published in LIFE magazine in May 1959.[14] Three of the featured pictures can be highlighted with regard to the illustrated neglect of the table as well as the complete absence of a table.

Figure 9: Neglected table (RAND Corporation).[15]

The first (Fig. 9) shows a group of four men and a woman: two of them placed on chairs, two on the floor, the women sitting on the steps of a staircase. The

14 At that time LIFE ranged among the U.S.-magazines with the highest coverage reaching its peak in 1970 with more than 8 million subscribers and an estimated pass-along rate of four to five people per copy (cf. Doss, 2001:1).

15 Photographs by Leonard McCombe, in L. McCombe (1959) 'Valuable batch of brains: An odd little company called RAND plays big role in U.S. defense', *LIFE magazine*, 11 May.

table appearing in this picture palpably plays a marginal role and reminds of the manifold descriptions Francis Ponge gives of his way of relating to the table: 'If I sit at a table, then I do so next to it, [...], left elbow sometimes resting on the table and calves and feet up, writing tablet on my lap' (1967: 3).[16]

The second picture (Fig. 10) shows a group of people gathered on the floor, arranged in a circle in a particularly furnished and lowly lit up room (it is the home of Albert Wohlstetter, one of the central figures at RAND). The third picture (Fig. 11) presents Albert Wohlstetter stretched out on an armchair, his feet up on a desk. A globe in the background doubles the shape of his head. The question is, what do the tables do in their absent or neglected role?

Figure 10: Absent table (RAND Corporation), spiritualistic séance?[15]

The emergence of the RAND Corporation is commensurate with the possibility of a nuclear war and the need to think about the unthinkable (Kahn, 1962). In the face of the existence and deployment of nuclear weapons (after Hiroshima and Nagasaki the mere existence, the non-deployment already is the deployment), established military knowledge appeared more and more inappropriate or even useless (Smith, 1966: 20-21). The gap of incompetence was filled by a group of specialists recruited from different disciplines (Brandstetter, Pias, Vehlken, 2010: 39). This called for practices apt to efficiently coordinate interdisciplinary exchange and the development of hypothetical solutions to widely hypothetical problem scenarios – 'thought-style of virtuality', (*ibid.*: 40). What were those practices? According to John D.

16 'Si je me mets à table, c'est plutôt assis à côté d'elle [...], le coude gauche alors parfois appuyé sur la table et les mollets et les pieds par dessus, mon écritoire sur les genoux' (21-23 Nov., 1967).

Williams, who exercised heavy influence on the organisation in its early years (Abella, 2008: 21), the idea was to generate constant informal and unplanned get-togethers. This state was to be reached through the architectural configuration of the RAND building in Santa Monica optimising spatial motion and thereby generating 'controlled collision of clever heads' (Brandstetter, Pias, Vehlken, 2010: 46). The plan worked out: In different reports there is mention of the apparent atmosphere of casualness, playfulness, experimentation, concentration and devotion signified through open office doors, endless group discussions, meetings on the floor, a relaxed dress code, overly scribbled black boards, tables surcharged with papers and spreadsheets, and completely immersed scientists (*ibid*.: 39). All of this can be considered as a staging of the current narration of what it looks like to be engaged in outstanding and innovative out-of-the-box thinking ready to be applied to contemporary challenges. The absence or neglect of tables appears as an integral part in this staging by connoting ideas like being liberated from middle-class conventions and hence able to think beyond established borders.

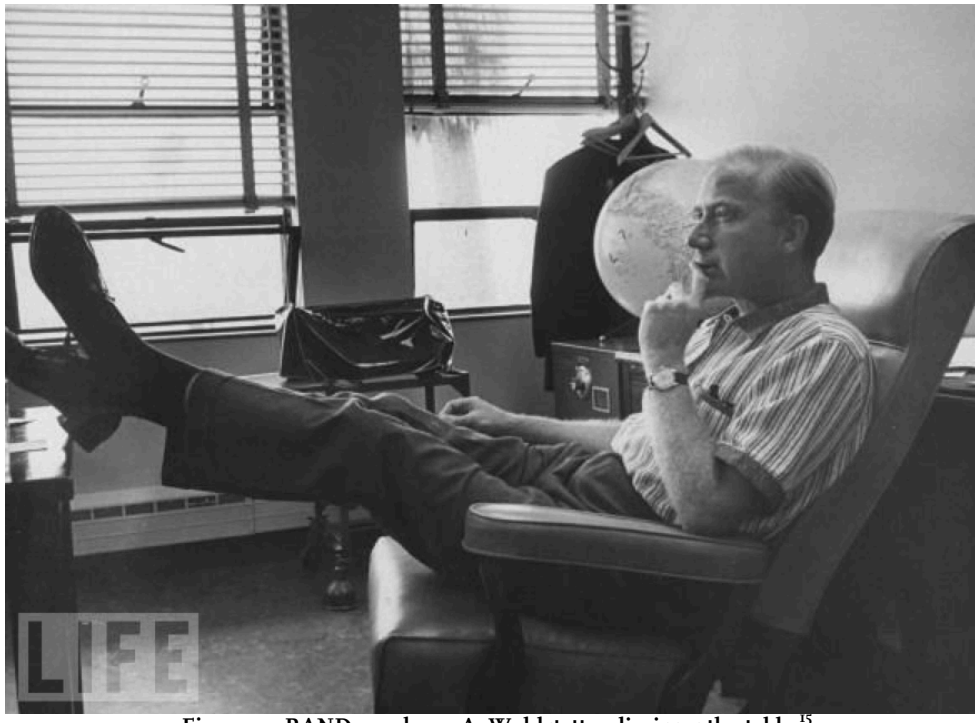

Figure 11: RAND employee A. Wohlstetter dimisses the table.[15]

This is a rather innocent, maybe even euphemistic and certainly apolitical assessment of the think tank. It omits the frequent critique on RAND and its influences on policy decisions, sometimes labelled as 'exaggerated' conspiracy theories imputing a 'sinister behind-the-scene role' (Smith, 1966: 26-27). One of

these critiques presents an article by Chalmers Johnson who himself was a consultant at RAND in the 1960s. He describes the RAND Corporation as a 'quintessential member of the American establishment' with the central objective to support American imperialism and militarism. (Johnson, 2008) In doing so RAND-analysis appear to comprise and effuse essentially anti-democratic conceptions. Johnson refers to RAND's 1960s research conclusions on the then so called Third World as an example. They state that the United States should support military rule in underdeveloped countries so as to ensure collaboration with military officers. Chalmers considers these research reports to entail the establishment of U.S.-backed military dictatorships in East Asia during the 1960s and 1970s in countries such as South Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia (*ibid.*). But it is not only this specific consultancy that makes RAND appear as a propagator of hegemonic and anti-democratic reasoning. According to Alex Abella, the highly prominent idea of man comprised in rational choice theory can be traced back to RAND where it was contrived in 1951. Through RAND's long-term advisory role, the conception explaining all human behaviour in terms of pure self-interest and reducing rationality to wanting more rather than less of a good, could gain in implicitness in Western policymaking and eventually begin to resonate in all kinds of societal areas, from education to relationships.

Curiously, for Hannah Arendt the absence of a table placed in the middle of a group of people metaphorically signifies self-interested individuals being completely unrelated to each other. With regard to contemporary mass society she says:

> What makes mass society so difficult to bear is [...] the fact that the world between them [the people] has lost its power to gather them together, to relate and to separate them. The weirdness of this situation resembles a spiritualistic séance where a number of people gathered around a table might suddenly, through some magic trick, see the table vanish from their midst, so that two persons sitting opposite each other were no longer separated but also would be entirely unrelated to each other by anything tangible. (Arendt, 1958: 52-53)

In contrast, living together in society in a way that people are related to each other implies the common custody over a public realm, literally 'that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it' (*ibid.*: 52).

Tabula rasa

In this article we deliberately restricted our regard to a specific object, the table, and tried to present tables as part of a material world that is far from being

passive. Rather material artefacts like the table intervene in human interaction by structuring activities, promoting certain activities and restraining others. Our objective was to put to the test some analyses possibly deriving from solely looking at the object, here the table, in this knowingly imbalanced thing-perspective. We firstly looked at the material power and medial properties of the table followed by examinations of different manifestations of the table in business and work settings. Our approach not only allowed to focus, examine and bring together different table scenarios, but also to hint at certain structures and relations. We showed how table shapes create different degrees of integration, consequently how round tables can be viewed as a technique of producing consent while the unequally distributed degree of integration at rectangular tables renders them appropriate for the exposition of difference in status. Following Franck Cochoy's explanations on 'market-things', we made the case that offer and demand follow up on the preposition of a table that assembles retailers, products and consumers and by doing so constitutes a market through its fabrication ('faire laissez-faire'). Concerning mobile tables it can be stated that the working space has changed its medial properties and its character. The digital desktop of the laptop has in part made the chair-table-combination superfluous by forming that constellation in itself. In this way the ubiquitous imperative of mobility and flexibility is linked to the materiality of work. It is important to note that in flexible work spaces power is still prevalent also if not always visible. In this way the connection between the material and the imaginary flexibilization of work are illuminating. Flexibilization is about the extension of the workplace into the whole life of the individual rather then freeing the individual from prescribed routines. Lastly, we looked at possible consequences of the absence or the overt neglect of tables as central pieces of furniture using the example of the RAND Corporation. The flaunted 'tablelessness' can be considered as a staging of unconventionality. Does it go too far to relate absent and neglected tables to hegemonic and anti-democratic thinking? From an epistemological perspective this is worth discussing more in depth.

With regard to theoretical underpinnings there are also interesting prospects for further researching materiality in the spheres of production, consumption and reproduction. The already mentioned writings of Henri Levebvre (La Production de l'espace, 1974) for instance could add some fecund further points concerning space as a social product that affects social practices and relations. Karen Dale and Gibson Burrell (2008) as well as Bill Hillier (2007) draw largely on Lefebvre. It is also possible to turn to earlier authors, such as Friedrich Nietzsche (e.g. *On the genealogy of morals*) who conceived human beings as technical beings. From this perspective, 'Menschwerdung' would have been impossible without cultural techniques related to specific artefacts. In terms of methodology, there is a need to further review and probe possible forms of researching objects, materiality and

human-object-interaction in an adequate and perceptive manner. In this context, the choice of objects to research and whereupon to structure an inquiry seems to be of importance. What are promising, revealing and productive objects to focus on? What are the criteria? For instance, we are actually thinking about looking at the role of voice amplifiers like megaphones and telephones in the context of management. How do the changing modes of communication affect the organisation of production, the character of work and of the business itself?

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Working through the allotment*

Abigail Schoneboom with photographs by Julian May

abstract

Using photography and critical reflection, this article explores the relationship between contemporary allotments and paid employment in the UK, making connections to contemporary debates about the future of work. Via interview data and portraits of plot-holders in Newcastle upon Tyne it considers how allotments fit into working lives and the challenges and satisfactions they represent. The project critically reflects on the social theory surrounding work and leisure, looking at the interplay between emancipation and submission that epitomises modern leisure time. It argues that allotments represent a complex discourse on rebellion against and accommodation of an intensified labour process, which can inform discussion about how best to spend our time.

Introduction

This note explores the relationship between today's allotments, which are currently in huge demand (Jones, 2009), and paid work. It represents a reflection on allotment work and a provocation towards further theoretical engagement in relation to time, durability, work-life boundaries and social engagement. Using photos of allotment-holders in a fairly affluent area of Newcastle upon Tyne, it looks at how the allotment complements the working life of a teacher, taxi driver or nurse, and how it facilitates the transition from the structure and routine of a job into retirement. Inspired by the work of Humphrey Spender and the Mass Observation Movement (Past Perfect, n.d.), as well as Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot's (2005) notion of portraiture, the project involved

* This project is funded by The York Management School Pump Prime Fund.

ethnographic fieldwork, interviews and a three-day photography shoot at two allotment sites in Newcastle upon Tyne during the summer of 2011.

Figure 1: *The Ashington Allotments*, by Humphrey Spender, 1934.[1]

The study critically reflects on the social theory surrounding work and leisure, looking in particular at the tension between emancipation and submission that is at the core of modern recreation. In a contemporary labour process characterised by intensification, is the allotment a way to dilate time or just another way of staying busy? Does the allotment's permanence and wholeness appeal to those of us who are engaged in intangible and precarious work or is it a mere extension of a production-consumption cycle that creates nothing enduring? In a post-scarcity society that is nonetheless threatened by looming ecological catastrophe and financial meltdown, how might productivity and play be interwoven?

Figure 2: Emma (Silversmith and Caregiver): 'At the same time that this is incredibly relaxing and fruitful, it also can be stress-inducing at the same time.'

Existing at the nexus between hunger and beauty, the allotment's prosaic rows of potatoes and its indulgently eccentric structures, fashioned from found objects, are a fascinating site of inquiry into these questions. Since its inception in the late eighteenth century, the modern allotment has been a means of containing problems of capitalism and a source of possible rebellion. In the early stages of industrialisation, allotments promised a way to nurture work-discipline and sobriety, offering a means of subsistence to complement meagre wages or enable survival during unemployment. However, pre-Victorian

1 More allotment photos may be viewed at http://www.pastperfect.org.uk/sites/woodhorn/archive/humphrey.html. Reproduced with permission of Bolton Archives.

landowners worried that their allotment-holders would develop a spirit of independence that would make them work-shy and insubordinate (Crouch and Ward, 1988).

In a similar vein, the contemporary vegetable plot may be a source of harmonious work-life balance but it might also be a locus of creative resistance to our jobs, signalling unmet needs and desires. Although recent research has highlighted the role allotments play in managing stress and building community (Hope and Ellis, 2009; London Assembly Environment Committee, 2006; Scottish Allotments & Gardens Society, 2007) and the health benefits of allotments to retired people (Milligan et al., 2004), the interplay between today's allotments and paid employment has not been adequately explored. Engaging with this area of inquiry, this project captures allotment-holders on their plots and reflects with them on how their gardening activity fits in with their working lives.

Figure 3: Hattie (IT Project Manager): 'Before children I used to do 12 hours sometimes, and not even realise, then suddenly feel faint and look at the clock and think, I haven't eaten anything, and I've been here all day ... But now I don't get there nearly as much, and I'm finding it quite hard to keep on top of the plot, and I get weed warnings.'

Methodology: Photographing allotment work

In 1934, photographer Humphrey Spender took pictures of Northumbrian coalminers, exploring how the men traversed the boundary between work and leisure in their daily lives (Past Perfect, n.d.). The photos include several portraits of the men on their allotments. In one, a man stands spade in hand at his leek trench, separated by his shed (or 'hut', as allotment-holders often call these structures) from the slagheap and pitworks chimney behind. Another of the photos depicts a cloth-capped man contemplating his climbing plants inside an archway constructed from old furniture: the corkscrew-carved ends of a wooden banister clearly visible in the entrance (see Figure 1). A third photo features the smoky profile of a man standing before a display of competition dahlias in pop-bottle vases.

As a member of the Mass Observation Movement (Madge and Harrisson, 1937), Spender was interested in documenting daily life in working class communities in a way that made sense to his subjects. His allotment photos document leisure time but are inevitably a commentary on the exigencies of coalmining work. To see a man who spends his working life underground devoting his leisure time to labouring on the land suggests both a community based on continuous toil and economic scarcity and, by contrast, independence from the work discipline of the pit, a mental and physical space uncolonised by industrial rhythms. The depiction of cloth-clapped workmen before their delicate blooms or pleasing arbours simultaneously reminds us of the harshness of mining culture and the resilient creativity sparked by a brutalising labour process.

Figure 4: Sam (Business Consultant): 'I would say that I'm much more authentically me here. I don't believe that I'm authentically me when I'm working... when I come here I revert back to the more full version of the real me, which is a scruff, who prefers manual labour to intellectual labour.'

Setting out from the tension between freedom and toil that Spender's allotment photos encapsulate, I became interested in using photography to explore today's allotments. As a descendant of Northumbrian coalminers, I have long been fascinated by the role that allotments play in working life. In particular, I am interested in how the allotment has shifted from being a largely working class pastime to becoming a mainstay of middle class aspiration. In particular, I wanted to explore the role allotments play in the lives of time-challenged

Figure 5: David (Property Developer): 'My spare time somehow has got to be shared...so we built a sandpit and gravel pit at the end of it to plonk the kids in, so I could then do a bit of digging.'

professionals with demanding jobs and young families. However, I also wanted to document how the allotment replaces the structure and intensity of paid work during the transition to retirement.

This interest emerges from my own involvement on my family's allotment plot in Newcastle upon Tyne, which helps me to handle the stress of doing an academic job and raising small children, yet also creates another dimension of time scarcity where I never seem to have enough time for the digging and weeding. The project involved ethnographic fieldwork at two nearby allotment sites in a relatively affluent area of the city. I am directly involved at the first site, where my parents' plot is one of 28 plots, but I sought interview contacts at a second, much larger site, conducting a total of 35 interviews across the two locations. I spent a six-month period in 2011 documenting my personal involvement in allotment activity through field-notes, followed by a one-month period of conducting interviews with allotment-holders on their plots. I then worked with photographer Julian May to document a subset of the plot-holders on their plots, drawing on some of the themes that had emerged during the interviews.

Figure 6: James (Retired Operations Manager): 'I've always been a busy person, if you know what I mean. I don't like to be sitting around.'

Figure 7: Liam (Lecturer): 'It's one of the very, very few things in my life that is entirely up to me. If it all goes horribly wrong it doesn't matter, it's my learning experience, and no-one knows where I am when I'm here, and no-one can come and get me.'

The portraits are explicitly focused away from the face, partly to protect allotment-holder identities (real names have also been replaced by pseudonyms), but also in order to draw attention to the setting and tools as well as to the work of the body that the allotment entails. We were inspired by Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot's interpretation of portraiture as a tool of social science inquiry that attempts

a "probing, layered and interpretive" (2005: 5) understanding of human identity and social interaction. Lawrence-Lightfoot emphasises a purposefully interdisciplinary approach that aims to capture the richly textured and aesthetic nature of human experience, engaging the emotions as well as the intellect, aiming at an account of human experience that is "generous and tough, skeptical and receptive" (*ibid.*) such that subjects are introduced to perspectives, or ways of reflecting about themselves, not previously considered. As such, we employed a collaborative approach (Pink, 2001), working with the allotment-holders to develop their portraits, drawing on themes that emerged through the interviews.

Figure 8: Paul (Retired Town Planner): 'I'm attached to this partly because it was given to me by my daughter – it's rather a nice dibber, rather elegantly made... it also makes life so much easier for doing so many things... it's a thing of beauty as well as certainly useful.'

Allotments and work

A 2009 *Guardian* article announced 40-year waiting lists for allotments in parts of London and a surge in allotment demand throughout the UK (Jones, 2009). The allotment sites featured in this project, which had a surplus of plots in the 1980s, are currently experiencing waiting lists of several years. When an aspiring plot-holder receives the call and is told a plot is available, he must fit the new responsibility into his life, accommodating it around his paid employment and care-giving obligations. Those who stick at it and, armed with gardening books and advice from neighbours, succeed in taking on the challenge, may carry their plots with them for decades, through career changes and into retirement.

Making time

The participants in this project – some new plotholders with full-time jobs, others veteran retirees – spoke of the relaxing and trying aspects of having an allotment. Emma[2], a caregiver and silversmith, calls it relaxing and stress-inducing (see Figure 2); Hattie, who juggles an IT job and two small children,

2 Participants' real names have been replaced by pseudonyms.

describes the guilt she experiences when her plot goes neglected, but also values how the allotment seems to expand or slow down time, allowing her to become focused on an activity (see Figure 3). Sam, a business consultant, described simultaneously losing himself and (re)discovering aspects of his identity, in the absorbing rhythm of outdoor physical labour (see Figure 4).

For those plagued by time scarcity and caught up in the social networking hurricane, allotments offer a welcome pause and contrast, yet bring with them new challenges around fitting everything in. David, a property developer with a young family, has constructed a sandpit so that he can simultaneously cover childcare and allotment duties (see Figure 5). At the other end of the spectrum, retired allotment-holders retrieve the temporal structure of the work day without the compulsion that attended their paid work life: James, a retired operations manager and extremely active site secretary finds himself very occupied with allotment-related tasks (see Figure 6).

Figure 9: Tom (Taxi Driver): 'Once in a while you plan a job, you go out and buy the stuff, you make it, and you finish it...You don't get that in the work that I do. It comes and goes and it's gone, you know?'

In relation to scholarship on contemporary work, the allotment suggests the need for 'constant busyness' (Hochschild, 2008: 89) that is the new opiate of the masses, but it also raises the possibility of contemplation and escape. The unceasing activity involved in planning and tending an allotment possibly invokes Horkheimer and Adorno's (2001[1944]) contention that the capitalist labour process seeps into the workers' leisure time, such that, 'his experiences are inevitably after-images of the work process itself' (*ibid.*: 137). However, the way people experience their time on the allotment is also a direct contrast to the intensity (Warhurst et al., 2008a) of contemporary employment. Liam, a lecturer who visits his plot before and after work, notes how allotment time feels very much his (see Figure 7). By disrupting usual patterns, creating separation from the wired world outside, and enabling flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997), the allotment can offer an authentically free moment to those who feel their time and their thoughts are not their own (Marcuse, 1964).

Countering evanescence, discovering scarcity and abundance

Allotment activity is an integral whole, steeped in rich, layered narrative where objects and processes have stories behind them: this windbreaker was made from scavenged twigs cast off by the local racecourse; that handcrafted wooden dibber was a gift from a daughter in London (see Figure 8). Tom, a taxi driver, relished the opportunity to design and build a shed on his plot (see Figure 9). Set against the evanescence (Gorz, 2005) of much contemporary work, the allotment-grown potato or hand-built shed provides a satisfying objecthood that provides an antidote to intangible knowledge or service work. Planning and crop rotation, foiling pests, nurturing and planting out seedlings, weeding, picking and processing fruits and vegetables involve sometimes repetitive or unpleasant work. However, these tasks also invite creativity and innovation, which flourish because the allotment is not a necessity. We can buy potatoes from Tesco if these ones fail, so allotmenteering allows us to *play* at scarcity, pitting our wits and ingenuity against nature.

This creative and productive satisfaction that derives from traditional allotmenteering is increasingly intertwined with commodification, which replaces the handmade, hand-reared and innovatively makeshift with pre-fabricated and made-to-order gardening supplies, from luxury worms (Vermisell, 2011) to iPhone gardening apps. Yet the allotment production and consumption process remains largely extra-economic, holistic and mucky. Nicole, a retired NHS clinician, is delighted by her partial independence from the supermarket (see Figure 10). Theresa, a nurse who cultivates endless varieties of basil in her greenhouse, envisions becoming increasingly self-sufficient in her retirement (see Figure 11).

Figure 10: Nicole (Retired NHS Clinician): 'I did a very busy job which didn't involve soil or growing or anything at all, and I drove around a lot. And now I feel much more... it sounds corny, but I feel much more connected with what's important in life, and that now I could feed myself at least for some of the year if I couldn't buy things in shops.'

Plot-holders become conscious of their capacity for self-provisioning and experience a sometimes exhilarating sense of abundance, contributing to our understanding of luxury and wealth as socially constructed, dynamic concepts

(Berry, 1994; Veblen, 1994[1899]). The capacity to give away armfuls of fresh herbs to your neighbours; the secure knowledge that your cabbages are untouched by pesticides or slave labour; or the sense of social superiority that derives from having a healthy outdoor lifestyle are all part of an unfolding ethic of consumption that simultaneously complements and contradicts contemporary capitalism (Campbell, 1987).

Steeped in this process, the allotment gardener might be seen, in Arendt's (1998[1958]) terms, as addicted to a production-consumption cycle that connects her animalistically to the "sheer bliss of being alive" and allows her to "remain and swing contentedly in nature's prescribed cycle" (*ibid.*: 106) producing nothing that endures or develops her humanness beyond the level of reproduction and devouring. As a captivating hobby, smoothly absorbing the leisure moments of an atomised and content gardener, it draws us into a privatised dilettantism that distracts us from the social injustice of the larger system. Yet, against Arendt's suprabiological definition of what constitutes durability, allotments combine story, creativity and place-hood in a way that extends and resonates well beyond this year's growing season and transcends the perishable.

Figure 11: Theresa (Nurse): 'We've got this idea, when we have more time, that we'll come down, we'll have a stove and we'll just dig and create our food out of what we've got. I lived in Crete for quite a while so I'm quite used to taking things off the land and just cooking with what's around...'

Sustaining social connections

While it exists in sharp aesthetic and rhythmic contrast with the office or 9-to-5, socially the allotment has some strong resonances with the workplaces we frequent. Relative to the private garden, the allotment is a public space that, like many organisations, affords its members a congenial, cooperative spirit as well as a rich dose of gossip, power-mongering and drama. Although much of the actual labour is solitary, it is interwoven with the fabric of the site as a supervised and regulated social space.

In Newcastle's allotments, power is devolved, with each site overseen by a management committee consisting of a minimum of three, usually the Secretary, Chairman and Treasurer, although others can be co-opted. They regulate

activities, managing the waiting list and handling cases of plot neglect. For retirees or those experiencing unemployment, this fabric can be an antidote to anomie (Durkheim, 1984[1933]). For the overworked, it can provide a refreshing alternative social attachment. Imbued with its own distinct tempo, language, rituals and mode of social interplay, the allotment offers a habitus (Bourdieu, 1977), a possible refuge for identity buffeted by or relieved from work pressures.

The type of collaboration and knowledge-sharing that goes on among plotholders is not dissimilar to the professional social networks of the IT development or intellectual spheres, and contemporary knowledge workers are well-placed to move between both milieus. Discussion and consultation about the raising of produce provide endless opportunities for banter – but are also a means of pleasantly limiting the intimacy among plot-holders who may work side by side for years and share the knowledge and fruits of their gardens without being uncomfortably familiar with each others' private lives or political leanings. At the same time, family members working a plot find an opportunity for untroubled togetherness: educators Stephen and Louise have made their allotment a way to spend quality time with their teenage children, hanging out and working the plot alongside each other (see Figure 12).

Understanding and re-envisioning contemporary work

Attention to the activities that unfold outside of paid work can sharpen our awareness of the sensual or creative shortcomings of our careers, contributing to labour process and work-life boundary debates that, increasingly, regard work as intertwined with the broader socius rather than as a clearly separable domain (Thompson and Smith, 2010; Warhurst et al., 2008b). Allotments are experienced in relation to paid employment. Bill, a retired printer, commented on how his plot used to clear the noise of machinery from his head (see Figure 13); others reflected on how their allotment provides thinking time to mull over work problems. Mary, a library assistant, enjoys the novel sensation of self-directed, tangible labour after a morning's work at the helpdesk (see Figure 14).

Figure 12: Steven & Louise (Educators): 'We've had to buy so many tools because we all had to have one. We wanted it to be a family thing, not just a mum and dad thing.'

These functions exist alongside busy (and often rewarding) jobs, richly uncovering how workers actively limit the colonisation of their bodies and minds by their jobs, and exploring whether this is a harmonious or conflict-laden negotiation.

Scholarship on contemporary employment has highlighted incompatibilities between the profit incentive and humane or fulfilling work (Bunting, 2004; Hochschild, 1997; Kunda, 1992), and raised the ontological and ecological imperative to look beyond wage labour and consumer society to more sustainable forms of work and leisure. The enduring notion that an ideal society is that which restricts necessary labour to a few hours per day, freeing people to pursue spontaneous self-development in the arts, horticulture, and other pastimes has roots in such places as More's *Utopia* (1992: 37) and provocative 19th century pamphlets (Dilke, 1821; LaFargue, 1883). Using technological advancement to shorten the working day, unleashing spontaneous creativity and productive activity, is an idea that underpins *The German ideology* (Marx and Engels, 2001[1846]: 53) and *Grundrisse* (Marx, 1993[1858]: 706). In the early twentieth century (Hunnicutt, 1988) and the automation-crazed 1980s (Handy, 1984), visions of a leisured society gained purchase in mainstream circles.

Figure 13: Bill (Retired Printer): 'I could walk out of [work] and my head would be buzzing, spinning, and I'd get here and I'd sit here for five minutes and, you know, everything's right with the world again.'

Concerned by the negative environmental and societal impact of our current system, contemporary scholars have advanced the radical notion of delinking income and work (Aronowitz and DiFazio, 1995; Gorz, 2005), while the 4-hour work week and other variations have been promoted by management gurus such as Tim Ferriss (n.d.). This society has failed to materialise, and we have seen instead the rise of an overworked elite maintained by an army of low-paid service workers (Rosenberg, 1993; Schor, 1993). Yet, as Granter (2009: 111) argues, does this merely show that a leisure-based society – one that removes the societal control that work enforces – is easily attainable yet too frightening to contemplate?

Existing in dialogue with paid employment, allotments provoke consideration about how we might best spend our time in a society, faced by economic recession and imminent ecological disaster, where paid work makes less sense as society's central organising principle. As a form of unwaged, eco-friendly production and consumption, the allotment suggests possibilities for a society that looks beyond the wage labour/consumption binary to more sustainable forms of social interaction. It helps us contemplate the social benefits and organisational challenges (those weed warnings remind us of the limits of autonomy in any communally managed space) of a third sector based on unpaid self-development. Importantly, the allotment enables us to picture a post-work scenario not as an atavistic back-to-nature scramble but as a way of life compatible with cappuccino-drinking and vibrant urbanism. Further theoretical engagement with allotment work – its temporality, tangibility and sociality – may thus lend clarity to debates on present and future work.

More than anything, this note emphasises that the allure of allotments is bound up with the exhilarating and demanding urban work patterns and lifestyles they complement. Today's allotments are neither a form of pure rebellion nor a harmonious antidote to work-related stress but a many-layered and contradictory discourse on wage labour and its alternatives. These portraits are a celebration of the creative freedom, ingenuity and self-reliance that thrives alongside our careers but they also reflect tension and possibility as we negotiate how best – in a society capable of co-opting all our emotional and physical resources – to spend our time.

Figure 14: Mary (Library Assistant): 'I absolutely love picking the crops and gathering the harvest then taking it home and sitting down to a meal that is almost entirely grown by us. You feel empowered, that this is your bit of the earth and that you're creating something beautiful out of it.'

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FUL's free work

Committee – The Free University of Liverpool

Introduction

The Free University of Liverpool (FUL) was set up in November 2010 to explore an alternative model of Higher Education. First and foremost conceived as a protest, FUL stands in direct opposition to the radical free market practices implemented by the coalition government in the UK. FUL's protest has been joined by over eighty leading academics and artists who have signed up as 'visiting artists and scholars' (www.thefreeuniversityofliverpool.wordpress.com). FUL is currently running its Foundation Degree in Culture and Performance and will embark on a BA in Cultural Praxis in 2012. At any other university in the UK a BA will cost up to £9,000 a year. At FUL it will cost the student nothing.

The Free University of Liverpool is part of a growing movement of alternative education practices in the UK and helped co-organise a national conference with the Free University Network (or 'FUN' for short) in Oxford earlier this year. (www.sustainingalternatives.wordpress.com/conference/). What seems to characterise this movement so far in the UK, is the enthusiasm participants have to resist the marketisation, instrumentalisation and dehumanisation of mainstream educative practices. People involved are all working 'for free' to protest and establish alternative, sustainable spaces of co-learning.

The practice of free work, therefore, is a key issue. Below, the founders of FUL (the Committee, an anonymous group of three artists and academics) reflect on their own subjective positions in relation to 'free work' and FUL. The text has been divided into three separate voices where each 'voice' expresses a particular aspect of how FUL grapples with free work. In order to emphasise the multivalency, the voices have chosen to present themselves according to the standard typeface settings available with most word processors: 'normal' '*italics*'

and '**bold**'. The following attempt to flag up issues with free work is meant to be read more as an artwork than an academic essay. For example, we have deliberately left out contemporary debates regarding notions of 'unproductive labour' (Harvie, 2003) or entrenched neoliberal managerialist notions of 'macroeconomics' and its relation to free work (Blanchard, 2011) in order to leave as much room as possible for the connective interplay between the three voices and what they are seeking to articulate. The first voice cites some academic references by way of offsetting the interpersonal reflections of 'Voice 2' and 'Voice 3', whilst at the same time making sure that FUL locates itself in relation to academic, cultural discourses, some of which are explicitly politicised. In the context of a struggle around 'free work' we feel it is important not just to reference that politicisation but to try to demonstrate it as much as possible. The sometimes contradictory nature of the beliefs of the Committee (and FUL more generally) are not just questions of temporality theory (Hammer, 2011) or productive labour (Harvie, 2003) but also a question of clashing personalities and priorities. The Committee feels it is crucial that those elements are included in a discussion of free work. The net result is, hopefully, a melody, composed of three different octaves that sing a relevant and complex song about the productive but always-already problematic practice of 'free work' in the context of the struggle against the instrumentalisation of higher education in the UK.

The dialogue

Voice 1: 'normal'	Voice 2: '*italics*'	Voice 3: '**bold**'
'Shifts' and 'Free Time'	*'Whispers about Free Work - reflexive provocation foregrounded through lived experience'*	**'On positionalities, free work, utopia and vertigo'**
'Capitalist production therefore drives, by its inherent nature, towards the appropriation of labour throughout the whole 24 hours in the day' (Marx, 1990:367).	*Listen, this is not free work. This is my research day. I am being paid for this. I might not be able to cash in this work in terms of REF 2014 as this work is written under the collective name of The Committee, but I will still benefit. This is me being a critical thinker. This is me being a scholar. This is*	**The meaning of working for free at FUL shifts depending on the different positions we occupy, so does FUL...**
About a quarter of the way through Volume 1 of *Capital* Marx is keen to understand what working 'shifts' are. This is in order to understand how surplus value is produced		**I became engaged with FUL while I was working as an hourly paid lecturer**

via the miserable working conditions of employees of the bakery, wallpaper, match and linen industries of the 19th century. It is not rocket science to deduct that the more you exploit your labour force the higher your profits are likely to be. Marx is keen to point out that a very significant factor of this exploitation is the constant cutting away of free time for labourers; at meal times, toilet breaks etc. This means that the labour power - the only commodity the worker can offer to guarantee their own survival - is under constant, unending and relentless pressure. If a balance is not struck between what is demanded of a worker and what that worker is capable of, then the result is, what Japanese companies call, karōshi - death by overwork. David Harvey tells us that, after Marx's insights we might conclude 'there is no such thing as a natural working day just various constructions of it [...] in order to maintain a continuity of flow at all costs.' (Harvey 2010:144). For the capitalist, part of the solution to the	*about recognition.* *Listen, the Committee (of which I am a part) gets to contribute to the debate about Free Work. We have been recognized by the editorial team. We decided that recognition was worth us writing this 'provocation' for free.* *Listen, when did we stop being surprised at the fact that academic writing does not pay? Why have we naturalized non-payment for critical thinking/writing? Do we assume that it is scholars in full time employment who usually write the articles, and therefore are already paid for by their institutions?* *Listen, I am in full time employment, but I am also an artist-activist. I work overtime, I work all the time. I reckon that most of my labour is for free: the raising of the family, the household duties, the extended family, the social appearances. And, clearly, such free labour blends into life - life becomes labour. It is impossible to keep account of the differences. And some would argue that it is not*	**in HE where I assumed I would eventually win a contract and stay in academia. For diverse reasons I didn't get a contract and I doubt if now I will ever find a way back in; at the moment the level of personal and ideological compromise feels too high, but who knows, the whole point is that our positions shift...** **Not working in academia but being involved in a protest like FUL that positions itself in opposition to the current HE system in the UK affects the very purpose of working for free at FUL. Free work at FUL is not anymore a form of finding a space to think critically outside what was becoming an oppressive institution. In theory I am already 'free' from it, but to which level do I want that? FUL should be free work done with joy because it is premised on the practice of the transformation of the world. Reality though tells me that the work is hard, not only in terms of time commitment but also emotionally. In addition, in situations of precarity, working or engaging with FUL, can be a double-**

problem of maximising surplus value is to introduce working 'shifts'. This goes as far as any measure might to maintain the constant use of the machines. Time is money or more accurately: the maximisation of the potential of time through the exploitation of labour power results in the highest levels of surplus value for the capitalist. In essence what this delivers for the worker is 'time to rest' or some free time. When the worker has eaten and slept, taken some leisure time, albeit very little, or, in other words, has 'replenished their labour power', they have to get back to work. Adorno, about a century later builds on this basic insight in his work on 'free time', stating that 'organised freedom is compulsory' (Adorno, 1991:164). In other words, the illusion of free time exists as a function of the maximisation of working time. Or to put it yet another way: essentially there is no distinction between working time and free time. All time is at the service of the production of surplus value. Under present conditions we are	*productive to delineate. Says who, for whom? My full time university work pays me exactly the same every month regardless of the amount of work I give. Does that mean that some 'free labour' is paid for?* *Listen, I am now engaged in the Free University of Liverpool. This is my activist work. This is free work, but it is also paid for from time to time. Occasionally the members of the Committee get invited to give talks and get paid £250 or so. Once the members of the Committee got £1000 for facilitating two weekend workshops. I can say that I am in between the two strands, the waged and unwaged work. The world of both waged and unwaged work is flexible and exploitative. At the end of the day, it demands productivity regardless of it being waged or not. We are here, producing, working away, thinking, writing. There's a luxury in paid work, there's also a luxury in deciding not to do paid work.* *Listen, this is my big point. I am more concerned with my productivity than with 'free work'. What is it that keeps me going, over and over and*	**edged sword that situates me in the risky position of becoming unemployable at HE institutions.** **Some questions become more urgent. Who and what benefits mostly from FUL? Students that don't get nationally recognised qualifications? How fragile is this initiative and is it able to support processes of people really searching for an alternative? Would it be more valuable if our effort was mainly geared towards the latter rather than as a protest against the existing HE system? Or on the contrary do we need to fight and get back our right to use knowledge and the structures generated by universities through many hundreds of years, to be able to then imagine and build something new? There is a difficult tension within these sets of operations...** **Still, working for free at FUL offers a space to question one's own position. Like radical pedagogies, FUL can be a tool to find positions in life that we can live with, psychically and socially. But again, lets not forget**

always working. In this light, from the 19th century to today, what the labour movement, unions and collective bargaining have won for workers is the right to continue working at all times. Perversely what we are entitled to at the moment is access to the conditions that allow us to never stop working. At FUL this right is acknowledged, negotiated, cursed and carried out. There is an understanding amongst The Committee that our capitalistic subjectivities are developed to such a degree that we organise our lives into 'shifts'. This way everything gets done between the three of us, within the working day. The machines are never switched off and the production line is always moving. This is done in order to maximise something. But given that we are alter-capitalist anarchists, against the production of surplus value that involves exploitation of others or ourselves, what is that 'something'? Marx, Adorno and Harvey's insights have helped, but there's	*over again? Productivity is even more apparent in so called 'free work' than with 'paid work'. See, paid work brings in money, it soothes me and my family. It sedates, it helps, it gets things ticking over. There is less concern about it; it is routine. 'Free work' is dangerous and risky. It is uncomfortable and compromising. It is validating. It is about recognition. It can also be about social change* *Listen, it's Sunday 7pm and here I am playing with words, composing my thoughts, restructuring my mind, making my processes more articulate, edited for you. For the moment, I conclude: there is free thinking, but this writing is labour-some. It is yet to be reviewed by the members of the Committee and the editorial team, and the readers. It is for someone else.* *[deletion of three sections:* *always productive,always saying 'yes', always eager to be heard…* *free to answer, free to provoke, free to listen…* *stop work, stop email, stop*	**that FUL is a protest, and it is very different to protest from a safe financial position than from one of precarity. For some it might improve their psychic and intellectual position, so they find freedom and a way of dissenting without having to give up a job that satisfies their economic needs. Others, like myself, are looking to find not only how to improve their psychic and intellectual position but also how to find a sustainable economic position.** **The opposing forces generated by people's positionalities are operating everywhere, including any HE Institution. There is a radical difference though in a space that acknowledges that and explores it critically and openly and a space that uses hierarchies in the classroom to naturalize or even neutralize it. But once again, for the ones that are not already in stable financial positions studying/teaching at FUL pushes them further to find ways of being that might not be financially safe at least for the**

something missing. For us the existence of FUL is the best guarantor of conditions within which we are able to engage in the processes of humanisation with each other as Committee members (and other participants) in relation to higher education and knowledge production. Our 'surplus value', the thing to which everything at FUL is directed, is our own humanisation, as fully as possible, in an increasingly dehumanising knowledge industry, replete with managerialism, worker exploitation and the maximisation of surplus value in financial terms. FUL's methods are to protest wherever and whenever it can. To this end we put in long, long shifts at FUL, even at the risk of committing small acts of karōshi.	*commands... live.]* *Listen, this is my final note. I estimate that it took me some three hours to write this up - with edits and deletions and re-writes and hesitations. It took me twenty-one days of thinking as well. There are supposed to be 700 words here. There are three of us in the Committee; each one is supposed to write 700. Too many words as it stands (803). Let me get rid of the overflow, delete the surplus and set them free...*	**forseeable future.** **So yes, on the one hand free work at FUL can be the means of accessing a new world, or of creating a space to imagine one when the current state of affairs around us does not allow it. On the other hand, it seems, that in times of real transition, when somehow an alternative has to be found if one is to survive, and going back to old models is not so easy anymore, some people might get lost ... it feels like a vertiginous process and I suffer from a fear of heights...**

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The Free University of Liverpool is run by a collective of artists and activists (aka The Committee) devoted to the idea and practice of a free education for anyone who wants or needs it.
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Fate work: A conversation*

Valentina Desideri and Stefano Harney

In April 2011, Valentina Desideri and Stefano Harney met at the Spring Seminars of the Performance Art Forum (PAF) in St Erme, France. Desideri, a dancer and performance artist, and Harney a university professor in strategy, shared an interest in the work of Suely Rolnick and Lygia Clark. Desideri and Harney began a collaboration at PAF that would see them present new material at the *ephemera* Conference in Berlin on Free Work in May, 2011, and that would continue with an intense collaborative conversation over the next few months, some of which is presented here. Both Desideri and Harney felt that the techniques and strategies in their respective fields now stood before a high wall, and it was necessary to shift attention to new forms of life altogether if performance and teaching were to float beyond this wall. In particular, they suggest it is not sufficient just to register the way work dominates both daily life and art making. Rather, it is possible to experiment with new practices that embraced the forces of fate and complicity around us. The conversation on 'fate work' that follows is part of an exploration into this complicit fate and the way it opens up a new form of life.

Stefano Harney (SH): Let's propose that what we are calling 'fate work' arises as a potential practice in the face of the way work today is said to determine our lives. It is very common in the scholarship on work today to say that no matter how we try to strategise our way out of capitalist work in favour of other forms of working together differently, in favour of another world being possible, being present, we find that the regime of work uses this strategy of resistance against us. So if we criticise capitalist work, this regime makes it cool to be cynical about

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work at work. Or if we seek meaning away from work, this regime invites us to find meaning, find authenticity, at work. If we seek other ways to live cultural or sexual difference, this regime encourages us to bring this difference to work, to put it to work. Let's call this 'work fate'. This kind of work fate is notoriously the one found in the Boltanski and Chiapello (2007) book, *The new spirit of capitalism*, but also the one that dominates critical management studies. This work fate also leads of course to the strategy of trying to escape work through entrepreneurship or financial investment. But in either case, the case of resistance or the fantasy of escape through 'embracing your dreams', what work fate provokes is strategy. And what strategy proposes is that the future can be determined now, that it can be, whether good or bad, whether another world or more of this one, made singular and worked toward, predicted, managed, hedged. And it is not just the fantasist who strategises. He who resists also tends to resist strategically. This is perhaps because work fate appears to us so obviously now as a strategy deployed against us, all of us, and all parts of our lives, that it provokes in us this strategic reflex, a strategic reaction, this tendency to want to fix the future in both senses of the word fix. Knowing we are strategised we nonetheless try to strategise our way out.

Valentina Desideri (VD): Maybe that's because the future has fixed us, or better our current relation to the future has fixed our notion of work. Under capitalism the future is an open field ahead of us that we can shape and construct through our work. Since we're condemned to have a future, we're condemned to work, and at the same time, if you are condemned to work, you are condemned to have a future. So if you want to realize your dreams you have to work (always assuming that those dreams are something that belong to a future scenario and not the present one). If you want to avoid work, you have to work as hard because you have to find a way, you have to have a plan, a strategy. Whatever you choose you will be working and you will be acting strategically, towards a goal and therefore you'll be productive. In order to change this dominant fate that wants to control the future, and therefore stay in the realm of the known, you have to sabotage this double machine of work and future so that it stops functioning for a while and that a space is opened up (a present) and later, the future will come. One way to sabotage can be to refuse strategy.

SH: Yes I agree and this raises immediately two questions. How would one refuse strategy or even as you say sabotage it? Is it possible given that we are ourselves so thoroughly strategized? And what would come to stand in the place of strategy, what would emerge? I think that we can say the question goes even beyond the governmentality of strategy and tactic, of individuals and populations, explored by Michel Foucault (2009). The question is also one of our very form of thinking. This thinking arises not just from the interventions of governmentality

but from our habit of abstract thought, a habit we inherit, as Alfred Sohn-Rethel (1978) puts it, from our practices with the commodity form, practices that have us acting as if abstraction comes before practices, before our materiality, abstractions that rule over our materiality. Strategy is possible only where this kind of reasoning reigns. It is an abstraction of the future that is then said to be put into practice, and it is for this same reason that 'in practice' strategy generally fails or has to be constructed afterwards as a story. This not to say that strategy does not strategise us, nor that this is a matter of ideology. It is there in our daily compulsions of work. But it can of course never deliver. So the thing to ask is, can we sabotage strategy by developing a practice that does not know the future ahead of time, but works at it nonetheless, which is to say, it is not without its own intention.

VD: Yes, strategy and intention are very different. To have a strategy is to have one fate or future we envision and that we try to realise, while to have an intention means to start from the present and stay there while the future anyway happens and fates (many) unfold. If for example we set an intention 'to work together' maybe we could just continue writing and see what it produces and how it happens. Maybe it means that we need to stay sharp and sensitive in recognizing the 'work' that emerges, in the present, rather than finding a way to produce the desired work. It's different from having a working method. A collaborative writing method in this case would be a strategy, an example of what we are naming work fate rather than fate work we are proposing. Fate work could be better understood as a practice, which of course can involve tools and specific ways of using them, but that are never prescriptive, they never guarantee any result and that ultimately let the writing (or any work) emerge from the actual doing of it. An intention is not some kind of wish for the future, on the contrary it operates and changes directly the present. The moment you set an intention of doing something you assume that in a way you are already doing that very thing, just have to find out how. This also mean that there is no right or wrong way of doing something, a more or less valid practice in principle, you can just experiment with them, but with no claim of truth or attachment to its results, visible and invisible ones. Thus to set an intention is to open up a space for practices that can be generative of different and multiple futures or fates in the present. In this proliferation, the truth claim of the right strategy is swept away. In a way it already works this way with strategy, since strategies keep failing and we keep trying them, only we always readjust the narrative at the end to make the experiment somehow succeed (or not succeed but according to known parameters).

SH: And bringing the future into the present has long been the ambition of the Left too, but at the same time this has been also a strategic move. It has too often

involved a programme, a leadership, a unity in the face of the future, a unified future, even if we can understand how these 'strategies' were provoked in response to the brutal abstractions of capitalism. But as you say, developing a practice that proliferates fates, generates futures, can perhaps cause the future to lose it authority, which is to say to lose its abstraction, to come into the present as sensation, as something susceptible to the senses and something that in turn works on those senses in the present. I mean this in the most concrete way. So let's think about popular fate work, because fate work goes on all the time even if the impulse in this popular fate work appears at first to work fate, to produce a new destiny, to replace pre-destination, or to find 'the truth' of the future. Let's think of the tarot card reader, the palm reader, the village seer, the one who throws the bones. Of course for each person who is read, this fate work is designed to secure, change, or see a fate, restore the future, but the constant practice of this fate work has the opposite effect. It produces more and more fates and even for the single person having her fate told, repeated readings generate fates rather than holding one steady. But more than that, there is a confusion that takes place in the reading of fates between determination and self-determination, a confusion that undermines strategy. What I mean by this is that strategy depends on a self-determined subject positing an abstract future and then overcoming the forms of determination that stand between him and the future, or in the case of much work fate, the positing of the impossibility of overcoming the forms of determination because strategy itself becomes 'strategised'. (Work fate we should remember can be as skeptical of strategy as we are, but for opposite reasons of course. As we have suggested it can use a kind of cynical anti-strategy without really exiting strategy or even embrace a true pessimism that fastens to one bad fate when it rejects strategy as inadequate to that very fate.) But when one accepts a tarot card, one immediately accepts that the self is part of a kind, a set, and at the same time, that determination has gone into the hands of the reader, becomes part of the practice of fate work. So we have a kind of undermining of the premises of strategy, a bit of sabotage. In other words, its seems in these popular practices the subject of strategy gives up his position, and determination also yields to a reading, to an interpretation that undetermines it.

VD: If the future loses authority, how can we then relate to social and political change? We cannot hope anymore in revolution since it heavily bets on change in the future (after the violent moment of revolt society will change, it often refers to the 'post-revolutionary society'). Now the idea of insurrection is pretty fashionable, the scenario of an irrational, non-organized, diverse explosion of violence against the system which will inevitably bring change, but why? How?

Although much less future-oriented than revolution, insurrection (this moment of almost pure revolt) is also expected to bring forth change as a result of the physical experiencing of it, almost as a moment of magical transformation. It is sure that to go out and smash things is an exciting, beautiful and healthy perspective, we should all do it starting from our own stuff (at least from time to time) but who would like to live in a completely chaotic world where violence reigns in the streets for more that a couple of days? Not even the 'rioters'. And what kind of change will it bring apart from more, and now better justified, violent state repression? And here the question of working a proliferation of fates as opposed to having a strategy for the future is fundamental. Both revolution and insurrection are, even if in different ways, strategies for a future while fate work is to go for practices that will start to make us live differently now and violence is there to be used against anything that impedes us to do so – even against ourselves or the symbolic (and non-symbolic!) order to which we give authority – and not just indiscriminately, hoping that it will change us for the best, or at all. What it is to set an intention of radical change and just be busy with that, with practicing that now, instead of projecting it into the future? And I don't mean only small, daily life-practices within your surrounding, you can go for big changes. I take the idea of wikileaks as an example: you want information to circulate free, so you make a website where information can be released, pretty simple.

But how do we start to live differently now? The sabotage we were mentioning earlier can be useful here. Mutual self-sabotage could be a practice to develop, a practice that is inherently complicitous as it has to be done with others (and other things – like a *sabot*) and that by interrupting the machines at work, creates unregulated time and space. In this way sabotage can be a way of practicing co-determination, of unsettling each other, thus opening oneself up to co-determination while becoming more perceptive, since in order to sabotage, you need to be able to perceive the rhythms of the machines at work. You need to become a present reader, a reader of these abstract machines, and you throw a shoe in the middle of them. So that many fates can open up.

SH: Yes I think one interesting result of fate work as co-determination is that it precludes the idea of a common fate in the future. To enter into fate work together means that what is common is what is now, not what will be in the future. In fact we could even say that it reverses the idea of a common future, starting from a common present and through co-determination makes different fates together, produces different fates, different futures in the present. In this sense co-determination in fate work could be understood as what Paolo Virno calls developing a philosophy of the preposition 'between' to understand human nature (Penzin, 2010). But for us, it is not just human nature or human fate. But

rather we start with what we call the practice of complicity, where the accomplice can be human for some complicities but non-human for others, and between the non-human too.

One way to think about complicity, about the way we are already in a 'conspiracy without a plot' with all around us and all in us, is through the reading accomplice. Not every reader of fate can be said to be an accomplice. Especially a reader who claims authority, does only one reading, or returns always to the same fate. Such a reader is not an accomplice. But the reader who reads new fates again and again, is read by and through new fates again and again, who through the sustained act of reading again and again offers a kind of love, love because this is the word for helping someone to make fates, to generate and proliferate fates. Such a complicity of love can do two things. It can help someone avoid the full mix of self-determination and determination that strategises every attempt at self-organisation today, that assaults every singularity. It does this because this love of the accomplice takes place in superabundance, even if from the edge, even out of sight. There is always a co-determination that prevents determination from becoming individual, and it is a co-determination not of reciprocity but of mutual superadundance. And such a complicity can also open someone to the depth and breadth of the conspiracies already under way amid her being, amid the beings in her midst. As such a practice unfolds, it is commonality in the present that is enriched, generated, and the future disappears as an obligation or authority, and yields to the difference of the present modes of living. Thus commonality in the present changes in the presence of the fates proliferated from it, or in other words the common is always becoming another common through fate work, through the self-organisation it permits, organisations of the common that may also be called fates in the present, accomplished by the proliferation of readings, of fate work.

VD: If we start from what we have in common now, one thing for example is debt, but politics continue to work fate on it. We have a present situation, debt, that has to be 'resolved' (always in the face of the future of course). Whatever the ideology or party, there is a future that politicians envision for which they are trying to find a strategy, be it the future vision of the debt repaid or the vision of the debt cancelled. How can it be approached differently? What's before debt and in debt? Can we be present readers and generate a proliferation of fates and practices that can allow us to be in debt experimenting with what it is, finding ways to practice debt, until one day, when it will be the future and things will be different?

SH: Right. In what ways would these kinds of readings make debt a mechanism for deepening co-determination? If debt is the way we are currently told we ought

to relate to each other in the future then to work the future into the many readings of fate in the present, to do fate work, makes debt into something present as mutual readings, brings debt and work back together in the service of commonality now, a commonality that is already here and with practice can allow for a co-determined proliferation of self-organisation, of fate work, of fates here in the present. I can never repay nor would anyone ask me to repay nor could anyone calculate a debt in the present, but to know that such debts prepare the way for more readings, more fates, is to know debt as co-determination, as the sabotage of the future, not its predetermination, not its strategic premise. This is what you and I mean, I think, by bad debt.

So we might say that the problem with popular fate work is not that it is based on superstition or that it has its own abstractions, and anyway whatever abstractions it has are less stable than in the proper realms of strategy. I think we would say that the problem of popular fate work is that it is not popular enough, that even here something equivalent to an anti-psychiatric movement is necessary such that popular fate work becomes open to all as readers as well as those being read, in the manner that you insist on for your practice of 'political therapy' for instance, where anyone can become a practitioner, a therapist. This possibility of expanded practice requires that the way readers are chosen, apprenticed and initiated be opened up. How could we provoke this possibility? For me, your practice of political therapy is so revelatory here in the way it confronts the realm of politics which after all overlaps the realm of strategy closely in both its abstractions, its intellectual history, and its hold on 'self-determined subjects'.

VD: It's possible to open up how the reader is chosen once the authority of the reader is undermined. I'm no political expert whatsoever, so political therapy only creates the possibility to develop other languages to talk about and do politics. There is no discipline, no specific theory behind it. It's a practice that develops as it happens and continue happening, in between the people involved, the vocabulary used, the sensations, the experience it brings forth and so on. Neither the therapist nor the patient is responsible for any kind of 'solution' of the problem. The problem is rather treated as an occasion for language to develop, for speculation to happen and politics to be felt.

SH: Another aspect of your political therapy practice that is crucial is that like popular fate work, it happens between two. Your practice provokes the question of how readings might be multiplied both between two and among many. What this suggests is that we can never intend to practice fate work by ourselves, even if a change in something like 'ourselves' is what we look for in the opening to vulnerability produced by fate work. Not only is the proliferation of someone's fate from the beginning a collective project but also that the presence of the other

in the fate of the one means the one is already not one, the self is not self to itself but shares a sense of a fate-making self with another self, to twist Catherine Malabou (Malabou and Vahanian, 2008) a bit, and in turn this other of the self is now also in the presence of the reader, not some unknowable other but the other who is in the midst of your proliferation of fates.

Of course in order for this not to be a kind of intrusion, and also in order for this not to remain a situation of strategy or managed risk, in other words, in order for it really to be a proliferation of fates that opens up through and to vulnerability, through and to the capacity to be affected by others, people and things, to be possessed by the many futures already present in others, it is necessary to sense that such an opening, such vulnerability will not lead only to a wound. So long as one feels vulnerability will lead only to a wound, strategy remains the main approach, and vulnerability is immediately converted back into risk, into a calculation about how not to be wounded.

But even here it is important to note that such a sense of vulnerability, as a capacity to be affected and to use these new affects to chart new cartographies as Suely Rolnik (1989) puts it, even here it is necessary to say that an opening that leads to a wound could also be productive of these affects. But, it is naturally difficult to want to be wounded. And here is where we can perhaps return to the term self-sabotage. Because here there is the possibility to say, why do such a thing to yourself, a thing that sounds potentially violent?

VD: Because it's the only way to experience transformation and there is a specific joy to it that it's not concerned with something being good or bad. When you practice this opening of vulnerability you cannot judge if the situation you're opening to is good or bad, you really don't know because if you knew, you would go for the 'good' one and that's strategy. Instead the unstrategic opening of vulnerability allows us to sense the present differently, to perceive the potential fates in the present, to perform multiple readings. And from this very concrete practice other perception emerges, other thoughts, other realities, other politics and other futures.

SH: But we are left with the fact that even with all of the emerging potentialities, even with the proliferation of fate work, even with the potential we can sense from the obvious failures of strategy both economically and politically, even with the potential expansion of the fate work of migrancy, precarity, and even the numerous governance and governmentality failures to strategise subjects, evident in riots in Britain for instance, which were anti-strategic riots, many more still do not open up to vulnerability, do not self-sabotage, do not experience this joy coming from a fate work that transforms (even if perhaps more people do

than we acknowledge). I think this is because there is one more social relation, one more social capacity we have to talk about here. I think we can say that when an opening to vulnerability becomes evident, this is also because a certain safeness was available, a safeness in co-determination. I mean a certain kind of accomplice off to the side who provides the support for someone to enter into a set of readings, to open in this way. We could call this support from the side, from the accomplice, love. But we would have to add quickly that we know it as love only by the way it produces vulnerability in another, not in itself. It may be a friend, lover, even the reader, or some combination of these, or this complicity could be a family, or a collective, some kind of complicity we did not see at the time, though maybe we could sense some kind of invisible accomplice somewhere, some kind of accomplice providing this safeness that will allow for another to become unsafe. This is love but in this way love can only be known by what it generates, as what went on 'off to the side', making this opening to vulnerability possible.

VD: Yes maybe the riots in Britain can be an example of a kind of fate work: unstrategic action that opens up vulnerabilities and other fates. The rioting was not something that whoever took part in them could judge as good or bad, it sprang from a situation of vulnerability that exceeded itself. The kids that 'rioted' in London made themselves even more vulnerable, to further police violence and ridiculous prison sentences. In the lack of a future they started to disregard it all together and instead they took care of the present (even if the present is new shoes) and they opened up new fates. Maybe what was lacking then was the accomplice(s) on the side, the safeness you talk about, a way in which this vulnerability could have started to self-organize and proliferate rather than burst and discharge. But also the riots remind us that vulnerability is not necessarily linked to any specific aesthetic of weakness or passivity. To open up to vulnerability could very well mean to stay in a situation and 'resist'.

SH: And this seems to bring us back in some ways to Catherine Malabou's term plasticity, for a self that gets bent and twisted but at the same time can be very resistant, and I think what we are seeing in the face of strategy, of strategising, and in these riots is a failure to be able to deal with this very resistant vulnerability. We might call this staying a militant preservation. And this for me also brings us back to the realm of politics, not just the failed politics of government, but also Left politics, movement politics.

VD: By the time an organised movement would decide what to do in a situation of riots for example, the riots will be over.

SH: Yes they go straight to the strategy toolbox!

VD: 'I told you it was Chapter 3! No, not there!' But anyway, can politics become a kind of common space or just an available space where vulnerabilities can be opened, where large scale fate work can take place? A large-scale collective fate work that makes possible the recognition and the deepening of complicities, a kind of love as a political practice.

SH: Perhaps, but in many instances as we've said, Left politics seems as caught up in strategy, and in the management of risk, as any politics. Still there may be ways for something like strategy and risk in Left politics to give way to practices that can offer openings to many fates, openings to collective vulnerabilities let's say. So we might think about occupations, of universities, of squares, of squats, or of protests in detention centres, prisons and military bases. These occupations are not always strategic, some arise as with these riots quite specifically from the failure of strategy to strategize people, which is also an opening. But many are strategic, and they are specific about the risk, calculating about the outcome, even if they may include the utopian impulse of 'who knows what might happen' in the future of this occupation. But let's also remember why these occupations occur. It is because an intolerable settlement has been imposed, a settlement that proliferates strategy, and risk management. Obviously to oppose this with a specific risk of occupying a square, or a specific strategy of marching to a building, can leave us far from the kinds of vulnerabilities that first brought on the settlement. These vulnerabilities remain in what we might call the pre-occupation, but they are now submerged not only by the settlement, settled, dispersed, subject to fortifications, but also now potentially lost to an occupation that is drawn into strategy and risk, the same weapons of the settlement.

VD: So the occupation ends up becoming a new settlement since it employs the same tools of strategy and risk management. Then fate work in this case would be a practice that dismantles the settlement (and the eventual occupation) by making the pre-occupation emerge and proliferate. An occupation, as the settlement before that, emerges from a set of pre-occupations, vulnerabilities, what are often understood as problems (precarity, debt, etc.) but the real problem is that we try to solve these problems, and whatever solution becomes a new settlement. Wouldn't it instead be possible to open up the problems, the vulnerabilities, understanding what kind of social relations they produce, what kind of affects and possessions they afford, reading their potential in the present? Such a fate work could look at how precarity dismantles the idea of future, of working for a future, and opens up a new present where people take care of how to live now and not when they'll have a car or a house or a family or a cat. How would we organize ourselves if the future would not be of our concern? This has practical consequences and practices have to be invented to deal with these new

spaces that are opened. A similar thing can be done with debt as with any other current 'problem'.

SH: Yes we would have to try to take the strategy out of the discussion of debt. Right now it seems that we are supposed to unite around debt, either to share in the agony of its exploitation, or to beg for forgiveness. This imagination of a future without debt or this coming together around the risk of debt is clearly not going to yield any transformations in being, in ways of living. It asks us to share a common fate in the future either as the exploited who will make a revolution or as the liberated who will live in a new utopia. We move from the commonality of our exploitation to the commonality of our liberation, with no proliferation of self-organisation, of fates, of complicities. Debt holds no surprises here and no potential. But I would like to imagine, and by this I mean practice, or better still join the ongoing practices, of seeing debt, and particularly bad debt as a chance not to bring us together but to proliferate our differences, not in the future, but here, right now. Because to feel a bad debt is to feel a debt that is both incalculable and unpayable and one that refuses credit, refuses to be paid back. Who for instance can pay back, would want to pay back, could count, the debt owed to that accomplice who provided the safeness, the love? Not only because such an accomplice would not want it back but because the opening it allowed generated all kinds of fates in the present, all kinds of new sensations brought on by the vulnerability to others. How to count that? Why count that? Instead let's say that bad debt, as capital would wrongly name it, means we all owe something different, and we are not drawn together in a unity by this but rather drawn by the complicity of such debt to any number of new accomplices, to any number of new conspiracies without a plot. Bad debt is a principle of association beyond the self-determined self or the determined future. It is the accumulation of fate work in the present, a present wealth, a wealth of being in the present together.

VD: I agree. I know that all this talking about proliferation of love and vulnerability can easily look fluffy, but we need to see this against the background of a prevailing narrative of scarcity that's all around. You take a debt because you lack something and then you have to repay it and with interest, just to make sure that you'll keep lacking something. This is clearly not a politics of enabling or of complicity. It's a politics of scarcity that makes sure that you will always lack something.

SH: That's right but we could go even further, or rather we could come even closer. It is possible to see both the self-help literatures, and the history of so-called self-criticism on the Left, as the politics of scarcity at the level of subjectivity. Because both are strategic tools to make something better in the

future, they both understand current forms of being as inadequate, rather than over abundant. Or if they do see over abundance, they want to discipline it, strategise it into specific futures. With self-help and self-criticism we also get the return of work fate, today especially. Think of the role self-help plays today in the reproduction of precarity, and self-criticism in the taming of the politics of precarity. The answer to precarity is not 'more', more work or more security or more rights. Precarity is super abundance, and the answer is less strategy, less self-help, less self-criticism, those practices that reduce super abundance.

VD: That's why self-sabotage! It's different from self-criticism. You don't have to criticize yourself and therefore make (become or operate as) a new settlement. You can read the present, both the tension within your self, as in Malabou, and the tension with what is around and is your accomplice. It is a way to consider your subjectivity already very abundant, capable of proliferating through interrupting mechanisms and dismantling settlements, so you don't have to waste too much time thinking about yourself or carefully controlling how your subjectivity is produced, but rather you can fully act and engage in co-determination. In a way it's much more convenient than self-help, you do two things at once, 'change yourself' and 'change the world around you', only you don't know for what... It's the kind of thing you can try when you're at the corner, when strategy fails, when future has lost authority, when to wish for the apocalypse is to think positive, a moment like now for example!

SH: In contrast to self-help and self-criticism, to their scarcities leading always to a need for strategy to win some of these scarce resources or a risk management not to lose them or even 'decision science' to attack over abundance – and always to a future that will have to deliver what is not yet here enough – fate work, self-sabotage can then really come to feel not violent, but as you say, fluffy. Because we are suddenly in the presence, in the midst of so many readings, so much love, so many fates, so many openings, so many sensations that of course it can make us drunk, make us fluffy. And in a way this abundance ought to exhaust us only in the ways that exceed us, that is only in the ways Gilles Deleuze understood as an exhaustion that finally makes possible new capacities in the face of abundance, abundant capacities, abundant fates.

It seems to me also that because as beings we are affected in more ways than we can count, name, or identify, but we are also subject to an historical process especially the dominant one emanating from Europe, an historical process encouraging us to be in control of ourselves, that we have a tendency to 'feel' things working on us must be coming from another world, because we are supposed to be able to master 'this world'. There are various ways to close down this feeling of an unseen world working on us, of not being self-determined. To

close it down or control the unseen world, as Denise Ferreira da Silva (2007) has shown us in her discussion of the persecution of affectable beings as a necessary condition of taming the transindividuality of rationality in Europe, of returning reason to the self-determined, male, white, propertied subject, or trying to. And of course religion was the classic way to acknowledge this other world and close it down, and reason might be said to be really another reaction to this other world, even if it claimed to be a reaction to this closing down. Thus anyone who seems to open up to this transbeing, to this affect, becomes the enemy, the virus to these reasonable ones, the ones who make policy, who believe in dialogue, who are the settlers. But now once we open up to this being affected, as some have always done, but with what we are suggesting, with fate work, with a surplus of readings and readers, this other world, the unseen world, becomes even more abundantly present. Once we start 'seeing things' I think something happens to this other world, and to us.

VD: Yes because this unseen world, this world of everything that affects us, from this glass of water to the smile of a passer-by to the position of the planets, everything operates in the present. In a way it's nothing esoteric, this unseen world is very concrete, just we cannot see it and measure it well. I guess that's why strategy keeps failing. It cannot bring this unknown world into its equation, but still it's pretty dumb just to ignore its existence all together and keep failing. There are ways to deal with what we don't see that can be generative and not religious or repressive. Like what we're trying to do here bringing fate into the notion of work.

SH: So instead of trying to control this other world through readings of fate, as has often been 'understood' as the tradition among oracles, soothsayers, witches, instead we see a counter-practice. We see that far from taming or lining up two worlds, such readers often destabilize, proliferate fates, bring another world into intense resonance with this one. Because really when you have your fortune told, it is in a way no help. It proves something is working on you, something you cannot control. You can only be open or not open to it. The more open you are to it, the more that the other world interrupts, disrupting that reading, requiring another. It does not matter perhaps if this other world is really other, since again with Malabou, the other is other to the self too, to whatever one would understand as this world now. This other world then is not a matter of religion or superstition. It is a matter of openness to affect, but also of what Suely Rolnik calls 'ruthlessness'. A harsh word but one she uses I think against any mode of thinking or being that attempts to stabilize worlds, or especially to make them one. And perhaps one way we have to be ruthless is by generalising reading, not allowing readers to control reading.

VD: That's what I'm interested in with practices like political therapy and fake therapy. Anyone can give therapy to anyone else, just you have to put yourself to do it for real and be open to it. If you come to have or do a fake therapy session it means you're open to find out what it is to 'cure' or 'be cured'. You practice engaging in a present with no future guarantees or specific aim but still with a full commitment, a clear intention. Here the reader, the fake therapist has no authority, she is not backed up by a discipline or a fixed body of knowledge. That's maybe part of the needed anti-psychiatric move you were talking about before, the move that would allow us to invests ourselves in impossible tasks (like to cure, or radical political change) with no expertise needed, to find out what it really means or can mean, without knowing it in advance.

SH: Maybe we could say more by returning to the rioters in London. The riots felt to me, as I walked among them because this was possible, such was their character, like an eruption of fates or readings, unsustainable, but pointing to an excess of the future in the present. Riots are a self-organisation of overflowing fates, fates produced by all the social life that gets degraded, policed, ignored or exploited most of the time but at the same time is not so ignored that it does not call forth these responses, the terroristic resistance of the state. So when those kids said they ran the city, they meant it. They organised the city even if dangerously, briefly and through their own vulnerability. But that is the point. We saw this tremendous social vulnerability, open to so much in a way that had not perhaps found its co-determinations allowing for such self-organisation to find more and more fates for all. But nonetheless we saw people allowing themselves to be possessed by the riots, taken up in a thousand readings of their fates by others.

Riots and occupations in this sense share a lot in common. Both erupt, unsettle a settlement from within, around, outside and inside that settlement, from its preoccupation, from its 'surround' as Fred Moten and I have called it (Moten and Harney, 2011). At first we might say that the occupation and the riot are both fate work riding an overproduction of social capacities but that occupations are fate work where the co-determination is in place and everyone has a chance to use this common of fate reading to make fates. We might oppose this to riots where the co-determination, including the accomplices that make vulnerabilities possible, are unstable, unmatched, in turbulence. But not so fast. Although we can certainly feel this potentiality in occupations, we can often also see the emergence of risk management, of a class of readers and a class of those being read, and more than anything else a new productivism that says we must work at this, we must set up that, we must keep discussing this thing, we must keep critiquing that thing. This productivism is nothing but a mirror of either work fate or its shadowy illusion, a better future. Riots at least show their exhaustion

up front. They have a wild productivism of their own in the way they organise a city so quickly. It is clear this cannot go on, even as it goes on. The vulnerabilities are unable to open onto the fates in this furious present. They are met with violence and become violent. Riots help us to see another world but also to resist trying to control it, resist the work fate of lining up these worlds. They introduce the question of militant preservation. A militant preservation I would understand as the resistance of the collectivized object. If strategy fails to make of these rioters the kind of logistical subjects who are compelled to connect everything to everything else, then there self-organisation as objects through which strategy will not pass is a kind of militant preservation, a plan to stay as they are, vulnerable as they are.

VD: And the question of organization within vulnerability. It implies thinking about vulnerability as a capacity for the construction of fates, rather than a state or some sort of 'condition' usually associated with a weakness. To be vulnerable instead means to be open to the organization of a present that disregards the future. Now when we have to organize something, take work for example, we have to think how to do this in order to either be the most productive, or interesting, or to meet a certain deadline. There is always an obsession about the future. To organize something in disregard of the future is to say: how could we possibly do this inhabiting the present conditions, needs and desires rather than being obsessed by the future outcome? In such a way that opens up possibilities instead of being a way to reduce the possibilities and chose one strategy over another.

The lack of consideration for the future may sound very scary and pointing directly to chaos, but that's only when you consider the actors of such organization as self-determined subjects. The only way we can really shift the attention from future to present, is through establishing a relationship of complicity with the others (animate and inanimate ones) all around us and in us. Simply because we cannot disregard the future on our own. It's a paradigm shift but one that is very concrete and not future-oriented. It's not difficult to start imaging what could be ways of avoiding future-oriented managing of our lives, work, political struggle and so on. Already when you take the time to do so, you start to engage in fate work. You become busy building present situations so even when you might be attacked or attack, you don't have to defend your original project, you'll just continue building presents now taking in consideration the situation of conflict. I'm just thinking that future is unavoidable, in the sense that it will come anyway, you want it or not. So instead of staying trapped in the expectations and subjectivities that the current notion of future creates in capitalist society, we can try another move for social change.

SH: What strategy does in one sense, is take up time and space, take it up in the name of the future, leaving nothing for us here and now, or at least this is its never-fully-realised ambition. Work fate is a fate of no free time and no free space, and of course finance produces this no free time and no free space as our permanent mood, the affect of today. There is no time or space not open to its strategies of risk and securitisation. It wants the future to look like the present and will attempt to control all present time and present space to ensure this, control the time through work and the space through settlement. This suggests to me that the concrete way to do fate work, to proliferate readings is to make the free time and free space, but at the same time, fate work itself makes free time and free space, precisely by freeing us from strategy and its future. Collective self-defense of this free space and free time against settlement, against strategy, against work fate, is not a defense therefore of fate work. You are right it needs no defending because it does not try to holding any territory. It's fugitive even when it stays. Rather collective self-defense is of the free time and free space to make fate work, and as fate work grows and produces free time and free space, so too should the need for self-defense diminishes.

VD: Yes, but free time and free spaces cannot be defended directly. For instance, if you think that sitting in silence means creating free time and you start to defend this practice as one that has to exist and be done collectively then you end up with work fate again. You know what's good, what's 'free' time and space and then you work to make it happen. This is very tricky. Fate work needs time and space in order to happen. It needs those gaps between making decisions, between identifying what can be done, between doubting and changing. In a way it is about letting those spaces and times open up. But you can't make an ideology of the gaps, of the in-betweens, of the 'free' space and time, you can't strive to produce them as if they were 'just what we needed'. You can be sensitive to them and try to inhabit them instead of wanting to produce them. You can try to break whatever mechanism you recognize that is closing them down or not letting them happen. I guess it also has to do with understanding yourself as a kind of co-determining agent rather than a self-determined subject, so you can engage your abundant subjectivity in these processes and act against any kind of settlement you are able to recognize and sabotage them.

SH: Yes only practice will tell! No free or unfree time or space but practice makes it so. And this brings us back to the concrete practices. Of course it cannot be just tarot cards or palm readings that can be the materials of fate work, so too can any materials that make a certain free space and free time that release us from strategy long enough to start experimenting with other fates, and with enough room to bring those fates right into the present, right now. Here is what might at first seem an unusual example from the US, but also from Africa and Latin

America, even from Singapore. Bible study groups. Okay this kind of study is often degraded and not only, or perhaps we could even say not mainly, because it retains a notion of centralised authority and singular fates, both of which are a problem. But this is no reason to neglect this social form of reading, of studying, of making fates, any more than we would reject tarot cards for the way they are used to capture fates sometimes rather than release more. Bible study is largely neglected as a form of self-organisation of fate work because it is conducted in the US by black people or poor white people, and in Africa and Latin America by poor people often on the margins of more powerful Christian institutions. But it is a mass popular form bringing together fate work, reading, and study. It needs its own liberation of course, it's own liberation theology just as in the Catholic base communities (and often it has been set against such communities, and certainly against the hierarchical power of the Catholic church). But such bible study demonstrates the social capacity to share readings, to study without end, without credit, in debt to each other. Or indeed as we have reached this point we could say without too much trouble that every form of self-organisation present today is by definition also a practice of fate work, of making fates through the unfolding of organisation, or changing and accumulating fates with every unfolding, every new combination, intensity, extension of these common organisations, every new common rhythm of speed and slowness. Every instance of self-organisation from children's games, to gaming communities, to parties and carnivals, to new kinds of families, though none of these are without the struggles accompanying self-organisation in a society that is subject to constant if unsuccessful enclosures, all these instances and more make fate work happen. Fate work it turns out, is everywhere.

VD: Indeed! The problem is that every form of organization or activity is now measured and valued in relation to its 'success', its functionality, its capacity to produce measurable results, in other words through its single fate. So it's no surprise that all the already existing instances of fate work are usually overlooked and not so much taken into serious consideration. The legend that self-organization doesn't work, that all the attempts of re-organizing communal living in the 60s and 70s have failed is built on this system of valorization of the single fate. A system of valorization that doesn't want to see (and let exist) the multiple fates, not even the frictions, the time and spaces that such experiences opened, the intensities they produced detached from any notion of success. Fate work disregards the future and with it any system of valorization that is attached to determining the future. Instead with every new fate it makes possible, fake work produces a new valorisation of the present. In fate work, it is not the future but our present that is full of wealth.

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Control and becoming in the neoliberal teaching machine

Amit S. Rai

review of

Michael Peters and Ergin Bulut (2011) *Cognitive capitalism, education, and digital labor*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing. (PB, pp. 341, £28.00, ISBN 9781433109812).

In the first part of a scathing series of posts for the New Left Project focused on the 'Big Society' sham, Emma Dowling writes:

> This kind of "philanthro-capitalism" is seen as progressive in its supposed ability to produce a more ethical form of capitalism, because the commodities produced have some kind of "social value". This trend is much more aptly captured by a different term: the Social Factory. The image of a "social factory" can conjure up a sense of a society made up of one long assembly line, where factory workers are involved in mass-producing the immaterial commodities of sociality, in the same way they would produce washing machines or packets of peas. Perhaps some of the ways in which investors vie for the opportunity to make money out of our sociality may have that quality to them. Yet, the Social Factory is not about promoting an image of society as resembling the factory. To clarify the political problem, it helps to draw an analogy with the Feminist analysis of social reproduction. Social reproduction encompasses the biological reproduction of human beings, it also includes the sexual and emotional labour required for the maintenance of relationships, and it involves the unpaid care and voluntary work undertaken in communities – short, the work that goes in to reproducing labour power and life. Feminists have been especially astute in demonstrating how the unpaid reproductive work in the home and in the community is vital in sustaining the capacities for surplus value production in paid forms of labour. (Dowling, 2012)

If the social factory is an image – understood here as a fraction of both a thing and its representation—its sensory motor circuit has intensified specific material tendencies active across far-flung assemblages of capital, affect, machines, (gendered, raced) populations, work, and values. The social factory, however, is a poor metaphor for societies of neoliberal control: a sieve with a variable mesh is better (Deleuze, 1996), but only as far as metaphors go. The ontological or affective turn in Western theory and practice, aside from nurturing a healthy skepticism for all metaphors, pushes radical materialist praxis to confront and provoke the contemporary crisis of capital itself.

The collection of essays gathered together in *Cognitive Capitalism, Education and Digital Labor* develops several of these new materialist directions with urgency and insight, at times tapping into, or better conjuring a kind of proleptic Marxist Zeitgeist: the potential and limits of the autonomy of living labour. Organised around both the 'Theoretical Foundations and Debates' (1-122) of the cognitive capitalism thesis, and its implications for 'Education and Labor' (123-287) today, the collection has stand-out essays by Antonio Negri, George Caffentzis, Sylvia Federici, Christian Fuchs, Ergin Bulut, Emma Dowling, Alex Means, Alberto Toscano, and Tahir Woods. Written for a general audience interested in the relationship between educational institutions, accumulation, activism, work, and the digital broadly construed, these essays explore the various dimensions of the crisis of capital and subjectivity today. Here, I review some of the major themes running throughout the essays.

As Alex Means argues in his excellent contribution to the volume, the current crisis is rooted in the transition from the industrial-Fordist model of national production in the 1970s to post-Fordist globalization in the 1980s and 1990s. Consequently, the reach and organizational power of the market has extended into ever more domains of life leading to a broad expansion of global corporate profit making. This radical expansion of privatization is broadly what is referred to, following Marx, as the real subsumption of living labor into capitalist production. Driven by a wave of privatization, wage repression (outsourcing, automation, free trade/labor zones, precarization, etc.), informational and communicative processes, and speculative innovations and semiotic manipulations in the financial markets, capitalist accumulation has deepened inequality and insecurity. 'Millions have lost their homes and livelihoods. Unprecedented wealth has been upwardly redistributed as publics have been left holding the bag—systemic risk, debilitating debt, and historic social disinvestments. While architects and cheerleaders of neoliberal globalization claimed that unbridled information-driven capital would usher in a new era of "friction-free" exchange in a "flatter" world, everywhere we turn we seem to be confronted with new walls, hierarchies, and points of conflict' (213).

As points of conflict proliferate throughout global capital, how is cognitive labor structured in and through this deepening of inequality and insecurity? Again, it was Marx in his *Fragment on Machines* who saw a body-becoming-machine and its implication for capitalist accumulation. It was the biopolitical turn that emerged from the set of researches Foucault pursued toward the end of the seventies, and its postcolonial/Italian autonomist conjunctions that opened political practice to a new analysis of heterogeneous and transnational assemblages of power. Cote and Pybus offer a succinct genealogy in their excellent contribution to the volume:

> Lazzarato leaned conceptually on Foucault, precisely because of the urgent need to propose a different kind of political economy, which is neither the political economy of capital and work, nor the Marxist economic critique of "living labour", hence the more heterogeneous economy of forces. Therein are contestations between coordination and command, between the exploitation of "surplus power" and formations of radically new collective possibilities, the likes of which were envisaged as far back as Marx in his visionary *Fragment on Machines*. (177)

It is the feedback loop between laboring body and machine that forms some of the crucial backdrop for the thoughtful and provocative insights in this volume. Alex Means usefully elaborates on this in his contribution. In the *Fragment*, writes Means,

> Marx speculates that technological developments contain the potential to pass a threshold whereby collective intellectual and communicative processes – the "general intellect" – overtake industrial labor as the primary driver of production and surplus value. As he puts it, this occurs when "general social knowledge has become a direct force of production" and the "conditions of the process of social life itself have come under the control of the general intellect and have been transformed in accordance with it". Carlo Vercellone has... argued that the "hypothesis" of cognitive capitalism "cannot be reduced to the mere constitution of an economy founded on knowledge." As Marx's formulation implies, it is rather "the formation of a knowledge-based economy framed and subsumed by the laws of capital accumulation." (215)

This argument resonates with an insight found in, among others, Patricia Clough's work on affect and capital (2007, see also Clough and Wilse, 2011), where the biocybernetic body is taken out of the thermodynamic model of closed systems. Such systems were conceived as cancelling out time by forming a closed circuit characterized by steady states at equilibrium or constant states cycling in time; there could be an exchange of energy with the outside, but not with matter itself. Theorizing the capitalist motor-machines of the 19th century, Marx writes:

> Nature builds no machines, no locomotives, railways, electric telegraphic, self-acting mules etc. These are products of human industry; natural material transformed into organs of the human will over nature, or of human participation in nature. They are *organs of the human brain, created by the human hand*; the power

> of knowledge objectified. The development of fixed capital indicates to what degree general social knowledge has become a *direct force of production*, and to what degree, hence, the conditions of the process of social life itself have come under the control of the general intellect and been transformed in accordance with it. To what degree the powers of social production have been produced, no only in the form of knowledge, but also as immediate organs of social practice, of the real life process. (Marx, 1993: 706, *emphasis in original*).

When the machinic phylum is harnessed as a direct force of production in capital, processes of subjection return to a phase of embodied primitive accumulation, that is accumulation through the enslavement of affect or capacity. Clearly, the post-Fordist re-centering on cognitive labor moves the human-machine out of closed equilibrium states to develop new, continuous modulations of body-information technology-capitalist systems in societies of control. If the birth of artificial life and the expansion of superexploitative states of exception exacerbate the question of how revolutionary political practice will engage with the tools of nonlinear dynamics, chaos theory, and intensive science our intuition today is that the distributed networks of autonomous, living labor operate and hence mutate precisely because they are far from equilibrium, which is not to say revolutionary. Rather, the posthuman cybernetic machines are a new, extreme form of slavery. Deleuze and Guattari write:

> If motorized machines constituted the second age of the technical machine, cybernetic and informational machines form a third age that reconstructs a generalized regime of subjection: recurrent and reversible "humans-machines systems" replace the old nonrecurrent and nonreversible relations of subjection between the two elements; the relation between human and machine is based on internal, mutual communication, and no longer on usage or action. In the organic composition of capital, variable capital defines a regime of subjection of the worker (human surplus value), the principal framework of which is the business or factory. But with automation comes a progressive increase in the proportion of constant capital; we then see a new kind of enslavement: at the same time the work regime changes, surplus value becomes machinic, and the framework expands to all of society. It could also be said that a small amount of subjectification took us away from machinic enslavement, but a large amount brings us back to it. Attention has recently been focused on the fact that modern power is not at all reducible to the classical alternative "repression or ideology" but implies processes of normalization, modulation, modeling, and information that bear on language, perception, desire, movement, etc., and which proceed by way of microassemblages. This aggregate includes both subjection and enslavement taken to extremes, as two simultaneous parts that constantly reinforce and nourish each other. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 458)

Part of what we see throughout the corporate world is a reinvestment in 'innovation' (entrepreneurial capture machines) as an always unstable, stochastic, and necessary process of capitalist accumulation in the age of the digital. As Antonio Negri limns it, the 'originality of cognitive capitalism consists in capturing, within a generalized social activity, the innovative elements that

produce value...' (qtd. in Peters and Bulut, 2011: xxv). This insight is built on by several of the contributors who focus specifically on the creation of value in network societies. Christian Fuchs argues that computer networks are 'the technological foundation that has allowed the emergence of global network capitalism, i.e. regimes of accumulation, regulation, and discipline that are helping to increasingly base the accumulation of economic, political, and cultural capital on transnational network organizations that make use of cyberspace and other new technologies for global coordination and communication' (Fuchs, 2011: 86).

In other words, the social factory under cognitive capitalism has dispersed its dispositifs. Around the world we witness not only its consolidation in new media marketing strategies of value capture through social networks, but emergent techniques for modulating the embodied capacity to sense and affect. Indeed, the social network is parasitical on affect, as Cote and Pybus, Sylvia Federici, Michael Peters and Emma Dowling all note in this volume. Effectively, what these critics bring to attention is the real subsumption of living labour under capital—the real and practical folding in/of affective and labouring capacity is both a tendency and variable within the non-equilibrium systems of digital capitalist control. Indeed, as more and more forms of expression, labor, reproduction, care, emotion, and affect are incorporated into capitalist accumulation strategies (Dowling's analysis of affective labor in the restaurant industry is a clear example) the precariat develops pathologies of hyper-expressivity, as Franco Berardi puts it (Berardi, 2007). Think of the exhibitionism of Facebook and Twitter, of the continual revaluation of the self through Linkedin and XING. The workings of many aspects of everyday neo-liberal life is legible in the unending modulations, audits, measures, and evaluations of populations understood as human capital (the neoliberal University is the perfect laboratory for the training of commodities training commodities), instruments and targets of digital control. The cognitive worker as the perpetual self-entrepreneur gives the lie to the creative economy. It is not autonomous creativity but competition for innovative capture and individualism for value that is the dominant mode of autonomy in our time (movingly analyzed by Dowling in her post quoted above).

There are many examples world-wide of this struggle between real susbsumption and real autonomy in the far-from-equilibrium systems of biocybernetic control. My own research has focused on the social, economic, and political implications of the large-scale and rapid adoption of mobile phones throughout India in the past ten years. Real subsumption in this context has meant that the mobile phone has become a technology central to the workings of state and capitalist logistics (used, for instance, in tracking individuals, identifying movements, and securing populations both through the mobile itself and the process of securing a

workable SIM card, as well as in extracting more and more labour time from workers constantly connected and audited through their mobiles). On occasion the mobile phone has also been used in radical and populist journalism uncovering police injustice and governmental corruption, or as a coordinating tool in activist events, or as a viral machine sending out and forwarding timely information or politicized memes; twenty years ago in Mumbai women did not leave the house without pepper spray, today those who can afford it make sure before stepping out that their mobile is fully charged. In India today, new forms of sociality, movement, rhythm, gesticulations, attention, vision, touch, and sound are emerging at different speeds, scales, and patterns of distribution. One cannot discount the political and material impact of these shifts immanent to the habits of digital media for revolutionary becomings. (De)habituation is the very process that take these networks far from equilibrium through continuous and simultaneous vectorings of reterritorializations, deterritorializations, and lines of flight. To affirm Marx's communisation as a process through one's diagrams of body-machines necessitates transversal connections, conjunctions producing monsters who never cease to leave the axioms of capital.

But accumulation by dispossession also continues apace. Following the work of the Italian autonomists, Alex Means argues in the volume that within the biopolitical economy capital is increasingly charged with the expropriation of 'value as "rent"—the becoming rent of profit'. The expropriation of rent can be in the form of primitive accumulation or what David Harvey calls '"accumulation by dispossession": the privatization of "fixed" assets like schools, transportation systems, hospitals, as well as natural resources and biogenetic materials. However, what is increasingly at stake is the capture of value directly on the basis of the common' (216). So can local critical events that reclaim and reorganize the commons (Tahrir, LSX, OWS, Occupy Mile End...) intervene in the general crisis of capital itself? As Peters and Bulut put it in the *Introduction,* 'it is safe to argue that we are in a period of universal crisis. Institutions built on the model of enclosed spaces, that is, the institutions of modernity—school, family, prison, factory, clinic—are in a struggle to redefine themselves. The modern institutions are struggling to survive within the crisis of flexible and informationalized capitalism whose survival is dependent on the very connections it promotes' (xxix). Certainly the crisis in technology, ecology, value, work, and subjectivity is global, but does it all arise from the conditions of cognitive capitalism, or are conditions more heterogeneous across forms of labor (factory, piecework, farm), and their effects more molecular and yet diffused?

For Peters and Bulut, and for many of the other contributors, 'cognitive capitalism' is a general term that has become significant in the discourse analyzing a new form of capitalism sometimes called the third phase of

capitalism, emerging from mercantile and industrial capitalism, in which the accumulation process is centered on 'immaterial assets utilizing immaterial or digital labor processes and production of symbolic goods and experiences' (xxv). Throughout the volume, the language of crisis and transition produces an uncanny feeling of being poised on some fundamental transformation already lived: 'This place is pre-something', as China Mieville puts it in the *London's Overthrow*. Are we living through again, this time as farce, what Antonio Gramsci remarked as Europe's fascist conundrum, in which the 'old is dying and the new cannot be born: in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear'? (qtd. in Keyman and Koyuncu, 2005, 106). Is immateriality one such morbid symptom? And what exactly is immaterial about working in a Bangalore call centre for twelve hours a shift?

I end this review with a consideration of three themes central to the collection: the organic composition of industry (that is, the ratio between machinery and labour power in the production process); the political economy of affect (accumulation in the bodily mode); and the limits and potential of autonomy today.

In his appraisal of the cognitive capitalism theses, George Caffentzis argues that the image that Carlo Vercellone paints of the 'parallelism between contemporary cognitive workers and the proto-industrial cottage-industry workers of the 16th to 18th centuries should be taken either as a grain of salt or as a seed of truth' (45). For Vercellone, Caffentzis notes, the old putting-out system is a place where the direct producers were autonomous from the capitalist and need only meet him at the end of the labor process, i.e., 'at the point of "capture."' However, he goes on to argue that the historical accounts of the putting-out system show the merchant capitalist deeply involved in the planning and organizing of the work process, with often 'only a semblance of power over the instruments of production' (45). For Caffentizis, this tendency of piece wages to organize payment in the putting-out system is very important, 'especially if we run Vercellone's parallel the other way and see the contemporary cognitariat as the domestic industry laborers of our time' (45). This tendency toward piecework, 'an obscured and fetishized form of time-wages', is an image of the '21st century's cognitariat's plight' (45).

Caffentzis is highly critical of the cognitive capitalist thesis however. Partly because cognitive labor is only one still relatively small part of the capitalist production, Caffentzis wonders at the importance it is granted in contemporary criticism. As he writes,

> ...there is no correlation between the cleverness, self-discipline, charisma or brutality of the individual boss and the rate of profit of his/her firm or industry. Some capitalists might be exploiting the hell out of their workers, say in a branch

> of industry in which the exploitation rate is 100% but if their firms are in a low organic composition industry (roughly, the ratio between machines and labor power employed in the production process), they must share the surplus value created in their industry with the capitalists in industries at the high organic composition end of the system of production whose actual exploitation rate is 10%!...Vercellone and Boutang do not take into account the relationship between the lowest and highest organic composition poles of the system and the transfer of surplus-value from lower to higher branches for the latter to be able to achieve at least an average rate of profit. (50-2)

If we grant this argument (which we note is still tied to the basic humanist binary between bodies and machines – nanotechnologies and evolutionary algorithms, to name just two examples, blur this distinction), the implications are serious. The focus on the struggles in the knowledge-based sectors of the economy results in an overall neglect of class struggles taking place in the huge area of agriculture, for instance against land displacement, and in factory production worldwide, which together still account for about two-thirds of global employment (53-4). As an initial response (beyond the post-humanist critique), one might note that the cognitive capitalism thesis is not only about one area of capitalist production but, as crucially, about the gradual and increasing informatization of all aspects of capitalist production world-wide, which is one of the key dynamics effecting real subsumption.

Second is the question of affect. The genealogy of this term generally passes through Lucretius, Duns Scotus, Spinoza, Kant, Nietzsche, Bergson, Whitehead, Deleuze and beyond into contemporary biopolitical criticism. Michael Hardt in his pathbreaking book on Deleuze argued very clearly for the link between affect, essence, and power: the essential power of a thing is tied closely to its variable capacity to affect and be affected. As Federici and Clough from their different contexts note, feminist theorists have drawn on this concept to develop a critique of reproductive labor, while rigorously avoiding reducing affect to emotion or feeling. Today, affect has become important to militant materialist practices, strategies, and assemblages of communisation. As Cote and Pybus note, 'the creative and communicative practices of immaterial labour enumerate what is novel in these [sic] new "economy of forces." Further, part of the surplus of power produced—certainly that is pursued with great avarice by capital—is affect itself—the very stuff that coheres and differentiates those myriad networks that express those myriad subjectivities' (177). What then is this 'affect itself'? They go on to elaborate:

> ... capital relations are always already social relations. Social networks enable an exponential explosion of such social and economic relations. And what is also produced in these social and economic relations—indeed, what causes them to coalesce in the first place—is the production of affect. It is this affective trajectory that we argue passes through the heart of what is immaterial labour—a modality

> of work that diffuses production (in subjectivity and consumption) throughout the extremities of the social factory (177-178).

For her part, Dowling draws a sharp distinction between affect and emotion. Thus, affect is 'an attention to the inter-, or better transactions that occur between and among bodies prior to and in excess of how they are cognitised or verbally expressed as feelings. Affect as a philosophical, psychoanalytical and neuroscientific concept is connected to the relationality of "sense" and describes physiological shifts or transmissions of energy, mood or intensity....Affect is a "subjectively registered embodied experience" and emotion is a "cultural or discursive articulation of bodily response"' (204). If forms of cognitive capitalism seem to be so much more insidious today it is because subjectivation has become bound up with the conditioning of affective capacities, the modulation of dispositions for memory and action, the shaping of habits of consumption and communication: accumulation in the affective mode targets and agitates the capacity for sense and sensation in life itself.

If sensation and its ecologies have become the moving target of value capture within cognitive capital what space is left for the autonomy of living labour? Certainly the Italian autonomist tradition affirms the potentiality of labour to create, refuse, sabotage, hack, flee, exit, and on occasion to precipitate a general crisis in accumulation (e.g. globalization as a result of workers in the core countries and the colonies refusing work and racialized servitude). Alberto Toscano warns against a too easy adoption of such a 'vitalist' position considering that 'if all value stems from the autonomous, proto-communist interactions of "singularities" of living labour, what of the contradictions faced by a capital that both needs creativity and is obliged, politically, to stifle it?' Two senses of the word autonomy must be distinguished he urges; indeed 'between a substantial autonomy (of the kind we might equate with emancipation) and the formal autonomy of much outsourced, self-employed or precarious labour, there is no transition, just homonymy' (263). For Toscano, while there are realities 'antagonistic to the capital-relation, there are no forms of life or knowledge simply autonomous from it' (268). As he argues:

> The political problem lies precisely with the premise of autonomy. It is one thing to argue that the mutations in the organization of labour and in the state's framing of the reproduction of the capital-labour relation have led to a shift in the mechanisms that subsume labour under capital, it is quite another to read this passage solely or primarily through the lens of the affirmation of an autonomy of living labour. This would in fact imply, rather perversely, that the loss of rights and security of labour is the result of a strange victory of labour over capital, forcing it to give labour greater autonomy....[W]e should ask which labour-power has become ever more autonomous because of the predominance of communicative knowledge and affective relations as sources of value under contemporary

> capitalism. In my view, by and large—that is to say outside of enclaves or forms of emancipated commonality stolen from the rhythms and imperatives of capitalist valorization—what we face is an autonomy-within-heteronomy. This is the autonomy of the consumer and social entrepreneur, whose desire and creativity is by definition competitive. (263-264)

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of this warning: which and whose autonomy are we referring to? The autonomy of the entrepreneur to capture value, or the autonomy of a precariat to create the conditions of their own emancipation? But perhaps there is a category confusion afoot in Toscano's formulations? Perhaps the life of autonomous living labour, in its qualitative difference from the entrepreneur's mode of capture, is lived in a non-dialectical difference that does not go all the way up to contradiction or even antagonism, and its political value lies in its unceasing lines of flight that create conjunctions between radical practices of communisation—potentializing, anomalous, and experimental forms of life that are no longer subsumable within capital's relations of measure.

This is precisely where many of the contributors note that the neo-liberal educational institutions become sites of struggle over measure and value and a veritable laboratory for autonomy itself. Toscano is rather more pessimistic: 'The student-consumer formatted by the Browne Review, the catechism of the current counter-revolution-without-a-revolution in UK universities, is precisely a subject wholly determined by an instrumental relationship of financial calculus balancing the deferred purchase of skills and knowledge in the present against future income' (270). At stake is the relationship between the time of capital accumulation and the time of politics, and indeed what Toscano means by a 'substantive' autonomy. But we shouldn't subsume the time of autonomy within a presentist temporal disposition. We would do well to recall here a key passage from Deleuze (a constant point of reference throughout this volume) who urged a practice of another duration in the interests of a time to come:

> Becoming isn't part of history; history amounts [to] only the set of preconditions, however recent, that one leaves behind in order to "become," that is, to create something new. This is precisely what Nietzsche calls the Untimely...They say revolutions turn out badly. But they're constantly confusing two different things, the way revolutions turn out historically and people's revolutionary becoming. These relate to two different sets of people. Men's [sic] only hope lies in a revolutionary becoming: the only way of casting off their shame or responding to what is intolerable. (170-171)

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Having knowledge: How handbooks are shaping the way we think and work

Helen Nicholson

review of

Alan Bryman, David Collinson, Keith Grint, Brad Jackson, and Mary Uhl-Bien (eds.) (2011) *The SAGE handbook of leadership*. London: SAGE Publications. (HB, pp. 592, £95.00, ISBN 9781848601468)

When I started this book review of *The SAGE Handbook of Leadership*, I asked myself a question we often ask of texts in our field: what is useful about this book for scholars? This seems a benign question. So benign, particularly given that this is a highly useful handbook, that for quite some time I didn't think I had much to say in this review. In short, this is a very 'handy' book that lives up to one of its purposes to be 'a key point of reference for researchers' (xi), and should be, as one of the endorsement blurbs says, 'on every leadership scholar's bookshelf'. So, I thought about all the ways I have used this handbook to help me in my work: as a reservoir of references, as an entry point to a given leadership topic, as a source of delight when reading the writers I admire. The more I thought about how I use this text, the more I started to wonder if there wasn't something deeply problematic about how I was relating to it, which has led me to ask: what do these handbooks tell us about how we're using and producing knowledge, particularly in leadership studies but perhaps also more broadly in management and organization studies? This short review essay will address this question, but first I'll briefly outline the handbook's contents and strengths.

Edited by five of the field's most prominent leadership scholars, the handbook brings together 38 chapters written by 64 authors. One of the key editorial intentions was to capture the theoretical and methodological plurality of a highly fragmented field. Therefore, the text is divided into five main sections, beginning with historical and methodological overviews, moving to more macro and sociological perspectives, then on to political and philosophical approaches, followed by psychological and psychoanalytical perspectives, and finishing with a group of loosely-termed 'emerging' perspectives that range from followership and complexity leadership to relational and discursive perspectives. The table of contents reads as a 'who's who' of leadership scholarship and the majority of contributors are professors (only five of the 64 authors are doctoral students).

Some chapters seem to fixate upon the difficult task of reviewing a whole field in 8,000 words, leaving the reader at times questioning how some of the chapters really offer something different to the many excellent review articles already available. Leadership studies does seem to be a field that likes to review itself. However, there are other writers who are aware of this tendency and proceed to skillfully review the field while offering new interpretations, arguments, or theoretical lenses, such as Dennis Tourish's 'Leadership and Cults' chapter, Peter Case, Robert French, and Peter Simpson's 'Philosophy of Leadership' chapter, and Amanda Sinclair's 'Being Leaders: Identities and Identity Work in Leadership' chapter to name a few.

In order to consider what this handbook tells us about how leadership knowledge is produced, it is important to consider the case the editors make for why this book is 'necessary' (xi). Firstly, the rhetoric of diversity and heterogeneity is used to justify the necessity of this text. Leadership studies is 'one of the most extensively researched topics in management studies', and it is 'changing rapidly as new perspectives and methodological styles proliferate' (xi). This disciplinary diversity of the field is celebrated, not least because it also makes leadership a 'highly relevant area of inter-disciplinary contemporary scholarship' (ix). However, there's a sense that this diversity is also risky as it could lead to an increasingly fragmented field riddled with a series of divisions and boundaries that become increasingly protected, to the success of some and the detriment of others. Therefore, a handbook like this that draws together a multitude of perspectives could be one attempt to consolidate the field and mitigate the negative effects of fragmentation.

The editors also allude to the 'fertile' and arguably frenetic publication rate of leadership scholarship that 'continues to grow apace to the degree that current research can sustain' three leadership journals (ix). Indeed, it is precisely because 'it is such a productive field' that 'it is difficult for even specialist scholars to keep

up with its breadth and it is even more difficult for new scholars to break into it' (ix). On the face of it, then, this handbook is necessary to retain and sustain scholars' interest and to combat the exclusionary possibility of leadership scholarship. But this last quotation says so much about leadership scholarship. Why is leadership scholarship being produced and published at such a rate that even the 'specialists' themselves can't keep up with it? How does a handbook in which chapters are written primarily by established professors really help new scholars 'break into it' – wouldn't they be able to break into it more effectively if they had been invited to write a chapter for this edited collection? And why, when they acknowledge that it is difficult to keep up with the pace of publication, do the editors call for even more research and 'reinforce the process of broadening out and stretching the theoretical and empirical agenda of leadership studies' (xi)?

The handbook therefore hopes to contribute to the production of more leadership scholarship. Whilst this idea of production and progression is on the one hand understandable, it is also problematic. Many of the chapters are infused with the assumption that constant progress is necessary and therefore they follow a pattern similar to: 'here's what has been done, here's how we've progressed over the years, and here's how we can further develop, address, and advance research'. Aside from the very few chapters that suggest alternative movements like critique, questioning, or deconstruction, the overall tenor is to 'generate new lines of inquiry' (xi), despite the fact that what's pitched as new and innovative in leadership writing often has a sense of déjà vu (Hunt and Dodge, 2002).

This reification of progress is problematic as it impacts on how we as readers and scholars relate to the text. There's something sadly instrumental about approaching each chapter with the attitude of a) what knowledge can I get from this to use for my publication (or, as one of the chapter's authors said to me, 'people read these chapters so they don't need to read anything else'), and/or b) how can I use this chapter to generate a new publication? This orientation to the text has many similarities to Erich Fromm's 'having' mode of existence, in which people's relationship to the world 'is one of possessing and owning' (1979: 33). We have come to believe that 'I *am* more the more I *have*' (1979: 15; emphasis in original). Fromm outlines the impact this having mode of existence has on how we learn, read, converse and know. In brief, we quickly consume texts or ideas by asking what we can use from them, what we can 'have' from them, in order to bolster the knowledge we have. As a result, we remain 'strangers' to the content, forgoing the opportunity to deepen our connection, insight, and understanding of human nature (1979: 37). Given the proliferation of leadership handbooks that are currently available (and more are on the way – Oxford University Press are soon to release *The Oxford Handbook of Leadership and Organizations*), it could be

argued that the handbook business is simultaneously appeasing, responding to and sustaining this 'having' orientation to knowledge.

The question thus arises: what are some of the consequences for knowledge if we approach handbooks with this 'having' orientation? Firstly, it raises questions about how leadership scholars create new ideas. I am reminded of a comment I heard from an American-based leadership professor, in which she described that all one needs to do to create a popular leadership concept (and in doing so secure one's career) is to choose an adjective that hasn't yet been claimed and place it in front of the word leadership – just what has been done with charismatic, strategic, authentic, spiritual, team, transformational, political, cross-cultural, ethical, virtual, relational, hybrid and so on (these are all terms used in the chapter titles of the handbook). It is perhaps no surprise that given how densely populated the field is, one needs to employ rhetorical or branding manoeuvers like this in order to have an impact. But it does raise questions about our relation to consuming knowledge ('if it doesn't grab me with a fancy concept, I'll overlook it') and our relation to producing knowledge ('I need to invest more time in the "packaging" of my idea'). It's no wonder, then, that a recent discussion on the leadership list-serv, entitled 'leadership thinking needs a drastic overhaul' (Rausch, 2012), where the author argued that we need a 'new' and 'practical' theory of leadership that consolidates leadership theory to produce a criteria that could apply to all leaders, was forwarded to the CMS list-serv and responded to by a scholar who describes leadership as 'the pornography of the B-School – a titillating group of fantasies that are seldom relevant to the average workday of the average B-school graduate' (Jacques, 2012). Another scholar agreed that 'it is time to be more vocal in challenging colleagues who peddle this stuff and engage in healthy debate, that is tell them most of it is bollocks' (Thomas, 2012). Given these sharp critiques, one could argue that leadership handbooks engage in legitimization work on behalf of those scholars who invest much of their careers in producing leadership scholarship, but who may be all too aware of their colleagues who describe their work as 'bollocks'.

So, I round this essay off by returning to Fromm and his hope that we may live with a 'being' mode of existence instead, one which asks us to consider how we can relate to knowing, learning, loving, reading and conversing differently. Where rather than reading to have knowledge, to use it in quite narrow and constrained ways, to get by on the bare minimum we need to know, we consider how we relate to the texts we encounter and create with a spirit of spontaneity, aliveness, joy and deep connection. However, as Fromm (1979: 38) quite rightly points out, this orientation, where the 'student has been affected and has changed', can only prevail if the text offers stimulating material – a warning future handbook editors may wish to remember.

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The history of philosophy – an obituary?*

Stephen Dunne

review of

Anthony Kenny (2010) *A new history of Western philosophy*. Oxford University Press: Oxford. (HB, pp. 1058, £30.00, ISBN 9780199589883)

The great German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Hegel's prefatory note to his 1816 *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* inquisitively gestured towards the methodological and practical difficulties inherent to the task of historicizing philosophy:

> How should we begin to treat a subject, the name of which is certainly mentioned often enough, but of whose nature we as yet know nothing? (Hegel, 1892a)

Hegel addresses this question not to his fellow professors but rather to his students, students who were surely already curious in this specific regard. How, Hegel asks his students to ask themselves, is anybody to talk meaningfully about the History of Philosophy when they don't yet know what Philosophy is? And how, moreover, can that which is supposed to speak in the name of timeless and eternal truths– Philosophy– logically lend itself towards historicity, in part, or at all? They are just the sorts of questions which get us thinking about the history of philosophy and so, they are just the sorts of questions that we should begin by asking in a review of a book like this.

* Thanks to Sam Mansell for suggesting to me that I should do a review of this book, to Nick Butler, for waiting so long for me to do it, and to Kate Kenny, for her editorial guidance

Such questions, and this is the main point that Hegel ascribed to them, required students to think about what the history of philosophy entails and, in so doing, to form an active relationship towards it. 'The study of the history of Philosophy', Hegel goes on to teach, 'is an introduction to Philosophy itself' (Hegel, 1892b). This is not to say that in familiarising ourselves with the history of philosophy we are doing philosophy, of course. It is rather to say that we cannot become philosophers without first of all bearing witness to the ongoing historical becoming of philosophy. We should study the history of philosophy, according to Hegel, not so that we can be historians but so that we might become philosophers:

> This is the function of our own and of every age: to grasp the knowledge which is already existing, to make it our own, and in so doing to develop it still further and to raise it to a higher level. In thus appropriating it to ourselves we make it into something different from what it was before. On the presupposition of an already existing intellectual world which is transformed in our appropriation of it, depends the fact that Philosophy can only arise in connection with previous Philosophy, from which of necessity it has arisen. The course of history does not show us the Becoming of things foreign to us, but the Becoming of ourselves and of our own knowledge. (*ibid*.)

Hegel's preliminary methodological remarks concerning the history of philosophy reverberate throughout Anthony Kenny's recent contribution to the genre (2010: ix, 502). Just like Hegel's, Kenny's history of philosophy draws attention towards, and subsequently distinguishes between, its historical and its philosophical components. Having made this distinction Kenny, like Hegel, again collapses it since 'any serious history of philosophy', he argues, 'must itself be an exercise in philosophy as well as in history' (2010: xiv). Philosophy and history, in other words, are the two sides of the same coin.

Also like Hegel's history, Kenny's initially emphasizes the inherently pedagogical nature of the endeavour he and his audience are embarking upon– the study of the history of philosophy remains the fundamental task awaiting any would–be philosopher (2010: xvii). Both histories are forms of apprenticeship, therefore, the main difference between them in this regard is that for Hegel, those seeking mere erudition from the history of philosophy should find their dinner party anecdotes elsewhere (1892c). Kenny, on the other hand, sees no real objection to feeding those who want to satisfy their appetite for 'information and entertainment' (xvii) with the fruit of his life–long scholarly labour.

Beyond differing with Hegel on the questions of by whom and in what spirit philosophy should be studied by the living, however, Kenny's history also differs from Hegel's in at least three other important ways. Firstly, Kenny's covers an entire epoch of philosophical labour which Hegel's could not have foreseen and

certainly couldn't have engaged with– post–Hegelian philosophy – and for this reason Kenny's history is broken into four epochs, as opposed to the Hegelian three. Secondly, again since Hegel, philosophy, as with many other intellectual endeavours, has become an increasingly specialised affair, the consequence being that 'no one person can read more than a fraction of the vast secondary literature that has proliferated in recent years around every one of the thinkers discussed in this volume' (xvi). Hegel's history conceded no such qualifications, which probably says a lot more about the time Hegel was working in than it does about Hegel himself.

Finally, Kenny's history is distinguished, by him, from Hegel's *Lectures*, from the first book of Aristotle's *Metaphysics,* and by implication from the whole genre of philosophical writing which 'saw the teachings of the earlier philosophers they recorded as halting steps in the direction of a vision they were themselves to expound' (ix) in that it is a creature of modesty and exegesis rather than one of hubris and pronouncement:

> because philosophy is all–embracing, so universal in its field, the organization of knowledge that it demands is something so difficult that only genius can do it. For those of us who are not geniuses, the only way in which we can hope to come to grips with philosophy is by reaching up to the mind of some great philosopher of the past. (x)

It is so that his readers can begin to come to terms with the great philosophers of the past that Kenny has produced his book. He has written it with a level of enthusiasm which is as instructive as it is infectious and, while the book is self–professedly aimed at non–specialists, I would defy anybody to read this book and not learn many things of genuine value from it, Anthony Kenny apart. In addition to offering a general account of the major contributions which have been made during the two and a half millennia of western philosophy, Kenny also specifies how the major strands of western philosophy (logic, epistemology, physics, metaphysics, mind, ethics, politics, theology, aesthetics and language) have each waxed and waned in the passing of time. The prose is didactic throughout, without ever feeling condescending, and the reader is always offered the primary and secondary, as well as the critical resources, which would allow them to pursue any topic of interest further. In what follows I offer what can only be a brief whiff of the very rich feast which Kenny has served up here, before concluding with some general remarks about books like his.

As already mentioned, the book is structured into four major historical epochs. The first of these begins with the pre–Socratic Thales of Miletus and stretches onwards as far as the neo–Platonic Plotinus and the Christian neo–Platonist Augustine. The story told in the first part of the book is very much one of gradual

philosophical refinement reaching its culmination in the philosophy of Aristotle. 'The history of philosophy', Kenny writes, 'does not begin with Aristotle, but the historiography of philosophy does' (8). It is Aristotle who points out the weaknesses of his teacher's Plato's philosophy, as well as those inherent to the scattered fragments and received wisdoms of the pre–Socratics, as a means of creating a system which would ultimately cast its shadow upon all subsequent philosophy. Augustine, for his part, has one foot in the Ancient period covered within the first part of the book, and the other in the Medieval period covered within the second part of the book, since his system includes elements of pagan *and* Christian philosophy. 'Of all the philosophers in the ancient world', Kenny asserts, 'only Aristotle had a greater influence on human thought' (94) than Augustine. The remaining three parts of the book offers testament to this claim.

The Middle Ages, Kenny shows in the second part of the book, is a period of philosophical productivity which owes just as much to the intellectuals of its time, many of whom had names beginning with the letter A (Augustine, Avicenna, Anselm, Abelard, Averroes, Aquinas), as it does to a variety of practical contingencies. Among these were the contingencies of the translation of Ancient Greek texts into Latin, Hebrew and Arabic, along with the associated work of commentary; the contingencies of intellectual professionalism and institutionalisation, and, above all; the contingencies of clerical authority. Of the four philosophical periods covered in Kenny's history, this is the one which frequently gets passed over within many university courses on the history of philosophy. It is also a period through which Kenny's personal interests in narrating the history of philosophy, pedagogical reasons apart, are brought into sharper relief. The reader will have already begun to suspect the presence of these extra–pedagogical concerns within the first part of the book when the narration of Plato and Aristotle is populated by the sort of notation familiar to all analytical philosophers and most mathematicians. By the time the book makes it to the Middle Ages, there can no longer be any doubt that there are biographical factors guiding Kenny's quill:

> My own training in philosophy began at the Gregorian University in Rome, which, in the 1950s, still aimed to teach philosophy *ad mentem Sancti Thomae* in accordance with the instructions of recent popes...After studying at the Gregorian, I did graduate work in philosophy at Oxford in the heyday of ordinary language philosophy...many of the problems exercising philosophers in the analytic tradition at that time were very similar to those studied, often with no less sophistication, by medieval philosophers and logicians (259).

There will be more said about the relevance of Kenny's extra–pedagogical sympathies in a moment. For now, pedagogically, Kenny underlines how if the ancient period culminates in the veracity of the Aristotelian system, and if the

medieval period hosts debates concerning the value, or otherwise, in reconciling the Aristotelian system with religious doctrine, then the modern period cannot but strike us for its relative if not almost absolute absence of Aristotlelianism. This is the period where Thomas Hobbes slandered the Schoolmen for their want of knowledge of reality, the period where physical and scientific empirical experimentalism comes to the fore, the period within which philosophy is mostly done outside of the university, and the period which culminates in Hegel's philosophical system. Above all it is Descartes who, in his attempt to find new and firm foundations for philosophical speculation and knowledge acquisition is, for Kenny, 'the standard bearer for the rebellion against Aristotle' (501) and by extension, the characteristic modern philosopher:

> in the history of philosophy his position is like that of the waist of an hourglass. As the sand in the upper chamber of such a glass reaches its lower chamber only through the slender passage between the two, so too ideas that had their origin in the Middle Ages have reached the modern world though a narrow filter: the compressing genius of Descartes. (532)

Descartes is the pinch–point of Kenny's history – his work heralds in the third of the four crucial periods of philosophy– the modern period. Kenny's narration of the modern period treats a chapter on Logic and Language as temporarily superfluous (these concerns will reappear in his account of the final period), a chapter on Political Philosophy as demonstrably indispensible (for the first time), and a chapter on Physics as no longer abiding (it ceases to be the concern of the philosopher so as to become that of the scientist). Within the modern period, furthermore, the old gradually begins to give way to the new and the single, continuous tradition gradually becomes a series of diverse, parallel traditions. After the modern period, things only become ever more fragmented:

> In the nineteenth century there was a constant interchange of philosophical ideas between the countries of continental Europe and the English–speaking world...By the middle of the twentieth century all this had changed. Continental and Anglophone philosophers went their separate ways, hardly speaking the same language as each other. In Britain and America the analytic tradition in philosophy, which Russell had helped to found, had come to be *dominant in academic circles,* and had almost driven out alternative styles of philosophizing. In continental Europe existentialism was *the fashionable school,* led in France by Jean–Paul Sartre and in Germany by Martin Heidegger. Well–meaning attempts to bring together proponents of the different styles of philosophizing met with only limited success in the second half of the century [Italics Added]. (810)

It doesn't take too much to determine which side of this divide Kenny's sympathies rest with, not least of all because we have already been given strong hints in this regard within his discussion of earlier philosophical periods. For those who only want an account of recent philosophical developments from the

book, the lesson is that analytical philosophy was a near dominant academic tradition which almost achieved intellectual hegemony, whereas 'existentialism' and everything that is said to follow from it was, and indeed remains, little other than a 'fashionable school'. As an ordinary language philosopher, Kenny is more than aware of what he is doing when he opposes near dominance to mere fashion– he is teaching that recent philosophy is made up of the sensible and the silly, and that, as well–meaning as he undoubtedly is, there is only so much silliness he is willing to take. Kenny's four page discussion of Jacques Derrida (824–828) is therefore either the polemical low point or high point of the book, depending on where your own philosophical sympathies lie. That this passage is supposed to be read as a pedagogically instructive discussion, rather than as a professionally and biographically motivated sentiment is, I think, a bit of a problem.

Nevertheless, I'm not so sure that Kenny, the Wittgenstein sympathiser, has actually let himself down in refusing to pass over that of which he cannot speak into silence. After all, he offers his history of philosophy to his readers with the explicit caveat that in many cases he will 'write of necessity as an amateur rather than an expert' (xvi). It will be a cold day in hell before Anthony Kenny claims to be a Derrida expert, of course, so perhaps the lack of respect with which he treats Derrida's work, as well as his lack of *any* acknowledgment he pays to Adorno, Bergson, Foucault, Deleuze and Rorty, to mention only five of the more obvious omissions, can perhaps be excused as the inevitable shortcomings of a history of philosophy written in an age of intellectual fragmentation and specialisation– an age he has diagnosed. In as much as one reviewer might take issue with the way in which Kenny has engaged with Derrida, so too another reviewer might well challenge the account of Plantinga with which he closes. Perhaps, in the end, it is asking too much of any single person, however much they have read and however carefully, to give an authoritative account of the history of philosophy. What Randall Collins and W.K.C. Guthrie said of their histories of philosophy, Anthony Kenny has no doubt also thought of his own: 'it seemed better to finish the work in my own lifetime' (Collins, 1998: xix).

In an interview about the book, Kenny suggested that it is best understood as steering something of a middle course between the excessive jocularity of Russell's *History,* on the one hand, and the excessive seriousness of Copplestone's *History,* on the other (Philosophy Bites, 2007). In this regard, as well as in many others, the book is clearly a triumph. What it is not, however, is an uncontroversial history of philosophy. If such a book can no longer be written by any one person, if indeed it ever could have been, perhaps what is required is not so much the dis–continuation of the form as its re–continuation by other means. In addition to its being the period where the analytical and the

continental philosophical traditions parted ways, post–Hegelian philosophy is also the period within which the concern with the relationship between philosophy and history became ever more central. If there is a single question which unites the 'fashionable school' of 'existentialism' it is this.

Perhaps a pronounced hermeneutical discussion along these lines has little place in a work like Kenny's, however, since it moves us away from the primacy of pedagogy. In which case the history of philosophy can also be explored by students through alternative formats to the 1,000 page tome such as, for example, cartographical diagrams (Drunks&Lampposts, 2012), podcasts (e.g. http://www.historyofphilosophy.net/home) and online lecture courses (e.g. http://www.openculture.com/philosophy_free_courses). Kenny's book is by no means the last history of western philosophy which will be composed. It is, however, perhaps the last one which will be single–authored and book bound.

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