

Forum Kunsthof on 7 June 2013

Public disputatio or polemic discussion with the participation of: **Christoph Brunner, Daniel Morgenthaler, Garrett Nelson, Aoife Rosenmeyer, Aria Spinelli, and Stefan Wagner**, moderated by **Dimitrina Sevova** (in English)

Performances by **Burçak Konukman, Garrett Nelson & Sarah Bernauer**, and **P.F.T. (Peter Emch, Franziska Koch, Tobias Oehmichen)**

Admission free! With *barbecue* (please take your own grillables along).

Showing or Snowing Art in June? on Art, Value, Price, Work and the Market

Art vs. Market / Market games and the play of commons / Art vs. Multitude

As we go about discussing the value of art we must not lose sight of the fact that in the current economic relations, “in the art field speech is gold. [...] Put differently, the high volume of communication required is directly related to the precarious character of the symbolic values that are being traded. Artworks are not intrinsically valuable.”¹ The discussion aims self-reflexively and in cooperation with its public to contribute to new forms of exchange, and animate awareness, solidarity, and engagement, in order to respond to how the value of art shifts within the creative leap and affective turn from where new market relations open up in an expanded economy of art beyond the gradually contracting art market in the knowledge economy and so-called creative industries.

These new relations consist of new forms of production and consumption, of use, measurement, dissemination and exchange of art, new forms of organization and market economic and social changes, and entail the transformation of the conditions of production and consumption of art. They raise the question of the value of art and creativity, how it relates to the system of measurement, valorization and capitalization in post-Fordist speculations, and how the crisis may be considered as ambiguous and open into new political and social opportunities for art practices. How do art practices relate to society as a whole, and create and imagine new systems and forms of exchange, new cultural and political realities?

Forum Kunsthof for this public polemic discussion takes as a point of departure an action by David Hammons from 1983, titled *Bliz-aard Sale*, in which the artist stood on a sidewalk in downtown Manhattan as a street seller offering to pedestrians snowballs arranged in order of and priced according to their size. This intervention was an art gesture not driven by a desire to gain, but rather by a desire to lose the measurement of economic scale and its relation to art, creating



David Hammons, *Bliz-aard Sale*, 1983

a speculative situation as a mockery of the market economy, introducing a new role of art in society.

The snowballs that make visible the work of the hands, what kind of object are they actually? The action embodies the relation between work and labor, between the labor of the hand and the labor of the head, the craftsman and the trader, material and immaterial aspects of working conditions and conditions of production and circulation, bringing together homo faber who shapes the form and produces the object and homo oeconomicus ludens who creates the circuits of their relation, mediation and exchange.

But in this case the value or quality of the art lies not there in its object at all. The snowballs are temporal objects with a given form that will metamorphose by itself without being a life form, as physical forces alter their form and transform their matter, so that every fixation is but temporary. *Bliz-aard*

1 Isabelle Graw, “Talk ‘Til You Drop: The Art Conversation and the Communication Imperative,” *Mousse Magazine*, Issue #38, April 2013 <<http://www.moussemagazine.it/articolo.mm?id=971>> (accessed 2013-05-26).



"Marching Piece" performance by George Maciunas. Fluxus Snow Event, New Marlborough (Massachusetts), 1977.

Sale lies in a politics of small gestures that look like smuggling or speculation as it conspiratively turns art against itself so that it diminish itself, so that there be no growth, no surplus, seeking the logic of the existence of an art work that will be difficult to commodify.

There is no need for a ritual destruction of material or "creative destruction" in order for new value to be shaped. No need for the balls to be freed from their utilitarian domination to achieve symbolic value. The snowballs are fated to dissolve by themselves. They are material art work not in the sense of ephemeral art without work or ready-made (in which the labor of others is appropriated). Their objecthood is slippery. At the same time they are obviously not objects of art that can easily be prized fetish objects in a private or public collection. Some collectors have tried – only to see their objects fade away during one of New York's black-outs.

How does this relate to the eschatological and conservational discourses that have been the prevalent drive in collecting art since the 1990s? With today's technology and from the point of view of what can be considered an object of collecting and exhibiting, there remains no doubt that snowballs can be conserved, deep-frozen and re-exhibited as part of a public or private collection, while documentation of the situation can be attached to provide its historical context. How can we stress today the production, "use" and exchange value of work of art – its function, meaning, and value, as well as its distribution, dissemination and collecting? How do speculative mechanisms of the market relate to the purely speculative character of art?

If on the one hand this is an action to resist commercialization, creating its own marginal space, the balls there are saying "one can buy me, but no one owns me", breaking through the art/life binary, creating a situation mimicking racist stereotype and social stigma linked to appearing in public, putting under question not only the value of art but also what Lefebvre calls

the "space of representation." Raising the question of who is visible in the public space and how, the action is a play of speculative possibilities against hierarchies in public space and rebellion against hegemonic narratives within the history of black music or about who has been perceived as a drug pusher on the street.

After the revelations of Walter Benjamin's protocols of his experiments with hashish and opium, in art the representation of snow or sameness, the things ordered in regular and symmetric rows are easily linked to a frozen and snowed-in or symmetric well-ordered hallucinogenic space created by these drugs – an "overcoming of the rational individual through intoxication"² linked to the workings of an artificial consumerist paradise or the virtual reality of the cool media.

If the traditional way of distributing art is showing it, does then not snowing art, as commons to all, propose a speculative story in which snowballs are the new telos of ecological existence towards the political economy? At the same time in the stock market a snowball effect is the appearance of liquidity that acts destructively on the markets. Are snowballs antagonistic to money-making, or are they mostly antagonistic to the financial markets and their flux? What is the dilemma between this process of volatilization of the surplus value of art and the process of its valorization?

Artists must never directly access the market. It is the prerogative of a system of mediation, the guild of art dealers and commercial galleries to articulate demand for their 'goods' and valorization as doorkeepers of the 'law of art's value.' The global financial crisis set off by the meltdown of the subprime mortgage bubble in the United States in 2007 led to a crash in the art market in 2008, which ironically but hardly accidentally coincided with a market intervention of another artist, who in contrast to David Hammons attacked the art market directly in hyper-commercial proportions and produced a snow-ball

2 Walter Benjamin, *On Hashish*, "Note on Surrealism, 1928-1929 (GS2, 1022)," p. 142.



Feathers fly around this 15 metre-long tank installed by Japanese designer Tokujin Yoshioka at the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo. Sensing Nature; Mori Art Museum; 24 July - 7 November 2010; Tokujin Yoshioka Design.

effect of his own. Damien Hirst's action "Beautiful Inside My Head Forever" at Sotheby's, London in 2008 relied on his brand name and Hirst as an individual artist and entrepreneur to bypass his dealers and the system of art, disrupting the artist-gallery relationship, going "against the established artist-dealer means of doing business." "It destroys order within the art world."³ If Hirst's action can be seen as a destructive hit against the market of art as a whole, entailing a future devaluation of the prices of his own production (a manufacture with 120 jobs) by producing sudden liquidity flooding the art market. Its symbolic value with its metaphor of the "Beautiful Inside My Head Forever" disperses the beauty and creativity, "beauty-value, that is, aesthetic forces"⁴ in the immaterial economy and cognitive capitalism, the branding industry and beautification, individualization and anesthetization as the main fuel of the knowledge economy and so-called creative industries.

The financial crisis of 2008 did not help overcome the recession, as some economists had predicted, but went on to coalesce with the Euro crisis followed by austerity measures which affected the system of art and its apparatuses through governmental budget cuts and reductions in public funding that contrast with the system of beautification and anesthetization of our daily-life and urban environment under the new economic imperatives.

3 Daniel Chazen and June Shin, respectively, "Day 17: The Beautiful Inside My Head Forever Auction," assignments for Cheryl Finley's Art Market class at Cornell University <<https://confluence.cornell.edu/display/tam2011/The+Beautiful+Inside+My+Head+Forever+Auction>> (accessed 2013-05-26).

4 Maurizio Lazzarato, "European Cultural Tradition and the New Forms of Production and Circulation of Knowledge," *Multitudes Web* <<http://multitudes.samizdat.net/article1292.html>> (accessed 2013-05-26).

Today the field of art is characterized by contradictory narratives, where on the one hand there is "a collective awareness that everything can be art," and on the other that same awareness that everything can be art is a collective trouble. What are these mechanisms, criteria, and rules that actually legitimize precisely that particular thing as art, subtracted from everything, rather than something else? What are alternative strategies and tactics of producing and distributing art in these contradictory relations towards the legitimizing circuits of the system of art with its apparatuses of producing, exhibiting, mediating, contextualizing, disseminating and exchanging?

What is the artist an agent of? How does the practice of art today relate to the work of art? If the practices of the artist are of first-order importance and value is not produced through the final product, can then the artist be conceived as a laborer, or does Hannah Arendt's claim from 40 years ago still hold true that the artist is "the only exception [...] who, strictly speaking, is the only 'worker' left in a laboring society"?⁵ Is art the only 'Other' of the market imperatives? If the economy based on scale is vanishing and giving way to new forms of de-scaled and aestheticized speculation like the branding economy, can we say that art actually fuels new forms of economic and social relations, through time-based and immaterial art, because it partakes in the liquid market and spectacularized post-industrial society with its commodification of labor and increased productivity, where time and labor are still the main system of measuring its value?

An ambivalence lies in the dismeasure of art, and can be found in both showing or snowing. On the one hand it is inherent to the "unaccountable enactment of the love of art" as a form of sabotage of measurement, with its inherently speculative character that stands as a fundament of arguments in favor of privatizing mechanisms of the society of

5 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 1958, Chapter 17, p. 126.

art lovers and its predilection for private ownership. On the other hand the dismeasure of art is a subversive practice, a critique of the logic of the market and consumerism. How can art today be dismeasured so as not to be caught in the trap of private collectors' passions and calculations? As art runs away from its collectible form, what new economic or political relations will be lurking?

Can we speak of an expanded art market beyond the art world, beyond the circuit of commerce, the art apparatuses of the gallery system, museums, biennales and art fairs? Does it not today appear more correct to speak of economies in the field of arts, heterogeneous and mixed strategies, the exchange and plurality of commercial and noncommercial circuits? Does this not beg the question whether it is possible at all to generalize the relation between the value of art and cultural capital and the system of law, all the more so that art is an active factor in the expanded knowledge economy, takes part in the industry of control, or in the production and organization of space? What are the consequences of these new forms of economicizing art?

Is the abyss growing between the production of cultural goods and their capitalization (private ownership) and the new channels that exist alongside the commercial channels and give a possibility for redistribution as commons (general) of the aesthetic, sensual and cognitive in the biopolitical factory?

What is the role of the system of mediation in art, as a bridge between the world of art and its broader social and economic field of action? How does the mediation of art intervene to make public art political or socially engaged? What is the role of mediation in transforming the meaning of art, and how does this relate to the new currency of attention, the economy of affects and politics of austerity, and the power of dream politics? What is its effect on distribution practices and the dissemination of art, the system of grants and awards, of buying and investing in art? Art has never been connected primarily to monetary value, as its symbolic and representative value has been a matter of cultural and social wealth. What are at present the dependencies between the cultural, social, political and economic value of art?

Can we consider today that art is linked to business like it has never been before? To what extent has art been integrated in the economic labor system? Can we not conclude that we are all, whether artists or so-called cultural producers, active in the sphere of services in a liquid modernity in flux? Would art as services mark the end of artistic work, and lead to the work of art in the age of its disappearance into social (bio) productivity? If artistic work and its object are on the wane, so that perpetual ephemeral virtuosic performances emerge, does this liberate art practices, and create situations allowing to speak about art as non-alienated labor? Or does it rather, with the loss of its object, get integrated

fully in the neoliberal conception that "culture should serve the economy" in which immaterial forms of labor virtuosity, creativity and communication are important economic sources?

Today there are heterogeneous forms and practices of art as never before. Looking just at the field of what is recognized as contemporary art there are practices and forms antagonistic to each other. If on the one hand there are increasingly spectacular, "sophisticated and technically astonishing institutional practices of installation," perfected large-scale production of industrial studios organized as manufactures with an entrepreneurial artist as a boss, are there not on the other new forms of art that translate destructive forces into new forms of organization, cooperative strategies, self-management, an aesthetics of resistance? Is there a relation between them, in the way in which the system of art makes profit from one or the other?

How does art transform within the cultural creative industries in order to fit in with knowledge economy, the industries of control, or capitalization of memory, which find their social manifestation and transmission channels in certain forms of documentation and exhibition? How does art today confront the demand for increased creativity and education, the knowledge economy and its lifelong learning process that appears as fuel for the system?

How can these new forms of art be assessed which are directly orientated towards research, accompanied by new approaches to art education such as the PhD Art in Practice? How do they relate to the restructuring of art education towards the expanded art market, and where do these new 'standards' lead, which aim to determine among other things what is research in the field of art practices?

On the one hand it is obvious that even in the current crisis there is an unremitting demand for constantly growing sizes and spectacularization of populist strategy in making large-format exhibitions in the system of art such as biennales and art fairs, in which the investment and interests of representatives of various groups linked to economic forces and state and governmental affairs are concentrated, from local politicians to local and global businesses and collectors who find a stage for showing themselves in public.

On the other, is this not precisely what is often forgotten in discussions of this context: What is in fact the social role of art? What is the impact of these exhibitions on the local context, and how do they intervene in the everyday life of communities? What is the social value of art in the social factory? For instance, official sources such as the BBC often mention that London and the Londoners reap no benefit from the concentration of the bank industry in the city. It is considered that on the contrary, its presence drives prices up, and with them the cost of living. As global corporations whose employees are themselves from all over the world they will often disperse their wealth somewhere in the world rather than concentrating it locally.

Is there any link between the mode of operation of global corporate business and this part of the system

The rise of social democracy and, later, of neo-liberalism changed the conditions of critical opposition.

Put at the service of the leisure economy and later the paradigm of creative self-management, the neo-avant-garde once again faced the question of complicity.

The critique of co-operation went so far as to accuse artistic opposition of actually feeding the neoliberal capitalist machine, which, after 1989, became globalized and consequently incapable of distinguishing an outside.

Hila Peleg, A Crime Against Art, 2007. Video still.

of art that operates globally? Just like art can be an agent taking part in the security industry and the production of a controlled and safe space, it could also create more space and context for local community gathering – art oriented towards the multitude. It lives at the interstices of contradictory narratives of urban space: On the one hand, between private capital and public space it is coopted and a matter of commerce, part of the industry of control, while on the other it plays the role of an active agent of socio-spatial variations of commons and artistic-aesthetical and political interventions, where art signifies something other than wealth and creative growth.

With their flexibility and mobility, their alternative approaches to self-precarization and escape from occupations related to wage labor, their autonomy or bohemian lifestyle, artists have often been accused of contributing to the system of inventing and restructuring towards a permanent precarization and social instability, even as the same traits make them an attractive face of the post-factory system of self-entrepreneurship and increased productivity, self-control and self-exploitation.

Add to that the accusation that artists contribute to new patterns of taste formation in the process of an increasingly aestheticizing and flexibilizing environment, and play an active role in the valorization and anesthetization of public space and the position of daily life, of artistic forms of life alternative to the labor market and the living wage, introducing mostly individualistic lifestyles that become attractive currency

for investors and their clients. It looks as if artists contribute to a process of gentrification and hyper-territorialized subjectivation. Do artists indeed profit from this, or does the process entail for them pressure and escape on a search for new possibilities to settle in other parts of the city?

Can we look at art as public capital or commons in a gift economy, and what would the role of the art system and art market, of state policy be in that? Because it looks like again and again it has to be pointed out that artists have to survive under extremely precarized conditions and in unstable situations dictated by the caprice of private patrons or the lack of continuity in government policies changing in quick succession, and aimed rather at supporting industries than independent practices.

Where does the artist's income stem from nowadays? Is art a business? Is there any autonomy left in the aesthetic process? Is there a chance for the economic independence of artists, and what would it look like? Is the price of this independence indeed that suggested by Andrea Fraser in *Texte zur Kunst*? "Except to stalwart adherents of trickle-down theory, it must be abundantly clear by now that what has been good for the art world has been disastrous for the rest of the world. How can we continue to rationalize our participation in this economy?"⁶ Is there solidarity left between artists, a ground for collectivism, or do competition and an overwhelming sense of individualism remain a defining feature of the art system?

6 Andrea Fraser, "There's No Place Like Home / L'1% C'est Moi," *Texte zur Kunst* 83, September 2011, pp. 114–127.

Can we consider the art worker with her autonomy as the ideal liberal subject, as a true representative of the creative class? According to US economist Richard Florida, art and the artist are part of the Super-Creative Core, a small subset of it alongside a wide range of occupations like science, engineering, education, computer programming, research, design, and media work.

The claim that there is no outside of the system does not call forth perplexity, but has rather turned into a strong theoretical argument. Does it not carry the risk, instead of mobilizing our efforts to reinvent an alternative or propose an exodus, to dismantle our every possibility to imagine a different horizon? Is it not absurd for art practices to be limited by statements to the effect that there is no alternative to participating in the innovative system of control and in new safety technologies? And consequently: Is there a market for criticism or political art? Is there such a thing as critical art practices, and are they the object of collecting – and who would collect them?

Today it is said that the more critical one is, the more one serves the system. Does it follow from this that Hans Christian Andersen's multitudinal cunning about the emperor being naked no longer works? Does in consequence, in the dynamic of the spectacle of late capitalism, the speaking of truth in the face of normative power (speaking with Foucault) only add a layer of fabric to hegemonic forms and dress them with additional power? Is there a space left for tactics of artistic resistance, or are they quickly assimilated by marketing strategies, as even the most critical forms of art are often converted to cash?

Post-Fordism blurs the distinction between life and art in a new type of coalescence utterly different from the "interdependence between art and life" in "the early-twentieth-century avant-gardes" with their claims that the "production of a new type of art would result in a new way of life and, in turn, a new subject."⁷ How does art, in practice, partake in the process of aestheticizing everyday life? Can we say that art and creativity are one and the same thing? This leads to the question as to whether art practices should be called creative practices. If "human creativity is the ultimate economic resource"⁸ and "the industries of the twenty-first century will depend increasingly on the generation of knowledge through creativity and innovation,"⁹ it would seem that the practices of art should arouse special interest, which not always coincides with what we come across in practice in terms of the link between art and business?

7 Anton Vidokle, "Art without Work?," *e-flux journal* #29, 11/2011.

8 Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class. And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure and Everyday Life*, Basic Books, 2002, p. xiii.

9 Charles Landry and Franco Bianchini, *The Creative City*, Demos, 1995, p. 4.

Can art practices and creativity (understood as the activity of a creative entrepreneur, along with governmental efforts in relation to the creative city, the creative act, perception and affects that resonate in the production of the whole) be considered to be the same? What are this social economy of creativity and its creative apparatuses in which creativity appears to be the main dispositive, "a key driving force for economic development in the post-industrial and post-political cognitive and affective economy."¹⁰ All the while not only industries, but the entire society is faced with a crisis of creativity and its shortage. What happens to art practices in this shortage, combined with the stimulation of hyper-productivity?

If our creativity turns against us, our inventions are appropriated in order to serve social and industrial management, what can we make of dream politics? Can we imagine how the creative force of artists and their practices could be used primarily destructively, and turn into new forms of social and political organization and a new imaginary, following Deleuze for whom the act of creation, the creative act is not a form of communication or information, and while the creative act does not always correspond to an act of resistance, when they do coincide in a form of active struggle this is called creative freedom?

Does not this privileged mobile group from the public today remain strictly limited that has access to art and its market and its globalized context? In this context, should not the question of participation rather be viewed as a privileged stimulation proving the elite position of the creative class? Can we say that today the public of art consists primarily of survivors of the post-Fordist drama and shock, hedonist individualists, indifferent and ignorant, bored bulimic consumers? Or take exhibition-making and display practices in an institutional context, which are just as ignorant and do not attempt to commit their spectators, preferring to present to them a landscape of disheartening hyper-production of demanding activity, an ocean impossible to swim across?

As Hannah Arendt points out, "every activity unconnected with labor becomes a 'hobby'."¹¹ In fact in this case even the "work" of the artist does not remain, as it melts or sublimates. How can artists make a living, and what becomes of public funding if art is perceived by society and state politics as a hobby, or contingent work? What are the consequences of the demand of liberal politics for art to be "accessible," between sports and popular mainstream culture? As government policy supports participation, and stimulates a certain form of consumerism, are these the main conditions of art production today? On the other hand art is linked to collective forms of thinking and doing, and sharing, which Hannah Arendt calls "spaces of appearance," which it appears do not have to be forced by specific policy to address a broader public, i.e., the multitude.

Text: Dimitrina Sevova

10 Richard Florida, *op. cit.*

11 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 1958, Chapter 17, p. 126.

This is the second in a series of events this summer and autumn 2013, comprised of screenings, public readings, performances, talks and an art guided walk through some of the playground places in the city of Zurich, which are to take place as part of

Opportunities for Outdoor Play? Playgrounds – New Spaces of Liberty (The Question of Form)

A transdisciplinary collective research and production project curated by Dimitrina Sevova at Kunsthof Zürich in cooperation with Prof. Elke Bippus, Franziska Koch and the Bachelor Medien & Kunst, Vertiefung Bildende Kunst of the Zurich University of the Arts.

Project blog: outdoorplay.tumblr.com

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