Another Criteria… or, What is the Attitude of a Work in the Relations of Production of Its Time?

Author(s): Marion von Osten

JSTOR

Another Criteria... or, What is the Attitude of a Work *in the* Relations of Production of Its Time?

— Marion von Osten

I just wanted to do it and get it over with so I could go home and watch TV.
— Frank Stella [1]

The editors of *Afterall* have asked me to reflect on an article titled 'Producing Publics — Making Worlds! On the Relationship between the Art Public and the Counter-public', a consideration of art and curatorial practices of the 1990s that I originally gave as a lecture in the context of 'Never Look Back', an event at the Shedhalle Zurich in 2000. This text has been published over the last decade in a variety of adaptations and translations. [2] Even though the published versions differ considerably, the impetus behind their central arguments remains the same: the methodological shifts of feminist and collective artistic practices of the late 1990s, which in my opinion constituted new forms of publics or publicness. Specifically, I referred to what I have called the 'project exhibition', a practice combining artistic, curatorial and discursive practices that I posited as distinct from

Marion von Osten looks back on the 'project exhibitions' of the 1990s and how artistic practice has responded to the social and economic shifts of the last twenty years.

thematic or curated art shows, in which artworks are selected in relation to a specific topic or issue. Project exhibitions, as well as other forms of exhibition-making by artists and cultural producers, established a counter-model to conventional group and solo show formats. On the one hand, exhibition-making as an artistic practice belongs to a long tradition that has it roots in the modern avant-gardes' critique of the museum's institutional order and the selecting processes of juries, boards and curators. On the other, it relates to the expansionist mode of artistic practice itself, as a result of which the gallery space is used as a site for intervention, action or denial, as Brian O'Doherty suggests in *Inside the White Cube* (1976). [3] Art institutions, as these practices exemplified, are not neutral containers for the presentation of works of art but are historical, material and symbolical frames of reference and influence. Museums and galleries produce novel spaces and ordering systems of knowledge as well as specific modes of viewing, and knowing by viewing, in public. [4]

Exhibition-making by artists has precedents in twentieth-century art, starting with the self-organised Dada Salons, Marcel Duchamp's interventions into installation display, or, as a particular example, in the almost forgotten counter-exhibition that took place opposite the International Colonial Exhibition in Paris in 1931. [5] This show, 'La Verité sur les colonies' ('The Truth about Colonies'), was organised by the Anti-Imperialist League

1   Quoted in Caroline A. Jones, *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996, p.121.
2   First in the international feminist art journal *n.paradoxa*, edited by Katy Deepwell in 2001 ('If White Is Just a Color, the Gallery Is Just a Sight?', issue 15, July 2001, pp.46—51), and subsequently in the Swiss feminist periodical *Olympe*, guest-edited by Ursula Biemann and myself in 2003 ('Dispersion: Kunstpraktiken und ihre Vernetzungen', issue 19, December, 2003, pp.59—72); in *Compléments de Multitudes 15*, guest-edited by Brian Holmes in 2004 ('art contemporain: la recherche du dehors', issue 15, Winter 2004, pp.239—49); in *Critical Readers in Visual Cultures: In the Place of the Public Sphere*, edited by Simon Sheikh ('A Question of Attitude', issue 5, 2005, Copenhagen and Berlin: Øjeblikket and b_books, pp.142—66); in *Architecture and Participation*, edited by Peter Blundell Jones, Doina Petrescu and Jeremy Till (Oxon: Spon Press, 2004, pp.201—10); in *Publicum: Theorien der Öffentlich-keit* reader, edited by Gerald Raunig and Ulf Wuggenig in 2005 (Vienna: Verlag Turia + Kant, pp.124—39); and last but not least in the *Curating Critique* reader, guest-edited by Dorothee Richter, Barnaby Drabble and Marianne Eigenherr (ed.) in 2007 (Frankfurt a.M.: Revolver, pp.230—45, 246—61).
3   See Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, San Francisco: The Lapis Press, 1986.
4   See Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne (ed.), *Thinking About Exhibitions*, London and New York: Routledge, 1996.
5   See Brigitta Kuster, 'Sous les yeux vigilants/Under the Watchful Eyes: On the international colonial exhibition in Paris 1931', 2007, available at http://eipcp.net/transversal/1007/kuster/en (last accessed on 29 June 2010).

and sympathisers in the Surrealist movement, and through it artists of the historical avant-garde not only questioned the division of labour between the mediators and the producers of art and culture, they also created counter-narratives to the official racialised, colonialist representations as manifested in the International Colonial Exhibition. Moreover they helped to constitute a specific sociality in which resistance movements, workers' coalitions and artists went up against the colonial propaganda machine of imperialism. Exhibition-making was transformed into a medium, into an intervention and a form of political articulation. The collaborative process put into play in producing the exhibition thus formed a new constellation for the resistance movements and their publicness. 'La Verité sur les colonies' can, in this way, be called a project exhibition, as it used the exhibition format as a communicative platform, as a space and practice for and of a counter-public.

Exhibition projects and spaces generated by postmodern artists also went deliberately beyond linear communication structures, primarily in order to establish new forms of collaboration that pointed beyond the actual site of the exhibition and the field of art itself. In the late 1960s, for example, women discussed the ongoing issue of exclusion from art institutions and took a range of stances on the art-space context, its claims and antagonisms, and its power to constitute Western societies. The feminist art movements of the 1960s and 70s utilised self-organised exhibitions and spaces for the establishment of new publics — publics outside the boundaries of dichotomous sexuality who would be capable of developing new forms of collaboration and cooperation. These activities came about partly because female artists were then even more forcefully excluded from the official spaces of art than they are today, and partly because the underlying conditions of production and representation were patriarchal and Eurocentric. Another important aspect was that of collaboration, which in High Modernism had mostly been the province of white men. Feminist art actions took place as well in the urban space, involving a new public — for example in performances by VALIE EXPORT, Adrian Piper or Mierle Laderman Ukeles.

At the same time, female artists continued to use 'white cube' exhibitions as a form of communication and, in the course of the 1970s and into the 80s, increasingly began to open these up to everyday cultural and experimental practices. Feminist groups tried out new working methods and concepts of publicness that contrasted with the abstract public of the exhibition space, such as *Womanhouse* (1971—72), the large-scale cooperative project executed as part of the Feminist Art Program at CalArts in Valencia, California by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, or the A.I.R. Gallery in New York.[6] The focus on women-related subjects was central in the 1970s, but — like feminist discourse in general — feminist artists' exhibition-making underwent a process of change throughout that decade. Feminist artists moved to stress not only identity issues ('we women') but also macropolitical discourses. What was feminist about non-identity or post-identitarian projects was their method: their emphasis on informal networks, on the formation of new publics and a collectively developed, embodied knowledge and aesthetic practices.[7]

Against this background, the 'project exhibition' of the mid-1980s united several of the debates described above and attempted to integrate the experience of alternative artistic practices into the exhibition: again, the opening up of the art space to a non-art public; the collective production of new 'knowledge spaces'; the self-assertion of social groups as opposed to their symbolic representation; the use of the art space for political discussions; and the establishment of transdisciplinary networks that could be active and productive in areas of society beyond the exhibition context.[8] Alongside classical counter-public strategies, which were key in the 1970s, artists tried out new production and distribution models, adapting the format of the exhibition by including curatorial, theoretical and research processes in their production. Thus the practice of artist-led exhibitions was also informed by the counter-cultural use of the exhibition space by small leftist, anti-racist and most of all feminist collectives, which established tactical, marginal uses of exhibition spaces for possibilities of self-articulation and action. One criterion of a project exhibition is that the exhibition itself would be used to intervene in a specific and local hegemonic setting or context and its representational politics, rather simply selecting and staging existing knowledge and artworks.

The format of the project exhibition I referred to in 'Producing Publics — Making Worlds!' was mainly established in the late 1980s and 90s by artists who curated shows

Current Issues series event, mid-1980s, A.I.R. Gallery, 97 Wooster Street, New York. Courtesy A.I.R. Gallery

in collaboration with actors from other social or cultural fields with specific purposes in mind. The exhibition 'If You Lived Here...' at the Dia Art Foundation in 1989, organised by the artist Martha Rosler, is a paradigmatic example.[9] In the show Rosler focused on homelessness and the related processes of gentrification, not just because they were relevant issues at the time, but because the gallery was located in a gentrifying area and was thereby involved in the transformation process itself. The exhibition also addressed the gallery's surroundings in terms of audience — in that potential visitors to the gallery were simultaneously actors in the gentrification process — and in terms of how other audiences could enter the gallery space and participate in the project, despite their not being generally acknowledged as an art public nor as producers of culture. The fact that each exhibition space defines a specific type of public that has normative force also implies the potential of its alternative use: to address and involve audiences who are generally separated from the art public due to disciplinary divides or the social or class order.

As opposed to classical curatorial or scientific approaches, project exhibitions involve people from diverse fields of knowledge in developing the concept or the realisation of the show. Project exhibitions, in this sense, use the white cube of the gallery or museum

6   A.I.R. (Artists in Residence, Inc.) was the first women's cooperative gallery in the US, founded in 1972 as a response to the resistance of the art world to art made by women. It is a non-profit organisation supported and run by its membership: twenty New York artist-members and fifteen affiliate-members from around the country. See http://www.artseensoho.com/Art/AIR/air.html (last accessed on 29 June 2010).
7   See, for example, Julie Ault (ed.), *Alternative Art New York, 1965—1985*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002. Or another volume edited by J. Ault on Group Material, *Show and Tell: A Chronicle of Group Material*, London: Four Corners Books, 2010.
8   From 1996 to 1998 I worked in a changing team (Sylvia Kafhesy, Renate Lorenz, Rachel Mader, Brigitta Kuster, Pauline Boudry, Justin Hoffmann and Ursula Biemann) as an exhibition curator at the Shedhalle Zurich, a venue which can be considered a paradigmatic space for this type of practice. See Shedhalle Zürich (various authors), *Jahresberichte 1994—98*, Zürich: Verlag der Shedhalle Zürich, 1994—98 and Ursula Biemann and Marion von Osten (ed.), 'Dispersion, Kunstpraktiken und ihre Vernetzungen', in *Olympe, Feministische Arbeitshefte zur Politik*, no.19, 2003.
9   See Nina Möntmann, *Kunst als sozialer Raum*, Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2003, and in *e-flux* journal '(Under)Privileged Spaces: On Martha Rosler's "If You Lived Here..."', issue 98, October 2009, also available at http://www.e-flux.com/journal/view/89 (last accessed on 13 July 2010).

as a communicative platform where ideas about collaborative and collective practices, new spaces of possible discourses can be established or used for a local intervention.[10]

Expanding the field of visual arts into other social realms and changing subject positions in the process of cultural production is a form of resistance against the functions that have been assigned to the artist in capitalist societies. Thus new, flexible figures have developed in the art context in the last decades, standing in a critical relation to normative transformations in society. On the one hand the appearance of these new figures emphasises the fact that artistic practice is a varied field of action, extending beyond the art context and the production of single works of art. As many shows in the German-speaking realm of the 1990s show, aesthetic production was liberated from the single author's contribution and moved towards project-related production. This complex process of differentiation of artistic practices also manifested itself in the establishment of self-organised spaces, alternative venues and the use of a variety of media; constant crossovers between high and low; de-skilling and re-skilling. This development is also a trigger for debates on art as knowledge production or research-based practices. As the collective kleines postfordistisches Drama (kpD) wrote in 2005:

> *We employ the term 'cultural producers' in a decidedly strategic way* [...] *we are not speaking of a certain sector* [cultural industry]*, nor of an ascertainable social category* [...] *or of a professional self-conception. Instead, we are speaking of the practice of travelling across a variety of things: theory production, design, political and cultural self-organisation, forms of collaboration, paid and unpaid jobs, informal and formal economies, temporary alliances, project-related working and living.*[11]

Martha Rosler, 'If you lived here…', 1988, organised by Martha Rosler. Installation view, Dia Art Foundation, 77 Wooster Street, New York. Courtesy Dia Art Foundation

This mobility between different positions, formats and practices is no longer unique to artists; many other actors are also increasingly changing their position in the cultural field, and the notion of the 'cultural producer' tries to grasp this new formation of activities as a transversal practice. At the same time, however, this expansionism in the arts corresponds handily with the shifts in the capitalist economy and to the development of ever more flexible labour markets.[12]

Art Work

In his groundbreaking essay 'Other Criteria' (1968), Leo Steinberg argued that art of the 1960s no longer understood itself as art, but rather as labour, as work.[13] He called for a new form of art critique, made from a socio-cultural perspective, that would be able to measure up the artwork according to its new criteria. The exhibition 'Work Ethic', which was first shown at the Baltimore Museum of Art in 2003, focused on this paradigm shift in art production and critique.[14] The show's curator, Helen Molesworth, presented avant-garde practices from the past forty years that addressed art's relationship to, debate on or inscription into the socio-economic changes of its time. 'Work Ethic' defined such shifts as a series of upheavals within Western capitalist-industrial societies: from a Fordist consumer society to a post-Fordist, service-based system, which today goes hand in hand with the globalisation, informatisation and deregulation of economic markets and the privatisation of resources or industries that were previously public. The show included works from different artistic movements, predominantly from the US in the 1960s and 70s, such as Fluxus, feminist, process, performance and Conceptual art practices.

The exhibition, as well as the publication, was divided into four analytical categories: the first, 'The Artist as Manager and Worker: The Artist Creates and Completes a Task', referred to works by Frank Stella, Chris Burden and Robert Morris; the second section, 'The Artist as Manager: The Artist Sets a Task for Others to Complete', showed works by Sol LeWitt and others from historical Conceptualism. The third section, 'The Artist as Experience Maker: The Audience Completes the Work', highlighted Allan Kaprow and Fluxus, and the fourth section, 'Quitting Time: The Artist Tries Not to Work', looked at the strategy of refusal to work (the strike) and the conversion of leisure time activities into artistic work as by such artists as Lee Lozano, Tom Marioni and Gilbert & George.

In choosing these categories, 'Work Ethic' focused on processual, cognitive and immaterial aspects of artistic practices. Molesworth, however, does not describe the emphasis on 'process' as dematerialisation, but rather as the manner in which something is produced, the steps that are necessary for the creation of an object, a sign or emotion. Process becomes the 'work' of art. Despite the fact that cognitive processes such as thinking were privileged, especially in historical Conceptualism, emphasis on process also offered artists of that period the opportunity to attach an integral importance to production itself, or rather to the interconnection of manual and cognitive processes behind production. The performance of the production process as 'art' turns the process into an aesthetic form. The object, the action, the image become signs of their time, of a collective, or of the division of labour in place for producing art. The exhibition made clear that modernist and postmodernist artists have redefined their practices not only along institutional contexts and the art system as such, but also in relation to transformations of social and economical conditions and concepts of labour. Thus artistic labour performed as repetition, process, management or teamwork was on the one hand a critique of stereotypical assumptions of the artist as creator and single author, and on the other a reflection on societal changes of the composition of labour in the society as a whole. In doing so, these artists not only shifted and broadened the notion of what visual art could be, but also redefined the production of meaning itself, its conditions, its media of presentation, spaces and social

10   See Miwon Kwon, 'Ortungen und Entortungen der Community', in Christian Meyer and Mathias Poledna (ed.), *Sharawadgi*, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 1999, p.214; and *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2002, pp.154—55.

11   Quoted from kleines postfordistisches Drama/kpD, 'Prekarisierung von KulturproduzentInnen und das ausbleibende, gute Leben', *Arrancal*, no.32, Summer 2005, pp.23—25. KpD are Brigitta Kuster, Isabell Lorey, Katja Reichard and Marion von Osten.

12   See Beatrice von Bismarck, 'Kuratorisches Handeln. Immaterielle Arbeit zwischen Kunst und Managementmodellen', in M. von Osten (ed.), *Norm der Abweichung*, Vienna and Zurich: Springer, 2003, pp.81—98. See also M. von Osten, 'Fight Back the Determinator', in Christian Kravagna (ed.), *AGENDA: Perspektiven Kritischer Kunst*, Bozen and Vienna: Folio Verlag, 2000, pp.23—41.

13   See Leo Steinberg, 'Other Criteria', *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1972, pp.55—91.

14   The exhibition 'Work Ethic' was shown at the Baltimore Museum of Art from 12 October 2003 to 4 January 2004, at the Des Moines Art Center from 15 May to 1 August 2004 and the Wexner Center for the Arts from 18 September 2004 to 2 January 2005. See Helen Molesworth (ed.), *Work Ethic* (exh. cat.), University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2003.

contexts. This reflexivity has led to a massive differentiation of art production, which is described as an artistic practice, or in a more inclusive sense, as cultural production.

The term 'art worker', which was used regularly by artists to describe themselves during the 1960s and 70s, not only brought to mind left-wing labour struggles and traditional definitions of work, but also explored the relation between manual and cognitive labour during a time in which the production and consumption of common goods entered a new, cyclical relationship and the production of signs and symbols became increasingly important. Simultaneously, in addition to the production of useless objects and actions, the artistic and creative aspects of these actions were made profane, passed over, denied. 'Working on something' became an aesthetic concept and procedure — an aesthetic experience — because the process of participation was anticipated in many of these works. As 'Work Ethic' demonstrated, art contributed to the vocabulary and representation of labour. It proved that the artistic production of meaning is to be understood as a discourse in its own right, for it creates a declarative text, which does not signify but rather speaks about something already signified in a new manner. It is a discourse that connects manual and cognitive processes instead of separating them in the sense of the industrial division of labour.

Picket line outside the Museum of Modern Art, New York during the seven week staff strike, 1973. MoMA film curator Adrienne Mancia in centre. © 1973 The Museum of Modern Art/Scala, Florence

In the twenty-first century, artists are confronted with a social situation that has radically changed from that of the 1960s and 70s. In the mid-1990s, creative professions were ascribed an integral and trendsetting role in economies based on information and innovation.[15] Under the term 'creative industries', governments at the end of that decade promoted new forms of work that they hoped would result in the creation of employment and more innovative markets, and therefore facilitate the move away from national industrial economies. Today, the attempt to regulate 'creative' work in the free market under the term 'creative industries' seems to have lost its appeal. But the 'creative industries' discourse is one of many that calls for cultural producers to position themselves as integral to the economy, because cultural production is considered an economic factor and artists themselves are being stylised as blueprints of economic discourses of innovation and self-responsibility.[16] The notion of the artist as a never-ending source

15   See Gerald Raunig and Ulf Wuggenig (ed.), *Kritik der Kreativität*, Vienna: Verlag Turia + Kant, 2006; and Geert Loving and Ned Rossiter (ed.), *My Creativity*, Amsterdam: Institute for Network Cultures, 2008.
16   See M. von Osten, *Norm der Abweichung*, Vienna and Zurich: Springer and Voldemeer, 2003.

of new ideas and emotions was captured by Bruce Nauman in his *Self-Portrait as a Fountain* (1966), formulated as a critique of bourgeois fantasies of an endlessly productive, exceptional subject. Today, however, this mocking self-portrait of the artist as a self-powered source might not only be read as a bourgeois invocation of the artist, but also as the allegory of the flexible, self-motivated individual working subject of late capitalist society.[17]

This recent shift to the artist as exemplary of a norm affecting all of society is a reversal of the production conditions presented in 'Work Ethic'. When cultural and usually un(der)paid work and creative professions — formerly considered exceptions to the rule of paid labour — are stylised as role models of flexible, self-determined work in post-Fordist societies, the artist subjects, their value creation and working life become central to political and economic interests.[18] Fields not considered part of the economic world in Fordist society (communication, personal services, social relations, lifestyle, subjectivity) are increasingly organised in markets and production systems today. Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt argue that the current stage of capitalist socialisation has dissolved the boundaries between economy and politics, reproduction and production.[19] Negri and Hardt use the term 'biopolitical' to refer to the blurring of traditional distinctions such

'Be Creative! Der kreative Imperativ', 2003, installation view, Museum für Gestaltung, Zurich. Photograph: Regula Bearth, Museum für Gestaltung. © zhdk

that the 'social' and 'cultural' have become significant resources for the accumulation of value.[20] But according to the authors of *Empire* (2000), and as opposed to many interpretations, the relation between the 'biopolitical' and the 'social' is causal: biopolitical labour creates not only material and immaterial goods, but also social conditions — and thereby social life. In this way, the production of social conditions must necessarily include

17   See Diedrich Diederichsen, *Eigenblutdoping, Selbstverwertung, Künstlerromantik, Partizipation*, Cologne: KiWi, 2008.
18   See Brian Holmes and Marina Vishmidt in conversation with M. von Osten in 'Atelier Europa, Conversations, Kunstverein Munich', 2004, available on www.ateliereuropa.com (last accessed on 7 July 2010); Anthony Davies and Simon Ford, 'Art Futures', *Art Monthly*, no.223, February 1999; Isabell Lorey, 'Vom immanenten Widerspruch zur hegemonialen Funktion: Biopolitische Gouvernementalität und Selbst-Prekarisierung von KulturproduzentInnen', in G. Raunig and U. Wuggenig (ed.), *Kritik der Kreativität, op. cit.*, pp.121—36.
19   See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2000; and *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2004.
20   For further discussion of this, see Marianne Pieper (ed.), *Empire und die biopolitische Wende: Die internationale Diskussion im Anschluss an Hardt und Negri*, Frankfurt a.M.: Campus, 2007, and Justin Hoffmann and M. von Osten (ed.), *Das Phantom sucht seinen Mörder: Ein Reader zur Kulturalisierung der Ökonomie*, Berlin: b_books, 1999.

possible grounds for change in political and economic arenas. In their analysis, Negri and Hardt highlight the emergence of multiple forms of critique and practice as well as that of a 'multitude' of singularities with the potential to provoke transformations in other ways than by neoliberal politics. Affective and communicative skills are considered as productive forces, and these changes in value production can also bear facilitating effects and not only destructive ones. The production of relationships and of knowledge as well as reflective forms of work can signal revolutionary potential, which in turn allows the re-negotiation of terms such as occupation, collectivity and ownership. By predicting the end of the capitalist binding of money, labour power and use-value, they foresee a new vision for a different model of accumulation, describing the terrain for new struggles.

The outlook in the sociologists Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello's *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (1991) is not quite as optimistic.[21] The current ideology of self-responsibility, as promoted by the governing model of neoliberalism, was only able to establish itself, according to the authors, because the transformation of the Fordist model of capitalism went hand in hand with the integration of 'artistic critique' — as addressed in Molesworth's exhibition or in Sabeth Buchmann's publication *Denken gegen das Denken* (2007) — into

'Atelier Europa',
2004, installation
view, Kunstverein
München, Munich.
Photograph:
Dorothee Richter

the economic vocabulary. Boltanski and Chiapello claim that the structures of desire and models of critique of formerly (sub)cultural counter-worlds have now become part of an increasingly globalised economy. The theorisation and analysis of post-Fordist socialisation follows this antagonism between calls for liberation of the self and new forms of control and discipline. Dissident subject positions and so-called artistic critique, however, are never completely identical to their adaptations in the economy or their invocations in politics. Even if, as Buchmann demonstrates, it were verifiable that Conceptual and critical artistic practices contributed to the development of Negri and Hardt's 'societal factory', 'this transformation is infused with temporal discrepancies and heterogeneities. Thus one cannot speak of a continuous parallel between socially dominant manners of production and artistic practices.'[22]

Despite this, artistic investigations — if we take their production of meaning and discursive ability seriously — make a more important contribution to the possible critique of predominant economic discourses than has been assumed.[23] As a producer of discourses, of critical translations of societal trends, art stands discursively in partial opposition to the modern industrial and service society, which continues to perpetuate the difference between the cognitive and the manual under the notion of immaterial labour.[24] As the conditions of production changed over the past fifty years, the artist as producer did too.

Fighting the Imperative
It is thus not surprising that current socio-economic changes have brought forth debate on the artist or the cultural producer as a new political subject. Especially when this figure of innovation is used to further reduce governmental responsibilities and the entrepreneurially oriented self-optimisation of the individual becomes the norm.[25] The problem of one's own involvement in the current normative change becomes even clearer when the self-organised creative professions are attributed central significance for economic growth, as in the talent-led economy proposed by British Prime Minister Tony Blair during his time in office.[26] Together with the complementary discourse on 'capitals of talent', the Europe-wide competition for location advantages in the global market has, since the late 1990s, led to labour markets being rehabilitated and neighbourhoods enhanced, not only in Britain but all over the world,[27] while cuts in social and cultural spending are legitimised under the paradigm of the self-sufficiency of (cultural) entrepreneurs. But the reality of the labour conditions summarised under the construct of creative professionals (self-employed media creators, multi-media, sound and graphic designers) is blurred or idealised in these optimistic assumptions. At the same time, the labour conditions of artistic-creative professions and those of the remaining industrial production and other precarious service occupations are camouflaged. Creative action and thought are now demanded from all the citizens of Western industrialised societies. They are the customers of the booming market for creativity promotion and are supplied with the relevant manuals, seminars, software programmes and so on. These learning techniques and tools call for and encourage approval of the social conditions whilst at the same time liberating creative potential. Thus on the one hand creativity proves to be the democratic variation of ingenuity: everyone is credited with the ability to be creative. On the other, however, everyone is forced into having to develop his or her own creative potential. The imperative to turn oneself into a 'creative being' and 'entrepreneurial self' has absorbed the slogans for autonomy of the 1960s and 70s. The call for self-determination and participation no longer only denotes an emancipatory utopia, but also a social obligation in globalised economies. Individuals apparently subject themselves voluntarily to the new power conditions that encourage them to be accountable, autonomous and self-responsible — they are 'obliged to be free'.[28] Their behaviour is not regulated by a disciplinary power, but by government practices that are built on the neoliberal idea of a 'self-regulating' market and are more likely to mobilise and stimulate than to monitor and punish. We are now meant to become as contingent and adaptable as the market.

It is not surprising that artists have dealt with this normative change in recent years. The exhibition 'Be Creative! The Creative Imperative', at the Museum of Design (Museum für Gestaltung) in Zurich in 2003, was realised by a collective of artists, architects, designers, students, theoreticians, sociologists and cultural theorists, and looked at the changing concepts of creativity and the social design process that goes with them.[29]

21   See Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (trans. Gregory Elliott), London and New York: Verso, 2005.
22   See Sabeth Buchmann, *Denken gegen das Denken: Produktion — Technologie — Subjektivität bei Sol LeWitt, Hélio Oiticica und Yvonne Rainer*, Berlin: Polypen, 2007.
23   See M. von Osten, 'Irene ist Viele: Oder was die Produktivkräfte genannt wird', in Thomas Atzert, Serhat Karakayali, Marianne Pieper and Vassilis Tsianos (ed.), *Empire und die biopolitische Wende*, Frankfurt a.M.: Campus, 2007. English version available at http://e-flux.com/journal/view/83 (last accessed on 3 August 2010).

24   See T. Atzert (ed.), *Umherschweifende Produzenten: Immaterielle Arbeit und Subversion*, Berlin: ID-Verlag, 1998.
25   For a discussion of these trends, see Atelier Europa, Kunstverein München, Munich, 2004, initiated by Marion von Osten and Angela McRobbie. For a discussion of these trends, see http://www.ateliereuropa.com (last accessed on 29 June 2010).
26   See A. McRobbie, 'Everyone is Creative?', in Tony Bennett and Elizabeth B. Silva (ed.), *Contemporary Culture and Everyday Life*, Durham: The Sociology Press, 2004, pp.186—99; A. McRobbie, 'From Holloway to Hollywood: Happiness at Work', in Paul Du Gay and Mike Pryke (ed.), *Cultural Economy*, London: SAGE, 2002, pp.97—114.
27   See M. von Osten and Peter Spillmann (ed.), *Be Creative! Der kreative Imperativ!*, exhibition leaflet, Zurich: Edition Museum für Gestaltung, 2002; see as well www.k3000.ch/becreative (last accessed on 4 July 2010).
28   See Nikolas Rose, 'The Death of the Social? Re-figuring the Territory of Government', in Roger Cotterrell (ed.), *Law in Social Theory*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2006, pp.395—424.
29   'Be Creative! Der kreative Imperativ', Museum für Gestaltung, Zurich, 2003. Initiated by M. von Osten and B. von Bismarck, see http://www.k3000.ch/becreative (last accessed on 29 June 2010).

The project observed the demand for cognitive abilities that are assigned terms such as creativity and intelligence, and brought attention to the boom in training manuals for a wide variety of professions. It questioned their applications and reflected on the appropriation of artistic production processes and subcultural ways of life for the worlds of advertising and real estate, pursuing the transformation of emancipatory models from calls for participation to techniques of political control. It also included company mission statements, design concepts and motivational tools that are new elements of everyday life in the workplace, and it analysed changes in the higher education system as well. It considered recent town planning developments and conducted interviews and film projects where designers, artists and employees had their say about their working lives. In addition the exhibition took a new look at utopian models for living, learning and working against this contemporary background. The character of the show corresponded to that of a production site for social processes, design and communication. It therefore did not seek to teach the 'right' information, but instead involved the wide range of visitors in the above-mentioned antagonisms through a scenographic layout and compositions of the thematic clusters. The image of the factory — a space somewhere between an artist's loft, a sweatshop and a marketing floor — was selected as the basic architectural metaphor, reconstructed within the gallery space in the Museum of Design,

the division of theory and practice, mind and hand, the social and the cultural; and the split between a linguistic and a visual culture. It also questioned the tradition and future of art and design universities, specifically the College of Art and Design (Hochschule für Kunst und Gestaltung) in Zurich, where the museum is located. The project was constituted by a 'multitude' that was transversal to established job hierarchies in the university and constructed a new public sphere for concrete critique.

As 'Be Creative!' attempted to show, the term 'creativity' has not only left behind its shadowy existence but also its innocent reception; moreover, it has broadened the perspective of a common understanding of design processes. A current examination of notions of creativity calls not only for reflection on the methods of creation in art and design, but also for creation to be used as a description of a social process that has a political and cultural dimension. Thus the project created a counter-narrative to the normative discourse on creativity. It made room for interventions into visual and linguistic paradigms and created a public for dissidence and disobedience.

Exhibition-Making as Public Action

In the last decades artistic practices have created an epistemic space that is structured transversally to social invocations and regulations, while still remaining symbolic.

Left and this page: kleines postfordistisches Drama (kpD), *Kamera läuft!* (*Roll Camera!*), 2004, video, 32min. Courtesy kpD

which is at the same time the (hidden) administrative wing of the building. As the show took place not in an art gallery but in institution dedicated to the applied arts, a very popular place in Zurich, the exhibition and the following publications successfully linked the critique of artists, designers, theorists and art students with that of a larger public that is similarly involved in these new imperatives. Thus the project had many reviews in non-art related publications such as architecture and design magazines or leftist journals.

At the same time 'Be Creative!' had to carve out a number of paradoxes, as this hybrid practice, located between the realms of art, theory and design, is based on disciplinary flexibility — as well as being reliant on an anti-institutional, flexible economy of underpaid but highly motivated freelancers. Therefore the project itself came into being under working and production conditions very similar to those documented, analysed and criticised in the exhibition. But the practice developed in making the show radically questions the assumptions of the neoliberal commodity economy, even or precisely because it finds itself in the antagonism between radical critique and the current, normative transformation. Its criticism was directed towards three specific discourses on knowledge production: the disciplinary division and elitism of theory production;

These transversal practices can also be detected in current governmental initiatives, for example in the institutionalisation of artistic knowledge production in university research; the adoption of modes of institutional critique in so-called 'New Institutionalism'; or in projects funded by local or national governments in which art takes over the role of social work (in programmes such as 'community work'). Any attempt to integrate artistic or cultural practices into governmental knowledge for application-orientated or benefit-oriented purposes is a contradiction of these practices' mode of action because their strictures continuously and repeatedly evade institutionalised regulation. Furthermore, governmental or institutional regulations are never static, as Nicos Poulantzas demonstrates, but rather operate through the governing of the surplus that results from the frictions, conflicts and struggles against control and regulation.[30] It is all the more important to emphasise the paradox of incompatibility and immanence that contemporary art practices posed and continue to pose for social improvement.

But still, cultural practices that challenge and question their own involvement in and within the normative discourse may differ from or even contradict each other. They cannot

---

30   See Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism* (trans. Patrick Camiller), London: NLB, 1978.

be systemised and do not form the 'other' to hegemonic social discourses, because their lines of flight have become immanent to these discourses. At the same time, artistic practices, acting as shapers of discourse, are able to adopt new points of view on economic change and introduce ruptures to its seeming logic. Thus, cultural producers today have created a new arena in which a decentring of modernist universalisms or normative subjectivation can be practiced, in which imaginaries of the political can not only be expressed and visualised, but also worked through in changing constellations that are not fixed.

Moreover, those who are subjected to processes of precarisation — like increased social and economic uncertainty — create strategies and tactics in their everyday life that work both against and within hegemonic structures. They are not only experts in the very contradictions inherent to relations of production and contemporary governance, but are also the creators of new relations of production and new ways of making a living, and these need to be considered alongside techniques of control and processes of recuperation.[31] Can such tactical moves then become public, political action? This question calls for an analysis of histories of ongoing struggles that have produced transversal movements within seemingly stable, Western concepts of governability. These tactics and strategies likewise call for a new language to articulate the composition of the present situation, and, at the same time, to decentre and decolonise the *common* production of knowledge.[32] When vocabulary and subject positions are borrowed from cultural producers in management theory and political fantasies, it is the cultural producer who has the possibility to resist, to critique and to intervene. The production of an exhibition can be radically transformed into public action.

Paolo Virno regards the chief challenge of the present to be the establishment of new forms of publics. In his book *A Grammar of the Multitude* (2003) he describes the necessity of inventing publics, proposing that this is one of the central issues of politicisation under post-Fordist conditions: 'The shifting-to-the-foreground of fundamental abilities of human existence (thought, language, self-reflection, the ability to learn) can take on a disconcerting and oppressive character, or it can result in a new form of public, a *private public*, which establishes itself in a place far removed from the myths and rites of statehood.'[33] And in his book *Publics and Counterpublics* (2002), Michael Warner has shown how publics evolve in practice and in context, and do not satisfy universal expectations but identification-related ones. In his discussion of gay and lesbian counter-publics, Warner explores their opening up of new subject positions that reject the normativeness of attributions as lesbian or gay, i.e. as category of identification, and the creation of new worlds corresponding to a singular in the plural. In other words, the production of a public — and this holds for project exhibitions that form specific publics on the side of producing them as well on the side of being involved in them as a participant or viewer — always goes together with specific subject positions, which are brought about in the process and constitute themselves publicly. Thus, publics are highly situated, contextual and positioned as well as constitutive. This post-identitarian perspective reflected by Warner was a major factor in my own exhibition-making practice, as well as the idea that,

> *As opposed to other curatorial approaches, the project exhibition establishes a discourse, a practice that challenges the neutrality of the art space and the related representational regime.*

because of its artificiality and publicness, the art space can be turned into a space for the desire for new subjectivities, as a 'ground for possibilities'.[34]

With this article I hope to show that project exhibitions and the critical perspectives and interventions they generate emerged from concrete demands and social struggles which are increasingly concealed today in the reception of art practice. Project exhibitions do not serve to simply illustrate or exhibit a theme, but rather generate a potential for new positions of speech, articulations and cultural practices on the sidelines of hegemonic discourses; they also reflect the knowledge and body policies of the 'exhibitionary complex', as Tony Bennett calls it, and reinterpret its paradigms of depiction.[35] Moreover, in the project exhibition a process, usually dissociated from representation, takes on central significance: the 'development' of the content and research within a framework of collective authorship. Therefore, not only new audiences but also specific related socialities that form in the context of the project come to exist in the development process; the same is true of the related forms of communication.

In addition to the collective experience, project exhibitions by artists can thus chart an imaginary map of oppositional cultural practices and experimental knowledge spaces, pointing beyond the symbolic space of the exhibition and academic disciplines. Moreover, the imaginary public of the art space is not rejected as being 'alienating' and neutralising, but understood as productive and with potential for micropolitical action and the creation for new public spheres. As opposed to other curatorial approaches, the project exhibition establishes a discourse, a practice that radically challenges the neutrality of the art space and the related representational regime. These practices take their place consciously within the art discourses of the modern and postmodern eras, as well as within the context of political and economic transformations and social struggles and movements.

In the face of this, it is obvious that exhibitions in general would need to be read beyond their representational intention or composition of narratives. A critique of exhibitions would need to include a discussion on how, why and by whom they have been produced, under which conditions and, most importantly, what they finally enable. As Walter Benjamin asks in 'The Author as Producer' (1934): 'What is its attitude *in* the relations of production of its time?'[36] Benjamin was calling for practice that transforms the cultural apparatus in such a way that readers (in our case, viewers) are turned into producers.

To conclude I would like to propose a concept in which the production of publics, the constitution of new forms of subjectivation and public action is seen as entangled within critical artistic practices, rather than sticking to the terms 'labour' or 'production'. Following Hannah Arendt's theory of action and her notion of praxis, one might come to new criteria to understand the specificity of self-organising strategies such as exhibition-making by artists. By distinguishing, as Arendt does in *The Human Condition* (1958), action from labour and fabrication/production by linking the former to the freedom to begin the unthought and the plurality of singularities, it might be possible to articulate a conception in which exhibition-making by artists can be read under other parameters than those of neoliberal recuperation or 'multi-tasking'.[37] To understand the self-articulation of the role of the artist and the use of the exhibition space and format as action leads to an aesthetic conception of politics — one that is not reduced to a form of (productive) work or *poiesis* and marketable authorships, but which creates new publics and therefore new forms of subjectivation in the middle of the public sphere. To act means to appear in public, to be able to get rid of one's self and to do the unanticipated and unpredictable.

31   For example, MoneyNations (1998—2000) or Transit Migration (2003—06) resulted in different communities during their development processes; the same was true of the related forms of communication. MoneyNations communicated with cultural producers from Central and Southern Europe by way of the internet and personal contacts. On that basis, it generated not only an exhibition — in the more classical sense — about discourses on EU border production and border-crossing, but also a whole series of other activities. These included a conference in which artists, film-makers and political initiatives from south-eastern Europe participated, a seminar with radio producers from ex-Yugoslavia, a video producers' network and, most significantly, a mailing list which facilitated the active exchange of information between anti-racist projects, events and initiatives for more than four years. A kind of supranational community of artists, scholars and political activists thus emerged from the project. See: http://www.moneynations.ch or http://www.transitmigration.org (last accessed on 13 July 2010).
32   See Walter Mignolo, 'Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and De-Colonial Freedom', *Theory, Culture, and Society*, vol.26, no.7—8, 2009, pp.1—23.
33   See also Paolo Virno, 'Das Öffentlichsein des Intellekts. Nichtstaatliche Öffentlichkeit und Multitude', in G. Raunig and U. Wuggenig (ed.), *Publicum*, *op. cit.*, pp.124—39.
34   The concept of 'ground for possibilities' has been introduced by J.K. Gibson-Graham in *A Postcapitalist Politics*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

35   See Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, London and New York: Routledge, 1995.
36   Walter Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer', *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott), New York: Schocken Books, 1986, pp.220—38.
37   See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.