

Hourly Rate									
Per Hour	Per Day	(-19%)	Per Week	(-19%)	Per Month	(-19%)	Per Year	(-19%)	
8,00 €	64,00 €	51,84 €	320,00 €	259,20 €	1.280,00 €	1.036,80 €	15.360,00 €	12.441,60 €	
9,00 €	72,00 €	58,32 €	360,00 €	291,60 €	1.440,00 €	1.166,40 €	17.280,00 €	13.996,80 €	
10,00 €	80,00 €	64,80 €	400,00 €	324,00 €	1.600,00 €	1.296,00 €	19.200,00 €	15.552,00 €	
11,00 €	88,00 €	71,28 €	440,00 €	356,40 €	1.760,00 €	1.425,60 €	21.120,00 €	17.107,20 €	
12,00 €	96,00 €	77,76 €	480,00 €	388,80 €	1.920,00 €	1.555,20 €	23.040,00 €	18.662,40 €	
13,00 €	104,00 €	84,24 €	520,00 €	421,20 €	2.080,00 €	1.684,80 €	24.960,00 €	20.217,60 €	
14,00 €	112,00 €	90,72 €	560,00 €	453,60 €	2.240,00 €	1.814,40 €	26.880,00 €	21.772,80 €	
15,00 €	120,00 €	97,20 €	600,00 €	486,00 €	2.400,00 €	1.944,00 €	28.820,00 €	23.328,00 €	
16,00 €	128,00 €	103,68 €	640,00 €	518,40 €	2.560,00 €	2.073,00 €	30.720,00 €	24.883,20 €	
17,00 €	136,00 €	110,16 €	680,00 €	550,80 €	2.720,00 €	2.203,20 €	32.640,00 €	26.438,40 €	
18,00 €	144,00 €	116,64 €	720,00 €	583,20 €	2.880,00 €	2.332,80 €	34.560,00 €	27.993,60 €	
19,00 €	152,00 €	123,12 €	760,00 €	615,60 €	3.040,00 €	2.462,40 €	36.480,00 €	29.548,80 €	
20,00 €	160,00 €	129,60 €	800,00 €	648,00 €	3.200,00 €	2.592,00 €	38.400,00 €	31.104,00 €	
21,00 €	168,00 €	136,08 €	840,00 €	680,40 €	3.360,00 €	2.721,60 €	40.320,00 €	32.659,20 €	
22,00 €	176,00 €	142,56 €	880,00 €	712,80 €	3.520,00 €	2.851,20 €	42.240,00 €	34.214,40 €	
23,00 €	184,00 €	149,04 €	920,00 €	745,20 €	3.680,00 €	2.980,80 €	44.160,00 €	35.769,60 €	
24,00 €	192,00 €	155,52 €	960,00 €	777,60 €	3.840,00 €	3.110,40 €	46.080,00 €	37.324,80 €	
25,00 €	200,00 €	162,00 €	1.000,00 €	810,00 €	4.000,00 €	3.240,00 €	48.000,00 €	38.880,00 €	
26,00 €	208,00 €	168,48 €	1.040,00 €	842,40 €	4.160,00 €	3.369,60 €	49.920,00 €	40.435,20 €	
27,00 €	216,00 €	174,96 €	1.080,00 €	874,80 €	4.320,00 €	3.499,20 €	51.840,00 €	41.990,40 €	
28,00 €	224,00 €	181,44 €	1.120,00 €	907,20 €	4.480,00 €	3.628,80 €	53.760,00 €	43.545,60 €	
29,00 €	232,00 €	187,92 €	1.160,00 €	939,60 €	4.640,00 €	3.758,40 €	55.680,00 €	45.100,80 €	
30,00 €	240,00 €	194,40 €	1.200,00 €	972,00 €	4.800,00 €	3.888,00 €	57.600,00 €	46.656,00 €	
31,00 €	248,00 €	200,88 €	1.240,00 €	1.004,40 €	4.960,00 €	4.017,60 €	59.520,00 €	48.211,20 €	
32,00 €	256,00 €	207,36 €	1.280,00 €	1.036,80 €	5.120,00 €	4.147,20 €	61.440,00 €	49.766,40 €	
33,00 €	264,00 €	213,84 €	1.320,00 €	1.069,20 €	5.280,00 €	4.276,80 €	63.360,00 €	51.321,60 €	
34,00 €	272,00 €	220,32 €	1.360,00 €	1.101,60 €	5.440,00 €	4.406,40 €	65.280,00 €	52.876,80 €	
35,00 €	280,00 €	226,80 €	1.400,00 €	1.134,00 €	5.600,00 €	4.536,00 €	67.200,00 €	54.432,00 €	
36,00 €	288,00 €	233,28 €	1.440,00 €	1.166,40 €	5.760,00 €	4.665,60 €	69.120,00 €	55.987,20 €	
37,00 €	296,00 €	239,76 €	1.480,00 €	1.198,80 €	5.920,00 €	4.795,20 €	71.040,00 €	57.542,40 €	
38,00 €	304,00 €	246,24 €	1.520,00 €	1.231,20 €	6.080,00 €	4.924,80 €	72.960,00 €	59.097,60 €	
39,00 €	312,00 €	252,72 €	1.560,00 €	1.263,60 €	6.240,00 €	5.054,40 €	74.880,00 €	60.652,80 €	
40,00 €	320,00 €	259,20 €	1.600,00 €	1.296,00 €	6.400,00 €	5.184,00 €	76.800,00 €	62.208,00 €	
41,00 €	328,00 €	265,68 €	1.640,00 €	1.328,40 €	6.560,00 €	5.313,60 €	78.720,00 €	63.763,20 €	
42,00 €	336,00 €	272,16 €	1.680,00 €	1.360,80 €	6.720,00 €	5.443,20 €	80.640,00 €	65.318,40 €	
43,00 €	344,00 €	278,64 €	1.720,00 €	1.393,20 €	6.880,00 €	5.572,80 €	82.560,00 €	66.873,60 €	
44,00 €	352,00 €	285,12 €	1.760,00 €	1.425,60 €	7.040,00 €	5.702,40 €	84.480,00 €	68.428,80 €	
45,00 €	360,00 €	291,60 €	1.800,00 €	1.458,00 €	7.200,00 €	5.832,00 €	86.400,00 €	69.984,00 €	
46,00 €	368,00 €	298,08 €	1.840,00 €	1.490,40 €	7.360,00 €	5.961,60 €	88.320,00 €	71.539,20 €	
47,00 €	376,00 €	304,56 €	1.880,00 €	1.522,80 €	7.520,00 €	6.091,20 €	90.240,00 €	73.094,40 €	
48,00 €	384,00 €	311,04 €	1.920,00 €	1.555,20 €	7.680,00 €	6.220,80 €	92.160,00 €	74.649,60 €	
49,00 €	392,00 €	317,52 €	1.960,00 €	1.587,60 €	7.840,00 €	6.350,40 €	94.080,00 €	76.204,80 €	
50,00 €	400,00 €	324,00 €	2.000,00 €	1.620,00 €	8.000,00 €	6.480,00 €	96.000,00 €	77.760,00 €	
51,00 €	408,00 €	330,48 €	2.040,00 €	1.652,40 €	8.160,00 €	6.609,60 €	97.920,00 €	79.315,20 €	
52,00 €	416,00 €	336,96 €	2.080,00 €	1.684,80 €	8.320,00 €	6.739,20 €	99.840,00 €	80.870,40 €	
53,00 €	424,00 €	343,44 €	2.120,00 €	1.717,20 €	8.480,00 €	6.868,80 €	101.760,00 €	82.425,60 €	
54,00 €	432,00 €	349,92 €	2.160,00 €	1.749,60 €	8.640,00 €	6.998,40 €	103.680,00 €	83.980,80 €	
55,00 €	440,00 €	356,40 €	2.200,00 €	1.782,00 €	8.800,00 €	7.128,00 €	105.600,00 €	85.536,00 €	
56,00 €	448,00 €	362,88 €	2.240,00 €	1.814,40 €	8.960,00 €	7.257,60 €	107.520,00 €	87.091,20 €	
57,00 €	456,00 €	369,36 €	2.280,00 €	1.846,80 €	9.120,00 €	7.387,20 €	109.440,00 €	88.646,40 €	
58,00 €	464,00 €	375,84 €	2.320,00 €	1.879,20 €	9.280,00 €	7.516,80 €	111.360,00 €	90.201,60 €	
59,00 €	472,00 €	382,32 €	2.360,00 €	1.911,60 €	9.440,00 €	7.646,40 €	113.280,00 €	91.756,80 €	
60,00 €	480,00 €	388,80 €	2.400,00 €	1.944,00 €	9.600,00 €	7.776,00 €	115.200,00 €	93.312,00 €	
70,00 €	560,00 €	401,76 €	2.800,00 €	2.008,80 €	11.200,00 €	9.072,00 €	134.400,00 €	108.864,00 €	
80,00 €	640,00 €	408,24 €	3.200,00 €	2.041,20 €	12.800,00 €	10.368,00 €	153.600,00 €	124.416,00 €	
90,00 €	720,00 €	583,20 €	3.600,00 €	2.073,60 €	14.400,00 €	11.664,00 €	172.800,00 €	139.968,00 €	
100,00 €	800,00 €	648,00 €	4.000,00 €	2.106,00 €	16.000,00 €	12.960,00 €	192.000,00 €	155.520,00 €	

Paul Bille graduated from the graphic design department at the KABK in Den Haag in 2018. In his work he often looks westwards, at design made from metrics and the polished surfaces that define so much of our lives. Currently he works as a freelance designer in Berlin.

"*Making a Living* is the title of the Google Spreadsheet I made in order to calculate my rates as a freelance designer. The spreadsheet covers hourly, daily, weekly, monthly and yearly rates based on the minimum wage in Germany. All rates are calculated twice—including and excluding the German VAT. The color gradient in the background shows the viewer what a good rate is and what a bad rate is. Red is bad. Green is good."

Making a Living

“If I were to give a summary of the tendency of our times, I would say, Quantity. The multitude, the mass spirit, dominates everywhere, destroying quality. Our entire life—production, politics, and education—rests on quantity, on numbers. [...] Quantity, instead of adding to life’s comforts and peace, has merely increased man’s burden.” ^[1]

Emma Goldman wrote about the tensions between quantity and quality in 1910. Her description of the priorities of contemporary capitalist society can be said to still be valid over a hundred years later. Instead of detailed political analysis, we are lost in a slew of bite-sized memes, instead of carefully considered choices of media consumption, we binge watch anything Netflix or Youtube feeds us, instead of focusing on developing socially benevolent practices, we are guided to work a number of un(der)paid corporate gigs. In both cultural and non-artistic contexts, the dichotomy of quantity and quality seems to be at the core of this contemporary debate on precarity. Many are forced to take on any job, no matter the quality, whereas others might be lucky enough to practice in the field they desire to, but never have enough work or income to make ends meet. Those with exponentially rare “full-time jobs” usually work way more hours than what they are paid for, and business follows them home outside working hours via various communication platforms. A job with no security is only one accident away from being lost. A low income earner is only one sickness away from inescapable debt cycles.

The messages we are targeted with that address these struggles are telling of the values neoliberal society fosters. In offline spaces, such as public transport and broadcast networks, advertisements for payday loans, credit services and gambling sites suggest turning a blind eye to the systematic root causes of their precarity for those parts of the population exposed to them. Meanwhile, advertisements in our online feeds are increasingly personalised and hence persuasive; they are often soaked with stories of finding meaning, happiness and balance in contemporary life, either through turning the enjoyable into a monetized living or discovering the enjoyable *in* what one does for a living. More purpose, more love, more happiness! ^[2] For the prototypical creative worker described by Lara Garcia Diaz in her contribution to this journal issue—a young woman answering emails in the middle of the night on her cheap IKEA bed—the challenge lies in producing ‘quality’ in consistently large quantities, in a quantified way.

“Everything I do represents added value for my work, and I also very much enjoy doing it,” claims Rietveld alumni David Jablonowski in an interview in *What’s Next?*, a recent publication commissioned by the Academy about life after art school that uncritically promotes a passion-fueled productivist utilitarian approach for making it in the art world after graduation. Earlier in the school year, Rosa te Velde, Elise van Mourik and Tiphane Blanc organised *This is (Not) a Love Song*, ^[3] a people’s tribunal for the Rietveld and Sandberg community, to explore the reality and alternatives for this hegemonic burnout-inducing approach. As PUB Journal, we took it upon ourselves to continue, elaborate on and react to the themes of this conference, offering a variety of perspectives *from precarity* as a reaction to the pervasive expectations expressed in the aforementioned magazine.

A number of writings in this issue stem from experiences of playing according to the rules of the game, the gloomy reality

of which is reflected in Alina Lupu’s description of the wild yet somehow prescribed path of an art student, as well as Silke Xenia Juul’s bitterly poetic accounts of the discomfort and ableism deeply rooted in contemporary society. Theresa Büchner and François Girard-Meunier each touch upon expressions and influences of precarisation on intergenerational family relations, leading us to imagine future patterns and norms for the role of family in self-realisation and support.

When it comes to thinking about solutions and alternatives, by now it should be clear that gestures of subversion tend to be co-opted or silenced, but passivity contributes to maintaining the exploitative status quo. It seems damn hard to find a valid, proactive third option.

At the World Economic Forum in Davos this year, Dutch historian Rutger Bergman featured on a panel about inequality. He caused quite a stir when he pointed out that maybe we should talk less about philanthropic schemes and more about taxes. If we taxed the highest income brackets properly, we could fund a Universal Basic Income, a concept he explores in his 2016 book *Utopia for Realists*. While Mirko Podkowiak, in his contribution, warns against the hyper-consumptionist techno-dystopian direction that a general UBI might lead to by freeing up time and resources, there are plenty of experiments with egalitarian remuneration utilised in and for (micro)societies that value and practice collectivity over competition. An existing example of this is MACAO, a squatted community center in Milan, described in the collaborative piece of Giovanni Bozzoli and Ada Reinthal. This contribution makes for a brilliant and hopeful case study on the ambivalent, precarious, yet rewarding reality of anti-capitalist self-organisation.

An important part of the latter is acknowledging the ways of contributing that are often unnoticed or perceived as self-evident in competitive systems. In order to bring attention to and honour the ‘invisible’ mental, emotional, reproductive labour and resources that goes into any project, we initially started keeping an Excel log with the journal team where we would count every hour, penny and sacrifice spent and done for the production of this issue with the intent of including this table in the publication. After some time, however, we realised that quantifying our labour this way is just reproducing the same old “logic of the spreadsheet”^[4] we’re really hoping to surpass. Instead, we let the issue and our collaborative work fold out more slowly and naturally, giving ourselves just as much time, support and (self-)care as was needed at any moment. Our wonderful designers left the task of pointing out invisibility, transparency and extra work to the form of the journal itself.

[1] Emma Goldman, *Anarchism and other Essays* (1910)
 [2] See also: Kathi Weeks, “Down with Love: Feminist Critique and the New Ideologies of Work”, Verso Blog, www.versobooks.com (February 2018)
 [3] For further information, references and documentation: www.notalovesong.com
 [4] Flavia Dzodan, lecture series “The Artifice of Intelligence” (Sandberg Institute, 2018–2019)

▼ The obvious question when it comes to conceptual art is how to record it and how much, and whether that record is art unto itself. ^[1]

For a while now she had given up on her initial medium. What had it been? Photography? Sculpture? Collage? Painting, maybe?

Like every good girl, when starting her education, she went through all the required stages that a young woman's shaping up should check. The sex-less misunderstood boyfriend whom she called "my muse", tall platform shoes, beautiful white skin and a mane of blonde hair that would hide her large temples, a good degree of queerness, but not too much, just enough to allow her to dress casual and relate to her gay friends while they read together Paul B. Preciado's *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*. She asked her parents for money to buy canvases and concentrated pigments, and repeatedly posted on Instagram about how "to create art means to be crazy alone forever" with photos of herself squinting in front of one of those new canvases with her sleeveless wifebeater hung to the side on one of her angled shoulders, obviously in a black and white filter. For a while she decorated posts with artlife hashtags, but lately, after a brief stint in a phase where she applied painting to her body in various thick or thin layers, and after having posted one too many shots of her S.O. above comments which riffed poetically on "collecting body pieces", she realised she had graduated to shots of her own crotch during assessments and leserotic interpretations of "Ingrid and I seducing each other with an apple #adamandeve". She was in time, perfectly in sync for the upcoming revelations of making it as a woman.

By her second year assessment she had advanced on to working with language: words carved out of the everyday, reading intros to Wittgenstein's theories, and videos played on old CRT screens which flickered, cost next to nothing, and gave off a feel of having been around clearly for longer than she had been, as she straddled them for one more Insta shot before heading off towards vacating the school premises.

#fuckingdone

Then it became clear.

Purge: the world of bourgeois sickness, "intellectual", professional & commercialised culture, PURGE the world of dead art, imitation, artificial art, abstract art, illusionistic art, mathematical art—PURGE THE WORLD OF "EUROPANISM"!

After going through a stage of embroidery on pillows and period pieces, PROMOTE A REVOLUTIONARY FLOOD AND TIDE IN ART. Promote living art, anti-art, promote NON ART REALITY to be fully grasped by all people, not only critics, dilettantes and professionals.

she had discovered G. Maciunas's work.

FUSE the cadres of cultural, social & political revolutionaries into united front & action. ^[2]

And so came performance.

She remembers having laughed off performance as that thing which you do when you forget to turn in an *assignment and you still need to present something powerful in order to make an impression, to give a hint of having made large strides in your understanding of where your practice is going—bodies are* ►

Alina Lupu is a stage designer in the morning, artist by day and a food delivery courier in the evening, barista at night, kitchen help in her dreams, writer, performer and intern. The variety of temp jobs collected on the way starts to demand a few pages just to be described. For her a side-job is not an abstraction. The following text was performed by the author at the *This Is (Not) A Love Song* tribunal on October 11, 2018.

This Is a Work of Fiction

Scene 3—Conceptual Art

more often, not paid at all—which is fine for me because I have the luxury to not have to do these jobs for the money). ■ I work in my own illegal grocery. ■ I get paid for teaching

damned powerful stuff!—and what better way to do that than to offer yourself up for scrutiny either by arranging to have your hair shaved in front of your classmates, or flashing a bit of tit before lunch, or guiding a single orange through a trajectory down the stairs as you screamed one of those artsy screams which could have very well been a metaphor?

Now, the most pervasive habit with performance had always been one that bothered her intensely, instinctively. It seemed to her that performers wanted to incorporate the world itself into all that they were doing. But then she, too, had an obviously clear disgust for dramaturgy, even when she might have needed it most. She found herself not just twisting that crammed body of hers, expanding it beyond its limits, but also turning it into a tiny surround, all around, recording machine. At the flick of a wrist, she'd press the side button of her iPhone 6, glide one finger across the screen horizontally, then one finger vertically to reveal the real in videographer format. She'd press play and usually hang around looking only through the screen's surface at the scene in front of her for what seemed like infinity, but amounted to no more than thirty seconds on most days. Slide back, type in the four digit code to fully unlock, then tap on the Instagram app, +, take from gallery, no filter, write caption, add location, share.

The narrator of *The Flamethrowers* makes downtown New York diary films, too, recording a row of limousines out her window on Mullberry street, waiting to take mafia men home from their social club. Other than the performance aspect of her run at the Bonneville Salt Flats, the only art pieces that we see her making are films, using the medium to capture stasis and speed. ^[3]

That's how she ended up with a blue clad man that she followed on a bike path as he was doing his morning jog on a Sunday.

- A wave of 20-year-olds at a crossing, starting the school year.**
- A baggage claim band covered in contemporary art stickers, folding itself as it rotates.**
- A picture of a picture held in hand.**
- A row of flags reminiscent of old Europe.**
- A boat ride viewed through the screen of a stranger's phone.**
- Women instructing women on how to clean widows.**
- An aerial view.**
- A stranger wearing no shirt and his bag across his chest running to catch a tram on the main street.**

She made her love of continuous flow vivid as she had herself photographed on G. Maciunas's street in Vilnius, legs up in the air, miniskirt, two friends hanging by the wayside, with a beatific smile. By then, she had let her partially cropped hair grow and was shaping up to be the spitting image of your little sister in college. Her artistic ideals aligned her perfectly with the ideals of her colleagues. To live was to make. But to live was not to make a living.

The shop, like all his business ventures, was notoriously unsuccessful, however. In an interview with Larry Miller in 1978 shortly before his death, Maciunas estimated spending 'about \$50,000' on Fluxus projects over the years, that would never recoup their investment.

Miller: "May I ask a stupid question? Why didn't it pay off? Because isn't part of the idea that it's low cost and multiple distribution..."

Maciunas: "No one was buying it, in those days. We opened up a store on Canal Street, what was it, 1964, and we had it open almost all year. We didn't make one sale in that whole year...We did not even sell a 50 cent item, a postage stamp sheet...you

could buy V TRE papers for a quarter, you could buy George Brecht's puzzles for one dollar, Fluxus year-boxes for twenty dollars."^[4]

The irony of it all had of course to do with what historically followed, of which she was unaware:

According to scholar Bruce Altshuler, in 1949 there were only around twenty American contemporary art galleries, with the number of collectors investing in 'advanced work' around a dozen; by contrast, there were approximately 1900 single-artist exhibitions in New York in the 1984–85 season alone. In a 2014 Financial Times article, writer Harald Falckenberg cites a claim that more art was sold in the 1980s than 'in all previous centuries combined.'^[5]

The irony also had much to do with imagining a young middle class man building up a career,

Maciunas held several prestigious professional positions as an architect and graphic designer in firms including Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, Air Force Exchanges (Europe), Jack Marshad Inc., Olin Mathieson Chemical Corporation, and Knoll (company) Associates. ^[6]

and reshaping New York's surface and aspirations. As an urban planner, Maciunas is credited as the "Father of SoHo" for developing dilapidated loft buildings and gentrifying this New York neighborhood with artists cooperatives known as the Fluxhouse Cooperatives during the late sixties. ^[7]

Maciunas converted buildings into live-work spaces for and envisioned the Fluxhouse Cooperatives as collective living environments composed of artists working in many mediums. With financial support from the J. M. Kaplan Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, Maciunas began buying several loft buildings from closing manufacturing companies in 1966. ^[8]

There was a lot of irony in holding on to the romantic ideal that your artistic education will lead you any step closer to achieving enlightenment, when in fact enlightenment had been cozily sitting within real estate all along.

But I digress.

The new romantic ideal might have instead been one of ditching subjectivity and becoming object. In the quest of making any sense out of the present, after the body and flow had been exhausted, and no funds were made available for gentrification, circling back to the land of stuff, transactions, value, why not become one too? A thing, I mean.

In her essay "A Thing Like You and Me", Hito Steyerl writes, "But as the struggle to become a subject became mired in its own contradictions, a different possibility emerged. How about siding with the object for a change? Why not affirm it? Why not be a thing? An object without a subject? A thing among other things?" So, as Steyerl suggests, instead of aiming for subjectivity, which is anyway to be subjected to ►

2 hours per week but make way more hours; next to that I work 20 hours unpaid for a stitching, and I have a mother to take care of. ■ I have loads of different jobs, mainly

another, instead of trying to get back, behind and before the image, to some imaging and originally subject, what if we could become objects, be things? What new possibilities might this produce in the exchange of materials, commodities, but also specifically in exchanges with art objects? ^[9]

The transition itself, from performance to objectivisation, was a simple one to achieve. All around, in plain sight, since the advent of the assembly line, plenty of people were already becoming objects, their range of movements constricted and vocabularies reduced to a set list of similar phrases, which amounted on any given day to no more than ten with variations depending on the field:

“Hi, how are you?”
“How may I help you?”
“Large? Small?”
“We have 4 options for that.”
Have you lost your dog? ^[10]
“Will there be sauce with that?”
“Would you like a bag?”
“Receipt?”
So you don’t speak [insert language]?
You know, you should always learn
the basics of your profession in your
new language. It’s a good place to start!
“Thank you!”
“Enjoy your meal!”

There was no fighting the assembly line dance.

As spiritual and sexual drives lay to the wayside, the highest peak for the self to reach was one of giving in to the ecstasy of serving, to the inner music of the repetitive, accelerating the clock and relying on skills which could be picked up within the timespan of a full-time workweek.

6AM.

All around her now there is a trade happening driven by much of the same acceleration, automation, recording, repackaging, double blink. The only thing about it is that it isn’t under the usual assumptions — time for money — but rather time for value and respect; for being considered as a knowledgeable operator within time, as wearing the correct outfit for the job, integrated into the flow of the day and life and being allowed to feel that you’ve earned your keep and by lunch-time not saying much more than “gulp” as your food makes its way down into your stomach.

But she was yet to become aware of it. ◀

[1] Alice Bolin, *Dead Girls: Essays on Surviving an American Obsession*, Harper Collins (2018)
[2] George Maciunas, Fluxus Manifesto (1963)
[3] Alice Bolin, *Dead Girls* (2018), on Rachel Kushner’s *The Flamethrowers* (2013)
[4] Excerpt from an interview with G. Maciunas by Larry Miller (1978), quoted in *Mr. Fluxus*, E. Williams and A. Noel, Thames and Hudson (1997), p. 114
[5] David Balzer, *Curationism. How Curating Took Over the World and Everything Else*, Coach House (2015)
[6] Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Maciunas (accessed January 2019)
[7] Christopher Gray, “Streetscapes: 80 Wooster Street; The Irascible ‘Father’ of SoHo”, *The New York Times* (March 15, 1992)
[8] Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Maciunas
[9] Linda Stupart, “Against Critical Distance: Chris Kraus and the Empathetic Exchange of Objects”, in *You Must Make Your Death Public*, ed. Mira Mattar, Mute Books (2015)
[10] Laurie Anderson, *The Language of the Future* (1984/2018)

▼ My parents divorced in 1996. I was around 6 years old when it happened and could not really figure out the implications it would have on me and my sister later on. I wasn't unlucky, my parents got along well and lived close to each other. Every Friday, the parent which we weren't staying at would come over and pick us up for a two hundred and eighty meter car ride, the distance of the nine bungalow houses separating my mother's house from my father's.

For some time, we were looked after by two single parents that had yet to learn how to deal with caring for their children on their own. My mother was a freelancer and working from home most of the time, which proved to be practical. My father had a stable job in a construction company: he had to work long hours and was barely at home. This difference was expressed in the ways in which I was brought up. At my mother's place, I would be raised at home, while at my father's place I was being taken care of by others in remuneration-based relationships. It was there that I experienced daycare, nannies, summer camps, cleaning help and pre-prepared frozen food among other things. At the same time, my father always seemed more generous, both in pecuniary terms as well as emotional ones, maybe as a way to palliate the lack of time he experienced and to reverse the feeling of guilt he might have experienced having us while never really 'seeing' us.

It has been around nine years since I moved out of my parents' homes. Eighteen at the time, I left my suburb to relocate to the city and share an apartment with a friend enrolled in my class. I quickly learned how to take care of myself and be efficient at it. A shallow income meant a diet precisely accounted for, with collective cooking sessions ending up in massive amounts of lentil-based meals. I also became acquainted with dealing with utility and insurance contracts, winter insulation, plumbing and pest infestation issues, and the daily chores related to our apartment maintenance.

In the book *The Outsourced Self* (2012) American sociologist Arlie Hochschild goes on a journey investigating individuals that ended up on soliciting paid services from 'professionals' to perform routine tasks and cater to their personal needs.^[1] The motivation behind these choices is not coming so much from physiological inability rather than a perceived lack of time as a result of changing relations towards paid and unpaid labour. ►

François Girard-Meunier (CANL) is interested in the performativity and politics of labour in the contemporary western post-Fordist context. He works mainly in the cultural field as a designer, web developer, writer and so on. Having recently graduated from the Critical Studies department of the Sandberg Institute, he is based in Amsterdam, where he runs the Office for Workspace Studies and self-publishes.

The following excerpt is combined from François's thesis "Time Management and the Self: Personal Practices in Today's Fragmented Experience of the World" (2017).

Is It Because You Make More Per Hour That I Have to Clean Your Dishes?
Thoughts on Management of Time and the Self

Hochschild's subjects can be described as upper middle-class people who've decided to prioritise the workplace as a source for a sense of belonging over the home with its unappealing and stressful domestic demands. This shift has consequences: it changes the dynamics of solidarity between the members of a family, as they embrace belief in their self-interested individuality over their sense of belonging in community or family. By extension, it influences expectations towards our surroundings, as duties and tasks that were previously performed in an economy of reciprocal gifting and caring transform into commodified, consumable, transaction-based relationships.

Hochschild's *Time Binds* (1997) faces cases similar to the ones analyzed in *The Outsourced Self*, although in different circumstances and with different results. The individuals she interviewed seem to hardly be at home, magnetically drawn to their workplace. This is being enforced in today's corporate context with domestic enticements such as provided gourmet meals, laundry services, high standard free coffee dispensers, areas for leisure where one can play games or spaces for napping while at work—the workplace ends up providing everything one needs for sustaining their life. On the other hand, she observes a paradoxical situation as these individuals often invest their income in pristine expensive household appliances they will never end up using because of being at work. She speculates if the accumulation of these barely used objects, which function “as totems to a ‘potential self’ or hypothetical self—a self we would be if only we had time”,^[2] is a gesture towards that desired leisurely lifestyle.

Moving between my own household and my parents', I feel a contrast in lifestyles expressed through differences in tidiness and quality. My apartment is crusty and, as a small and optimized unit, displays very prominent signs of its use. Their spacious houses are fragrantly over-cleaned and feature under-used Swiss or German quality stainless steel apparatuses as well as other pieces of upscale furniture. As our discussions in the previous years often revolved around them expressing a sense of 'lacking time' and trying to 'take ownership over their time', I began to be doubtful regarding how their choices actually resulted in the concretisation of their desires to 'reconnect'.

Last summer, I had an interesting conversation with my mother. I told her that I found it truly admirable that she managed to let my grandmother live with her since my grandfather died and their house had been sold. I confessed to her that I was unsure to what extent I would be able to reciprocate the gesture later on, both money and time-wise. She didn't seem bothered by my comment, telling me that she had enough put aside to cover for herself, as if she didn't expect anything from me, and arguing that 'mentalities' had changed. She implied that she didn't

want to see herself as a burden to my fast-paced life and an obstacle to my desires and personal priorities. The comment on changing mentalities probably referred to how previously communal relationships within the realm of private biological and personal matters have now become an affair of 'management of the self'. Individuals are being self-responsibilized for both their successes and misfortunes, and start to believe that life events are more often than not a 'due thing' that can be changed or managed through one's personal will. Individuals, considered as entrepreneurs of themselves, evolve in a regime of full private responsabilisation over their economic and biological state.^[3] *If life goes well, it's because of you; if it goes bad, it's always your fault.*

Back in Amsterdam, in the here and now of a twenty-something-year-old single freelancer within the cultural field, part-time employee in the service industry and a university student, I struggle to find time to sustain myself between my obligations, which accumulate because I still haven't learned to say 'no' to offers and opportunities. Cooking, a once or twice a week activity, is planned some days in advance in my schedule, somewhere between 'write paper', 'send pdf files layout Alina', 'email Zuzana! IMPORTANT can't miss another time', 'pick up UvA card (can report)', 'prepare slideshow handshakes' and '11h lunch shift restaurant (@Elandsgracht)'.

Writing, most of all, is an activity that barely fits attempts of rationalisation through scheduling. This is an issue I have been experimenting with throughout the period of writing this piece. In my calendar, every 'writing day' has been accounted for with the expectation of some results. *Monday December 4th: (all day) writing (frame intro/time management theory)*. A full day should bring between five hundred and one thousand words, although the quantity does not say much about the quality. *Tuesday December 5th: Be done with part 4 (!important)*. Writing days are either full days or half days and are juxtaposed to days where pecuniary part-time work, school seminars, and freelancing duties are scheduled to happen. This fragmentation of time brings in an added level of difficulty to focus on the task, as I feel the anxiety of spoiling my time and being unable to make something out of it. *Wednesday December 6th: read/edit paper (fix references)*. When I seem to have a writing block, I alternate, as a strategy, with other (usually) low attention household tasks that must be done regardless of the writing. I have learned to keep dirty dishes aside for this purpose.

I share an apartment with three other flatmates with similar living situations. One works part-time as a layout designer for a fashion magazine, while working on cultural projects during the ►

remainder of her time. Another is now quite successful at directing and producing video works for the music industry, which means he's barely at home, often working intensely on projects until four or five in the morning. The third flatmate works in a nightclub during weekends while being enrolled in a Master's degree and periodically helping the 'more successful' flatmate on his video projects. We share a specific relationship to time and money, with our lack of sufficient fixed incomes placing us in a certain state of precarity.^[4] This relationship works differently for each of us, and can be observed in the way in which we engage in the maintenance of our own bodies. Our ways of handling food intake, as an example, express different strategies towards similar considerations of time balance, culinary experience and physiological nutritional requirements. Although I do cook proper nutritious meals, they are most of the time prepared in large batches for the whole week to save time on the long run. My flatmates, however, tend to rely on soups and salads, recurrent food delivery services or, more recently, the use of soy-based powdered meal replacement beverages.

"In an attempt to become the most productive person on the planet, I gave up food and lived entirely off Soylent. Here's how it went."^[5] This article hook, by Josh Helton, summarizes the motivations and ideology behind the recent popularity of meal substitution products like Soylent. With sentences such as "when you're busy, it takes eating off your plate",^[6] the U.S. based crowd-funded nutrition brand launched in 2014 wishes to target the young entrepreneur constantly fighting against ever-lacking time. The powder assemblage, versioned through changes in its recipe in a fashion similar to software protocols, aims at maximizing optimal nutritional input, a feeling of plentiness after consumption, and flexibility and practicability for typical 'on-the-run' uses. Adopters of the product are motivated by cutting on their unproductive time lost in buying ingredients, preparing food and having to sit while eating 'complicated foods'. The gains, as another user puts it in a blog article about being on the Soy lent diet, are noticeable. "The real value is in all the time you save. I estimate it takes half an hour to eat by other means at least, including shopping, dishwashing, etc. That means I easily saved 45 hours this month."^[7] Eating proves to be a physical body limitation for the overscheduled mind that 'has to deliver'. This is a situation which meal substitutes seek to overcome, turning meals "into a one-step process" and making "things a lot less complicated".^[8] These sales arguments are behind the choice of going meal-less of the busiest of my three flatmates. He starts his day by waking up, taking a shower, mixing some meal substitute powder with water and getting on his bike. Once at his studio, he will likely stay there for twelve to fourteen hours with his shaker glass next to the

computer screen, so video editing and intake of nutrients can happen synchronously, in an unfragmented way. Finally, bodily needs stop impeding on 'work to be done'.

I'm late and when I wave, I lose the time I save.
My fuzzy ears and whiskers
Took me too much time to shave.
I run and then I hop, hop, hop,
I wish that I could fly.
There's danger if I dare to stop
and here's a reason why:
I'm over-due,
I'm in a rabbit stew.
Can't even say good-bye,
Hello, I'm late, I'm late, I'm late.^[9] ◀

[1] David Frayne, *The Refusal of Work*, Zed Books (2015), p.67
[2] N. H Wilson & B. J. Lande, *Feeling Capitalism: A Conversation with Arlie Hochschild*, Sage publications (2005), p. 275–288
[3] See Michel Foucault's entanglement of the concepts of 'technologies of the self' and 'responsibilisation' within the neoliberal regime ('governmentality' applied to the self, as 'self-regulating' bodies of the Homo oeconomicus). In Foucault's *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Lectures at the Collège de France, Chapter 11–12 (1978–1979)
[4] Although precarity does not necessarily always have to rhyme with poverty. Precarity relates to 'not knowing', to a state of uncertainty, therefore the inability to plan the future. See: Precarity (last modified on November 18th 2017), Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/precariety> (accessed December 2017)
[5] Josh Helton, "Soylent: What Happened When I Went 30 Days Without Food" (September 8, 2015), *The Hustle*, <https://thehustle.co/soylent-what-happened-when-i-went-30-days-without-food> (accessed December 2017)
[6] "Let us take a few things off your plate", *Soylent.com*, <https://www.soylent.com/> (accessed December 2017)
[7] Vilhelm Carlström, "I Ate Powdered Meal Replacement Every Meal For a Month – And It's The Best Thing That Ever Happened To Me" (July 13, 2017), *Business Insider*, <http://nordicbusinessinsider.com/i-ate-powdered-meal-replacement-every-meal-for-a-month---and-it-made-me-a-better-person-2016-7> (accessed December 2017)
[8] Ibid.
[9] Danny Kaye, *I'm Late*, in: *Danny Kaye For Children* (1958). From the Walt Disney film *Alice in Wonderland* (1951)

Is It Because You Make More Per Hour That I Have to Clean Your Dishes?
Thoughts on Management of Time and the Self



Theresa Büchner, *Demolding a Daughter* (video stills)

▼ Iris does not live here. This room and everything that surrounds it is strange to her. On the boat that brought her here, she had had to think about the journey she had made with her daughter. Back then, the city seemed much smaller to her. Now she does not know where to start. At least the room is compact; a little too small, even. There is a chair and a table, a bed, a mirror and a shelf for luggage. Iris is sitting on the bed. She turns the TV on and leans back. There is a programme on about gems. Two women enthusiastically praise the qualities of a green jewel. It seems to be selling well. Only ten of them are left. Now only eight.

When she wakes up, it is already dark outside. Two men are discussing about knives on TV. Iris needs a moment before she realizes where she is. She stands up, closes the curtains, turns the TV off. It is very dark in the room now. Only her phone is glowing brightly. In the mirror, she can see her face illuminated by the display. She looks beautiful in this light, she thinks; not as many wrinkles.

When I see pictures of my mother when she was young, I see a woman who doesn't need me. She is not thinking about me, not thinking that I will become the most important person in her life, as she says. Back then it was her art first, later it was me. I would have liked to have met her back then. But maybe not. She seems so independent. Would she have liked me?

Iris holds the phone close to her ear. *This is Iris. I am in Amsterdam. You know exactly what I am doing here. She is my daughter, I must find her!* There is no help to be expected, Iris thinks.

The darkness does not help her to orientate. She switches on the table lamp and the light in the bathroom. The room measures three steps from one side to the other. Now she is standing in front of the curtains. The curtains form stiff, regular folds reaching from the ceiling to the ground. Its folds curve inwards on her side and outside on the other end, Iris thinks. With one foot she touches the fabric. A waving movement goes from fold to fold.

My mother dedicated her life to her work before giving birth to me. My grandmother could not understand why her daughter had no children. *These sculptures, Iris, they really are your children*, she always said. When I was born, I became my mother's most important project. She really liked to tell me that.

The folds of the curtain are not moving anymore. They are obtrusive. Iris turns her head away. *What are you doing here? I am looking for my daughter. You are talking to yourself. You didn't even call anyone. But I have the telephone in my hand!* The display is black, it does not say anything anymore. She tosses her phone on the bed and goes to the bathroom. Square tiles everywhere. A little card wishes a pleasant stay. She washes her face and looks at herself in the mirror. The lighting of the bathroom is remorseless, dazzling. *Shame on you!*

The room I live in is eight square metres. I had a rather small room growing up. My mother had a huge room as a child and later an entire house with a garden all to herself. This allowed her to make metal sculptures three to five metres high. I like writing. It allows me to create immaterial spaces of all sizes. While I am writing this, I am sitting on my bed. It takes up four of the eight square metres.



I had to give up the big house. The storage costs for my sculptures are enormous. And you, my dear daughter, I cannot reach. But we have to get together again. It all depends on that. I know how much you need me. You cried when I told you I wouldn't mind if you left. From time to time I just had to hear your weeping to know that we need each other.

Iris goes back to the room. She closes the curtains behind her. Its folds curve inwards on her side and outside on the other end. ◀

Theresa Büchner is a filmmaker and photographer. She graduated in 2018 from the Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam. The following short story is a pretext for and accompanied by stills from the short film *Demolding a Daughter*, Theresa's graduation work (2018).



Mirko Podkowik, *Work In Progress* (video stills)

▼ *My left palm, pressed flat against the glass. The intricate valleys and hills of my hand are flattened into blobs of texture. The flesh turns lighter in these spots as blood is pushed away by the weight of my upper body. With my right hand hovering in mid-air, fingertip millimeters away from the glass, I rehearse the forthcoming action in my mind. Applying even the slightest pressure on the screen will cause the electromagnetic field to distort. I place my finger on the lower third of the screen, flicking it upwards. My finger, now back in its waiting position, lurks in the air. Underneath, the scrolling list comes to a halt. I nudge it again, watching the list move and then decelerate. The next time I reach the end of the page, the bottom edge momentarily follows the momentum upwards, but bounces back to its position immediately, attached by an imaginary rubber band.*

When the Lumière brothers filmed one of the first movies in 1895, they chose to picture the workers leaving their factory in Lyon-Montplaisir for photographic goods. They capture the exact moment of transformation of the worker back to an individual person. Inside the factory, they form a workforce, a synchronized group of people stripped of individuality. When they pass the gate, this synchronization vanishes, as the group disperses out of the frame,^[2] most likely returning to their domestic spheres.

The Home used to be a space that involved production as much as any other domestic activities. However, with the advancement of organised work and the assembly line, production became increasingly removed from the domestic sphere. Workers started to use their wages to buy the mass-produced goods they helped to manufacture. For Jeremy Rifkin, the beginning of industrial capitalism was characterized by this transformation of the Home “from a place of production to a place of consumption.”^[3] This distinction between spaces of production and consumption has remained a constant characteristic of the era of industrialisation, peaking perhaps in the American suburbs of the 1950s and 1960s.^[4]

As Rifkin writes:

“The world, it seemed, was suddenly awash in physical capital and consumer goods, and all of society was swimming in a sea of private property. The push into the suburbs and the opening up of highway culture [...] and the near fetish of consumption that accompanied it, was the high-water mark of the era of property ►

Mirko Podkowik (1990, DE) is an artist and designer based in Amsterdam and Düsseldorf. His re-search is focused on the relationship of the advancement of technology and manual labour. In his practice, he utilises digital video to create seductive imagery in immersive spatial installations. Podkowik has a back-ground in design and artistic direction and he recently graduated from the Sandberg Institute department. Studio for Immediate Spaces. He is part of the spatial practice collective Fabulous Future in Amsterdam, as well as the co-founder of the design research group denken3000.

The following text is combined of excerpts from Mirko’s thesis “Work In Progress” (2018). It is accompanied by imagery from his graduation work *TBD*, a film that plays with the meaning and materiality of work in the contemporary world, showing “scenes that appear inevitably important to the protagonist and the viewer alike, but are really just hollow, meaningless actions. Work, only existent to be executed.”^[1]

Work In Progress

relationships, a time when to have, hold, and exclude was the *raison d'être* of human existence in the non-Communist world.”^[5]

The industrial world was preoccupied with hardware. To own hardware meant to have power. Nowadays, it just slows you down. Software is detached from the physical world. It is weightless. It can change in an instant, can be manipulated even after it was sold to you. Nobody really notices when Instagram ships a new version of their app. Suddenly, you can do something new, but you won't notice it until you see your friends use the Superzoom feature. Selling seems like an outdated concept—the old roles of production and consumption have been thrown out of the window and are plummeting towards the ground. In the case of Instagram, what exactly is the product? Who is producing? Is it the developers writing the code, or the users uploading their content?

My own world feels weightless—or at least very light. My new computer weighs about 1800g. If I add the 130g of my phone, throw in my headphones, maybe a charger, it won't be much more than 2kg. This is the mass I need to produce work, to earn money, to sustain my social life.

“The new era [...] is more immaterial and cerebral. It is a world of platonic forms; of ideas, images, and archetypes; of concepts and fictions. If the people of the industrial era were preoccupied with expropriating and reshaping matter, the first generation of the Age of Access is far more interested in manipulating mind. [...] The Age of Access is likely to be far more exploitative. Controlling ideas, in today's world, is more powerful than controlling space and physical capital.”^[6]

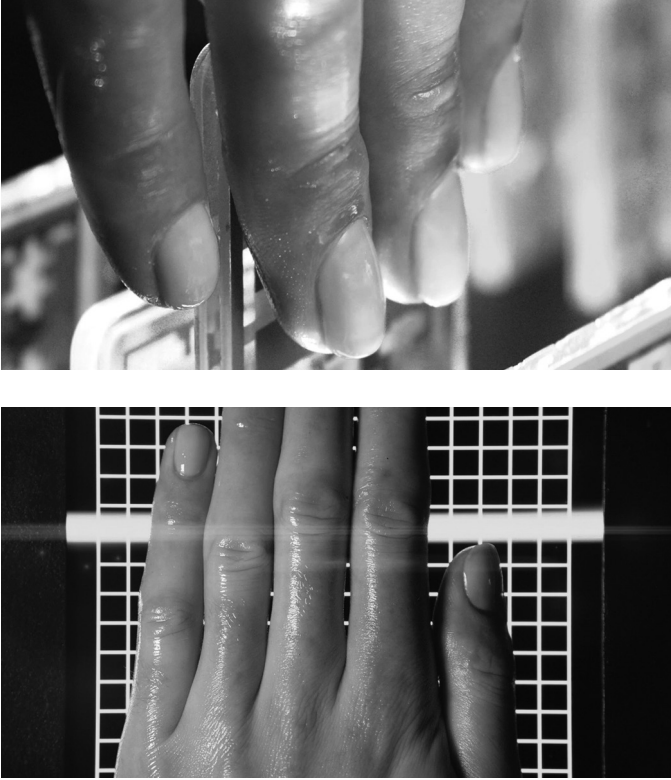
When Rifkin speaks about ‘The Age of Access’, he is describing the dwindling significance of ownership over physical goods as a key element in the economic model of our computerized time. Where goods used to be traded in the marketplace, he now sees a complex network that has infiltrated our everyday life: Netflix, Uber, Airbnb, etc. An extensive CD collection seems anachronistic, when access to most of the music ever released can be rented for a small fee per month.

Stealing movies or TV shows feels a little bit outdated now, but I still prefer to have a rock solid, high quality, beautiful .mkv file, than to navigate through porn ads and pop-up advertising to find a streaming source—only to be suddenly thrown out of an episode, because the video-streaming site stopped working for some reason. I have a pretty good workflow for stealing the content I desire, so most annoying things are automated and I don't have to use legally risky Torrent files. The only piece that cannot really be automated during the download process is the CAPTCHA. These used to be small images of warped and transformed text which a bot could not read and solve, to make sure it was a human who accessed whatever they were guarding. Now it is mostly just a little box that asks you to confirm “I'm not a robot”. I just click on the checkbox and most of the time, that's it. The technology behind it tracks various things, such as my browser, the cursor movement etc, to estimate if I am in fact a human—or

at least showing enough fitting properties to be determined as a human. If this step fails for some reason, I have to work a little bit harder to prove my humanness. A grid of pictures is presented, within which I am asked to identify images that feature a certain type of object. By solving this small task, I am put to work. Human attention is a precious commodity, and it would be a tragedy to let it go to waste. The objects are bridges, street signs, store fronts, motorcycles, vehicles; things found on streets. The provider for this service is reCAPTCHA, a company bought by Google in 2009. The work, attention and data I am providing is used in different Google products: it is pretty obvious that I am adding to the ever-growing dataset that feeds Google Maps and teaches Google's autonomous cars to drive. The expanding dataset is shaping the algorithm that is learning to solve the same puzzle in other contexts: analysing camera feeds from cars, satellite imagery etc.

Maurizio Lazzarato defines immaterial labour “as the labor that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity”, in contrast to material or manual labour, that involves fewer “procedures that could be defined as ‘intellectual’.”^[7] Immaterial labour is of course only one part in the global supply chain. Lazzarato describes its content as “a series of activities that are not normally recognized as ‘work’—in other words, the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion.”^[8] Previously, the industrialized worker was nothing but an anonymous muscle in the assembly line. Now, this role has dramatically changed with the computerisation of most industries. The worker has had to become an “active subject”,^[9] to coordinate “various functions of production, instead of being subjected to it as simple command.”^[10] He has to be capable in tasks of “management, communication, and creativity”,^[11] and to involve his own personality and subjectivity in the production of value: “the worker's soul [has] to become part of the factory.”^[12] “First and foremost, we have here a discourse that is authoritarian: one has to express oneself, one has to speak, communicate, cooperate [...]”,^[13] thus the relationship with work becomes even more exploitative “than the earlier rigid division between mental and manual labor (ideas and execution).”^[14]

My father would sometimes tell stories about his work in a butter cellar, before the pressure of having kids forced him to take on a more proper job. I always imagined him alone in the cellar, throwing large chunks of butter into a big machine, which were maybe then processed into smaller batches, wrapped into individual pieces, ready to be sold. My mother would just remember the smell of butter which was impossible to get rid of. While being immersed in the ►



10, I'm poor, but I love my work, (23) ■ No, I'm poor and I'm worried, (13) ■ No, but I have family funds/wealth at my disposal, (12) ■ Yes, (12) ■ No, my partner supports me, (6)

physical work, my father would tell us about the political work he did in his mind, formulating anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist or environmental messages to distribute as leaflets at the next demonstration. The manual labour was just a way to keep the body in motion, but the real, political work was happening inside his head.

The merging of the working self and the ‘private’ self follows the general dynamic of neoliberalism, in which “the market reaches into areas that were formerly considered ‘private’ and sheltered from its evaluative logic.”^[15] Now that factors such as the body, its health, its appearance, social relationships and friendships are exposed to the capitalist idea of economic optimization; ‘life’ and ‘work’ become indistinguishable.^[16] Technology further enables this folding of once separate roles into each other, mediating out relationships and creative endeavours. The transition “from a social paradigm of ‘labor’ to one of ‘technical activity’”^[17] forces us to reevaluate our lives: “from being oriented by substance to being oriented by relations.”^[18]

“The main reason why people today are employed, in my opinion, is no longer because what they produce is of great benefit to the whole society. The benefit lies rather in lots of people being employed. [...] What we might earlier have called production, in many respects today bears the characteristics of consumption. One consumes one’s job.”^[19]

Being stuck in immateriality, in the weightlessness, leaves me longing for physicality, towards a compartmentalized self, in balance... How to go on strike without a workplace?^[20]

The worker could only become an ‘active subject’ because the technology we needed to work with had infiltrated the domestic life. Once, most technology used in professional contexts was highly specialized; now, we use general-purpose ‘consumer’-technology.

“[The iPhone X is] the most thought out, carefully designed product in the history of the world. I don’t think there is any single artifact, that has ever been made, that has as much thought and intent that has gone into it.”^[21]

Looking at my devices, I wonder about my relationship with them, about the wild complex network of economic, emotional and social relationships they entail. I bring them everywhere, take them out, put them away and take them out again, notifications cutting my day into little pieces. Sharing pictures with my friends on a social network or in a private chat is as much a social action as it is a monetary one. Value is created for my social group as well as for the platform I am using. Promoting ourselves exposes our mode of engagement with the world now—polishing our self-image for social and economic relationships at the same time, surrendering to the capitalist idea of profit and maximizing value.

We are pushed and conditioned into these types of behaviors by the way the systems are designed. I imagine a team at Google, composed of mostly white men in their 20s and 30s, making decisions for billions of users, incentivised by metrics they can report back to a superior—watch time, click-throughs, retention rate, aiming to boost these numbers by using

manipulative psychological techniques that turn our devices into addictive stimuli, designed to hijack as much of our attention as possible. I recognize the problematic top-down approach familiar from modernist architecture, that tends to disregard the complexities of the smaller, human scale. A typical Silicon Valley business approach always includes scalability, rolling out a product to as many people as fast as possible. The question is always “what else is possible?” rather than “is it a good idea?”

When scenarios for post-work futures are discussed, i.e. a universal basic income, it is often ignored that they are essentially about freeing up more human time and attention ready to be consumed by a capitalist entity. It is easy to think of new computer technology as an intruder into our lives, as a destroyer of human relationships and solely as a multiplier of capitalism. This image is merely the outcome of companies drooling over new possibilities to make profit while deceiving themselves and the public with claims that their products are there to enrich the lives of their users. How could technology realise its potential to aid a change towards a human-machine relationship that respects and reflects the complexity of an individual? ◀

[1] Description of the artwork by the author
[2] Harun Farocki, *Workers Leaving the Factory*, in S. Gaensheimer, Nicolaus Schafhausen (ed.), transl. L.Faasch-Ibrahim, Berlin, Verlag Vorwerk 8, New York, Lukas & Sternberg (2001), p. 234–236
[3] Jeremy Rifkin, *The Age of Access: The New Culture of Hypercapitalism, Where All of Life Is a Paid-for Experience*, New York, Tarcher/Putnam (2000), p. 81
[4] Ibid., p. 82
[5] Ibid., p. 82
[6] Ibid., p. 54–55
[7] Maurizio Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labour”, *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press (1996), p. 133
[8] Ibid., p. 132
[9] Ibid., p. 134
[10] Ibid., p. 134
[11] Ibid., p. 134
[12] Ibid., p. 133
[13] Ibid., p. 134
[14] Ibid., p. 135
[15] Isabelle Graw, “When Life Goes to Work: Andy Warhol”, *October 132*, Cambridge, MIT Press Journals (2010)
[16] Ibid.
[17] Jaehee Kim, “Posthuman Labor”, *e-flux architecture* (March 15, 2018), www.e-flux.com/architecture/superhumanity/179232/posthuman-labor/ (accessed March 2018)
[18] Ibid.
[19] Tino Sehgal, “Sehgal: Ich suche eine andere Art der Produktion”, transl. P. Hurd, *Handesblatt* (June 6, 2005)
[20] Novara Media, “Immaterial Labour Isn’t Working”, podcast (2013), novara-media.com/2013/04/16/immaterial-labour-isnt-working (accessed March 2018)
[21] Kyle Wiens, founder of iFixit, on the iPhone X. “How iFixit Became the World’s Best iPhone-Teardown Team”, online video, youtu.be/tx-9LkVldz0 (accessed March 2018)

Fucking Health

▼ I want to change my health insurance because it's too expensive. I find a company that insures expats for a quarter of my current premium. I immediately begin my application online for the expat insurance and terminate my current insurance plan.

I am sitting at my parents' dining table amongst scattered remnants of the Christmas dinner from a couple of nights prior. My mum and I are trying to make sense of the many paragraphs and questionnaires to ensure that I will get the necessary cover from the new insurance plan. Pages and pages of application that need to be double-checked to make sure I remember everything.

Across from me, my brother is on his laptop. He is antsy and plays loud rap music from his speakers in the large room that makes up the entire open kitchen and dining area.

It's minus 37 degrees outside and we haven't left the house since before Christmas.

We are all antsy.

I ask him to turn the volume down, maybe he could even put on headphones. I ask him calmly. I really need to concentrate, it won't be much longer.

He tells me to calm the fuck down. *It's just fucking health insurance.*

I go upstairs to my dad's office-turned-guest room and finish the application. I am crying. I am crying over my brother's insensitivity, I am crying over my inability to concentrate after 3pm and I am crying about health insurance applications.

Nothing is *just fucking health insurance* when you're sick.

Two days later I receive an email from the expat insurance company. They are happy to inform me that they will insure me for the coming year, excluding all costs related to or caused by my narcolepsy.

I wish health insurance was *just fucking health insurance*.

The Wendie Chronicles

#1

I see a counsellor every two weeks, her name is Wendie. ►

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at I could do just a little bit of extra work next to the things that I want to work on myself. ■ I think I will be poor for a while longer. Two things might have to change: either I should skew

During our first meeting she tells me I probably have some degree of PTSD.

I thought PTSD was something you would get if you'd been to war.

Nore, a man in his forties, who I met at an art foundation in the middle of nowhere in Denmark in 2012, served in the Balkan war.

Nore writes on his Facebook that him and Bono are plotting an excursion to the moon and that he has the eye of Ramses.

Nore has PTSD.

I haven't been to war.

But I've battled depression, anxiety, narcolepsy, crippled body image, low self esteem, obesity—

Still. I don't have PTSD like Nore.

Wendie makes me unhappy.

#2 To Wendie, PTSD is a positive diagnosis for me.

The PTSD will make sure my first 8 appointments are covered by my insurance, she says with what seems to be a genuine smile.

I don't know if I should celebrate PTSD or mourn the fleeing stability of my mental health.

I cry a lot in front of Wendie.

It feels uncomfortable.

My health insurance pays for her to look at me cry.

I pay for the rest:
stress
anxiety
depression
low self-esteem
insomnia
narcolepsy
abuse
self-abuse
health insurance

#3 Wendie tells me of her plan;

I need to rewrite my nightmares—train my brain not to let nightmares unfold but give myself an out before it goes wrong.

I need to 'inception' myself.

She asks me if I can come up with a song or maybe a figure, which when presented in my nightmares will be able to divert it, thereby ultimately freeing me of nightly terrors.

I don't know what that would be.

After a long time, I tell her maybe I could use Rolling Stones' "Wild Horses"—

She says no, it's too specific.

Wendie proposes I turn myself into a phoenix.

She asks me to imagine the sensation of flying away from my problems.

I tell her it's cold and silent above the clouds.

#4 Everyone is talking about Berlin.

Either they have been or they want to go.

I could move to Berlin, I think.

My brother wants to move there, his best friend already lives there with his girlfriend.

A lot of square meters for little money. Neukölln and art life.

Two friends of mine tell me about their ideas of getting a group of friends together.

And then we get a place a bit outside the city. We build it ourselves, make it our own.

We each get our separate living space, but we share our collective existence.

"We just save up for a couple of years, and then we can do it together!"

My friend is excited, and I am excited too! I smile at her.

Genuinely.

Then my smile stiffens.

I can't save up.

I can't even pay my current rent without help from government, parents, good will. ►

I juggle whether to explain this to my friends.
I linger in my stiff facial expression.

Does it make sense to also mention that I need
a substantial (and free or at least dirt cheap) health
care plan?

I say the stuff about not being able to save up.
Or really pay a lot of rent.

I laugh a little. “Haha, sure if only I could save up.
Or have a full time job to just sustain my basic
financial needs—haha”—

My laughter isn’t nervous. It’s more that kind of
laughter that tries to sweeten impending doom.

You can’t polish a turd.

I am the turd.

We agree that the dream is still possible.
Shared living, shared expenses. I can pay in peaches
and good advice. Someone else will pay in cash and
never wash the dishes.

We pretend.

My friends leave, I smile to myself.

No one accepts peaches for rent.

Can I pay the deposit in self-deprecating poetry?

#5 I don’t remember the exact circumstances of the
conversation, but someone once tried to describe
what a healthy stomach feels like:

It feels like it’s not even there, they said.

Being aware of your stomach usually stems from
your belly making odd sounds, hurting, being very
full or not full enough.

When you do not notice your belly, then your belly
is happy and healthy.

Not paying attention to your gut is a sign it doesn’t
need attention.

No gut feeling is a sign of healthy tummy.

Either that, or you’re busy tending to

broken dreams of stable futures.
medical bills.
health insurance policies.

ability/inability to work.
ability/inability to carry children in the non-attention-
begging belly.
ability/inability to take out a loan because of your
ability/inability to work.
ability/inability to find a partner based on your
ability/inability to work, ability/inability to carry
children, ability/inability to take out a loan,
ability/inability to be a stable human being,
ability/inability to have high hopes of ‘till death do us
part’ being far from the present moment,
ability/inability to allow oneself to become the
burden of someone else other than perhaps your
parents when you know of your ability/inability to
help carry them as they carry you.

I feel sick.

Sick to my stomach. ◀

n order to make the second option work, we should ALL demand it. ■ I think it's not a bad thing to have a "money job", as long as it's something you also like doing—in my case,



Two of the mothers of students of Public School of Early Childhood Education in Seville who organised the collective construction of a dining room for their children.
Photo: Paco Fuentes, El País.

[Chorus]

*This is not a love song (This is not a love song)
This is not a love song (This is not a love song)
This is not a love song (This is not a love song)
Oh no*

[Verse 2]

*I'm adaptable and I like my new role
I'm getting better and better, I have a new goal
I'm changing my ways where money applies
This is not a love song*

▼ This is the chorus and one of the verses of the song *This Is Not a Love Song* from the group Public Image Limited released in 1983. It is well known how the song was a response of the leading singer of the group, John Lydon, who came up with the title and the lyrics of it, to a demand from their record label to write a nice, marketable love song. In the 1980s, it was quite common for record labels to push the bands to ‘manufacture’ love songs. At that time, romantic power ballads were often a band’s most commercially successful hits. Think about examples such as The Bangle’s *Eternal Flame* (1988), The Style Council’s *You Are the Best Thing* (1984), or soloist Jennifer Rush’s single *The Power of Love* (1985), who, with this song, became the first ever million seller by a female singer in Britain. Lydon’s response to write a commercial love song, however, was writing a NOT-love song instead. Ironically enough, and contrary to his ‘anti-capitalist’ bad boy form of engagement, the song became the biggest hit for Public Image Ltd., peaking at #5 in the UK and #3 in Ireland. Lydon was surprised the song was so popular, as he felt it was the most spiteful song he’d ever written.

One could say, henceforth, that Public Image Ltd.’s form of criticism and engagement towards the music industry was immediately swallowed by the logic of the market itself. It is important to bear in mind that this form of critical engagement, a sort of “fuck you” from within, is a continuation of the 70s punk and culture. Nonetheless, it is a strategy ►

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“The following text is an adaptation of my short intervention as an Expert Witness during the tribunal *This Is (Not) a Love Song* that took place on October 11th 2018 at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam. The ideas and thoughts presented that day, as well as the words that have been written here, would not have been possible without the invitation of Elise van Mourik, Rosa te Velde and Tiphanie Blanc, who initiated and organized the tribunal in the first place. In this text, I have tried to include some of the discussions and voices that were heard that day, which, thanks to PUB Radio and Journal, can extend now to reflections and practices still to be discovered in common. Again, none of the words that are written below would have been conceivable without all of you.”

that, as Dylan Clark brilliantly discusses in his text “The Death and life of Punk, the Last Subculture”, “The image of rebellion has become one of the most dominant narratives of the corporate capitalist landscape: the ‘bad boy’ has been reconfigured as a prototypical consumer. And so it was a new culture in the 1970s, the punk subculture, which emerged to fight even the normalization of subculture itself, with brilliant new forms of social critique and style. But even punk was caught, caged, and placed in the subcultural zoo, on display for all to see.”^[1]

What this story suggests to me is how forms of engagement may differ or change depending on the context and time in which they might occur or the intention with which the specific form of engagement is conceived. In other words, different forms of engagement, both critical or supportive, may differ depending on the context in which they develop.

But what do I really imply when I use the term ‘engagement’? On an etymological level, engagement refers to ‘a form to participate’ or ‘to become involved’ in something or with someone. Now, how (or in which form) do we become involved in something? When and with whom do we become engaged? Put another way, how do I (we) become engaged with something or with someone? And, more importantly, what are the effects of such a form of engagement?

In the case of the song *This Is Not a Love Song* from Public Image Ltd., for example, the effects of such a concrete form of engagement resulted, paradoxically, in a complete re-assimilation of the song by the music industry and the market itself. The NOT-love song became a big success in the golden era of love songs.

Contemporary forms of engagement with the cultural sector have nowadays quite identifiable effects. We have been hearing quite often these days how artists and other different agents involved in the cultural sector are suffering an insecure way of life. Instability increases states of anxiety, and, as British writer, critic and cultural theorist Mark Fisher already observed,^[2] also raises the alarming growth of cases of depression and suicide.

One representative image of such a contemporary form of engagement is well exemplified with the picture on the turn of the next page. In it, there is a girl replying to emails on her computer while lying on the cheapest IKEA bed frame, probably combined with a second-hand mattress, in the smallest, darkest room she has ever lived in. I am sure a lot of us can identify with her, having to be available at any time, any day of the week, living and working in a place that is far from what we imagined. And here is the contradiction—even though we are working basically 24/7, it is still not enough to pay for what we have been taught should be a cool way of life in the ‘creative city’.^[3]

Nowadays, we’re always bombarded with claims about the huge benefits of becoming

a ‘cultural entrepreneur’. Interested to try if such claims could really improve my own precarious situation, I Googled: “How can I become a successful entrepreneur?” The answers I got were quite shocking. The first result I got was the website *www.entrepreneur.com*, on which a blogger called Jayson DeMers talked about the ‘7 Risks Every Entrepreneur Must Take’. He literally wrote:

“Risk-taking is almost synonymous with entrepreneurship. To start and support your own business, you will have to put your career, personal finances and even your *mental health at stake*.”^[4]

How is it possible that we’ve got to the point where it is normal that our mental health is at stake? Is this really our desired form of engagement with our labour, and further, with our life or with each other? If your answer is NO, as obviously it is mine, *how can we come up with other forms of engagement?*

To reflect on this complicated and urgent question, I would like to first shortly trace the differences between the terms ‘precariousness’, ‘precarity’ and ‘precarisation’. By doing so, we can perhaps change the discussion from what precarity is in relation to wage labour to what precarity produces in our own bodies and minds. My proposal is, therefore, to start thinking about forms of engagement from another position, which includes an ontological (the study of the being) and political condition.

Feminist philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler unfolds in her book *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* the precarious character of lives specifically lost in war. For Butler, our common human condition is actually our equal subjection to injury or death. In her own words,

“To say that a life is injurable, for instance, or that it can be lost, destroyed, or systematically neglected to the point of death, is to underscore not only the finitude of a life (that death is certain) but also its precariousness (that life requires various social and economic conditions to be met in order to be sustained as a life). Precariousness implies living socially, that is, the fact that one’s life is always in some sense in the hands of the other.”^[5]

Although our *precariousness*, that is our vulnerability towards the world that surrounds us, is a common condition, some humans are more exposed than others to such precariousness due to gender, class, race or other axes of oppression. Thereafter, Butler refers to *precarity* to untangle how some bodies are more protected or exposed to precarious conditions than others. While ‘precariousness’ refers to an ontological condition, ‘precarity’ indicates a political dimension. The third term, *precarisation*, furthermore, refers in this text to uncertain or difficult conditions, and is the term I will be focusing on.

Discourses around the precarisation of working conditions have been gaining public awareness globally since the financial crisis in 2008. It has been less popular, however, to talk about the precarisation of, for example, Social Reproduction or ►

the precarisation of subjectivity — I’m referring here to the current crises of values, beliefs and identity. For that very reason, I would like to concentrate specifically on the precarisation of Social Reproduction, or in other words, uncertain forms of reproduction. Barbara Laslett and Johanna Brenner, Marxist feminist proponents of Social Reproduction Theory initiated around the late 1970s, refer to Social Reproduction as “the activities and attitudes, behaviours and emotions, responsibilities and relationships directly involved in the maintenance of life on a daily basis.”^[6]

I use this quote to draw attention to how the use of the term Social Reproduction in this text refers not just to *immediate* means of subsistence, such as food or water, but also *infrastructural* means, such as housing, education or health care, and *affective* means, such as care or love.

Under neoliberalism since the 1980s, the market has been expanding not just by enclosing (privatising) immediate and infrastructural means of subsistence, but also, as Nancy Fraser rightly asserts in her article “Contradictions of Capital and Care”,^[7] what I have signalled above as affective means of subsistence. The result is that we become more and more dependent on the market, which creates forms of exploitation caused by a total reliance on the market system. How can we reverse such dependency? Throughout history, collectivisation and solidarity movements have effectively functioned as forms of struggle on many occasions. However, our current context is quite unique and different from, for example, the reality that Karl Marx exposed in *Capital* (1867) of the proletariat of yesteryear. Since the beginning of the 2000s, the concept of the Commons has been gaining popularity as a possible form of engagement capable of struggling against forms of privatisation and enclosure.

The Commons is a notion that is part of a movement of rethinking how we live in relation to each other and the environment. In a sense, one could say that by practicing the Commons, it is possible to experience different forms of engagement with environmental resources, but also with cultural products or knowledges as well as urban spaces. In Commons theory, the *Commons* refers to both material resources such as water or air, but also immaterial resources such as codes, knowledges or beliefs. The *Commoners* are the people who share those resources; and *Commoning* is the social process within the practices of both production and reproduction of the Commons.

In my home country Spain, this movement changed the course of history in terms of collective revolutionary forms: I’m talking about the 15M and the Indignados movement initiated in May 2011. During the occupations of public city squares, this anti-austerity movement allowed people to experiment with structures of collective engagement, organisation and decision-making. During the occu-

pation of Plaça Catalunya in Barcelona, for example, different committees were set up to work on specific topics and areas. At the end of the day, all the information and discussions within each committee were shared in a collective assembly or plenary. Some of these meetings focused on political or strategic decision-making, others were dedicated to rethink forms of education, culture or art, while still others ensured the sustenance and sustainability of the collective by cooking, cleaning or caring for each other. In a sense, one of the most important challenges for the 15M and the Indignados movement was to rethink and conceive a social organisation that was capable to provide all immediate, infrastructural and affective means of subsistence for everyone equally.

The cultural sector was highly affected by the 15M movement in Spain, as more and more artists started to collectivise their activities, creating communal studios and shared exhibition spaces, thereby cutting costs at the end of the day. In some cases, such networks expanded to other areas of life, creating more complex systems of solidarity that now include urban gardens, collective parenting, alternative health insurance etc. One hugely important phenomenon was also that artists got much more involved in collaborating with and including voices that have been historically silenced — people who, in Butler’s sense, are emblematic figures of precarity: care workers, sex workers, undocumented migrants, refugees or the disabled population, among many others.

One really interesting collective that initiated their activities around that time is Recetas Urbanas—an architecture collective that aims to re-conquer and re-appropriate public space for collective use and needs. By reclaiming the potential of self-building, which is actually illegal in Spain, and creating a system of recycling material that allows re-building with minimal resources, Recetas Urbanas’ self-constructions are not just a sustainable architectural form but also a source of collective empowerment and social solidarity.

A good example of their work is their project ‘Aula de Convivencia’ (2015), which translated into English would be something like ‘Cohabitation Classroom’. The project came to life as part of a struggle of a small group of mothers from the Public School of Early Childhood Education of Montequinto and the School Europa in Dos Hermanas (Seville), who wanted to initiate the construction of a dining room for the school. For eight years, the school didn’t have one, and kids were forced to use the library space for eating lunch. However, in order for the library to be used as a dining room, all books had to be kept in boxes. Faced with such a precarious situation, the mothers shared their concerns between each other, teamed up with the school administration and ►



demanded the construction of a dining room from the municipal public administration. The municipality rejected the demand, claiming that building a proper regulated facility couldn't be afforded. The group of mothers united and started to search for their own solutions. One of those was to contact Recetas Urbanas to help them build the dining room illegally and independently with recycled material donated from other projects and parts of Spain. By doing so, they could minimise costs, create a common awareness of the problem and above all of the community's own ability to be part of the solution. In this way, 'Aula de Convivencia' became not only a means to achieve the construction of a necessary facility but also as a tool to teach students about fundamental principles such as the strength of teamwork or the importance of essential public values to lay the foundations for committed future citizenships.

The project in fact ended up in a trial because of its initial illegal nature. Thanks to the operational, juridical and affective support of Recetas Urbanas and all the volunteers and participants, the mothers of the school won the trial. In the end, they got an official license and even managed to change some of the clauses of the license itself. For the first time in Spain, a building licence included prescriptions for participatory execution of the works and recycling of all building materials.^[8]

In my opinion, this case can function as an example of an alternative form of engagement, of a collective network for struggle against precarisation of Social Reproduction, and an illustration of how sustainability relates here not to constant innovation, individualism or competition, but rather to circuits of interdependency, affection and solidarity. Even more, and differing from Public Image Ltd.'s *This is Not a Love Song*, the mothers of the school in Dos Hermanas successfully engaged with the problem from an illegal position to actually affect, in the end, the legal structure.

To conclude, I would like to add that through my own research and activist practice, and especially through co-writing different texts with cultural sociologist Pascal Gielen, we have identified how a possible platform of resistance against precarisation could be constructed in three different stages. We have referred to the first stage as *Articulation*, in which the current economic and political system is criticised and alternatives are formulated. In the case of the aforementioned dining room, the Articulation starts when the mothers decide to talk to each other and find that they share a common struggle. The second, *Composition*, refers to the stage of collective formation, moving from a representative plane of discussion to the act of collectivising. In the case exposed above, this stage starts when the mothers contact Recetas Urbanas and take the decision to

start building the dining room collectively with their own means. Last but not least, the third stage is *Commoning*: the practice of a social process capable of addressing other forms of production, including Social Reproduction—proposing other forms of behaviour that consider the importance of emotions, responsibilities and relationships directly involved in the maintenance of life. As the example shows, such forms of engagement can generate structural effects and debunk aspects of the current market/state system, and address contemporary states of precarisation in a structural manner. ◀

- [1] Dylan Clark, "The Death and Life of Punk, the Last Subculture", p. 231, in David Muggleton & Rupert Weinzierl (eds.), *The Post-Subcultures Reader*, Oxford: Berg (2003)
- [2] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is there No Alternative?*, Winchester, UK: Zero Books (2009)
- [3] David Yencken, "The Creative City". *Meanjin* Vol. 47, No. 4 (Summer 1988), p. 597–608
- [4] Jason DeMers, "7 Risks Every Entrepreneur Must Take", *Entrepreneur* (October 13, 2014), www.entrepreneur.com/article/238319 (accessed January 2019)
- [5] Judith Butler. *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*, p. 13. London: Verso (2009)
- [6] Barbara Laslett, Johanna Brenner, "Gender, Social Reproduction, and Women's self-organization", *Gender & Society* Vol. 7. No. 3 (September 1, 1991), p. 311–333
- [7] Nancy Fraser, "Contradictions of Capital and Care", *New Left Review* 100 (July–August 2016)
- [8] From the original building licence of the dining room issued in 2015: "This project is unique because there are unusual circumstances that the architect calls "in a participatory, educational and educational construction regime":
 - a) Parents and students of the school will collaborate in the execution of he works;
 - b) The materials will be, whenever possible, reused and recycled."



Documentation of *Communal Leaking*, a Sandberg-initiated intervention at MACAO. Work on the foreground by mrzb (Filippo Tocchi, Andrea Parenti, Desireé Nakouzi De Monte); work in the background by Tomasz Skibicki



▼ In November 2018, I spent two weeks together with a group of students from the Sandberg Institute in a cold building in Milan. We had come together to stage an intervention at MACAO, a local arts and community center, as a gesture of protest and solidarity: the center was facing eviction from the three thousand square meter property, just east of the city center, which has housed them for the last six years.

Why would a community center be evicted? Let us introduce the context by beginning with MACAO’s self-description:

“MACAO is an independent center for art, culture and research in Milan, Italy. Avoiding the creative industry paradigm and trying to innovate the old idea of cultural institutions, we started to consider art production as a viable process for rethinking social change, elaborating independent political critique, and as a space for innovative governance and production models. Our research concerns the labour conditions in the creative industry and cultural sector, the right to the city and new forms of organization and technological solutions for cultural production. The center is currently based in a former slaughterhouse in the middle of a huge abandoned area not so far from the center of the city.” ^[1]

To be precise,MACAO is a squatted space.

Earlier in the year, Giovanni Bozzoli, a student of the Dirty Art Department at the Sandberg Institute wrote his thesis on his experiences growing up in Milan and getting involved with MACAO. His decision to apply to the Sandberg Institute came after the Dirty Art Department had done an intervention at MACAO during the Design Week in 2016.

The practice of squatting is no worldwide news. [...] Even though the pragmatic need for and unavailability of affordable housing is the major reason for squatting, it is always a practice of civil disobedience, a strong statement towards the institutions (both private and public) that act against the benefit of the city and its citizens. In Italy, squats are usually called Social Centers and, according to Eliseo Fucolti’s definition, ^[2] they are “spaces, generally but not necessarily urban, occupied by a heterogeneous collective of people, acting independently of any external political supervision, who use it to meet their own needs and to give space to creative projects outside commercial and speculative business.”

In the experience of MACAO, occupying spaces has worked as a collective action to highlight two central points in Milan: ^[3] the underprivileged conditions of the workers in the field of art (not only artists themselves, but also technicians, researchers, activists and so on), and the huge amount of abandoned public and private areas of the city. The birth of MACAO took place at a specific historical



► Above: work by Pietro Agostoni, Below: work by Andrea Belosi and Javier Rodriguez Fernandez

Ada Reinthal & Giovanni Bozzoli
Ada Reinthal has a background in live events, film & TV and is currently part of the MA Design of Experiences at the University of the Underground, hosted by the Sandberg Instituut of the Gerrit Rietveld Academie. Her interests lie in activism & propaganda and she is currently writing her thesis entitled “Memes and Ends.” Giovanni Bozzoli graduated from the Dirty Art Department at the Sandberg Instituut in 2018. His thesis was an attempt at making sense of several years of being a member of MACAO, New Centre for Art, Culture and Research.

The following text combines excerpts from Giovanni’s thesis “On Community, Autonomy, Self-Organisation and Other Alleged Leftist Practices” (spring 2018) with Ada’s reflections and commentary. The accompanying images (taken by Emilia Tapprest) document the two-week collaborative intervention of Sandberg students and local artists at MACAO in Milan in November 2018.

Ambivalent Autonomy
MACAO’s Experiments In Alternative Living

money, whatever that means—just having a lot of money (a less interesting option) or setting up some sort of trade system which would allow me to not need money. ■ If I could stop

moment. Both Italy and the city of Milan had just come out of a period of almost 20 years of right-wing government. Those were the inglorious years of Berlusconi and his *TV-football party*^[4] when, while neoliberalism was spreading into our economy and society, the Italian population became hypnotized with *panem et circenses*—that is how the old Romans, by giving “bread and circus games” to the population, were able to control it. After the crisis of 2008, a strong necessity of change and transformation propagated especially among the youth, who were facing a blank future.

Our intervention was an immediate reaction to the decision of the municipal government of Milan to evict MACAO from their current location announced in October. However, by the time we arrived, the collective had received news that the property was no longer being sold to a private developer, and been presented with the possibility to buy out the building. I was informed that the process through which the municipality evaluated the worth of the building was simply to take the rough market price per square meter and multiply it by the amount of square meters of the property. At about a thousand euros per square meter in post-Berlusconi Milan, the resulting sum is way outside of MACAO’s budget. The response of the municipality was to request a business plan from the collective in order for them to prove the value that MACAO is providing to the community. If this “plan” is accepted, a new, lower offer would be made.

During my time at MACAO, I had the chance to sit in on the weekly general assembly twice. Even though I don’t speak Italian, I understood from a friend translating bits as well as from the jargon used that the business plan was definitely the most time-consuming point on the list of talking points.

MACAO is an ongoing experiment in self-governance/organisation and managing a community and space based on principles of consensus and equality. While unfettered by the bureaucratic systems of the “outside world”, moderating each individual’s needs in a medium-small community (MACAO is made up of a variable number of people ranging from 30 to 60) is a challenging operation. I will explain the governance and economic models that we have been experimenting with, applying changes as we go along, within our collective and space in the last year.

The MACAO assembly is the only executive organ, it is open and public and gathers once a week. All the main communication, discussions and decision-making happens here. The collective is made up of sub-groups that carry on specific projects, organise public events and activities or find ways for sharing the means of production and knowledge. It is not mandatory to be part of one of these groups in order to belong to the community. The experimental system that we are testing at the moment links governance and economy, aiming to result in a virtuous circle. From the very beginning, MACAO has supported itself only with incomes from public events, which are gathered at the central cash desk and redistributed for maintenance and renovation of the space, investments on projects or events, and universal basic income. This monthly universal income is one of the tools that we apply to seek for balance between everybody.

In a previous model, we had two to four people working on daily tasks and management and

receiving a symbolic monthly income, while everybody else could earn a small fee only by working during the events. This provoked an imbalance as the model was excluding those in the collective that for different reasons (age, work, family and so on) weren’t able to spend time and energy on the physical organisation of the space, but nevertheless were carrying on what we can define as invisible work, which doesn’t need to be done in the space on a daily basis: networking, political discourse, social network and communication management. Moreover, despite their monthly fee, the people who were involved full-time often found themselves having to cope with a huge amount of work and be available 24/7, which surpassed their mental and physical capabilities. This was also generating a gap between them and those who were not “working” and thus not recognized as part the system. The universal basic income gives the possibility for everyone to have access to a monthly fee for the work done both in and for the space.

Becoming part of the collective entails accepting a number of rules regarding some activities that each member of the assembly must accomplish each month in different areas:

1. at least one turn in the physical organisation of the space (cleaning, maintenance, water sources, dividing trash, etc);
2. the participation in at least two general meetings out of four;
3. the contribution to at least one of three main fields of MACAO’s activities—politics, continuous functions (communication, accountability, secretariat, bar storage management, technical storage management) or support during events.

The monthly total amount of funds depends on the events’ income, but the individual assignment happens through self-evaluation, according to shared web files that help us to collect data on the work and participation. However, we have avoided the necessity of a strict monitoring system that would be a huge conceptual inconsistency. Instead, during the month, each member earns virtual currency, Commoncoin, on the basis of participation and work. The amount of earned Commoncoin either makes them eligible for the UBI or not. This whole system, when it was first introduced, caused a fracture in the assembly especially between visible and invisible workers, but was in the end approved. The process improves the structure which now requires a wider partition of all responsibilities.

Knowledge-sharing and equal distribution of certain tasks have helped us soothe the conflicts, but there is room for improvement to reach stronger equality in the collective. ►



Spatial planning meeting for the exhibition

Communal Leaking



Above: Opening night performance by Anna Maria Merkel at the exhibition Communal Leaking, Below: Ada Reinthal is room for improvement to reach stronger equality constructing the cocktail bar run by Younwon Sohn during the opening night

Since early 2018 when Giovanni wrote his thesis, Commoncoin has been abandoned in favour of a self-regulated access to basic income. The Commoncoin was an attempt at a cryptocurrency which utilized a task-based form of meritocracy with various criteria for organisational input. The new basic income system, where everyone estimates the extent of their own contribution and eligibility for the UBI, was deemed more fair by the assembly and was adopted to avoid an intense quantification of everyone's labour: an approach of "I participated in MACAO" rather than "I did this and that and therefore deserve this or that".

I would like to situate here the general attitude I experienced at MACAO in the words of Emma Goldman: "an anarchism 'which stands for freedom from conventions and prejudice' should not be denied 'life and joy'." [5] Even though not all participants of the collective are self-identified anarchists, they come together over a desire to create a space for people to share the joy of whatever it is that they enjoy. During my two weeks there, events that took place included a tango night, a salsa night, a Sunday afternoon rope contortionist practising her art, an independent theatre company rehearsing an upcoming play, a temporary tattoo studio, a biological/organic market, a punk/noise party, film screenings three times per week, a weekly wood workshop class for refugees, a book launch, as well as our art show in the top floor hangars, while another resident artist was doing research and planning on bringing her theatre troupe there at a later stage.

Even though the event group forms a large part of the collective and the events provide the main source of income to the budget, this is not seen as most valuable to the community as a whole. This brings us back to the friction caused in the general assembly by the proposed business plan that was in the early stages of being developed while we were there.

The core difference between a majoritarian democracy — whether through representatives or direct — and a consensus based assembly is that the latter tries to protect the rights of minorities from within the democratic process itself. If one person disagrees with a proposal, they have the right to veto a proposal until it is redefined in such a way that they can approve it.

The activation of a 3000 m² space self-managed by an open assembly has often brought up managerial issues that one can also find in institutional or commercial spaces based on a hierarchical model founded on profit economy. We have tried to solve these issues precisely by developing a flexible structure that is always transforming according to the needs of the collective. Still, our structure and economic model has been criticised for reproducing business and capitalist principles—people tend to perceive any concrete plan as having a potentially institutionalising and hierarchical effect. I disagree with this criticism and do believe that, even if it's difficult or not very fluid, we work actively and consciously for the creation of our governance without any business aims.

Rather than rejecting reality and aiming to create an autonomous bubble that, even or especially when playing the part of the "anti", would anyway be incorporated into the system, it is more important to act in shifting and shaping the capitalist structure. This is today's only real possible fight. The fight for the destruction of capitalism is a legitimate one in theory, but if it is carried out while only focusing on destruction, it will bring nothing more than negation without a vision for the future. I do not intend to devalue the whole entirety of extremist or militant activism against capitalism but, unfortunately, this approach leads to an already lost war.

As mentioned, the main point of friction in the collective discussions was the prefigurative aspects of making a business plan. Doing so meant attempting to quantify a place which is at its core rather about the qualitative value that a space can provide for its community. In a city, country or world dominated by the quantification of every aspect of life through a monetary free-market system, MACAO strives to provide a space free from such metrics.

The numerics to be used in the business plan were as much about outreach (how many people attend different events and workshops, readers of publications produced at, through or in conjunction with MACAO etc) as well as the cash flow of the system itself. For some of the members of the collective, the sentiment of the compromises and critique that Giovanni also expresses in his thesis goes against their very ideology — namely the aim to create a space free from, rather than recreating, systems that express everything in terms of monetary value.

One evening, I participated in the weekly assembly of the hackers' collective called 'unit', and this theme was discussed at large throughout the night. The group, who were part of setting up the internal Commoncoin, were deliberating whether to participate in another cryptocurrency, Faircoin, which aims to connect autonomous spaces across the world. Faircoin is pegged to the euro, and its exact value is determined through online general assembly of the participants. Despite Faircoin's attempt at creating a more democratic currency, some of the members of the collective vehemently opposed the idea on the basis of it recreating a system very similar to monetary international capitalism, rather than one based on social relations.

The institutionalizing effects of quantitatively measuring the value of every aspect of a space such as this should not be taken lightly. Although our intervention in the space did not directly involve any monetary remuneration, by setting up and promoting an art show and a short film marathon, the participation of our temporary artist collective also contributed to the metrics that would be used in the potential business plan. Furthermore, we are in the process of organising a follow-up to the intervention: another art show in Amsterdam where we will invite the Italian artists we worked with in Milan, and potentially some musicians from MACAO's event team.

If this business plan is finished, approved and accepted by the municipality, there will be certain contracts formed in order for the municipality to have a guarantee the value provided stays on par with past efforts or increases. In other words, the activities currently present at or through MACAO will be incentivised to continue and the ability to adapt to changes or new members' wishes and desires will diminish. Whether or not there will be actual quotas to fill will not matter as much as the demoralizing effect of the feeling of being "indebted" to the local government.

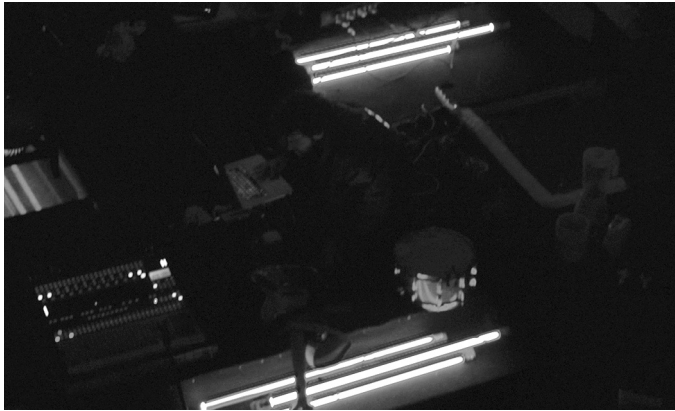
It should have been our parents' revolution, in the late 1960s, to lay the foundation for a society in which capitalism and lawless economy wouldn't be the only bedrocks of Western nation states. Unluckily, at that time the real effects of capitalism weren't completely clear yet and post World War II stability had a misleading effect on Western governments. A structural revolution has been lacking since then and the hippies' movement took its place, followed by the nihilist self-destructive punk subculture in the mid-seventies. The situation where we are now is defined by the impossibility to find an easy way out of the *hypernormalisation* [6] of almost a century of unlawful capitalism. People have shaped an extremely complicated, ►

fast-paced and ambiguous reality, while being distracted and attracted by the shining side of the coin. Leftist movements haven't been able to take hold of these topics and now Western societies are reaching their saturation point: democracies and politicians are not believed anymore, radical fascist parties are spreading around the planet, the *United States of Europe* are a utopia. Our countries are not able to join forces to deal with the refugee migration, the class of precarious workers is growing, and people get lost in cyberspace, attracted by the utopian illusion of it as a last equal world where everybody can say anything while not having to deal with difference and friction, subsequently shifting the whole reality into a rating system of self-spectacles.

Governance models of autonomous institutions such as MACAO's surely don't have an immediate and easily understandable impact, but neither does capitalist neoliberalism. In my view, MACAO is proof that the possibility of an effective change in Western societies and leftist movements exists; however, there must first be acknowledgment and management of responsibilities, followed by the development of practices that allow alternatives to the univocal structure of capitalism to usher in a system made of multiple different options and choices. This exiting process can only happen through different phases and ours might just be the first one.

In summary, working in an autonomous space is at the same time a precarious effort as well as a liberating one. While it was difficult to know who to talk to about aspects of the organisation of a show within the space, as there was no central point of authority to turn to for information, it was at the same time a beautiful experience of fostering social relations and working together with people I would have never met otherwise.

I believe that this ambivalence — idealism versus compromise, individualism versus collectivism, social versus monetary relations, lies at the core of anarchist prefigurative praxis exemplified by autonomous spaces such as MACAO. In order to break with the present status quo, experiments need to happen with different approaches to democracy and its relation to the practicalities and economies of everyday existence. ◀



Open jam session by the collective youngboyswritinggroup and Alessandro Veneruso giving tattoos at the party *Chimera* at MACAO

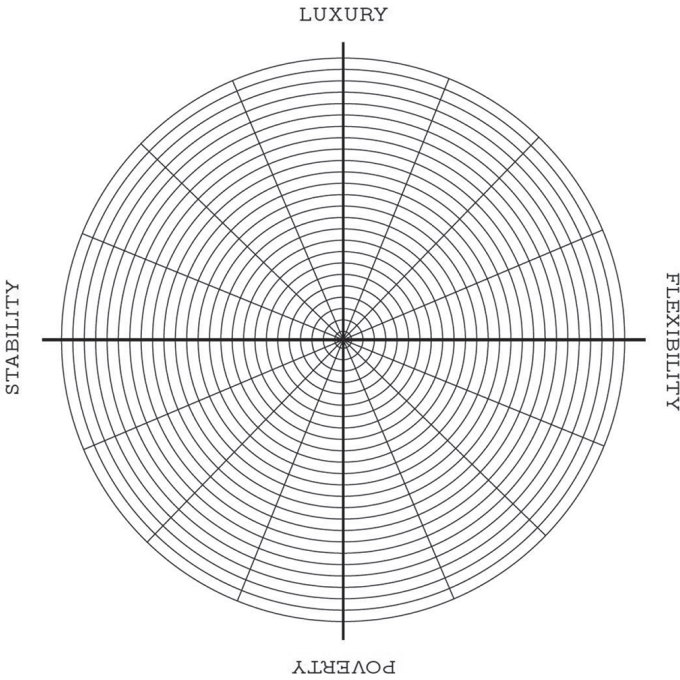
[1] Website of MACAO, www.macaomilano.org
[2] Eliseo Fucolti in "Centri Sociali (Social Centres) in Italy", *Making Room: Cultural Production in Occupied Spaces*, Other Forms (Alan W. Moore & Alan Smart) (2015)
[3] Since its birth in 2012, MACAO has occupied three buildings: the abandoned skyscraper Torre Galfa, the neglected eighth century Palazzo Citterio and, currently, the Slaughterhouse of the Fruit and Vegetables Market.
[4] Franco Berardi, *After the Future*, AK Press (2011)
[5] Emma Goldman, via Claire Hemmings, *Considering Emma Goldman*, Durham: Duke University Press (2017), p. 218
[6] Adam Curtis, *Hypernormalisation* (2016)



People's tribunal *This is (Not) a Love Song* at the Rietveld Academy, 11.10.2018.
Photo: Roman Tkachenko.

Moderator

▼ I would like to call to temporary action. On the floor is a map with areas for stability, luxury, flexibility and poverty. I would like you to stand in the area where you think you are right now.



Moderator

There's only one person standing on the luxury line, there are other people standing in between, but you're firmly on the line. Could you say why?

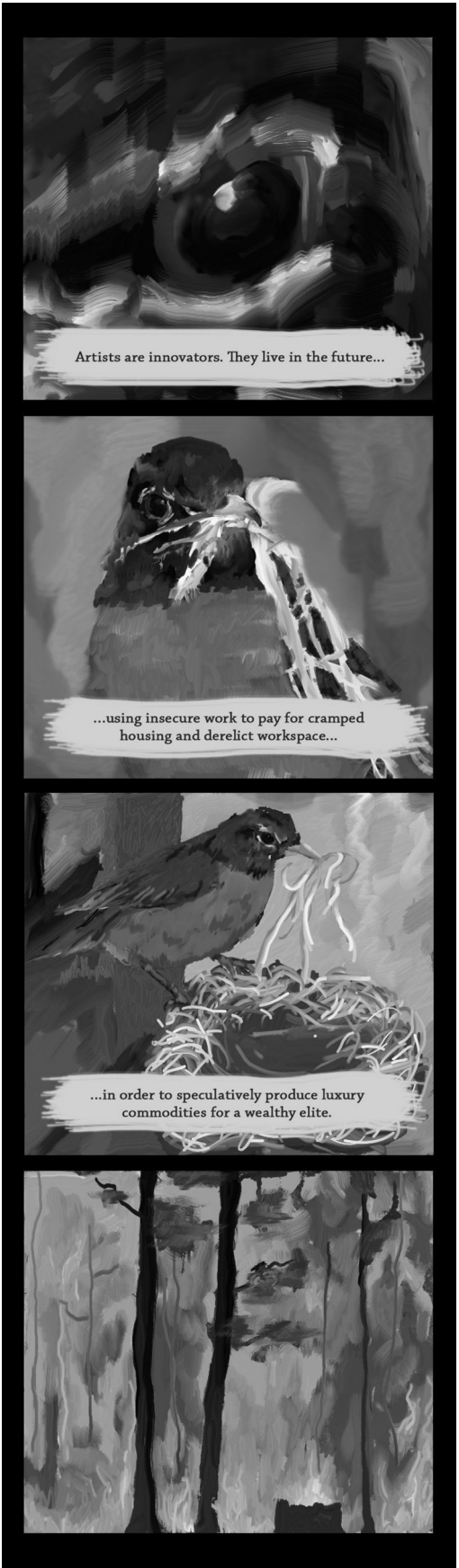
Participant

I definitely feel part of the luxury half of the circle, because I live in a very strong community where most of my basic needs are met collectively and there is an immense amount of activities going on that do not require to be in a consumerist state of mind nor take advantage of anyone. I think that's very luxurious. I also feel that I'm exactly in between flexibility and stability because I live in a house that is still a squat and I don't know whether I'll be able to stay there, but at the same time because I live in a very strong community, I know that whatever happens, I'll never be left out in the lurch since there is a common commitment amongst quite a large number of us, that we will have each others' backs. And at the same time it's pretty flexible because I don't have a regular income, but that's totally balanced out.

Moderator
Participant

Was this squat set up out of necessity or out of wish?
I'm not sure that I would make the difference between the two, so I can't really answer that question. ◀

Having trust in the future. ■ Less competition, more collaboration. ■ An equal life. The end of individualism. Harmonious community.



Leslie Lawrence & PACTO PACTO is an international alliance of artists, artistic researchers and writers, gathered to discuss and explore collectivity, and to support one another's individual endeavors. Rather than being led by form or structure, PACTO seeks to inquire how to work together and what that means through practice-led processes. Leslie Lawrence: who the fuck is screaming "DO PRAXIS" at my house. show yourself, coward. I will never do praxis. pg. 51/52

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