

**Radical Resonances: Art, Self-organised Cultural Activity and the
Production of Postcapitalist Subjectivity; or, Deferred Self-Inquiry of a
Precarious Artworker, 2008 – 2011.**

PhD THESIS

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his/her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

The thesis and portfolio of practical work presents a parallel inquiry into socially transformative art practice and the evaluative framework proper to it. It explores how art contributes to a better world and the form such practice takes in an increasingly expanded, ‘precarious’ and interdisciplinary sphere. The varied nature of the work under question leads to the adoption of a structure that distinguishes practices by their operation in different spaces or ecologies: the individual, social and structural.

A further distinction is made between those practices that self-identify as art (and the institutional, market-led and capitalist framework this can entail), and those that either actively disavow or go unrecognised as art due to their distance from the signifying apparatuses of the discipline. This ‘informal’ art practice is referred to as ‘self-organised cultural activity’ and opens up on to discussions of the relative merits of DIY practices including music, self-publishing, political activism and so on.

The thesis demonstrates how these often distanced and apparently contradictory practices find resonance and whose accumulative effect contributes to the conditions for a paradigmatic shift that would constitute ‘postcapitalism’. The connecting thread between these sites and practices is their potential for effecting change at the level of the individual via a subjectivising aesthetic rupture.

Contextualised by poststructuralist, postanarchist and Autonomist Marxist political philosophy and debates in contemporary art criticism and theory, the thesis and dossier of practice contribute to a richer understanding of - and expanded language with which to discuss – the relation between art and politics. It draws links between normally unconnected practices, identifying the often overlooked or underplayed aesthetic experience within socially engaged art and the political resonances of aesthetic experience, attending to gaps in thought and practice around art and social change.

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Introduction

For as soon as the distribution of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a herdsman, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood; while in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic.¹

If we want to cultivate new habits of thinking for a postcapitalist politics, it seems there is work to be done to loosen the structure of feeling that cannot live with uncertainty or move beyond hopelessness.²

The starting position for this thesis is one of uncertainty: of unsureness, instability and precarity. By this I am referring to both the socio-economic and political climate in which I write – July 2011 – that has seen upheaval on a local and global scale following on from market crash of 2008 and subsequent recession; the instatement of new governmental regimes and subsequent cuts and austerity measures in the UK; student-led and popular uprisings including those presently developing in Greece, Spain and the recent so-called ‘Arab Spring’ that threatens (or promises, depending on your perspective) to spread around the globe - and the personal circumstances and factors that motivate me to put fingers to keys. These are strange and exciting times and the prospect of ‘change’ hums and buzzes in the air, as well as all over the social networking websites that distract me from writing.

These are, arguably, even stranger times in which to be an artist or cultural practitioner. On the one hand, an artist ought to be thrilled with the prospect of a ‘blank canvas’ or at least one that is ripe with fresh possibilities. And what fantastic ‘context’ and socio-political ‘backdrops’ against which to reflect and make artistic comment! On the other, a niggling feeling and background noise like tinnitus compromise my focus with derailing questions

¹ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, ed. C.J Arthur, *The German Ideology* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1991), p.54

² JK Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), p.4

and comments that include ‘Why are you doing what you are doing? What good is it? What does it matter? How pointless to be making art when the real battle is on the streets, right now!’ etcetera. Such are the now-clichéd tortures of the ‘politically-committed’ artist.

A further complicating matter is my uncertainty about my position as an artist or, more specifically, an Artist-with-a-capital-A. My practice or daily activity involves making ‘art’ with varying degrees of regularity, yes, but amongst a range of other activities that may less comfortably fit the category of art (visual or otherwise) that I still consider to be part of my practice. By means of an overview: I take photographs, I make video-work, I engage in research projects that find form as exhibitions. I also work as part of a self-identified art collective called Black Dogs in Leeds, albeit a collective whose practice involves maintaining a critical and distanced relationship with the institutional ‘Artworld’ and the commercial and careerist mentality it entails. I lecture and teach in Fine Art, and talk publicly on the matter, often preceded by a biography that announces me as an artist - a biography that I have written. I contribute to the international ‘DIY’ music community (a loose network of musicians, bands, labels, writers and promoters who share an affinity with the ethics and not-for-profit mentality that emerged from the counter-culture and punk scene of the 60s and 70s) by playing music, organising gigs and releasing records. I spend a lot of time as a member of boards or steering groups for organisations, collectives and co-operatives that aim to facilitate ‘non-capitalist’ art and cultural activity. Not least, I am involved in practice-led research for a PhD in Fine Art. I write, I swim occasionally, I cook, I drink, and so on.

The purpose of this torrent of CV-material is not intended as self-congratulatory but rather to serve to highlight the motley brew of (often purposefully unwaged) activities and responsibilities that constitute my ‘living’. My position is by no means unique for two reasons. First, the collapse of life into art and art into life - or an understanding of everything an artist does as his (sic) work - is something we are familiar with (since Duchamp at least). Second, as economists, social commentators and political philosophers like David Harvey, Ivor Southwood, Guy Standing and Bifo have pointed out in their writings on precarity: the creative freelance, multi/interdisciplinary worker who is

notionally liberated, self-managed and ‘free’ but is in reality both always looking for and engaged in work (the boundaries of ‘work’ and ‘life’ having become almost irrelevant) and dogged by a total lack of stability, is fast becoming a new branch of the proletariat - referred to as ‘the precariat’³. This condition, and the accompanying forms of alienation specific to it, will be expounded upon in later chapters of this thesis.

Economic and financial concerns aside, a more ‘spiritual’ doubt underpins my desire to reflect upon and write about my practice. When looking over my calendar, CV or biography, or when I find myself in the potentially uncomfortable position of explaining to a stranger, relative or distant acquaintance what it is I ‘do’, I am reminded of the BBC documentary aired in 2009 that chronicled the lives of University Challenge Winners.⁴ When one of the subjects of the documentary, Tony – an especially socially-awkward and eccentric character – is asked what he would like to be remembered for (and, by implication, why he would dedicate so much of his life to a such a pointless and absurd exercise as the pursuit and mastery of ‘general knowledge’) his reply was disarmingly poignant and one I can paraphrase as such: ‘to be able to say that I have in some small way contributed to the world being a better place than if I had not existed.’ No doubt countless philosophers throughout the ages have better and more famously articulated similar sentiment, but I felt it had a particular resonance coming from the mouth of somebody engaged in such seemingly purposeless and innocuous activity and, accordingly, to whom I felt a peculiar bond.

So, on one level this thesis is a result of my attempts to be able to say with some degree of confidence that what I do ‘matters’ or makes a contribution towards ‘a better world’, no matter how small an offering it may be. For me a ‘better world’ is necessarily a ‘non-capitalist’ or ‘postcapitalist’ one and as such I evaluate my life-activity against its potential to contribute to conditions for that new reality. I have little to no faith in the neoliberal free-market conceit that my self-advancement will be of the benefit to society as a whole, and

³ See Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011)

⁴ *Wonderland: I Won University Challenge*, Last broadcast on Wed, 20 Jan 2010, 03:10 on BBC One

by extension my practice does not identify for the most part with the ‘professional’, market-led art world. Accordingly, my political orientation is roughly ‘anti-capitalist’ and my practice can be crudely understood as ‘critical’ or ‘radical’. Again, I will expound on these statements shortly and will continue to do so throughout the thesis but, for the sake of setting the scene, I hope these somewhat naïve statements suffice.

The naming of an aesthetic practice or praxis with such aims, especially in relation to the title of this thesis, is problematic. Many labels already exist and include the aforementioned ‘radical’ and ‘critical’ art practice, but for me they are labels that too readily announce their effectiveness and suggest an arrogance and lack of self-reflexivity. On the softer end of the scale we have ‘socially-concerned’, or simply ‘political’ art but this seems to define a particular content rather than an evaluative horizon for the practice. ‘Socially engaged art’ sits somewhere between the two but, like ‘community art’ before it, can be said to have well and truly gone through the cycle of co-option and recuperation by market and state forces and, as such, fails to signpost an intentionally antagonistic practice. ‘Activist art’ is another contender but denotes a certain form of direct action and pragmatism that this thesis will seek to problematise. ‘An art practice with socially transformative aims’ is the closest I have come to a suitable term but, as we will see in the course of thesis, the relation between social transformation might not be as directly socially engaged as this label might suggest, and, furthermore, it is just too unwieldy for repeated use. Instead, and after much deliberation, I have settled on just ‘art’.

There is, however, another thread to my practice that warrants a distinction from ‘art’ and the professionalized and separated sphere such a word conjures up. For this I have used the term ‘self-organised cultural activity’. This refers both to creative practices such as music, film-making, literature and so on when they do not appear as ‘art’, but also - and more specifically - to activity that identifies with the content or form of art practice, but not so with the professional or institutional frame such identification may entail.

Before elaborating upon them, let us first turn our attention to a framework in which we can understand the relation between these multifarious approaches, self-styled as art or

otherwise. In order to better conceive of a dialogue between disparate and overlapping activity, I have found it useful to adopt a spatial model. This helps to distinguish between, share out and group certain practices as a means to analysing their connections and disparities. The models on offer that interest me include Henri Lefebvre's distinctions of space outlined in *The Production of Space* that have been translated and expanded upon by geographers David Harvey and Stuart Elden, and by Félix Guattari as 'three ecologies'.

Guattari, somewhat surprisingly, offers the most straightforward definition of space when he describes the three ecologies as 'the environment, the socius and the psyche'⁵ or, elsewhere, 'the environment, social relations and human subjectivity'.⁶ Guattari makes these distinctions in the hope of forming an ethico-political articulation capable of resisting and producing alternatives to what he calls Integrated World Capitalism.⁷ As such, it appears as an appropriate model for understanding a range of critical art practices.

In addition, we can address the three types of space used by David Harvey in his short essay *Space as a Key Word* (who has in turn borrowed these categories from Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*).⁸ Here we have three articulations of space; 'material space' or as Harvey might put it 'absolute space' - this being the physical, geographical space in which we move, literally our physical, concrete environment; 'representational space' - that is, space as it is represented in maps or plans, or even in the descriptions of a place. Last, there is 'spaces of representation' which might be best understood as 'internal' or 'psychological' space; the space of thoughts, dreams and understanding. Stuart Elden has offered another translation of Lefebvre's spatial categories as 'lived space', 'conceived space' and 'perceived space'.⁹

⁵ Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis; an Ethico-aesthetic Paradigm* (Sydney: Power Publications, 2006), p.20

⁶ Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies* (London: Continuum, 2008), p.28

⁷ *ibid*, p.28

⁸ David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2006), pp.130-135

⁹ Stuart Elden, *Understanding Lefebvre: Theory and the Possible* (London: Continuum, 2004), p.288

By creating a hybrid of these spatial understandings and plotting them against each other, I have formed a matrix to utilise as a tool to describe and evaluate art (see Fig.1). This, however, proposes a mapping of art practices that can, in the first instance, be too rigid and overcomplicated for our purposes. I have found it useful to begin by thinking about various art practices as interventions into the spaces outlined by the matrix in broad levels, these being:

- Intervention at the individual level - which might be constituted by ‘representational’ and individually encountered practices such as those conventionally understood as art (painting, sculpture, photography, and so on) and found in galleries, as well as through mediums including music, film or literature, particularly but not exclusively, when experienced in domestic space or in solitude.
- Intervention at a social level - as demonstrated in relational or dialogic practices or in what has been termed new-genre public art, or in collective activity (the act of interacting with or working with other people towards something) or collective appreciation (for example dancing together, attending a music concert).
- Intervention at a structural level - that includes the altering of the material fabric of the environment (for example through public sculpture and architectural practices) but also practices that operate in ‘representational space’ via the creation of organisations, institutions or counter institutions, altering policy, place making, the creation of alternative economies and so on.

Naturally, these three levels and spaces overlap to various degrees and have permeable boundaries – where, for example, would an alternative, not-for-profit cinema that screens artist and structuralist film, operates as a social centre, and is structured as a co-operative where all members are paid in time credits, sit within the matrix? It can be considered to some extent as operating in and intervening into all three ‘ecologies’. Similarly, the matrix is not deployed to make unhelpful separations that create oppositions between practices.

Rather it is a structural tool deployed to help the flow of this thesis and also to highlight threads that connect and run through seemingly disparate or conflicting practices.

This thread, for the most part, is ‘the production of subjectivity’. By this I mean that when evaluating the effects of these practices, common to all is a capacity for creating a shift at the level of the individual – a change in world-view or perception that we can call subjectivity. This change at the individual level is understood by many of the theorists referenced in this thesis as foundational to any meaningful and sustained social or structural change. In fact, the relationships between individual or perceptual experiences, social or collective interaction and events, environmental and structural factors, and the production of a postcapitalist subjectivity are the primary concern of this thesis. It will be made clear that rather than a reductive chicken-and-egg or nature-vs-nurture approach to change at the individual, social and economic level, the connectedness between the three ecologies and the subjectivity they produce - and that in return the ecologies are shaped by - amounts to what Guattari described as a new ‘(aesthetic) paradigm’, or in mine and Tony from University Challenge’s words, ‘a better world’.

Before outlining this production of postcapitalist subjectivity in more detail, however, I would like to return to the matter of ‘self-organised cultural activity’. It is my intuition - and something that I will use this thesis to test and explore in more detail - that activity that is undertaken, produced or experienced in a non-capitalist frame, creates more frequent and more potent opportunities for the production of a postcapitalist subjectivity than does activity that wholly identifies with capitalism. This may seem like a truism, but to begin to justify such a claim we have to consider that which might constitute a ‘non-capitalist frame’ or, more directly, what non-capitalist activity might be.

An anecdotal example of the complications faced when identifying or defining non-capitalist activity can be found in the recuperation of the term ‘DIY’ (standing for Do It Yourself) when referring to the DIY music scene. Previously ‘DIY’ could be said to have been a signifier for a militantly not-for-profit and anti-authoritarian approach to cultural production; an ethical practice that promotes self-sufficiency, collective, egalitarian and

non-hierarchical organisation, and was purposefully disengaged from the professional music 'industry'. Like previously-considered anti-establishment and disruptive cultural and musical forms including 'rock and roll,' 'punk' and 'indie' before it, however, DIY as both a term and a method of organisation and production is under threat of co-optation by state and market-forces.

This co-optation is signalled in the shift in capitalist production from a material, Fordist, top-down model to an immaterial, horizontal, and collective or self-organised mode – that is, in the emergence of the knowledge economy of cognitive, cultural or late-capitalism. It is also, and most pressingly, demonstrated by the 'Big Society' model that is being pedalled by the current coalition government in which self-initiated and community-focused activities are reframed as the foundations for the given order. The combined effect of this dual enclosure of 'DIY' by neoliberal or neoconservative forces serves to blur the distinction between antagonistic self-organisation and an entrepreneurialism - and moralism - wholly complicit with, and contributory to, conserving 'business as usual'.

This recuperation of a previously resistant cultural form by capitalism and market-forces is, of course, not a recent phenomenon and examples of co-option have been outlined capably, and in more detail, elsewhere that render further elaboration here superfluous.¹⁰ My intention here, however, is to outline the landscape for the discussions about the radical and radicalising potential of various forms of cultural activity and the spaces in which that activity occurs.

I will be arguing throughout this thesis that there does exist art and self-organised activity that, at a fundamental level (one of ethics and the subjectivity emerging from it), is distinct from, and resistant to, total recuperation by capitalism, and, as such, we can say that 'non-capitalist activity' is both possible and even rife. My position is supported by writers including Gregory Sholette who has articulated non-capitalist or non-institutional - and

¹⁰ See, for example, Stewart Home, *The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1991) or Dave and Stuart Wise 'The End of Music' in Stewart Home, ed., *What is Situationism? A Reader* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1996), pp.63-102

therefore unrecognised - creative activity as the ‘dark matter’ of the art world; from Chris Carlsson, who has drawn together a number of case studies on DIY collectives and individuals that he describes as ‘nowtopians’; from John Holloway’s most recent reflections on Marx’s concepts of non-abstracted labour or ‘concrete doing’; and in documents from the DIY and punk music scenes, activists, and self-organised artist collectives.

My faith in the existence of such activity informs that which I consider to be a project of political and social transformation. In place of a theory of political change that relies on the capture and control of state power by a vanguard party, I feel greater affinity with conceptions of social change that envisage and understand ‘revolution’ as constituting or emerging from the joining-up and expansion of ‘cracks’ that already exist in capitalism; a case of dissolving power and capitalist relations that would avoid their continuation in a different form.

At one level this reflects a kind of stoic pragmatism on my part; that in a given situation I would rather spend time and energy creating an alternative solution rather than cursing or even directly addressing the problem. I recognise that this is not unproblematic or without its shortcomings. Rather than partake in demonstrations or lead union actions, I prefer to create alternative spaces and form critique through what I enjoy doing – an approach that falls prey all too easily to accusations of soft, evasive politics or ‘lifestyle’ radicalism.

There are, however, a number of political philosophers, writers and activists whose output relates to this conception of political and economic change (‘revolution’ is not the correct word in this case) and who will provide some of the theoretical lenses for this thesis. One camp is the ‘postanarchists’ – a relatively recent strand of anarchist theory that rejects the purportedly essentialist foundations of ‘classical anarchism’ in favour of a poststructuralist understanding of the subject. Another is found in Autonomist Marxism, which emerged from a revisiting and updating of Karl Marx’s writings in light of the aforementioned shift in form of capitalism that accompanied the transition from the industrial era to one we now

understand as ‘postindustrial’.¹¹ Related to these, but identifying with neither, are the writings of the aforementioned John Holloway, a sociologist, whose books *Change The World Without Taking Power* and *Crack Capitalism* signify their content in their title alone. Also worthy of note at this stage, not least because they have influenced the title of this thesis, is the writing of feminist economic geographers JK Gibson-Graham who write collaboratively (under a joint name) on ‘postcapitalist politics’, and whose case studies on experimental community economies, workers co-operatives and the production of non-capitalist subjectivities provide a generous foundation for some of the issues I wish to explore.¹²

As well as a roughly shared conception of political and economic upheaval arising from the direct participation of those whom change will benefit, and a critical view or outright rejection of the party form of political action, these theorists and practitioners all offer a central role to the subject or subjectivity in their reflections. Few discuss the role of contemporary art or aesthetic theory, however, and those who do fail to do so in great detail. To a certain extent this thesis will address such gaps between contemporary political philosophy, art theory, contemporary art and self-organised culture.

It is not my task, however, to give a detailed historical overview of the philosophy of aesthetics and subjectivity. I believe such a study to be covered in depth elsewhere¹³ and to begin to make a valid critical contribution would require the main focus of this thesis and fundamentally alter its content. Rather, I am happy to start with a more sociological view, as advanced by Gibson-Graham, who talk of subjectivity in terms of a sense of agency (the ‘world view’ or individual relation to the world that informs the will to act upon it) and as a phenomena that can be discussed in everyday and experiential, rather than purely metaphysical, terms. This will, however, necessarily lead to discussion on the philosophy

¹¹ See Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism* (London: Pluto Press, 2002) and Sylvere Lotinger, and Christian Marazzi, eds., *Autonomia; Post-political politics* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007)

¹² See J.K Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006)

¹³ See Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003)

of subjectivity and its production, particularly in postmodern and poststructuralist theory (with focus on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari), and more recent articulations from figures like Alain Badiou who have been seen to signal a return of the subject in critical thought, as well as notions of our being ethical subjects proposed by Simon Critchley.

For the time being, though, I would like to put forward my personal reflections on the manner in which subjectivity is produced in relation to the various levels of spatial intervention that structure this thesis. I find it useful to think of subjectivity as being produced in three ways, each relating to a different type of aesthetic practice and the ‘ecology’ proper to it. These are as follows:

- A modelling of subjectivity by its reflection and representation - for instance, through sociological/anthropological studies or the creation of characters that hold a mirror up to the audience so that they can achieve critical distance from their own and other’s subjectivity. Such practices might also be said to ‘produce’ subjectivity through their exertion of influence and capacity to act as role models and therefore we may also think of representational forms such as film, photography, painting, literature and poetry as reflecting and modelling subjectivity.
- The production of subjectivity by a rupture or event, especially in collective experience - this is a form of production, or rather a stage in the production of subjectivity, that relates to the dislocation of a subject from their previously ingrained (and most often capitalist) ‘self’. Writers on aesthetic appreciation and experience have described this dislocation as occurring in practices of immersion (such as those offered by music) or through representational practices that deny a straightforward rational understanding and exceed or overflow our capacity to make sense of the world.¹⁴ In this thesis, however, I will be reframing this rupturous or

¹⁴ See Ina Blom, ‘Boredom and Oblivion’ in Ken Friedman, ed., *The Fluxus Reader* (Chichester: Academy Editions, 1999), pp.63 – 90, or outlined in Guattari’s concept of the ‘aesthetic refrain’ which will be discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis, or in (post-) Kantian aesthetic theory of transcendental experience and Lacanian sublimation in Simon

ecstatic experience as a shared and collective one that pertains to ‘social space’ and includes art practices associated with relational aesthetics¹⁵ as well as group action.

- The production of subjectivity through conscious, sustained and reflexive learning - a method by which subjectivity is produced that, as previous, may entail aesthetic and social encounters and reflection upon forms of subjectivity but is here reframed as a more intentional project that requires a conscious fidelity on the part of the subject. We can consider this as another stage in the production of subjectivity. One where it becomes institutionalised, formalised or structured in some way and, accordingly, exemplified in this thesis through projects of radical and artistic pedagogy.

Again, it should be clear that these three models of the production of subjectivity are not mutually exclusive. Nor are they confined in any strict manner to a particular type of space (perceived/conceived/lived, or psychological/social/environmental). Instead there is a connectedness and relay between aesthetic practices, spaces of intervention and methods of production of subjectivity that amount to a resonating body greater than its constituent parts. It will be the task of this thesis, then, to contribute to a language appropriate to describing, analysing and evaluating aesthetic practices that aim to create conditions for the emergence of a postcapitalist reality.

Before going on to describe the structure and method of the thesis I feel it worthwhile to make a final clarification on the relation between capitalism, postcapitalism and a better world. Like issues surrounding recuperation, and the production of subjectivity I feel it appropriate to forego a comprehensive overview of the problematic, oppressive and destructive nature of capitalism, assuming some prior knowledge on the part of the reader and familiarity or willingness to engage with texts whose primary concern is the analysis of

Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London: Verso, 2008), pp.69-73

¹⁵ I borrow the term from the book of the same name - Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses Du Réel, 2002) - which will be given a fuller explanation in due course.

forms of capital in the contemporary world.¹⁶ There will, however, be specific analysis of elements of capitalism - especially in its late and neoliberal form - where it is pertinent to the evaluation of the radicality or resistant quality of the practices I am dealing with.

By way of an overview: the world is in crisis, not only economically and environmentally but socially too. I am in agreement with analyses of this situation that understand these compounded crises as a result of not only an economic system that is unsustainable due to its reliance on relentless expansion (its 'primitive accumulation' or 'accumulation by dispossession')¹⁷ but, at a deeper level, the result of a competitive, self-interested, individualist subjectivity. This self-interested subject is a result of neoliberal capitalism's sovereign appraisal of private, individual property on which it both relies and that it produces.¹⁸ The position in which we find ourselves, then, is one where capitalism must be done away with, or reformed at such a fundamental level, and to such extent, that it would be completely unrecognisable as capitalism. An alternative 'system' or political programme, however, is not readily available and, in fact, the other forms of socio-political and economic organisation (communism, socialism etc) have been shown to be equally untenable in their previously tested forms. This thesis, however, is aligned with social and political movements that refuse to see this situation - one that cries 'there is no alternative' in the face of any 'utopian' desires for change - as insurmountable. Rather, it embraces the fact that postcapitalism is just that; a leap into the unknown, something that will have to be

¹⁶ See, for example, Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy Volume One* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1976); Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2007); David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism* (London: Profile Books, 2010), Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009).

¹⁷ 'These include the commodification and privatization of land and the forceful expulsion of peasant populations; the conversion of various forms of property rights; the suppression of rights to the commons the commodification of labour power and the suppression of alternative (indigenous) forms of production and consumption; colonial, neo-colonial, and imperial processes of appropriation of assets (including natural resources); the monetization of exchange and taxation, particularly of land, the slave trade; and usury, the national debt, and ultimately the credit system as radical means of primitive accumulation.' David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.145

¹⁸ See Karl Marx, David Harvey, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri; elements of whose theories will be covered and explained over the course of the thesis.

experimented with in the everyday and named as it is practiced. What is certain is that in order for this to happen, subjects or subjectivities (individual and collective) that are capable of and willing to attempt to think ‘within, against and beyond’ capitalism are fundamental. It is my belief that art’s radical capacity lies somewhere within that field.

The thesis, then, is structured into three main chapters. These chapters are based on the three levels of intervention outlined previously in the spatial matrix. Chapter one is concerned with intervention at an individual and perceptual level and explicates in more detail the specifics of a postcapitalist subjectivity. The production of subjectivity by art is explored by its capacity to reflect and inspire a non-capitalist subject through ‘representational’ gallery-based practices including video and photography. There is particular focus on this chapter on Deleuze and Guattari’s figure of a ‘nomadic’ subjectivity and the way in which this has been picked up and expanded by postanarchist theorists like Lewis Call and Saul Newman, and, more recently curator and writer Nicolas Bourriaud.

Chapter two focuses on intervention at the social level and begins with an overview of the ‘post-relational’ landscape providing an overview of socially engaged art practices and the debates surrounding Bourriaud’s *Relational Aesthetics*. These are subsequently related to theories of the production of subjectivity through rupture, with attention given to Alain Badiou’s ‘event’ and Hardt and Negri’s ‘joyous encounter’. A secondary purpose of this chapter is to address some of the misconceptions surrounding ‘socially engaged’ art, and social practice in general, by challenging critiques that overplay their pragmatism and near-sightedness, and berate their lack of concern for aesthetic experience.

Chapter three is concerned with a structural or environmental intervention and production of subjectivity achieved through (counter) institutionalised learning. This is explored by an analysis of radical pedagogy as it appears in a range of art practices. Theories of pedagogy from Antonio Gramsci, Paulo Friere, Autonomist Marxism, and Jacques Rancière are applied to, and evaluated against, a range of art practices ranging from the creation of autonomous or ‘free’ art schools, through to video essays and social interventions. Again, a

secondary line of enquiry is present that aims to highlight the role of aesthetic experience as a form of education appropriate to the emergence of a postcapitalist subject.

The concluding chapter addresses the bleed between, and repetition across, the previous chapters. I put forward another mode of production of subjectivity based on Simon Critchley's writing about the 'ethical demand' that I show to cut across all ecologies.

A final word should be given to the method deployed in the research and formation of this thesis and accompanying dossier. I consider this writing to be a part of my practice, as a way to reflect on pertaining issues and of unpicking and progressing conversations relevant to it. I choose to do this not in a direct way by writing specifically about examples of my own practice but rather present a more academic and contextual reflection alongside those examples, allowing them to be read as explorations in parallel fields. There is a distance between my writing and my practice – one is not wholly dictated by, nor illustrative of, the other – but I see this as a productive crack or tension that highlights moments of ill-fit and excess, of resonance and dissonance, and of the known and unknown.

My concern has been in keeping the dynamic between my practice and writing a lively and productive one, where one does not drown out the other. It is important to me that this thesis and the practice are complimentary. Just as I have chosen not to present the entirety of my practice, editorial decisions have been made in terms of academic research. At certain points, paths have opened up that would lead me into specialising in one of the above areas; research into the history of aesthetics and subjectivity for example. Or theories of the subject, musicological studies, the history of anarchism or of communes, a review of European social centres and so on. At each of these junctions I have allowed my experiences as a practitioner to direct the flow of my research.

Similarly, much of my practice involves giving talks and presentations, and dialogue in both academic and non-academic settings. This has shaped the tone and content of my thesis whereby I am trying to keep it both relevant to, and in tension with, the field in which I find myself disseminating such material. Naturally, the direction taken by my

theoretical research has informed my practice and the spaces and contexts in which I find myself. In general, though, I see this thesis as a reflection on, and product of, my experiences as a precarious and uncertain art-with-a-small-‘a’ practitioner based in Leeds where self-organised culture and its relation to the development of the city is a prevalent concern.

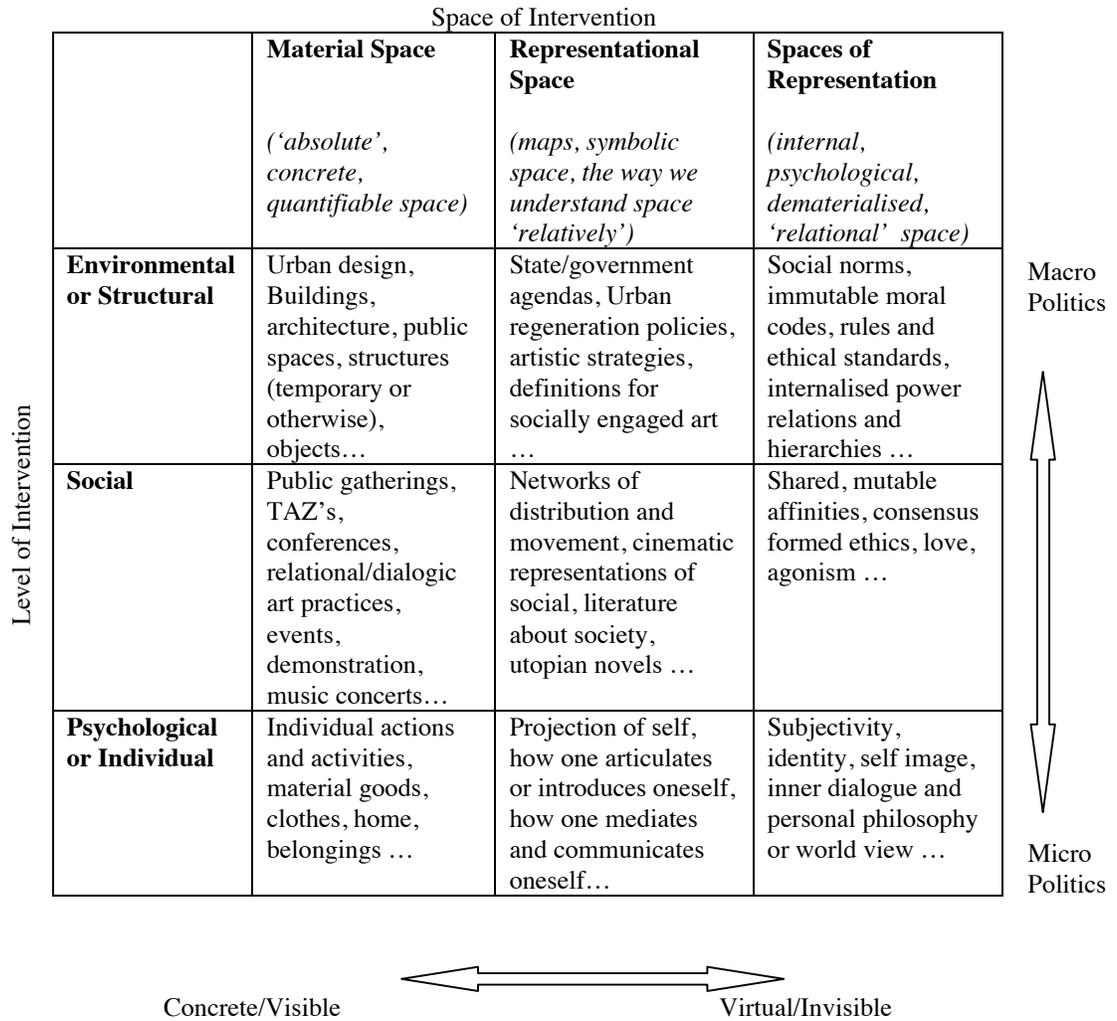
What, then, does this contribution amount to? On one hand, I hope to address some of the false oppositions and misconceptions of a political art practice, or one that dares to evaluate itself against the criteria of social transformation rather than self-interest. Too often these practices are berated for their lack of aesthetics, or patronised for their naïve belief in an outside to capitalism, or for their ‘debilitating’ and anachronistic institutional critique.¹⁹ I hope to show that, in actuality, such practices and practitioners are more savvy and aware than they are often given credit for.

Another aim is to highlight resonances across previously unconnected or discordant practices: between art, underground music, activism, forms of everyday cultural production and so forth. Equally, I hope to highlight the inconsistencies, conflicts and contradictions in previously lumped-together practices that have been grouped by their formal qualities or genre – those that exist in socially engaged art for example, or in self-organised and DIY practices more generally. It is not my intention to suggest that some practices should not be engaged in and others should, but rather to contribute to a more appropriate language for discussing, framing and making art that embraces its potential to ‘make a difference’.

¹⁹ See for example Claire Bishop, ‘The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents’, in Schavemaker, Margriet and Mischa Rakier, eds., *Right About Now: Art and Theory since the 1990s* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2007), pp.59-68. These arguments will be given fuller attention in the relevant chapter.

Fig.1

Matrix of Spaces and Levels of Intervention for Socially Transformative Art



This illustration is intended to visualise the various levels and spaces of artistic activity and intervention that are covered throughout this thesis and are referred to at the beginning of the chapters. Chapter One deals with the lower level of intervention, Chapter Two with the middle, and Chapter Three with the top.

Chapter One: Intervention in Perceptual Space - Reflecting non-capitalist subjects; the Nomad and The Amateur

As outlined in the introduction, the manner in which I will navigate the broad range of practices to be covered in this thesis will be to distinguish them in the first instance by their operation in different types of space. I have adopted the distinctions of space made by Henri Lefebvre and translated and augmented by Stuart Elden and David Harvey, and paired these with Félix Guattari's 'three ecologies' to form a matrix by which we can begin to distribute, arrange and analyse connections and disparities between various practices (refer to fig.1).

The first 'level' of space outlined by this matrix is, in one translation of Guattari, the level of human subjectivity. This is problematic, however, as I intend to demonstrate over the course of this thesis that the production of (non-capitalist) subjectivity is common to all these practices and is a thread that runs through the different spatial categories. A more useful interpretation of this first ecology, then, is that of the human psyche or 'mental space'. If we relate this to Lefebvre's space of representation, or, better, 'perceived space', then we begin to get a clearer idea of the type of space I am thinking of, and the practices most appropriate to it.

The level of perceptual space is that experienced 'inside' the individual – that is, the space of precepts, thoughts, imagination, dreams and so on. This space lends itself most readily to discussions of subjectivity as we are talking about something hidden from the concrete, material and objective world, a space that is impossible to show objectively to another - in its representation it would become what Elden has called 'conceived space' - and experienced differently by each of us. This immeasurability does not detract from its role in social transformation, as I will explicate in due course.

First, though, let us outline the types of practices that we might consider as interventions into perceived space. The most obvious examples are those conventional or traditional art forms - painting, photography, sculpture, film and so on - that we might expect to

experience in a gallery setting. To be more specific, we can think of representational practices. By this I do not mean those that are purely figurative but instead those that are forms of art that commonly seek to capture, reflect and represent a subject or a world for the appreciation and contemplation of others. For our purposes, I would make a crude distinction between these ‘representational’ practices that have a mediated relationship between artist or artwork and viewer, and those with a more direct and concrete effect such as social and participatory events, dialogic practices, and so on, which I will cover later.

Historically these forms of art that are designed to be contemplated, and which function primarily within perceived or mental space at an individual level, are used to explain issues of aesthetic judgement and subjectivity. Since Plato and throughout Enlightenment, Romantic and German Idealist thought, aesthetic appreciation has been understood as crucial to the development and self-mastery of man.²⁰ It is not my intention to address these theories directly, but instead to look to more contemporary theories of subjectivity as they appear in political philosophy. I do this both for reasons of space but also to focus on writing that offers a more contemporary and political context. That said, the influence of theories of the aesthetic’s dislocating and rupturous affect on the viewer and its potential as a tool for re-subjectification, as it appears in the writings of Guattari, Jacques Rancière and Alain Badiou, will be covered in subsequent chapters.

To begin, I would like to put forward a slightly different understanding of the manner in which art can shape subjectivity. We can propose that representational art forms have the capacity to reflect certain types of subjectivity. This could be in a literal and direct manner: for instance, through biographical video pieces that portray the thoughts and feelings of a subject; or more abstractly in the processes an artist goes through that may demonstrate a particular subjective tendency; or even through the figure of the artist themselves and their operation as a subject.

²⁰ See Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003)

I will explore these facets in more detail, but for now it is enough to say that art, by its representation of forms of subjectivity, holds a mirror up to the audience (and by extension society) and in so doing exerts some influence on the subsequent shaping of its subjectivity. We could go further to suggest that through the enactment and performance of certain types of subjectivity, and their translation into symbols and signs to be interpreted by an audience, that art *models* new forms of subjectivity. This is not to identify the artist as some kind of social engineer who forms collective consciousness like clay but merely to highlight the role that representations of subjectivity have in its development at an individual and social level.

Moving on, in this chapter I will focus on two models of subjectivity that are represented in contemporary art and can, to varying degrees, be claimed as post- or non-capitalist or, at the very least, subjectivities that challenge capitalist norms. The first of these figures will be in fact be two that are closely related; Deleuze and Guattari's 'nomad', or 'radicant', theorised in postanarchist theory and by curator and writer Nicolas Bourriaud. The second will be the self-styled non-professional, amateur or 'nowtopian' discussed by Gregory Sholette and Chris Carlsson, and provided with theoretical support by John Holloway's concept of 'just doing'. By outlining these models of subjectivity, and analysing the manner in which they are represented, expressed, performed and problematised through art practice, I hope to offer a better understanding of the relationship between art and the production of postcapitalist subjectivity. The discussion will also involve evaluating to what extent these models of subjectivity can be claimed as postcapitalist and how art practice provides new tools for its analysis.

The Nomad.

It takes a world to create a locality and an imagined world to transform ourselves in place. Perhaps this is one way that (counter) hegemony is enacted.²¹

To introduce the first subjective position it will be necessary to revisit and expand on the relationship between subjectivity and socio-political change. This relationship can be encapsulated by the now-clichéd statement that in order to change the world we have to first change ourselves. Or, articulated more specifically in relation to capitalism by Michel Foucault:

The political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our day is not to try to liberate the individual from the economy ... but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization that is linked to the economy. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries.²²

Foucault is suggesting here that there is a type of ‘individuality’ that is imposed by capitalism. Or, as The Free Association puts it:

When you participate in a competitive market you are forced to act as a utility-maximising individual – you have to act in ruthless and heartless competition with others over scarce resources. The more we do this, the more we come to adopt this outlook as natural: ‘each day seems like a natural fact.’ This is what we mean by a neoliberal subjectivity, the possibilities that appear open to us are conditioned by these experiences.²³

Whilst Marx(ism) may well have been criticised for his/(its) ‘economic determinism’ it is evident that capitalism promotes certain types of subjective relations (between individuals and the world) as well as social relations. In fact his assertion that capital is a social

²¹ JK Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), p.196

²² Michel Foucault in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rainbow, *Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982), p.216

²³ The Free Association, *Moments of Excess: Movements, Protest and Everyday Life* (Oakland: PM Press, 2011), p.110

relation²⁴ is one that resonates most strongly for me personally and is something that we see playing out at the everyday level: when stressed at work; when having to compete in order to win a commission; when being forced-smiled at and told to have a nice day by a coffee barista; when let down by someone you trusted because an offer they couldn't refuse came along. Or, on a more significant and less solipsistic level; the destruction of the planet due to its treatment as a pool of endless resources, the uneven development and subsequent inequalities between rich and poor, and the oppression and eradication of pre and non-capitalist cultures. All can be seen to arise from the capitalist economy that is sustained by subjects who explicitly or implicitly identify with its values.

It is not the task of this thesis, and especially not at this juncture, to offer a comprehensive list of those values and characteristics that are 'capitalist', as if making postcapitalism a reality were as simple a case as identifying and cross referencing them against a moral or ethical checklist. The complex nature of subjectivity and capitalism, of human and social behaviour, would make such a task impossible and undesirable, just as it does the attempt to identify 'systems' and structures of capitalism that have to be inverted or avoided at all costs. That said, analysis of traits and characteristics - specifically at the level of ethics and aspirations - is necessary and crucial to *thinking beyond* capitalism, especially when taking into account the production of non-capitalist subjectivity.

Similarly, as described by Gibson-Graham, a necessary stage in the production of a postcapitalist subjectivity - or better, a subject able to contribute to making postcapitalism a reality - is a recognition of, and break with, capitalist values and the identity inscribed by it. This can be a difficult, messy and painful process due to the phenomenon of

²⁴ 'Capital also is a social relation of production. It is a bourgeois relation of production, a relation of production of bourgeois society. The means of subsistence, the instruments of labour, the raw materials, of which capital consists – have they not been produced and accumulated under given social conditions, within definite special relations? Are they not employed for new production, under given special conditions, within definite social relations? And does not just the definite social character stamp the products which serve for new production as capital?' Karl Marx in *Wage Labour and Capital plus Wages, Price and Profit* (London: Bookmarks, 1996), pp.34-35

‘ressentiment’²⁵ or a wounded and paranoid attachment to capitalism.²⁶ So, we can think of a two-stage and interlinked process in becoming non-capitalist subjects that requires the ability to reflect on and recognise our own subjective relation to capitalism and the ability to make a break and to think and act ‘otherwise’.

It is important to highlight at this point that when I talk of a ‘non-capitalist subject’, I am not proposing a pure and uncontaminated subject that has fully escaped indoctrination by capital. The ramifications for the existence of such a subject is naïve, and the form of social change proper to it is wholly unsavoury. As we are well aware, and as I go on to explicate throughout this thesis, there is no outside to capitalism from which we can stand or to which we can flee. Nevertheless, I believe that there are moments or cracks that appear in which new subject positions, social relations and forms of organisation that undermine the values of capitalism can be experimented with. As such, when I use terms like ‘postcapitalist’ or ‘non-capitalist’ (subjects or subjectivity) it should be understood as shorthand for something in the process of becoming; never as fixed, guaranteed or fully-formed.

Returning to Foucault’s statement, then, we can read it in two ways: as suggesting that capitalism forces an individuation (used as a substitute word for subjectification), or, alternately, as suggesting that it individualises the subject. Both are true but the latter stresses the individualism and egoism that is often associated with the capitalist subject: that rampant self-interest and self-concern that capitalism - especially in its neoliberal form - feeds off of. This attachment to an essential self will be explored in more detail shortly.

Foucault’s statement also signals - and this is not as contradictory as it may appear - an interest in the role of subjectivity and the subject in social change. Some critics have

²⁵ See Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.22

²⁶ ‘To be a leftist is historically to be identified with the radical potential of the exploited and working class. Excluded from power yet fixated on the powerful, the radical subject is caught in the familiar resentment of the slave against the master.’ JK Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), p.5

berated postmodernism (with which Foucault is commonly associated) for underplaying the role of the subject or denying its existence outright and have reasoned that this is why the postmodern era has been one defined by an ironic and apolitical malaise.²⁷ Others, including Bourriaud as we shall see, interpreted postmodernism as championing a subject of the wrong sort. A group of writers that come from an anarchist perspective, however, identify in the theory associated with postmodernism, including that of Foucault, a model of subjectivity that would be appropriate to our era and a move beyond capitalism.

Postanarchism is a relatively recent branch of anarchist thought, so named because it merges poststructuralist and postmodern theory with anarchism's fundamental critique of power. For anarchists, capitalism is a product of our lack of ability to critique, our attachment to and even desire for power, best understood here as the will to exert power over others. Anarchists believe, then, that to recognise and make efforts to dissolve oppressive power relations or 'the place of power' would be concomitant with, and necessary to, a move beyond capitalism.²⁸

So-called 'classical anarchism'²⁹ has been criticised, however, for its mistaken belief that oppressive power is simply a result of hierarchical structures or environmental (including economic) conditions, rather than something performed at the level of subjectivity. In short, anarchist theory is often dismissed for its immature and hippyish outlook that once we 'smash the system' all evil will disappear with it; the implication being that deep down we are all 'good' and mutually-interested subjects corrupted by our capitalist or state-focused environment.³⁰

²⁷ As in Saul Newman, *From Bakunin to Lacan: Anti-Authoritarianism and the Dislocation of Power* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2007) or, elsewhere, Terry Eagleton, 'Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism' in *Against the Grain: Essays 1975-1985* (London: Verso, 1986), pp. 131-47, or Alain Badiou (trans. and ed. Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens), *Infinite Thought* (London: Continuum, 2006). p.3

²⁸ Saul Newman, *From Bakunin to Lacan: Anti-Authoritarianism and the Dislocation of Power* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2007), pp.37

²⁹ That associated with, and emerging from, writer's including Mikhail Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin.

³⁰ As demonstrated in the critiques by postanarchist writers outlined below.

The focus of writers like Saul Newman and Lewis Call, who are amongst postanarchism's most well known figures, is to address these critiques by revisiting anarchist theory and reconcile its critique of power (including, but not limited to, that of the state) with an 'anarchy of the subject' extrapolated from poststructuralist writing and its precedents. Accordingly, Newman and Call, as well as Todd May, dedicate a large portion of their writing to exposing anarchism for its essentialist traits.³¹ The crux of their argument is that until the *internal authority* of a fixed identity, or essentialist self, is replaced by a more fluid and contingent 'postmodern' identity any action on the part of those subjects aimed at changing the world will be hopeless. Their reasoning being that a fixed and rooted identity will reinstate the place of power. In postanarchist thought, commitment to a constant project of 'self-overcoming' is fundamental. Without it, the agent attempting to bring about meaningful social change will do little more than simply 'change the guard' of oppressive, authoritarian and hegemonic power.³²

Despite its numerous inconsistencies (not least, that a philosophy that rejects essentialism makes a fundamental requirement of its agents) postanarchism can be said to provide us with a foundation for a model of subject capable of thinking and acting beyond capitalism. Newman specifically draws on the philosophy of Max Stirner and his concept of the 'un-man',³³ whereas Call goes further back to draw on the 'godfather of poststructuralism', Nietzsche, to demonstrate the capacity for the individual to reject rational and Enlightenment-determined thought. Call, in particular, sees this project of self-radicalizing as a conscious effort on behalf of the agent; an 'immersing in the river of becoming'.³⁴ The question raised by this claim, though, is how - if we have been conditioned by internal oppressive power in the form of an identity, which might be ethnic, nationalistic, class-based, gender-oriented and so on - are we to shed these essentialist traits? What impetus is there for us to rid ourselves of the 'inner fascist' and what tools are available?

³¹ Saul Newman, 'Anarchism', in *From Bakunin to Lacan: Anti-Authoritarianism and the Dislocation of Power* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2007), pp.37-53

³² Lewis Call, *Postmodern Anarchism* (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2002), p.22

³³ Saul Newman, *From Bakunin to Lacan: Anti-Authoritarianism and the Dislocation of Power* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2007), p.62

³⁴ Lewis Call, *Postmodern Anarchism* (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2002), p.22

Call, May and Newman progress their anti-authoritarian project, and in so doing attempt to provide a solution to these questions, by drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'the nomad' as a radical subject, antagonistic to capitalist state power. In *Nomadology* Deleuze and Guattari describe a wandering tribe that, by their capacity to remain fluid and rootless, evade identification and capture by the state, and also retain the power to strike at it through 'raids'.³⁵ The analogy that is made positions the ever-moving, contingent traveller as both capable of eluding capture by state and capital, and is, at the same time, inherently antagonistic to both. Movement and travel, in its restless, evasive and unending form, becomes a methodology towards political agency via the rejection of a rooted, fixed and ultimately conservative self.

Before moving on to look at how the modelling of such a subjectivity might be helped by contemporary art that operates in perceptual space, I should make it clear that a nomadic subjectivity is not by default a non-capitalist one. One critique of Deleuze and Guattari's privileging of the nomad, and also of Newman's adoption of Stirner's egoist, individualist 'un-man', stems from the proximity of both figures to archetypes of the neo-liberal, trans-global capitalist. If we were to stand the flexible and adaptive creative worker (who globe-trots and shifts address, language, dialect and personality at will in order to meet the demands of his job) next to the 'inherently radical' figure of the nomad, would they look that different? Critical Art Ensemble, and Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello have noted the similarity,³⁶ with CAE reversing the analogy of nomadic power to describe the decentred, unidentifiable nature of capitalism in the digitalised, global neoliberal landscape.³⁷ When looking to examples of representational practices linked to a nomadic subjectivity, then, the aim is not just to see how that subjectivity is promoted but how it is problematised, tested and critiqued through art as well.

³⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Nomadology: The War Machine* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1986), pp.1-29

³⁶ Chantal Mouffe, 'Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces', *Art & Research: A journal of ideas, contexts and methods*, Volume 1, No. 2, Summer 2007

³⁷ Critical Art Ensemble, 'Nomadic Power and Cultural Resistance' available online at <<http://www.manifesta.org/manifesta3/catalogue6.htm>> [accessed May 29th 2009]

My starting point for discussing recent contemporary practices that indicate a concern with the radical potential of nomadism and travel is two examples from the ‘Altermodern’ exhibition that formed part of the Tate Triennial 2009. Curator Nicolas Bourriaud positioned the exhibition as illustrating the current condition of artist as ‘cultural nomad’ and ‘homo-viator’.³⁸ In a similar fashion to the postanarchist theory we have encountered so far, Bourriaud understands this ‘homo-viator’ as an empowered and radical subject capable of transgressing the ‘period of mourning’ and apathy that postmodernism often represents. Movement, travel, cultural heterogeneity and fluidity; the blurring or eradication of physical and cultural boundaries; the opportunities afforded by new technologies like hypertext; and, seemingly, affordable travel: all signal, for Bourriaud, an era brimming with potential for social change, which artists are both involved in representing and playing an active role in materialising.³⁹ The claim made by Bourriaud is that the practices that make up the exhibition are ‘cutting edge’ experiments in navigating a path out of, or between, ‘mournful’ postmodernism and outdated universalising approaches associated with modernity and the avant-garde.⁴⁰ The centrality of travel and nomadism in these experiments aligns them with postanarchist writing and such makes these particular works appropriate as case studies.

Bourriaud, somewhat contentiously, ‘coins’ this new era (one after postmodernism) the ‘altermodern’, following similar prefixes used in the ‘alter-globalisation’ movement. The term alludes to attempts made to find a radical position of agency and transformation that could be associated with modernity whilst respecting the primacy of difference and heterogeneity, and the distrust of grand narratives, ‘learned’ from postmodernism. Bourriaud’s term, naturally, throws up a multitude of questions and critiques, looking very much like a branding exercise that needlessly distinguishes itself by making false assumptions and reductive readings of a prior period, in much the same way as ‘postanarchism’ could be said to, or, indeed, *Relational Aesthetics* has been criticised for

³⁸ Nicolas Bourriaud, ‘Altermodern’ in *Altermodern: Tate Triennial* (London: Tate, 2009), p.23

³⁹ *ibid*, pp.11-23

⁴⁰ *ibid*, p.14, p.19, p.23

doing.⁴¹ Nonetheless, if we are to give Bourriaud enough credit to interpret this appropriation as an antagonistic tactic to prompt debate and discourse in art circles, and open up previously closed conversations to a wider public, then I believe it has merit.

How, then, do the artists in 'Altermodern' represent or facilitate the new subjective position of 'cultural nomad' and 'homo-viator?' To begin, the artists shown in 'Altermodern' utilise many forms of travel: through space and through time; by transporting objects from one place and time into another; through representing the collapse of time and space catalysed by current technologies; by anachronistic performances; and by the questioning of cultural identities and 'roots'.⁴²

An instance of this is Navin Rawanchaikul's video work *Hong Rub Khaek* (2008) where Indian migrants who have settled in Thailand are interviewed about their recollections and stories regarding their two 'homes'. This operates as a fairly conventional exercise in ethnography where the interviewees talk to camera in their domestic settings, reminiscing about their memories of the old country, the journey to their new country, and the initial strangeness of life in the country in which they have now settled.⁴³ In terms of reflecting a new nomadic subjectivity, it is possible to say that *Hong Rib Khaek* operates by making visible the commonality of migration and cross-cultural existence and is possibly 'giving a voice to those with no part', as Jacques Rancière would have it. Although there is potential for the work to open the mind of a viewer who has only considered the possibility of migration and immigration as a purely Western phenomenon and to appreciate it as a more global condition, I would question the art gallery as the most effective site for this form of awareness-raising, given the well-known facts and figures regarding the art-going

⁴¹ Dilettante Ventures' critique in 'Experience Economy - Art as Experience - Relational Aesthetics', online at <<http://leisurearts.blogspot.com/2007/10/experience-economy-art-as-experience.html>>

⁴² Nicolas Bourriaud, 'Altermodern' in *Altermodern: Tate Triennial* (London: Tate, 2009), p.13

⁴³ Other works that adopt a similar theme or form include Dinu Li's *The Mother of All Journeys* (2007) documenting his mother's journey from China to England in the sixties and Alexander Vaindorf's *Detour, One Particular Sunday* (2006 – 2007) exhibited at Manifesta 7, which focused on Eastern European migration to major cities in Italy where women take jobs as carers for the elderly.

demographic,⁴⁴ and this form's suitability to, or indistinctness from, television documentary.

Of more interest, because of its specifically personal qualities, was the hand-written letter displayed on the same wall, *From Puk-Kun to Mari* (2008). On reading the exhibition guide, we learn that this is a letter from the artist to his daughter who now lives in Japan. The letter combines an explanation of the difficulties and dangers obtaining pirated video games with personal anecdotes and advice about settling in a country from which you do not originate. As such, the work places Rawanchaikul in the position of interviewee but, perhaps, in part due to the intention in the work's creation being divorced from an art context, transcends the generic qualities of the video piece. Furthermore, there is an added tenderness and sincerity to the reflections and advice on dealing with a shifting cultural identity - from reminiscing on visits to childhood homes, to coping with bullying at school and the complexities of name changes required when taking residence in a new country - that we would be led to believe is what the artist *really* thinks, rather than some romanticised rhetoric about a radical decentred self that might be voiced to an art audience.

It is interesting in this respect that the advice that Rawanchaikul gives to his daughter is at such odds with the embracement of cross-culture, exile and diaspora that is characteristic of both the postanarchist's and Bourriaud's reflections on the empowering nature of nomadism. 'Be yourself and respect your roots' is a notable sentence in the letter, which, in postanarchist terms would reflect a conservative, essentialist notion of the self (to stay true to 'who you are') and also advice that directly contravenes the 'law' of the nomad: to embrace rootlessness. Is it possible, then, to reconcile the lesson's available in Rawanchaikul's work with the radical subjectivity and political agent of postanarchism and,

⁴⁴ 'According to the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu (1979), art appreciation and the social activity of attending art galleries is primarily the province of educated indigenous middle classes. In Bourdieu's terms, art bestows social distinction. While more recent demographic evidence on art gallery attendance has modified Bourdieu's findings, his overall thesis retains its force.' From *Tate Encounters: Britishness and Visual Culture* research project <http://process.tateencounters.org/?page_id=37> [accessed November 23rd 2011]

indeed, Bourriaud's own homo-viator, or does this application and working through of these principles 'in real life' complicate the simplicity of the claims made by these writers?

More in keeping with the 'radical potential' of the non-rational, nomadic self - at first glance at least - is Lindsay Seers' video installation *Extramission 6 (Black Maria)* (2009). Seers has created an environment in which to view a film that blends autobiography, fictional narrative and documentary to destabilising effect. The environment in which the audience views the video is an architectural form within the gallery space, a room within a room, which is a replica of Thomas Edison's film studio of 1893. This building also appears on occasion throughout the video, both visually and in reference through interviews. As a viewer, I felt disorientated by being confronted with a screen-based model of that in which I was seated. The fluctuations in scale further contributed to this, with the model on the screen at times fitting on a plinth or at others appearing as a photograph. The relationship between what we see on the screen and our environment sharpens an awareness of our precarious position. Additionally, the use of sound throughout the video highlights the architecture of the space, with an additional fractured soundtrack that plays intermittently from the back of the structure, interrupting or working alongside the more conventional soundtrack emitting from the direction of the screen.

Seers' subject matter in *Extramission 6 (Black Maria)* shares some thematic similarities with Rawanchaikul's work. It is in some sense an autobiography of the artist, reflecting on childhood experiences; starting with a revisit to a childhood home, and the effect of these early experiences in shaping the identity of the artist. The video uses familiar devices including interviews with her friends, colleagues and her psychoanalyst, augmented by 'archival' footage, re-enactments and photographs, as well as segments of abstraction, to tell the story of Seers' life.

Seers, in this narrative, is a silent child with eidetic (photographic) memory who has no need to communicate verbally until she sees a photograph of herself at the age of eight which jolts her into speech. The trauma of this event (linked closely to the revisiting of the childhood home) sees the onset of the loss of her eidetic memory which Seers compensates

for by 'becoming' a camera (in the video, by literally developing light-sensitive paper in her mouth) until she is able to exorcise her demons and instead 'become' a projector (again, literally, by projecting light through her eyes). The strange mix of science fiction, metaphor, symbolism and psychotherapy further disorientates the viewer in that it is difficult to find a fixed position within a narrative that shifts between fact and farce.

The video clearly offers a reading at the level of allegory relating to an artistic practice as self-therapy. We can understand the sections illustrating Seers 'as a camera' as mere rhetorical devices to explain a documentary or archival artistic practice as compared to a later, more communicative, practice 'as a projector'. Accordingly, we may interpret the anecdote proposing that with photographic memory there is no need for verbal communication (a state of innocence which is corrupted by the violence of seeing an actual photograph of oneself) as propagating the myth of the *gifted* artist compromised by society. Seer's narrative however is too multilayered to allow only for such reductive interpretation. Within the video we are presented with other analyses, where Seers' move from camera to projector is articulated as a desire to 'look forward instead of dwelling in the past.' Clearly linked to this disavowal of 'the past' is the 'trauma' catalysed by Seers' attempts to revisit the childhood home. The 'moral' offered by these interpretations of the story would place *Extramission 6 (Black Maria)* as an important postanarchist narrative, where it can be read as a parable warning against the dangers of attempting to revisit one's roots.

What is of interest here though, is the manner in which, even at the level of narrative, the void created by the renouncing of the essentialist self in Seer's story is quickly filled by another equally clichéd or fixed identity. This appears in the video as the aforementioned figure of the maverick artist, where Seers' photographic practice is described as 'part of her being' and as a 'compulsion' that takes her all over the world, constantly travelling and staying in hotels. Seers then, in this portrayal, embodies the stereotype of the nomad, but simultaneously - and not coincidentally - the figure of the privileged 'trans-global neo-capitalist'. In addition, far from finding travel an empowering condition, Seers is described as finding travel isolating, but, tragically, wholly necessary in pursuing her compulsion to make art, as a male friend relays to the screen.

This admission would appear, then, not to portray the nomad as a radicalised and empowered subject but simply a decentred and schizophrenic version of the essentialist subject where the ‘fundamental condition’, or *a priori*, of rootedness has been exchanged for the *a priori* of rootlessness.⁴⁵ Leaving aside whether we read Seers’ work as a *knowing* critique of this romanticised portrayal of the ‘troubled’ artist or as a naïve ‘altermodern’ re-emergence of this conservative figure: what Seers plays out in the video at micro-level is the contradiction that would arise when announcing a non-essential, nomadic self as *the* agent capable of meaningful political action. It is in the deployment of art as a laboratory to test the possibility of such a ‘non-essentialist’ figure that the work becomes a tool in formulating a truly transformative or critical art practice.

Returning to the theoretical framework, however, it is easy to over-emphasise the consequence of the contradiction unearthed in these practices and feel like we have reached an impassable theoretical blockage that demerits the notion of a postanarchist notion of radical subjectivity altogether. Whilst it is certainly worthwhile acknowledging the benefits of applying other theoretical lenses in the search for critical art practice - which I intend to do throughout this thesis - for the sake of critical reflection and respecting the lens thus far adopted, I would like to refer within the postanarchist framework in the first instance for a ‘way out’ of this contradiction.

Although privileging the figure of the nomad as the *sole* agent of change creates hierarchies and exclusions that undo the tenets of postanarchism, we might formulate a way to move on from this seeming impasse for ‘non-authoritarian’ thought in two ways. First, we maybe need to step back from the *outright* rejection of a position that may have remnants of essentialism, or, better, adopt a more sophisticated concept of ‘non-essentialism’ that acknowledges its essentialist Other. Secondly, we can begin to see the benefits of engaging in ‘nomadic’ activity for what they are; useful exercises that may aid a more politically

⁴⁵ This schizophrenic postmodern subject is the one outlined by Fredric Jameson as discussed by Dave Beech in ‘Recovering Radicalism: Critical Art After Postmodernism’, *Art Monthly*, Issue 323, Feb 2009, pp.7-10

inclined outlook, rather than as an off-the-shelf subjectivity that has to be adopted all-or-nothing.

To attempt the first exercise in theoretical unshackling we might turn to Newman's project in the latter sections of *From Bakunin to Lacan*, where he adopts Lacan's notion of 'the lack' to address the remnants of essentialism found in poststructuralist theory, particularly in Deleuze and Guattari's concept of desire.⁴⁶ Although Newman does not specifically address the problems invoked by the binary opposition that is set up between essentialist/fixed authoritarian subjectivity and contingent/fluid nomadic subjectivity in his own project, he does address a similar conundrum in terms of finding an 'outside' from which to resist.

Throughout his book Newman critiques what he understands as the conventional anarchist belief in an uncontaminated point of departure, or place outside of oppressive power. He draws on Foucault to demonstrate that power emits from many points, not simply 'from above' or from the exterior, and that such power is not necessarily always oppressive or repressive. He performs a similar exercise with Deleuze and Guattari, using the war machine and rhizomatic models as well as a 'nomadic' subjectivity that we have covered. Newman then deploys Derrida and Lacan for a more sophisticated articulation of resistance that goes beyond reductive binary opposition between the inside and outside of power but which we could equally apply to the binary that exists between 'essentialism' and 'non-essentialism', or 'nomadism' and 'fixedness', uncovered so far in this chapter. These thinkers are cited in the first instance to show that resistance is only possible through the acceptance of the presence of the Other (in Derridian terms). More interestingly for this project, however, is Newman's citing of the radical lack or 'traumatic kernel' that constitutes our subjectivity as developed by Lacan.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Saul Newman, 'Lack of the Outside/Outside of the Lack: (Mis)Reading Lacan' in, *From Bakunin to Lacan: Anti-Authoritarianism and the Dislocation of Power* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2007), pp.137-155

⁴⁷ *ibid*, p.152

Lacan understands subjectivity as arising from the gap between the signifier and the signified. Newman writes that:

He rejects the Cartesian subject, the subject of autonomous self-knowledge, the self-transparent subject ... Contrary to the cogito, then, the subject is given meaning by an external world of signifiers, by the symbolic order – the Other. The subject is seen as secondary to the signifier and constituted only in relation to the signifier ... However, this representation ultimately fails: there is a lack or gap between the subject and its representation. The subject fails to recognize himself in the symbolic order and is thus alienated... and it is this that actually constitutes the subject. The subject is, then, the failed “place” of signification; the “empty place of the structure” of symbolization.⁴⁸

This gap this surplus of meaning that cannot be signified, is a void in the symbolic structure – the “Real” ... The Real is the traumatic kernel of identity: something which never actually existed but whose effects are nevertheless felt.⁴⁹

Newman’s contention is that this ‘radical lack’ is the key to a properly contingent, non-essentialist subjectivity. If ‘at the heart’ of the subject, there is nothing but an ongoing contradiction – a void - then the place of power is in fact a ‘non-place’. As such potentially oppressive power relations rising from essentialist identity are foreclosed.

If we were to apply this concept to the type of postcapitalist subjectivity or political agency discussed so far, it would propose that it is the very *impossibility* of a wholly ‘non-essentialist’ subjectivity which makes it a radical position to (attempt to) take. It is impossible to do away with essentialism; it will constantly try and reinstate itself in ever-shifting forms. Therefore, a nomadic subjectivity is necessarily contradictory and, accordingly, it is the ‘traumatic kernel’ of the self.

Put otherwise: the ‘contradiction’ thus far identified in a ‘non-essentialist’ position - that there will be a constant return of a ‘non-essentialist essentiality’ - is the ‘non-place’ that constitutes a radical subjectivity. The tensions that are revealed in the previously-cited

⁴⁸ Saul Newman, *From Bakunin to Lacan: Anti-Authoritarianism and the Dislocation of Power* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2007), pp.138-139

⁴⁹ *ibid*, p.139

artworks - that complicate the relationship between roots and rootlessness, contingent and fixed identity, radical and conservative or complicit positions, and so on - facilitate the kind of self-reflection and inner conflict that constitutes a contingent subjectivity and, by extension, a potentially postcapitalist one.

In light of the prior discussion to have conceived of a ‘nomadic subjectivity’ merely as a figure who is physically always on the move, or who has no remnants of essentialism can be seen as a conservative misrepresentation and one that misunderstands Deleuze and Guattari’s use of the term. When we talk of a nomadic subjectivity from this point, then, I hope to have portrayed a self-reflective subject who cannot be reduced to a couple of ‘key’ characteristics; that they travel and that they have renounced their roots. As we have demonstrated, (momentary) inertia and an embracement of cultural identity are crucial ‘Others’ in maintaining the ‘lack’ that constitutes the radical subjectivity.

Bourriaud has also made attempts following the exhibition ‘Altermodern’ to address some of the critiques associated with the nomad as being a radical role-model, most notably in his book *The Radicant*. Bourriaud’s ‘update’ to the figure of the nomad who is too easily misunderstood as self-styled radical but ultimately conservative mirror image of the flexible worker of late-capitalism is found in ‘the radicant’. Bourriaud, somewhat characteristically, borrows the term from, (but only pays slight acknowledgement to), Deleuze and Guattari’s theorising in *A Thousand Plateaus*. In the introduction to their book Deleuze and Guattari famously make a distinction between the root, the radical and the rhizome to explain different forms of knowledge.⁵⁰ Bourriaud uses the same analogy to describe the difference between the essentialist subject and one more proper to the ‘altermodern’ era:

Ivy belongs to the botanical family of the *radicants*, which develop their roots as they advance, unlike the *radicals*, whose development is determined by their being anchored in a particular soil ... the radicant ... implies a subject, but one that is not reducible to a stable, closed, and self-contained identity. It exists

⁵⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Continuum, 2008), pp.5-7

exclusively in the dynamic form of its wandering and the contours of the circuit it describes, which are its two modes of visibility. In other words, it is movement that ultimately permits the formation of an identity.⁵¹

As in the text accompanying the exhibition *Altermodern*, Bourriaud's scorn is directed at the homogenization and standardisation common to postmodern globalization rather than singling out capitalism directly – a position I would attribute to his complicity in the commercial art world. In what might be seen as a contrasting interpretation of postmodernity to that advanced by the postanarchists, Bourriaud explains the era as being grounded in essentialism.⁵² This, he attributes to the knee-jerk embrace of nationalist, racial or sexual identity that occurs in the face of homogenising globalisation. Bourriaud finds theoretical support in contemporary philosophy and critical thought, including that of Slavov Zizek, Edouard Glissant.⁵³ The way out of this dangerous situation, and that which lies beyond it, is, for Bourriaud, the altermodern era but:

In order for this emergent culture, born of differences and singularities, to come into being, instead of conforming to the ongoing standardization, it will have to develop a specific imagination, relying on a logic unlike that which presides over capitalist globalization.⁵⁴

It should be of no surprise that for Bourriaud the agents capable of developing this 'imagination' are artists with their primary weapon being, for the most part, representational and gallery-friendly art. Many of the examples of artists who are experimenting and developing this imagination through their practice are working in a similar vein to that already covered in this chapter; artists who he describes as working with the 'journey form'. Bourriaud addresses some of the problems posed by the romantic and possibly mythical figure of the rootless nomad thus:

But must we forget where we come from just because we aspire to travel?
Radicant thought is not a defence of voluntary amnesia but of relativism,

⁵¹ Nicolas Bourriaud, *The Radicant* (New York: Lukas and Sternberg, 2009), pp.51-55

⁵² "where do you come from?" is its fundamental question, essentialism its critical paradigm' *ibid*, p.183

⁵³ *ibid*, p.12, p.20

⁵⁴ *ibid*, p.17

unsubscription, and departure. Its true adversaries are neither tradition nor local cultures, but confinement within ready made cultural schemata – when habits become forms – and enrootedness, as soon as it becomes a rhetoric of identity. It is not a matter of rejecting one’s heritage but rather of learning to squander it.⁵⁵

Bourriaud also considers artists who are dealing with ‘journeying’ or radicant subjectivity in a less literal manner as contributing to an altermodern imagination. Examples of this include artists who translate forms into other forms, or make connections between disparate and previously unconnected bodies of knowledge and signs like Simon Starling could be said to do.⁵⁶ Bourriaud describes such practitioners as *semionauts*.⁵⁷ In this context Bourriaud even makes a claim for an art of displacing objects from their original context into the gallery – as with the readymade - as contributing to a radicant subjectivity.

All this might lead the cynical amongst us to question whether there are forms of art that *fail* to promote a radicant imagination. Certainly the works to which Bourriaud awards such accolades appear as almost indistinguishable from the safe modernist and postmodern forms of abstract painting, ‘conceptual’ sculpture, and so on, common to galleries throughout the last century. Furthermore these artworks that contribute to the dawning of a new era hardly radiate their political and antagonistic qualities. Bourriaud can be seen to have anticipated such criticisms though when claiming that:

The mode of wandering – the visual model and monitoring force of these displacements – determines *a fortiori* an ethics of resistance to the vulgar form of globalization: in a world that is structured by consumption, it implies that what one finds is above all what one *isn’t* looking for, an event that is increasingly rare in this era of universal marketing and consumer profiling.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ *ibid*, p.56

⁵⁶ ‘translation also appears today as the categorical imperative of an ethics of recognition of the other, a task it fulfils much more effectively than merely registering otherness.’ *ibid*, p.132

⁵⁷ what these artists aim for in their works is not to accumulate heterogeneous elements, but to make meaningful connections in the infinite text of world culture. In a word, to produce itineraries in the landscape of signs by taking on the role of *semionauts*, inventors of pathways within the cultural landscape, nomadic sign gatherers.’ *ibid*, p.39

⁵⁸ *ibid*, p.185

It is perhaps a little trite to interpret Bourriaud as suggesting here that the failure to deliver overtly political content is an anti-capitalist act, but it does lead us on to issues about the nature of politicised art and whether, in fact, the commercial and institutional frame of the art gallery - in which all objects, no matter how 'displaced', are approached as having market-value and as being part of a capitalist system of trade - is entirely appropriate to the production of postcapitalist subjectivities. This is compounded by the significance Bourriaud gives to the role of the artist - and himself as curator - in modelling new subjective positions, illustrated by his referral to the manner in which artists operate (travelling the world, cross cultural boundaries and so on), as well as the labels he uses to designate their roles, which sound like professions for a future age - 'semionaut' being a particular favourite of mine.

If we are to begin to take into account the position of the producer as well as the product itself, and if this is part and parcel of our aesthetic experience in perceived space that is linked to the production of a subjectivity, then are 'professional' artists best placed to model such subjectivities? In the second part of this chapter I will further explore this question by looking at another subject position, that being the 'amateur', 'hobbyist' or 'non-professional', considering how this is articulated through artistic and cultural practices that operate in perceived space.

The Amateur

To begin discussing the amateur as a potential model for postcapitalist subjectivity we will first need to address the specific activity performed by this figure in relation to capitalism. A crude definition of the amateur would be someone who engages in a certain activity in a non-professional, and, most likely, unwaged capacity. By this definition we have amateur football players, amateur artists, amateur musicians and so forth. When not aspiring to enter the professional field, these figures are often referred to as enthusiasts, a nod to the fact that they are motivated by love, rather than money, and a fact to which we will return to later. Enthusiasts are often also thought of as ‘hobbyists’ or people who have a spare-time activity that helps define their identity. Sometimes this hobby is a defining characteristic of that individual and shapes their life and social relations, for others it is a shameful secret relegated and confined to the garden shed.

It is important when considering the significance of activity engaged in for no other reason than a love of doing so, that we analyse the other (capitalist) form of that activity; that being, work or labour. In work, the activity is most likely, but not necessarily, remunerated with a wage of some kind, and undertaken for reasons other than, or in addition to, the pure pleasure of the doer. We can, by this definition, begin to think of amateur activity as non-work. What, then, are the implications for engaging in and identifying ourselves through the activity of non-work? We must first address the role of work and the identity of the worker in capitalism.

In recent articulations by John Holloway and Gibson-Graham the identity of the worker is a foundation of capitalism and one that needs disrupting if we are to move beyond the logic of capitalism and create new economic and political realities.

At the outset of the project the primary economic identification of the community researchers was with capitalism – they were actual or potential workers, entrepreneurs, consumers, investors – and their economic politics were structured by antagonism or positive attachment to capitalist development. Capitalism in other words, was the master signifier organizing economic space as a space of identification and desire...the challenge was to produce a

dislocation in this formation and create the conditions for the emergence of noncapitalist modes of economic subjectivity.⁵⁹

Even Marx, whose theory has long been interpreted as a model for the organisation of work, meant for this restructuring and appropriation of the means of production to be a stage in the abolition of labour as we know it in capitalist society.⁶⁰ The history of resistance to work, and more specifically the capitalist form of work, is too long to comprehensively cover here but a few moments that I have found particularly inspiring are in the Luddite riots in the Midlands of England and Yorkshire in the early 19th Century,⁶¹ the actions and writings of the Situationist International in the late 1950s and 60s,⁶² and in Autonomist Marxism, particularly that practiced and theorised in Italy in the 1970s.⁶³ Similarly the anti-globalist movement-of-movements and the international DIY punk scene provide recent and contemporary examples of practical applications of the desire to find a life outside of work as we know it.

What, though, are the specific qualities of an activity that define it as ‘work’, and what about it is so despicable that incites resistance across the ages? Holloway goes deeper than looking at the organization of work and draws on Marx’s theory of abstract labour to better explain the alienating effects of work or labour.

The object which labor produces – labor’s product – confronts it as something alien, as a power independent of the producer. The product of labor is labor

⁵⁹ JK Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), p.148

⁶⁰ ‘In all revolutions up till now the mode of activity remained unscathed and it was only a question of a different distribution of this activity, a new distribution of labour to other persons, whilst the communist revolution is directed against the preceding *mode* of activity, does away with *labour*, and abolishes the rule of all classes with the classes themselves’ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, ed. C.J Arthur, *The German Ideology* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1991), p.94

⁶¹ For an overview see Malcom I Thomis, *The Luddites: Machine-breaking in Regency England* (Aldershot: Gregg Revivals, 1970)

⁶² Kenn Knabb, ed., *Situationist International Anthology: Revised and Expanded Edition* (Berkley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006)

⁶³ Sylvere Lotinger and Christian Marazzi, eds., *Autonomia; Post-political politics* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007)

which has been embodied in an object, which has become material: it is the objectification of labor. Labor's realization is its objectification. Under these economic conditions this realization of labor appears as loss of realization for the workers; objectification as loss of the object and bondage to it; appropriation as estrangement, as alienation ... then the product of labor is alienation, production itself must be active alienation, the alienation of activity, the activity of alienation.⁶⁴

Whilst Marxist theory has conventionally been used to substantiate the claim that when ownership of the end product of work is in the hands of the producer (the proletariat rather than the capitalist), alienation will be reduced, Holloway's interpretation suggests otherwise. He identifies:

(The) illusion within the anti-capitalist tradition that the problem with capitalism is the wage relation rather than labour itself... whereas our argument here is just the opposite: the creation of labour and the creation of capital are the same process. And the struggle against capital is the struggle against that which produces it, the struggle against labour.⁶⁵

For Holloway then, resistance and the creation of an alternative to capitalism is constituted by our non-participation in abstract labour that 'weaves the web' of capitalism and our partaking in another form of activity that he refers to variously as 'concrete doing', 'just doing' or, following Marx more closely, 'conscious life activity'. The distinction between these two sorts of human activity – labour and 'just doing' – form the foundation for Holloway's argument and his reasoning that the move beyond capitalism will be made through our operating in, and expansion of, the 'cracks' that exist in capitalism where we are able to 'just do'. Holloway's understanding of labour, work and 'just doing' – the latter of which, for our purposes, we understand as the activity of the amateur or hobbyist – bears more than a passing resemblance to previous Autonomist Marxist concepts of 'self-

⁶⁴ Karl Marx (trans. Martin Milligan), *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970), pp.108-110

⁶⁵ John Holloway, *Crack Capitalism* (New York: Pluto Press, 2010), p.104

valorizing' activity.⁶⁶ Accordingly it is subject to the same critiques and debates to which I will return in due course.

For now, however, I would like to move forward by looking for examples of this 'concrete doing'. Holloway's own examples range from cake-baking to the Zapatista uprisings with various illustrations of dissident activity within and outside of the work place in between. Another way to frame and exemplify the activity of non-labour, and one of particular significance to my practice, is by examining self-styled 'DIY' activity.

All the gigs in this guide are organised in a D.I.Y way. That means that all the money made on the night goes to covering the band's costs and the promoters costs (room hire etc.). No one's out to make a profit. These gigs exist for the music, not for money or kudos.⁶⁷

I first encountered the term 'DIY' as applied to cultural activity upon moving to Leeds in the late 1990s where the gig-listing publication *Cops and Robbers* was available for free in various independent record shops and at self-organised gigs. The gigs it listed were mostly organised by bands and independent promoters and took place in the function rooms of various pubs across Leeds that would be hired out for the evening. The main definition of a DIY gig according to *Cops and Robbers* was that it was 'not-for-profit'; this normally translated as meaning that the promoter was unpaid for their hand in organising the gig, that the entry price was as cheap as possible (oftentimes between £1 and £3) and that costs in general were kept to a minimum with any profits made used to pay the sound engineer (frequently also a member of the DIY community and only asking to be paid enough to keep costs covered), shared between the bands or donated to various musical or political causes. The precedents for this activity are in the punk scene of both the UK in the late 1970s and the hardcore punk scene in America throughout the 1980s and 1990s, although

⁶⁶ See Harry Cleaver, 'The Inversion of Class Perspective in Marxian Theory: from Valorization to Self-Valorization', 1992 <<http://libcom.org/library/inversion-class-perspective-marxian-theory-valorization-self-valorization>> [accessed July 6th 2011]

⁶⁷ *Cops and Robbers*, *Cops and Robbers Issue 2*, self-published pamphlet, Leeds, March 1999, back cover

self-organised and not-for-profit music stretches back much farther, through the counter-culture movement in the 1960s and in ‘folk’ music more generally.

DIY in this context was synonymous with doing things as economically and efficiently as possible in order to make the gigs as inclusive (that is cheap) as possible, often meaning that middle-men like managers, poster designers, booking agents and ticket agencies were deemed unnecessary and purposefully avoided. In this manner a form of organisation and ethos of collective activity, skill sharing and self-sufficiency was experimented with, developed and promoted through the activity of organising music events. There also existed at this time a significant crossover with the political activist and squatting scenes in Leeds (including 120 Rats in Meanwood and ‘Temporary Autonomous Zone’ creators Aspire) and accordingly the experience for many, myself included, was a first immersion into a more directly ‘politicised’ perspective on the world. Naturally, there exist many contradictions, tensions and inconsistencies within the DIY community that compromise and problematise its effectiveness as an entry point into, or a form of, cultural resistance to capitalism, some of which will be addressed here.

Nevertheless, the political potential of DIY activity has led historian, activist and writer Chris Carlsson to label the individuals, collectives and organisations engaged in it as ‘nowtopians’ reasoning that:

In myriad behaviours, people are appropriating their time and technological know-how from the market and in small “invisible” ways, are making life better right now – but also setting the foundation, technically AND socially, for a genuine movement of liberation from market life.⁶⁸

Carlsson’s book on the subject focuses for the most part on forms of technological and practical tinkering - bicycle collectives, computer hackers, vacant lot gardeners, bio-fuel inventors and so on - rather than self-organised cultural activity per se. As such Carlsson’s case studies better call to mind the ‘hobbyist’ or amateur that I am proposing as a model for non-capitalist subjectivity. Before addressing in more detail the extent to which we can

⁶⁸ Chris Carlsson, *Nowtopia: How Pirate Programmers, Outlaw Bicyclists and Vacant-Lot Gardeners are Inventing the Future Today* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2008), p.3

consider DIY, self-valorizing and autonomous activity - and the subjectivity that arises from it - as 'non-capitalist', it will be useful to look to some examples of art practice that aims to represent it.

There are plenty of examples of art practices that have sought to represent non-work activity. We could look back to the now innocuous portraits of bourgeois leisure activities in Paris painted by the Impressionists, contemporary versions of which include Simon Robert's photographic series *We English* (2009), where the artist 'travelled the length and breadth of England, documenting people at play, relaxing and revelling.' Similarly, Robbie Cooper's portraits of gamers, particularly through his project *Alter-Ego* (2007) in which he 'places players of online worlds alongside their virtual identities' goes some way to depicting an identity in the subjects that has nothing to do with their working lives.

Another well-known example is *Folk Archive* (2005) by Jeremy Deller and Alan Kane. This is a project that documents and draws together in mainly photographic form various examples of amateur creative and cultural output in order to 'celebrate activity from a vast range of British pastimes and pursuits, and demonstrate that folk art in the UK is both widespread and vigorous.'⁶⁹ *Folk Archive* has found form as exhibitions in both physical and virtual space as well as in book-form.⁷⁰ Activities represented in the archive include gurning competitions, elaborate house modifications, sign painting, craft skills, and all manner of hobbies undertaken in a spirit of 'just doing'. All we know or are presented of the individuals represented in the archive is their often eccentric and financially irrelevant pastimes. These are for the most part unwaged activities that are not undertaken for reasons of social mobility, 'work experience' or consumptive leisure and therefore challenge the identity of these people as 'workers'. As such, the archive could be understood as reflecting and representing a non-capitalist tendency that exists in contemporary culture; the drive to engage in 'concrete activity' that exceeds the market-led and means-end logic of capitalism.

⁶⁹ <<http://www.britishcouncil.org/arts-aad-folk-archive.htm>> [accessed July 6th 2011]

⁷⁰ Jeremy Deller and Alan Kane, *Folk Archive: Contemporary Popular Art from the UK* (London: Book Works, 2005)

Folk Archive is not an unproblematic project. Whilst it does the job of throwing light and reflecting a body of activity that ‘represents both artists’ long-term interests in creative practices and artefacts from outside the traditional art world’ it does so in an uncritical and patronising manner. Whether it is the intentions of the artists or not, the implication of *Folk Archive*, through its associations with art-world institutions, is that such activity *deserves* to be seen alongside and recognised as Art-with-a-capital-A. Such recognition is, of course, granted by artists and organisations validated in the professional sphere. This, in my view, undermines the political potential of the project and lends a general air of class-biased art-world colonialism to proceedings. Whilst such ethnographical and anthropological issues are acknowledged by the artists, an awkward mix of nostalgia, ‘privileged gaze’ voyeurism, and self-inflating moralism underlies the project.⁷¹ This is reflected in the statement from the British Council that is keen to point out that the archive contains ‘a cross section of the community to have their work shown in an art gallery for the first time and includes work from prisoners and community groups.’

In addition, whilst *Folk Archive* has a broad remit of inclusion and an apparent lack of agenda other than appraising ‘the things that people do’, its liberal pluralism is at the cost of any coherent narrative that would reflect a non-capitalist subjectivity. So, the fact that a joke shop display cabinet and signs painted to advertise food shacks are included as pieces of ‘Folk Art’ when these are undertaken with profiteering intent make it difficult to claim that the archive represents a non-market or non-work version of self-organised activity. If we were to be generous it could be suggested that the inclusion of such commercially-motivated activity is a purposeful attempt on behalf of the artists to create a dialectical tension with more functionless pursuits and problematise the notion of an outside to capitalist activity, but there is no real evidence for this in the display or accompanying text.

⁷¹ See Deller and Kane’s disclaimers in the introduction to the book, ‘we must apologise for the cheap ‘folk’ shot and a fly-by-night plundering of whole worlds.’ Jeremy Deller and Alan Kane, *Folk Archive: Contemporary Popular Art from the UK* (London: Book Works, 2005), p.2

Similar issues are raised by Jeremy Deller's event-based parallels to *Folk Archive*: his *Parade* (2004) for 'Manifesta 5' in San Sebastian and the *Procession* in Manchester in 2009. These events were about offering an alternative portrait of a city by celebrating its less visible elements including independent businesses and political and affinity groups as much as showing examples of 'folk art'. Issues of patronisation and tensions created by art world authorship and co-option are still at large here. Perhaps more successful in reflecting a non-capitalist subjectivity was the exhibition that accompanied the Manchester event curated by Salford Restoration office where research material, including archive film footage of Whit Walks, Pageants and other local customary events, that informed the *Procession* was displayed. This exhibition that aimed to 'contextualise' Deller's procession served to offer a much more heavily politicised, sophisticated and far-reaching narrative regarding self-organised and non-professional activity and the manner in which this is ingrained in the fabric of a city through its traditions, its narratives and even in its architecture.

Along the same lines as Deller's work, but keener to embrace its political readings, are Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska's projects *Enthusiast* (2004), *Enthusiasm* (2005) and the accompanying online archive www.enthusiastsarchive.net. In these projects, but most specifically in *Enthusiasm*, the artists use the history of amateur film-making clubs in Socialist-era Poland as a backdrop to explore the impulses behind self-organised activity. The book that accompanies the *Enthusiasm* exhibition comprises of interviews and articles that expand on questions posed in the research on the relationship between capitalism and work, amateur activity and desire, and the production of 'individuality', (better interpreted in this context as subjectivity). In the essay *An Archive of Exception*, for example, Carles Cuerra's outlines that:

An enthusiast is someone who follows his/her passions, in unwaged, personal free time, a time remaindered by labour. Consequently, the enthusiast questions the division of labour, the distribution of time and the way in which it is valued. This is, in short, the problem revealed to capital by the enthusiast: how to

convert the production of individuality outside of work – an exception – into a resource.⁷²

The exhibition and the archiving process itself, then, becomes a way of documenting and creating a history of self-organised cultural activity. In a similar manner to *Folk Archive*, a weight of material is formed that acts as both measure of, and testament to, the desire of amateurs and enthusiasts to use their ‘spare-time’ productively. In comparison to *Folk Archive*, though, the focus and tighter parameters of *Enthusiasm* – that being amateur films from a specific era – allow for a more nuanced exploration of the issues pertaining to amateur activity. So, not only are the films, by the fact of their being cultural products resulting from ‘concrete doing’, a representation of a non-capitalist subject, but the content of the films is also significant in articulating this position.

The curator of *Enthusiasm*, Iwona Blazwick, sees the activity of amateur filmmaking and the films produced as ‘an asylum for the marginalized and for dreams of happiness, love and freedom.’⁷³ In fact the desires that are expressed through the films are apparent enough to Cummings and Lewandowska that they are able to categorise them by theme:

In the cinema entitled Longing we screened films of personal, political, and sexual, love, loss and longing; we explored themes of alienation, ecological anxieties, a fear of war and violence, and a terrible longing to be elsewhere. In Love we showed films reflecting on the, joy, banality and celebration of ‘everyday’ life; with themes of humor and camaraderie, of families, parties, passion and sex as subversion. In Labour the films traced the beauty, banality and horror of labour in all its forms; themes of futility, of celebration, beauty and awe accompany films made by people caught within the processes of production.⁷⁴

The show-reel of films that make up part of *Enthusiasm* act as body of work that investigates the position of the amateur in relation to work, or as Cuerra puts it ‘constitute a

and the inclusion of Jeremy Millar’s somewhat defensive text ‘Poets of their Own Affairs’ *ibid*, pp.149-153

⁷² Carles Cuerra in Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska, *Enthusiasm* (London: Whitechapel, 2006), p.131

⁷³ Iwona Blazwick in Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska, *Enthusiasm* (London: Whitechapel, 2006), p.17

⁷⁴ <http://enthusiastsarchive.net/en/index_en.html> [accessed July 6th 2011]

collective act of self-representation.’⁷⁵ What is perhaps of most interest in terms of my proposition - that these reflect and contribute towards the production of postcapitalist subjectivity - is that they are products of a Socialist regime. An interesting comparison could be to look at amateur films made in capitalist conditions. As they exist, however, the project acts as an exploration of John Holloway’s assertion that it is our compliance with, and resistance to, labour, not the organisation of labour, that ‘makes’ or undoes capitalism. The film-makers whose products comprise the archive of *Enthusiasm* are workers temporarily operating outside of remunerated labour, expressing thoughts, dreams and subjectivities that are read as representations of that position of ‘non-worker’. It is useful to be able to read such subjectivities separate from a capitalist context in the step towards being able to articulate a ‘non-capitalist’ subject.

For all of the strengths of *Enthusiasm* as an overall project, and the questions it poses through the essays and interviews that surround it, its actual experience in an art context is still not without its shortcomings. First, the density and complexity of the research is difficult to fully translate in the gallery exhibition as demonstrated by its appearance in *Manifesta 7* (2008) where, surrounded by numerous other projects, its presentation as a miniature walk-in cinema was easy to overlook or misinterpret. Second, and relevant again to the previous criticisms of Deller’s work, the messy issues of authorship and co-option when the project is presented ‘as art’ are still rife. Although Cummings and Lewandowska take the step of labelling *Enthusiasm* as a ‘collaborative project’ (and thereby acknowledging the co-authorship of the filmmakers themselves) they still recognise the compromises entailed by their mediation of the films as art, positing that ‘we inevitably exploit but would like to avoid exploitation.’⁷⁶ One way to view *Enthusiasm*, then, is as a project that tests the limits of both the exhibition form and the art context as a whole.

By way of some final examples of art that represents a non-capitalist subjectivity, I will illustrate practices that avoid their presentation as art and/or are examples of self-

⁷⁵ Carles Cuerra in Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska, *Enthusiasm* (London: Whitechapel, 2006), p.132

⁷⁶ Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska, *Enthusiasm* (London: Whitechapel, 2006), p.24

representation. By the latter, I mean that they are not examples of amateur activity presented by a third party (artist), but are in fact demonstrations or enactments of amateur and non-work activity in real life. This will also provide us with opportunity to discuss in more depth the specific problems encountered when analysing work and non-work activity.

Gregory Sholette has attempted to articulate and theorize practices that have a similar form to art but are not recognised within the market-led art world as ‘dark matter’.

This label, whose analogy derives from physics, is given on account of such practices being the ‘hidden mass’ that constitutes the bulk of creative practice. For Sholette, dark matter:

makes up the bulk of the artistic activity produced in our post-industrial society... It includes makeshift, amateur, informal, unofficial, autonomous, activist, non-institutional, self-organized practices – all work made and circulated in the shadows of the formal art world, some of which might be said to emulate cultural dark matter by rejecting art world demands of visibility, and much of which has no choice but to be invisible.⁷⁷

One example of such an informal and invisible practice is the *Swampwall*; an ‘impromptu collage’ made by workers at a factory who attached rubbish and debris to a wall of the factory in which they worked until, over the course of years, it built up into what could be considered a collective piece of art. The issues surrounding intention and professionalism in relation to the validation of something as art are of interest here. For Sholette, *Swampwall* is an example of ‘dark matter’ because it was not consciously made as art or by self-identified artists; it exists beneath the radar of the institutional art world and it has no place in art history. As Sholette is no doubt aware, though, its inclusion in the book *Dark Matter*, thrusts *Swampwall* and its creators into the history of art, in the same manner Deller and Kanes ‘folk artists’ are co-opted, or indeed any number of ‘outsider artists’ whose work fascinates the art world so much because of its purported authenticity. The measure of ‘authenticity’ in these cases cannot be separated from the distinctions between abstract labour (or that done for profit) or ‘concrete doing’ (that done for love). The appropriation of ‘folk art’, ‘outsider art’ or ‘dark matter’ by the institutional art world seems to satisfy both

⁷⁷ Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in an Age of Enterprise Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 2011), p.1

the desire for authenticity that is reified in ‘non-work’ activity, and a sellable commodity, whether it be a painting to hang in a gallery or an example to illustrate an idea in a book (or, indeed, PhD thesis). We might ask whether this appropriation retroactively transforms non-work into work, or if it does manages to leave the activity unaffected if it is an appropriation that can only happen the once. In the latter case the search for authentic works of art is not unlike capital’s own expansion by dispossession, always moving into ever more exotic fields as the resource dwindles. I will return to issues of recuperation and appropriation in due course.

Other examples of cultural ‘hidden mass’ that better avoids such issues of appropriation and exploitation is that which is consciously performed as ‘art’ but not in a ‘formal’ art context. Sholette includes in his definition of ‘dark matter’ both interventionist practices - those acts performed in ‘public’ contexts and unannounced as art in order to better disrupt a given situation (and that will be covered later in this thesis) - and acts of ‘everyday resistance’. The latter is a term borrowed from Michel De Certeau and is not dissimilar to Carlsson’s labelling as ‘time theft’ the possibly petty acts of appropriation of ‘work time’ for creative means. For example, when using the work photocopier to make posters for a DIY gig; or the hours spent crafting a sculpture out of blue tack and paper clips to be included in an exhibition (or simply cheer up the office space).⁷⁸ These consciously performed practices occupy a middle ground between ‘innocent’ folk art, and the practices that dare to throw themselves under the light of the formal art world, which I will address now.

We can talk of the visibility that the art world affords as going hand-in-hand with the issue of waged labour. One of the ways on which the formal or institutional art world (or Art Inc. as Sholette occasionally calls it) recognises ‘dark matter’ is through actual or implied monetary remuneration that ‘transforms’ art from an informal hobby into a ‘profession’. This does not necessarily involve the sale of work or even direct payment for its production but can be as slight a gesture as mere interest and acknowledgement of such practices as

⁷⁸ See for example the work of Philip Welding <<http://www.philipwelding.co.uk/>> [accessed July 6th 2011]

having *potential* monetary value. Indeed, the formal art world sustains itself substantially on the promise of eventual remuneration rather than fairly waged labour, as highlighted by groups like W.A.G.E (Working Artists and the Greater Economy)⁷⁹ in their critiques of, amongst other things, internships and voluntary positions. The art world as such can be seen as a casino where the vast majority work for little or nothing in the hope that they may be one of the lucky few to ‘make it’, much the same as the music industry.

Following this argument could lead on to issues of precarious and informal labour as it applies to artistic and cultural production, but for now I would like to focus on the other side of the coin. In the eventuality that art production *is* remunerated, fairly or otherwise, then it is by association identified with the values of the market-oriented art world. This can be a market based on private money through commercial galleries, or public money through funded institutions, public art commissions, workshops and so on. It could even be through less direct involvement, such as, teaching or arts administration. The reality of the situation, of course, is that all these markets cross-pollinate and are part of the same system.

In any case the implied affinity with the values of a marketised art world, that occurs through one’s participation in it, is cause for concern for many practitioners who wish to avoid their creative activity becoming ‘work’. This may be for personal reasons and grounded in a logic not dissimilar to Holloway’s interpretation of abstract labour – whereby to be waged or engage in an activity for the purposes of a wage would alienate oneself from the product and the process – or is a decision arrived at through political considerations, including the lack of desire to contribute to a capitalist system of art or the regeneration and gentrification of neighbourhoods this entails. Again, the likelihood is that it will be a mixture of positions and considerations.

Sholette acknowledges these purposefully ‘informal’ practices within his remit of ‘dark matter’ and illustrates that there is a precedent in the practice of institutional critique whereby artists would use their position to highlight the gallery system and the art world’s entanglement in capitalism and the commodity form. This can happen through direct

⁷⁹ <<http://www.wageforwork.com/wage.html>> [accessed July 6th 2011]

critique, or by producing work that attempts to resist commodification. An extension of this can be found in many self-organised collectives and not-for-profit art organisations that are set up in this spirit, where their intention is to create an ‘alternative’ non-commercial and autonomous sphere for art production and engagement more often than not finding their energies are spent negotiating the difficult terrain between ‘autonomous’ and ‘sustainable’ operation. Some of these practices will be addressed in later chapters but for now it is worth noting the *qualitative* difference between the activity of producing art when knowingly engaged in a market and when working ‘informally’. In the latter situation, the subjectivity is one of a conscious and purposeful amateur or non-professional who refuses to call what they do ‘work’.

The question following on from this is as follows; if the intentional and motivational frame for the practice is crucial in reflecting a ‘non-capitalist’ subjectivity then how is this translated or represented through the work that the audience encounter? An example might be found in Stuart Murray’s Fanzine *WORK* (2004)⁸⁰ that is produced and distributed through independent means and whose content deals with his own problematic identity as a worker. The fanzine takes the form of thirty-two loose A4 photocopied sheets housed in a reinforced envelope, clearly all materials acquired from Murray’s work place. On each sheet is a drawing or text that conveys a fragment of conversation, or something overheard by Murray in the Post Office in Glasgow where he works, often referencing his own position as an arts graduate in an unfulfilling and somewhat inappropriate job. The fanzine *WORK*, then, functions as both an act of ‘everyday resistance’ as previously mentioned, by *détourning* or re-appropriating work time and its physical and social resources into a creative act, but also as a piece of self-investigation that unpicks and represents the oppressive and confusing identity of the worker and the manners in which it can be resisted.

Not all work, however, can be as autobiographical or self-reflective. Other means by which the ‘non-professional’ intentions of art are explicated include artist statements and contextualising writing – a curatorial statement for example - that make the intentions and

⁸⁰ Stuart Murray, *Work (Thirty-two Post Office Drawings)*, self-published fanzine, Glasgow, 2004

background of both artist and work explicit. An example exists in the 2009 Istanbul Biennial that was accompanied by a breakdown that illustrated the distribution of funds and fees that in turn highlighted the non-payment of most of the artists, or in art collectives who purposefully remain unwaged. It is far from guaranteed that such statements of intent and position will be read in conjunction with the work however. Another tactic is to show work in a space where the ethics of non-work are implied through the constitution of the space; showing work in a not-for-profit gallery, squatted space, domestic space and so on. Oftentimes such work has to make difficult decisions between being shown in an ‘appropriate context’ (a self-organised space for example) or reaching a larger and unfamiliar audience (through established art world galleries) to avoid ‘preaching to the choir’.

These problems that are encountered through an art practice that remains purposefully DIY, ‘informal’ or at a distance from the institutional art world become experiments and demonstrations in the complex terrain of self-valorising activity. Self-valorisation or ‘auto-valorisation’, was a term coined by Italian Autonomist Marxists in the 1970s to describe the process of struggle that would produce new subjectivities through non-capitalist activities.⁸¹ The Italian movement was based in fresh understandings and critiques of work and the new forms it was taking in the post-Fordist era. Furthermore they identified the lack of distinction we experience now between work and non-work, or the seeping of capitalist dominance in to every aspect of our lives in their conception of ‘the social factory’.

We will return to the history and theory of *Autonomia*, its precedents and its antecedents throughout the thesis. The relevant lessons here is that it is mistaken to think that there are uncontaminated spaces ‘outside’ of capital in which we can operate, just as it is to think that any activity is wholly non-capitalist, or that it would produce a subjectivity that is wholly Other to capital. As Harry Cleaver has put it:

⁸¹ “The self-valorisation of the proletarian subject contrary to capitalist valorisation, takes the form of auto-determination in its development” Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx* (London: Pluto Press, 1991), p.162

We craft autonomous environments and activities but we do so in spaces scarred by capitalist exploitation and with commodities and personalities at least partly shaped by the process of (capitalist) valorisation.⁸²

We can see evidence of this ‘scarring’ in the complex relationship between work and non-work that is represented, performed and unpicked by DIY, self-organised, non-institutional art practices and ‘dark matter’. Through practices that complicate the conventionally ‘straightforward’ distinctions between work and non-work, professional and amateur activity and the valorisation afforded by these activities, we are offered a richer starting point from which to conceive of a non-capitalist subject. The practices that we have explored in this section show that it is reductive to suggest that all activity undertaken outside of waged-labour is antagonistic or oppositional to capital, as a crude interpretation of John Holloway’s writing might suggest. Conversely, the notion that all waged activity is necessarily abstract or alienating also needs revisiting.

Furthermore, even when those spaces of non-capitalism are formed they risk eventual recuperation and co-optation. The process of DIY and autonomous activity is never completely beneath the radar or able to go unnoticed by capitalism. This is demonstrated in as everyday an occurrence as once-underground forms becoming mainstream. As Carlsson writes:

People resist these forces in their normal daily lives by carving out spaces of autonomy in which they act concertedly outside (and often against) capital’s attempts to commodify their activities. Capital inexorably seeks to colonize all such spaces and relationships and reintegrate them into the market logic of buying and selling.⁸³

The hybridisation between non-capitalist and capitalist activity is not only a one-way relationship, it is, rather, symbiotic. Whilst it is true that much of the cultural innovation and ‘research and development’ of potentially profitable forms occurs within self-organised

⁸² Harry Cleaver, ‘The Inversion of Class Perspective in Marxian Theory: from Valorization to Self-Valorization’, 1992 < <http://libcom.org/library/inversion-class-perspective-marxian-theory-valorization-self-valorization> > [accessed July 6th 2011]

⁸³ Chris Carlsson, *Nowtopia: How Pirate Programmers, Outlaw Bicyclists and Vacant-Lot Gardeners are Inventing the Future Today* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2008), p.39

spaces and self-initiated, hobbyist activity equally as Carlsson points out, ‘DIY punks, anxious to assert their independence and self-sufficiency, would find it difficult to survive without the resources they derive from mainstream society’s waste.’⁸⁴

Such recuperation and cross-pollination of forms and structures not only happens at the market level but also at the level of governance as experienced presently with David Cameron’s model of the DIY or Big Society. This blatant co-option of not just a label, but a form of social organisation, whilst not a uniquely recent occurrence, has prompted many debates within not-for-profit, DIY, self-organised and voluntary circles about the antagonistic or compliant nature of their activity with neoliberal government agendas and has forced a revisiting of once ‘safe’ values.⁸⁵ We can see the reflection of amateur and DIY subjects through art practices – either by their representation, self-representation or enactment – as an important factor in aiding this self-reflection.

The amateur, like the nomad or radicant, is a complicated subjectivity, not complete, sedentary or ‘pure’, but contingent and in constant tension and relation to its Other. This is not a situation to be bemoaned, or that signals the negation of resistance to capitalism, but, on the contrary, is the very foundation for the possibility of such resistance. A non-capitalist subjectivity must be open to, and able to recognise, its contamination by that which it seeks to change rather than mistakenly believing in a pure essentialism. By the same logic, the inevitability of recuperation or co-optation of once self-organised forms by their institutionalisation or recognition by the market needs to be inverted so as to recognise the potential of resistance in this cycle. Chris Carlsson and Harry Cleaver both conceptualise this as occurring through the accumulated and materialised experience of autonomous and self-valorising material that may be left or passed on to resonate with other and future struggles:

⁸⁴ *ibid*, p.49

⁸⁵ Including those that took place as part of Alternative Strategies, Leeds, March 2011. <http://alternativestrategies.blogspot.com/> [accessed 11th July, 2011]

when radical projects survive to become institutionalized as business (for- or non-profit), narratives are preserved and hopefully resources are available for their successors, and for the less “successful” in their community.⁸⁶

Projects of self-valorisation should be seen as experiments in new ways of living, so that although they are in no way pure and often recomposed by capital through strategies of commodification, incorporation or outright repression they push forward boundaries and provide the basis of future experiments in self-valorisation.⁸⁷

What is too often overlooked in discussions on the lack of distinction between capitalist and non-capitalist forms - or in the recuperation of the latter by the former - is the role of the production of subjectivity. That is, in the analyses of the various structures and forms that capital takes, and that non-capitalist activity seeks to provide an alternative to, it is easy to ignore the qualitative difference in the ethical and affective experience of engagement in such activity. It is these ethical and affective phenomena that are reflected and represented through the various art practices covered in this section.

It is not my intention to suggest, however, that resistance occurs equally as effectively across the board and in all spaces. It is important to take into account the manner in which the space of articulation or representation relates to the content of the subjectivity that is reflected. I propose that those awkward examples, where, for example, non-professional subjectivities are presented in a ‘professional’ context, are less successful in representing a non-capitalist subject than when the form of delivery and content are in harmony. This proposition will be elaborated on and explored in more depth through the development of this thesis.

To conclude briefly, in this chapter I have looked at two figures of the subject with non-capitalist tendencies and the manner in which they are represented and articulated through perceived space in art. These models were, first, the Nomad or Radicant, that we saw has an

⁸⁶ Chris Carlsson, *Nowtopia: How Pirate Programmers, Outlaw Bicyclists and Vacant-Lot Gardeners are Inventing the Future Today* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2008), p.238

⁸⁷ Keir Milburn, ‘When Two Sevens Clash: Punk and Autonomia’, paper presented at No Future conference September 2001 < <http://freelyassociating.org/when-two-sevens-clash-punk-and-autonomia/> > [accessed July 6th 2011]

antagonistic relation with late-capitalism by its rejection of essential identity but still has formal similarities to the neoliberal creative worker. The second was the figure of the Amateur, whose self-valorisation through non-work activity provides a useful case study for unpicking the complicated web of activity that is complicit with, and resistant to, capitalism. In both cases it has been demonstrated that subjects are entangled in capital but that the recognition of such an entanglement as represented by art is a point of departure for formulating new forms of struggle and the creations of an alternative to capitalism. The crucial question to ask in both cases is, to paraphrase Bourriaud, not ‘where are you from’ but ‘where are we going?’ This dialogic and socially constructed aspect of subjectivity, and its production through experiences in social space will form the content of the next chapter.

Chapter Two: Intervention in Social Space - Subjectivizing Ruptures, Events, Encounters and Moments of Excess

In the previous chapter I examined how art practices that operate in ‘perceptual space’ help reflect and model subjectivities that are potentially ‘postcapitalist’. That is, they affect the precepts, the imagination and the relation to self of those who engage in them to an extent where they facilitate new ways of thinking about the world that can open on to new economic realities beyond capitalism. I looked more specifically at the way in which these practices - that ranged from photography, film and video, through to archives and, in later stages, self-representation through auto-biographical practices and modes of operation - reflect a subjectivity that may shape the viewer’s own by inspiration. In essence, then, I was examining ways in which non-capitalist subjectivities are represented by contemporary art practice.

The purpose of this chapter is to look at the next level of intervention on the matrix illustrated in the introduction (the second of Guattari’s ecologies), that being the level of the social. As we will see, this involves looking in some detail at art practices that unpick or use social and collective activity and can to some extent be evaluated by their concrete and practical effects.

This level of intervention, and the types of practices appropriate to it, presents an opportunity to look in more depth at the manner in which engagement with art can affect subjectivity. A dual movement occurs in this chapter then; in one direction towards a more concrete and visible space – that of social relations - and in another to further examine the subjectivising affect or rupture prompted by aesthetic and collective experience.

To begin, I would like to address the space with which this chapter is concerned. By ‘social level of intervention’ I might be speaking of the insertion of an artwork into the space in which a number of individuals come together; for instance, a performance, an installation, or even a painting on a wall experienced by more than one person simultaneously. If we are to understand social space economic-politically, as analogous to ‘public space’, I may

simply be talking of any art occurring or encountered outside of the ‘private space’ of the gallery. The ‘social level’ could also refer to the circuits and distribution networks of information and dialogue that connect individuals into something we understand as ‘society’, thereby bypassing the condition of bodies-together-in-the-same-physical-space. Add to this the potential difficulties in confusing notions of the community, the collective and the collaborative, and we realise that ‘the social level’ covers an unwieldy number of concepts for the purposes of examining specific practices.

It is, however, not unusual to see these differing, and at times contradictory, interpretations of ‘the social’ blurred and collapsed into one another when ‘socially engaged art practice’ – understood as a term denoting a category of art - is concerned.⁸⁸ ‘Socially engaged art’ is fast becoming, or has indeed already become, a seemingly fixed yet paradoxically ill-defined term for a particular medium – like, for example, ‘sculpture’, ‘film’, ‘performance’ or ‘installation’ - that can be experimented with by artists as a material to explore their (aesthetic/conceptual) concerns. More irksome is that it is often used as a means by which to describe an artist’s ‘mode of expression’ or ‘discipline’ within the artistic field; it is not uncommon to overhear such statements at artists networking events as ‘Yes, I used to be a painter but now I’m more of a socially engaged artist.’ To be ‘socially engaged’ is, when understood in this sense, then, by no means to be answerable to a set of socially transformative aims. At times, in fact, quite the opposite is true. When defined so loosely, art ‘engaged in the social’ conjoins such disparate practices as state-instrumentalised community art, public art (of both the ‘heavy metal’ and ‘new genre’ type), relational gallery-based practices, and activist and interventionist practices that operate below the radar of the art world. Clearly, all sit at very different points on a transformative scale between disrupting, criticising and conserving the current order and require, as such, some unpicking in order to evaluate the radical strategies that might be gleaned from art that ‘intervenes at the social level’.

⁸⁸ For example any number of calls for proposals for ‘socially engaged artists’ or seminars on ‘socially engaged art’, examples of which are in appendix.

The Post-relational Landscape

I propose to begin this unpicking by concentrating on the set of discourses that have arisen in the art world following the identification, classification and coining of ‘relational practice’ by Nicolas Bourriaud in the late 1990s. Bourriaud’s background and the practices to which he is most commonly associated are well covered elsewhere and require little rehearsal.⁸⁹ Regardless of the familiarity we may feel with the ‘basic points’ of Bourriaud’s theory, however, it should not be ignored that the publication of *Relational Aesthetics* (in particular in English), and its somewhat audacious claims about the distinctiveness and the political efficacy of a relative handful of contemporary gallery-based practitioners, marks an important point in the development of discourses around social, participatory, co-produced, co-authored, collaborative and socially transformative art. The significance of Bourriaud’s contribution, (not based on its quality but the set of conversations, articles and publications it prompted as well as its impact on current art pedagogy), is such that many describe the current landscape for artistic practice of this sort as ‘post-relational’.⁹⁰ This is not to say that contemporary art is ‘over’ the concern with its relational context and framing - as much as it may seem some of the more traditional artists and arts facilitators wish it were - but, rather, that the intellectual stakes upon which the political claims of such art are made have been irrevocably transformed.

I will now offer a brief and incomplete outline of these ‘post-RA’ debates to which we will return to explore more fully. Following Bourriaud’s description of any significant art practice in the 1990s as being concerned with a relational horizon - that is, the relationships between subjects an artwork produces rather than the aesthetic form of the work itself - a number of critics highlighted some fundamental flaws in Bourriaud’s text. These included the opinion that Bourriaud’s claims were nothing new; that the idea that art should be

⁸⁹ See Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses Du Réel, 2002) or the edited version in Claire Bishop, ed., *Participation* (London: Whitechapel, 2006), pp.160-171

⁹⁰ Gail Day, ‘The Fear of Heteronomy’, in *Third Text*, 23:4, 2009, pp.393 – 406 and John Roberts ‘Introduction: Art, ‘Enclave theory’ and the Communist Imaginary’, in *Third Text*, 23:4, 2009, pp.353–367

evaluated on its social impact and ‘what people do with it rather than what it is’ - as an activator rather than as an object to be consumed - was common to the last century of art practice at least.⁹¹ Furthermore, even if these *were* new claims for the transformative nature of art then they had been misplaced by Bourriaud, given the conservative nature of the artists he had employed to illustrate a supposed relational turn; Bourriaud’s set of relational practitioners offer little more than ‘frivolous’ interaction rather than a meaningful social experience.⁹² Closely linked to this was the fact that Bourriaud’s ‘theory’ was left open to criticism for being little more than a piece of propaganda to raise the profile and perceived significance of a set of artists in which he, as a curator, had a certain investment. There was, in business terms, an identifiable conflict of interest that questions the integrity of his claims. These criticisms share in common a distaste for the ‘Artworld-with-a-capital-A’ (that which is most centred around gallery spaces and the market) adopting political criteria for art that was previously the property of more radical, underground and antagonistic (to capital) practice.

More curious perhaps were the critiques that might be seen as siding with the Artworld; the art historians, writers and curators defending the autonomy of art against Bourriaud’s primarily ‘ethical criteria’. Claire Bishop has been the most vocal and visible of these, to the point where her responses to *Relational Aesthetics* have practically become afterwords to Bourriaud’s text.

Bishop’s points of contention can be understood as twofold. First, in an echo of Rosalind Krauss’ derision of interdisciplinarity,⁹³ that the fact that Bourriaud’s stable of artists work mostly with unfinished forms in a purposefully open-ended manner, turning the exhibition space into a laboratory, make it difficult to criticise such works meaningfully. Her question is how can we judge what is not yet finished? This is elaborated upon, and given slightly

⁹¹ John Roberts, ‘Introduction: Art, ‘Enclave theory’ and the Communist Imaginary’, *Third Text*, 23:4, 2009, pp.353-367

⁹² Stephen Wright, ‘The Delicate Essence of Artistic Collaboration’, *Third Text*, 18:6, 2004, p.535

⁹³ See Rosalind Krauss, “A Voyage on the North Sea”: *Art in the Age of the Post-medium Condition* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), p.56

more weight, by a tandem criticism where Bishop, similarly to Stephen Wright, points out that when interactivity becomes the horizon of the work it merely reflects, rather than provides critical distance from, the spectacularised form of ‘participation’ we experience in late capitalism. Interactive art is simply the result of, rather than a challenge to, a culture where everyone is made to feel like they are contributing and having meaningful input, when in reality they are being pacified through harmless concessions to that need. As such, galleries become little more than theme parks, playgrounds or hands-on learning centres that have little critical merit or transformative effect.

Second, and more famously, Bishop attacks *Relational Aesthetics* for privileging an ameliorative and altogether too ‘nice’ understanding of intersubjectivity. Through what Maria Lind has called her ‘famous misunderstanding’ of Laclau and Mouffe's theory of the antagonistic public sphere,⁹⁴ paired with an interest in deconstructionist articulations of community in the vein of Jean Luc Nancy's *The Inoperative Community*, Bishop arrives at a position where ‘tougher’ more antagonistic forms of relational practice - such as Santiago Sierra's or, less convincingly, Thomas Hirschhorn's - should be considered as more effective in creating real democracy than those practitioners that take a more ameliorative or convivial and ‘constructive’ approach.⁹⁵ This shifting of the frame of relational or socially engaged practice to include those works that favour critique over the creation of alternatives is a position that has been explored variously by other critics and groups such as BAVO collective,⁹⁶ and is one to which I will return in more detail later.

Concurrently, the overriding criticism that Bishop offers of relational practice and other forms of collaborative art is that an aesthetic criteria appropriate to art has been substituted by an ethical one. In short, artworks are judged on whether they are good and ethical collaborations - by how much room they offer to participants to shape the project and, again

⁹⁴ Maria Lind, ‘The Collaborative Turn’, in Billing, Johanna, Maria Lind and Lars Nilsson, *Taking the Matter Into Common Hands; On Contemporary Art and Collaborative Practices* (London; Black Dog Publishing, 2007), p.22

⁹⁵ Claire Bishop, ‘Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics’, *October*, 110, Fall 2004, p.77

⁹⁶ BAVO, eds., *Cultural Activism Today: The Art of Over-Identification* (Rotterdam: Episode Publishers, 2007)

in a fairly perplexing if not unwarranted analogy, how well they enact Christian ideals of authorial sacrifice⁹⁷ - when they ought to be answerable to a set of aesthetic criteria, which would, in Bishop's view, ensure a level of distance and autonomy that would result in them having some critical value.⁹⁸ Counterarguments from Grant Kester and Stephen Wright question the assumption that aesthetic criteria is as relevant or fundamental to the critical potential of non-instrumentalised activist art practice as Bishop maintains.⁹⁹

More recently, the reductive choice between an aesthetic or an ethical-political criteria against which to judge an artwork, and the circular arguments that result forthwith, have been seemingly avoided by the embrace of Jacques Rancière's theory of the 'distribution of the sensible' and his writings on the political implications of aesthetic experience.¹⁰⁰ There exist, however, a number of practitioners and critics who remain unconvinced by the apparent third way offered by Rancière that cites art's political efficacy in aesthetic judgement and, as such, another approach to this problem may be welcomed.¹⁰¹

This, then, concludes the brief sketch of the post-relational landscape against which I will attempt to pull out some specific analysis of artistic techniques for intervening at the social

⁹⁷ 'The discursive criteria of socially engaged art are, at present, drawn from a tacit analogy between anti-capitalism and the Christian "good soul."' Claire Bishop, 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents', in Schavemaker, Margriet and Mischa Rakier, eds., *Right About Now: Art and Theory since the 1990s* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2007), p.67

⁹⁸ 'It is to this art – however – uncomfortable, exploitative, or confusing it may first appear – that we must turn for an alternative to the well –intentioned homilies that today pass for critical discourse on social collaboration.' Claire Bishop, 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents', in Schavemaker, Margriet and Mischa Rakier, eds., *Right About Now: Art and Theory since the 1990s* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2007), p.68

⁹⁹ Leisure Arts, 'The Social Turn - Claire Bishop - Response to LeisureArts' at <http://leisurearts.blogspot.com/2006/08/social-turn-claire-bishop-response-to.html>

¹⁰⁰ See Ross Birrel, 'Editorial: Jacques Rancière and The (Re)Distribution of the Sensible: Five Lessons in Artistic Research', *Art & Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods*, Volume 2, No. 1, Summer 2008, also 'For Rancière, the aesthetic does not need to be sacrificed at the alter of social change, as it already inherently contains this ameliorative promise.' Claire Bishop, 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents', in Schavemaker, Margriet and Mischa Rakier, eds., *Right About Now: Art and Theory since the 1990s* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2007), p.68

¹⁰¹ Amongst them, Stephen Wright in 'Behind Police Lines: Art Visible and Invisible', *Art & Research: A journal of ideas, contexts and methods*, Volume 2, No. 1, Summer 2008

level. There are many areas in which to delve back and elaborate and I hope to achieve some more radical readings of socially engaged or relational practice by addressing some of the omissions or contradictions in the debates that have formed in the wake of *Relational Aesthetics*. Before that though I would like to offer a more anecdotal contextualisation of the current ‘post-relational’ landscape as a way to highlight the need for a more sophisticated understanding of the political implications for art intervening at the social level in developing a transformative art practice.

Faith in Art (to be Autonomous or Instrumentalised)

In December 2009 I was a delegate at the ‘Faith in Art’ seminar at the Henry Moore Institute, Leeds¹⁰², an event supported as part of Arts Council England’s ‘Turning Point’ national strategy for the arts. The Arts Council’s ‘Turning Point Network’ is:

an ecology of mutually dependant partners cooperating locally, regionally, nationally and internationally for the benefit of artists, arts organizations and audiences, present and future.¹⁰³

The ten-year strategy is commonly understood as attempting to anticipate a future scenario where artists will have to work under conditions of much-reduced government funding as well as in response to a less stable economic climate. The potential lessons learned from ‘socially-transformative’ or a-economic art practices, then, have suddenly pricked the ears of government agencies and taken on a new resonance. Similarly, the language of co-operation, self-sustainability, self-organisation, and ‘strengthening’ the sector (we can take this as a euphemism for solidarity) previously the preserve of what we might think of as the radical camp in art practice, is being deployed liberally throughout these documents and surrounding discussions.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Turning Point: Interchange: Should We Have Faith in Art to Change the World, Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, Weds 2nd Dec, 2009

¹⁰³ Turning Point: Interchange: Should We Have Faith in Art to Change the World, Delegate Pack, p.9

¹⁰⁴ See ‘Turning Point Network’ at <<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/our-work/turning-point-network/>> [accessed July 6th, 2011]

Accordingly, the 'Faith in Art' afternoon consisted of presentations by artists, art facilitators and academics followed by a chaired discussion that promised to examine such questions as:

Does relational art practice succeed in its aspirations?
In fact, should art exist in a special category of its own?
Is there a utopian avant-garde of the contemporary art world?
What impactful, contemporary art strategies are currently employed?
What can we make of the re-emergence of the manifesto in contemporary art?
How can art contribute to progress, and the making of a better world?
How should art be relating to its site specificity and its space and time context?¹⁰⁵

In summary, then, the questions to be addressed at the event by speakers and delegates reflected the set of discourses that make up the post-relational landscape but now framed by the increasingly urgent demand for art to 'do something'; to show the potential solution, or appropriate survival strategy, to a looming crisis where business for artists and arts workers will be far from usual. Another, less cynical, reasoning for the prominence of these questions is that they reflect a current trend where artists are beginning (again) to seriously consider their position as an avant-garde; that is, the agency willing to experiment with art and life.

The speakers at the event, however, had a generally dismissive if not outright hostile response to the questions used to frame the event, particularly (as I perceived it at least) the purposefully overstated title for the event: 'Should We Have Faith in Art to Change the World?' The manner in which the question was challenged, belittled or simply ignored varied from speaker to speaker; some preferring to concentrate instead on the 'inherent value' of aesthetic experience or of 'learning to appreciate' (Matthew Kieran); or proposing that the artist's responsibility is primarily towards making a high quality piece of work and that what the audience do with it afterwards should not be anticipated for fear of overdetermining it (Heather Morison); or that the limits of relational practices, such as the

¹⁰⁵ Turning Point: Interchange: Should We Have Faith in Art to Change the World, Delegate Pack, p.3

problematic nature of audience as actor and the power relations involved in framing a dialogue, should become the content of the work (Dave Beech); or simply that it is not worth bothering with (Carey Young). The scene was set as such for a circular open discussion in which all forms of politically motivated or consciously transformative art were dismissed as ‘instrumentalized’ (by the state assumedly), culminating in a skin-crawling baiting of the representative of the Arts Council by various ‘defenders of culture’ with demands to know why art has to justify its ‘use’.

Clearly, the context in which these questions were being explored – a think tank of sorts for the Arts Council – would give reasonable cause for some hostility to be directed at an assumed agenda of pinpointing the exact methods and measures of relational practice. What is worrying nonetheless is the fact that the discussion settled so quickly into such reductive terms – a fairly one-sided argument for the autonomy of art and against its instrumentalization and, underlying this, for an aesthetic rather than ethical horizon of art practice. This could be an indicator of what Gail Day has called the ‘fear of heteronomy’¹⁰⁶ - the discomfort in critical discourse arising from current practitioner’s (revived) desire to blur art and life - but also that the specific details of activist practices, or art that attempts to produce alternative forms of life rather than limit itself to the critique of those lived currently, are still of such low visibility that they are easily scanned-over and fail to interrupt the tired back-and-forth between ‘autonomous’ and ‘propaganda’ art extracted from Adorno’s critical theory.¹⁰⁷ What is overlooked in that exchange is the fact that there are artists, myself included, who understand the current situation of art as having some social responsibility placed upon it (by the state) as an opportunity to be hijacked and *détourned* rather than a constriction from which to flee.

Likewise, a more recent discussion, also in Leeds, ‘Valuing The Arts in an Age of Austerity’ in June 2011 - at which I was invited to speak as part of a panel – illustrated well the reductive and ultimately debilitating perception of practices that dare to evaluate

¹⁰⁶ Gail Day, ‘The Fear of Heteronomy’, *Third Text*, 23:4. 2009, pp.393–406

¹⁰⁷ For overview see Theodor Adorno (trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor), *Aesthetic Theory* (London: The Athlone Press Ltd, 1997) and Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Bertolt Bloch and Georg Lukács, *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso 2007)

themselves against a socially transformative criteria. At this event, the discussion was almost impossible to move away from the (in my view false) oppositions between autonomous (and generally 'traditional' gallery-based forms of art) that offer the 'rich' experience of aesthetic and critical judgement, and instrumentalised social forms that are seen as dumbing-down art experience and pandering to quantitative measurements. Ultimately this debate became one between art's 'intrinsic' or 'instrumental' value, despite my contribution that these values are two sides of the same coin.

What is to be done, then, to help prevent such potentially fruitful discussions from falling into a self-serving appraisal of autonomous (in its modernist sense) and often very conservative and traditionalist forms of art practice? My attempt in this chapter will be to revisit some of the original claims and critiques of relational practices to see where potential misunderstandings have arisen and to examine more recent political theory that will serve to challenge the position that any art that judges itself by its potential to create and experiment with working alternatives to capitalism (in concrete social space) is fated to inefficacy by total appropriation and instrumentalization. More simply put, my premise is that we can, or at least should, have some faith in art to change the world, and be able to evaluate it in terms of this capacity.

From Demonstration to Experiment

We can identify a path out of the autonomous versus instrumentalised discursive trap by returning to Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics*. By noting the claims that have generated so much contestation, and then examining what may have been excluded or overlooked in the consequential debate, I propose we can offer a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of 'relational art' - even of the sort championed by Bourriaud - than that to which it is commonly reduced: ameliorative and ultimately ineffectual art microtopias.

It is not my intention to defend the gallery-based practices favoured by Bourriaud but to highlight that a selective understanding of Bourriaud's relational theory has been accepted generally in the art world. This, in turn, has offered the chance for socially engaged art-sceptics to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Otherwise put, the set of criticisms mechanically deployed and used as justification to dismiss relational or socially intervening art are founded on a purposefully biased reading of *Relational Aesthetics* which has negatively affected the wider field of socially engaged art.

The bias to which I refer in the interpretation of relational work is an exaggeration of what, for the purposes of this essay I will call, its 'parochiality'. That is, it is common for critics and artists to evaluate the intentions and efficacy of a socially engaged work in terms only of its immediate operation within the space in which it intervenes - a space which is often delimited or created by the work itself and, as such, it is responsible for. Only focusing on the *local* effect of socially intervening art leads to two errors in its interpretation and evaluation. First is that the socially engaged artwork pertains to an autonomous field. Second is that it is primarily concerned with pragmatic solutions to immediate problems. The first, then, overplays socially intervening art's naïve utopianism, while the second reduces it down to ultimately conservative reformism.

Utopianism

Let us begin by addressing the first error. It is not uncommon for writers, when talking of relational or socially engaged art, to draw parallels with similar cultural and creative methods towards social transformation like the Situationists ‘concrete situation’¹⁰⁸ and Hakim Bey’s *Temporary Autonomous Zone* (TAZ).¹⁰⁹ Understandably so, as Bourriaud offers the comparison in his own texts – referencing both the underground techno-music rave scene of the 90s (the theoretical bible for which was Bey’s TAZ), and Guy Debord’s theory of the spectacle.¹¹⁰ Although Bourriaud retains a keenness to highlight relational art’s distinctive and unique qualities – he maintains that artists of the 90s are not simply repeating tactics from the 60s¹¹¹ – his theoretical touchstones are too alike to avoid sometimes confusing with his own ideas.

In addition, there certainly exist moments in *Relational Aesthetics* that describe relational art as the creation of, or activity in, autonomous zones. Bourriaud understands the gallery as ‘a space partly protected from the uniformity of behavioural patterns’¹¹² and grants the exhibition format with a curious privilege amongst art forms including theatre and cinema, proposing that only in galleries are visitors offered the opportunity to immediately discuss what they are presented with, and that they are, accordingly, more sociable.¹¹³ Bourriaud goes even further to suggest that contemporary art exhibitions are comparable to Marx’s ‘interstice’ creating ‘free areas’ that ‘(encourage) an inter-human commerce that differs from the “communication zones” that are imposed on us.’¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ See Kenn Knabb, ed., *Situationist International Anthology: Revised and Expanded Edition* (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006)

¹⁰⁹ Hakim Bey, *T. A. Z. The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2003)

¹¹⁰ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses Du Réel, 2002), p.19

¹¹¹ *ibid*, p.30

¹¹² *ibid*, p.9

¹¹³ *ibid*, p.16

¹¹⁴ *ibid*, p.16

Against his intentions,¹¹⁵ Bourriaud's description of art activity as creating or existing in a world uncontaminated by the forms of commerce and communication that stall experiments in social transformation elsewhere has a distinctly utopian flavour. Add to this the stress that Bourriaud places on relational practice as the creation of concrete forms of life in statements such as 'the role of artworks is ... *to actually be* ways of living and models of action within the existing real'¹¹⁶ and we begin to form a picture of relational art as the invention of new utopian communities, independent from the 'real world'.

It is this understanding of the intentions of relational art, and the political project that can be inferred from it, that I believe underlies John Robert's description of such art as 'enclave practices'.¹¹⁷ Roberts' description of relational art ultimately projects on to it an immature and outmoded strategy towards social transformation, that does not do credit to the sophistication of some of those practices and their aims. It makes it appear that artists are in agreement with the very idea of an uncontaminated autonomous sphere, one that has closed itself off from the outside, the possibility of which, even when one is not talking of the exhibition space, has been convincingly contested throughout the development of poststructuralist theory.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, even if there were such a thing as an autonomous zone - art world or otherwise - social transformation by the proliferation of such zones posits another highly problematic model of resistance to the given order. To describe artists working in the production of relational frames as 'enclaves' is to align such practices with an atomist, postmodern model of social change where the slow spread and growth of communes and 'pure' zones will eventually swallow up and suffocate the current economic and political framework.¹¹⁹ It is my contention that artists working with relational practices

¹¹⁵ *ibid*, p.13

¹¹⁶ *ibid*, p.13 (my emphasis)

¹¹⁷ John Roberts, 'Introduction: Art, 'Enclave theory' and the Communist Imaginary', *Third Text*, 23:4, 2009, p.353

¹¹⁸ See Saul Newman, 'Derrida and the Deconstruction of Authority', in *From Bakunin to Lacan: Anti-Authoritarianism and the Dislocation of Power* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2007), pp. 115 - 135

¹¹⁹ Such tactics adopted by activist movements and cultural activist groups have grown out of readings (and misreadings) of Deleuze and Guattari or John Holloway. See John Holloway, *Zapatista!: Reinventing Revolution in Mexico* (London: Pluto Press 1998), p.16

have a more contemporary and nuanced understanding of social transformation than this utopian vision; one that I will explicate shortly.

Pragmatism

Let us first turn to the other erroneous path leading from the overstating of a relational artwork's parochial scope; a reading of relational or socially engaged art work as a set of pragmatic solutions to immediately given problems. The reduction of relational or socially intervening art to a 'quick fix' to societal problems or the simple 'repair of tears in the social fabric'¹²⁰ might be said to arise from a misreading of site-responsive tactics. This is understandable, in part due to the common ground Bourriaud's relational practice shares with Suzanne Lacy's 'new genre public art' which, in turn, can be traced back through minimalist sculpture's desire to deal with its own presence and the relationship to the viewer.¹²¹ Such an understanding of site-responsive or context-specific work has the potentially ill effect of confusing *response to* the given environment or set of circumstances with a *limiting by* that same environment. That is, the legacy of site-specific practice, and its lessons for progressive public art, should not be reduced to the fact that art is *only* concerned with its immediate surroundings. This, however, appears to be exactly what has happened in current dealings with site-specific art and, in turn, the socially intervening art that is seen as extending from it.

Another contributing factor to the interpretation of relational or socially engaged art as practical solutions emanates perhaps from some of the practices and practitioners associated with relational and post-relational landscape. Artist collective WochenKlausur, for example, self-consciously works in such a manner, its members defining themselves as

and Richard J. F. Day, *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), pp.19-45

¹²⁰ To paraphrase Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses Du Réel, 2002), p.36

¹²¹ As does Miwon Kwon in *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (London: The MIT Press, 2004)

art activists who work within a strict time frame and with ‘concrete goals’.¹²² Their working methods involve the identifying of and attendance to small and manageable (social) problems that can be practically dealt with within a given time frame, for example the lack of free healthcare for the homeless in Vienna, or the need for a community centre for drug-addicted sex-workers.¹²³ Associated practices can be found in exhibitions such as Nato Thompson and Gregory Sholette’s exhibition *The Interventionists*¹²⁴ which showcased a number of projects and artists whose works blur the boundaries between creative art practice, intelligent eco-design, social work and activism with projects including temporary mobile housing for the homeless,¹²⁵ clothes and bags specifically designed for shoplifting from chain-stores,¹²⁶ and graffiti-writing robots.¹²⁷ The pragmatism of such art, alongside its specific and quantifiable frame of evaluation - we can easily decide whether it is good art or not by whether it ‘works’ or ‘functions’ properly - has drawn criticism both from art critics who desire a more sophisticated and open-ended experience of art¹²⁸ and from those concerned with radical social change who dismiss such tactics as mere reformism.¹²⁹

These criticisms are exacerbated when we bring Bourriaud’s artistic examples into the mix. Although a potentially fruitful debate may arise from weighing up the merits of ‘practical’ activist solutions under the guise of socially intervening art (see for example, Gavin Grindon’s article in *Art Monthly* about activism and art at the Copenhagen climate

¹²² Pascale Jeanne, ‘WochenKlausur’ in Wolfgang Zingll, ed., *WochenKlausur: Sociopolitical Activism in Art* (Vienna: Springer-Verlag, 2001), p.8

¹²³ ‘Intervention to Provide Healthcare to Homeless People’, documented in Wolfgang Zingll, ed., *WochenKlausur: Sociopolitical Activism in Art* (Vienna: Springer-Verlag, 2001), pp.21-26

¹²⁴ Nato Thompson and Gregory Sholette with Joseph Thompson, eds., *The Interventionists; User’s Manual for the Creative Disruption of Everyday Life* (Massachusetts: Mass MoCA, 2004)

¹²⁵ Krysztof Wodiczko’s *Homeless Vehicle* (1988 – 1999)

¹²⁶ Yomango’s *Yomango Bag* (2004)

¹²⁷ The Institute for Applied Autonomy’s *Little Brother* (2002)

¹²⁸ Such as Claire Bishop in ‘The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents’, in Schavemaker, Margriet and Mischa Rakier, eds., *Right About Now: Art and Theory since the 1990s* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2007)

¹²⁹ BAVO, ‘Always Choose the Worst Option. Artistic Resistance and the Strategy of Over-Identification’ in BAVO, eds., *Cultural Activism Today: The Art of Over-Identification* (Rotterdam: Episode Publishers, 2007), pp.19-39

conference)¹³⁰ this same debate becomes farcical when illustrated by some of Bourriaud's gallery-based relational practitioners. Works like Rirkrit Tiravanija's oft-cited 'transformations' of gallery spaces into convivial self-service soup-kitchens and Felix Gonzalez-Torres' 'interactive' or user-shaped installations are all too easily dismissed as 'frivolous interaction';¹³¹ the poverty of the actual experience in the gallery being world's apart from the claims that Bourriaud makes for such work to 'fill in the cracks in the social bond'.¹³²

Even when we shift the frame of evaluation from the actual physical interaction to the fact of participation itself, this abstract yet still parochial understanding of relational art (in as much as the work is now only concerned with its immediate 'moral' context) leads to a harmful generalisation of socially engaged art as short sighted. As noted earlier, Claire Bishop posits that works in the relational field have a tendency to be evaluated by whether they are a good collaborations rather than whether they are good art where the '(critical) emphasis is shifted away from the disruptive *specificity* of a given work and onto a *generalized* set of moral precepts.'¹³³ Bishop describes, and subsequently criticises, such works on the basis that they aim to be flawless moments of collaboration, accountable only to an ethical horizon of authorial renunciation and good 'democratic' practice.¹³⁴ Following her own logic she berates such microtopic moments and spaces for their 'gestural ineffectuality';¹³⁵ for offering a form of democratic social relations that overlook the radical potential of difference, disagreement and antagonism. This, in turn, leads her to claim that the only option open for critical art is that it escapes its 'marshalling' to social change.¹³⁶

¹³⁰ Gavin Grindon, 'Art and Activism', *Art Monthly*, Issue 333, Feb 2010, pp. 9-12

¹³¹ Stephen Wright, 'The Delicate Essence of Artistic Collaboration'. *Third Text*, 18:6, 2004, p.535

¹³² Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses Du Réel, 2002), p.36

¹³³ Claire Bishop, 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents', in Schavemaker, Margriet and Mischa Rakier, eds., *Right About Now: Art and Theory since the 1990s* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2007), p.64

¹³⁴ *ibid*, p.61

¹³⁵ *ibid*, p.61

¹³⁶ *ibid*, p.64

Whilst there is much in Bishop's critique that is well placed and vital to a richer understanding of socially engaged practice, her characterisation of relational works as working-models of perfected social relations is debilitating. It wrongly collapses together work that aims at something other than representation or critique with a hapless utopian or reformist naivety. Subsequently, it is ammunition for those artists and critics who wish to defend art's autonomy and argue for its exemption from the experimentation with and production of working alternatives to capitalism. Bishop's citation of Santiago Sierra's statement that 'I don't believe in the possibility of change' is telling.¹³⁷ It demonstrates her affinity with the more 'representational' end of a camp within 'socially-engaged' art who, like Allan Sekula, propose that 'art, although it cannot overthrow (capitalist) order, can unmask it and break its ideological hegemony'¹³⁸ or, as Dave Beech articulated at the 'Faith in Art' seminar, prefer to work *with* the limits of language, participation and social relations under capitalism¹³⁹ rather than producing concrete alternatives to them. It is my contention, however, that a more 'direct' approach should not be discounted when considering socially transformative art.

Laboratory

Rather than understanding relational art, 'socially engaged' art, or any work that attempts to move beyond representation and critique as utopian-pragmatic exercises, to be subjected to a near-sighted critique we should instead see them as experiments with resonance in a much broader field than the one in which they are conducted. I mean experiments in the true sense of the word: an exercise with an unforeseen and potentially divergent outcome, not simply a rehearsed demonstration or micro-exercise to be applied to the real world. It is this understanding of relational practice as laboratory that, contrary to the above readings,

¹³⁷ Claire Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', *October*, 110, Fall 2004, pp. 51-79

¹³⁸ Alan Sekula quoted in the press release for 'Polonia and Other Fables' exhibition at Zacheta gallery in Poland. Available online at <<http://www.zacheta.art.pl/en/article/view/246/allan-sekula-polonia-and-other-fables>> [accessed July 6th, 2011]

¹³⁹ For example in their recent pieces where participants are actors with very defined roles such as *Revolution Road: Rename the Streets!* (2009)

Bourriaud champions most often in *Relational Aesthetics*. As noted earlier, Bishop bemoans this very trend for the exhibition-as-lab but, it seems, conveniently overlooks this very aspect when her argument develops to address the question of the ethical versus the aesthetic horizon.

As well as describing art as the creation of micro-communities and construction of ‘concrete spaces’,¹⁴⁰ Bourriaud makes frequent reference to relational practice as ‘a rich loam for social experiments’;¹⁴¹ as the testing of various forms of sociability to find new forms of being together. It could be considered slightly disorienting to be informed that art exhibitions are where ‘forms of sociability are worked out’¹⁴² but are simultaneously also where ‘their author has no preordained idea about what would happen.’¹⁴³ These may seem like subtle differences that do not warrant highlighting as inconsistency on the author’s part, but, as I hope to have illustrated above, they lead to very different understandings of relational art’s intent.

The muddling of relational practice as open-ended experiment with its being a demonstration or illustration is most prominent in Bourriaud’s use of the word ‘model’. Throughout (the English translation of) *Relational Aesthetics* art is described variously as ‘models of action’,¹⁴⁴ ‘participatory models’¹⁴⁵ and ‘models of sociability’;¹⁴⁶ he also asserts that ‘art *models* more than it represents’¹⁴⁷ and that it functions as ‘modelling possible universes’.¹⁴⁸ There is a small but significant difference between relational art being understood as a model of relations and, on the other hand, something that models behaviour: that is ‘model’ as a noun or as a verb. It makes the difference between interpreting relational art as an exercise that can be evaluated by what is achieved in its own

¹⁴⁰ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses Du Réel, 2002), p.46

¹⁴¹ *ibid*, p.9

¹⁴² *ibid*, p.31

¹⁴³ *ibid*, p.40

¹⁴⁴ *ibid*, p.13

¹⁴⁵ *ibid*, p.2

¹⁴⁶ *ibid*, p.28

¹⁴⁷ *ibid*, p.18

¹⁴⁸ *ibid*, p.13

self-made parameters or, alternatively, as an experiment with an unknown outcome or a catalyst for untraceable or unperceivable phenomena. The latter interpretation demands that as critics we look beyond the frame of what has happened in the situation created by the artwork and instead at the possible reverberations it has in ‘real life’; to look at the ‘world it suggests’ rather than the one it creates in front of us. For artists, it suggests that, instead of making art as a representation or micro-version of a preconceived already-transformed society, we approach relational and socially intervening practice closer to Bourriaud’s description as creating ‘a bundle of relations with the world, giving rise to other relations.’¹⁴⁹

Art when understood as a laboratory or an experiment begins to concern itself with what may be invisible or happens outside of its immediate frame. It becomes the creation of encounters and events where new behaviours and habits are formed. It is, as such, not subject to the ultimately pacifying criticisms that require relational art to demonstrate, in the here and now, the specific, flawless mode of being-together that many of Bourriaud’s critics have demanded. Instead relational art is a factory for experiences and social forms with a less visible and immediate outcome. These experiments do not produce ideal models of sociability or political organisation, but forms of subjectivity that might lead to informing them.

Furthermore we can look at the manner in which the ‘excessive’ or ‘ecstatic’ experience, offered by socially engaged art, social practice and collective activity, has both far-reaching and deep effects in terms of social relations and subjectivity that resonates beyond its present locality.

¹⁴⁹ *ibid*, p.22

Four Subjectivizing Ruptures: Refrain, Event, Joyful Encounters and Moments of Excess

A substantial section of *Relational Aesthetics* is dedicated to the articulation of the production of subjectivity that occurs in the encounter with (relational) art. This essay - printed towards the end of the book - is notably less cited, both by admirers and critics of Bourriaud. I would suggest part of the reason for this is that it proposes a broader evaluation of relational and socially intervening art than those described above. It is messier, more complex and is less specifically illustrated by the 'new forms of art' or relational 'movement' that Bourriaud champions in the previous essays.

Bourriaud deploys Félix Guattari's thought, and in particular his writing in *Chaosmosis* about the 'aesthetic paradigm', to outline an argument similar to that put forward in the first chapter of this thesis; that being, that individual transformation in mental space must occur in parallel with meaningful social transformation. Guattari, as in his writing with Deleuze, favours a fluid, contingent subject as the agency capable of disrupting the 'rigid social fabric' of capitalism which leads Bourriaud to explain that a fixed subject will always be at 'the exclusive service of the powers that be'.¹⁵⁰ However, whereas I previously outlined individual movement and travel as strategies towards facilitating a 'nomadic' subjectivity, Bourriaud, in this case, stresses the role of social experience in 'unsticking' and radicalising subjectivity:

only a mastery of the 'collective agencies' of subjectivity makes it possible to invent particular agencies.¹⁵¹

Bourriaud, through Guattari, describes in some length the social condition of man, referring to Marx's definition of the crux of man as 'the set of social relations'¹⁵² and highlighting that 'subjectivity can only be defined by the presence of a second subjectivity.'¹⁵³ It is in

¹⁵⁰ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses Du Réel, 2002), p.89

¹⁵¹ *ibid*, p.90

¹⁵² *ibid*, p.91

¹⁵³ *ibid*, p.91

these moments that Bourriaud appears better read in the poststructuralist and agonistic theories of democracy than Claire Bishop has given him credit for. Bourriaud moves on to write of the structures that ‘make up the production of collective subjectivity’ that for Guattari include cultural production and consumption and ‘informational machinery’.¹⁵⁴ Bourriaud, unsurprisingly, gives special emphasis to the role of art and the practice of artists in subjectivization.

Bourriaud interprets Guattari as suggesting that artistic experience offers the opportunity to be involved in ‘*heterogenetic processes*’ at the mental level that ‘cultivate *per se* differentness, before *moving it* over into the social.’¹⁵⁵ Art has the power to disrupt, freeze or ‘ritournellize’ plural subjectivity, that then allows us to contemplate it from a distance.¹⁵⁶ Guattari himself describes this experience as occurring in analysis and aesthetic experience as a ‘refrain’ that would lead towards the resingularization of subjects who are normally caught in the deadly repetitions and homogenisation of the capitalist-machine:

A singularity, a rupture of sense, a cut, a fragmentation, the detachment of a semiotic content – in a dadaist or surrealist manner – can originate mutant nuclei of subjectiviation.¹⁵⁷

Bourriaud uses Guattari’s concepts to stress the experimental nature of the subjectivization that occurs in the encounter of art. The experience of art, for Bourriaud, is similar to a shaking up of previously sedentary (subjectivizing) elements that are magnetised towards a particular form before being sent off on a trajectory towards ‘new vanishing points’.¹⁵⁸ The aesthetic experience is a rupture and redistribution of subjectivity towards unforeseeable destinations. This notion of the aesthetic experience as an experimental zone with a crucial relationship to what is ‘outside’, unknowable or invisible to it contrasts greatly with the utopian-pragmatism levied at socially intervening art we encountered earlier.

¹⁵⁴ *ibid*, pp.91-92

¹⁵⁵ *ibid*, p.95 (emphasis in original)

¹⁵⁶ *ibid*, p.97

¹⁵⁷ Félix Guattari (trans. Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis), *Chaosmosis; an Ethico-aesthetic Paradigm* (Sydney: Power Publications, 2006), p.18

¹⁵⁸ Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses Du Réel, 2002), p.100

I would, therefore, like to follow this path and augment the theoretical palette thus far adopted to describe the radical potential of socially engaged art. It would be to give Bourriaud undue credit if we were to concentrate purely on his understanding of socially engaged art. Although he has made a major contribution to the foundation for the post-relational landscape, and whilst I hope to have demonstrated that there is still much that can be productively extracted from his text, there are potentially more fruitful sources for dealing with the relation between the social level, art as event and the production of radical subjectivity. I propose to begin broadening the theoretical territory by examining Alain Badiou's writing on art and the event.

Events

The claims that are made for Badiou (as well as the ones that he himself makes) centre on the new type of philosophy that he proposes: one that 'cuts across' analytic and continental 'schools', and surpasses postmodern and poststructuralist thought by giving primacy to a discussion of ontology.¹⁵⁹ He also draws much attention for his articulations of universal truths that often lead to his awkward pigeon-holing as a 'post-postmodern' philosopher along with Slavov Zizek. Of course, the distinction between Badiou's philosophy and those of his 'poststructuralist' peers is often overplayed for effect and, despite crucial differences, there exists an overlap between these spheres of thought.

Like Guattari and Bourriaud, Badiou conceives of subjectivity as being produced through an interruption or a rupture in normative experience. Crucial to this is Badiou's distinction between 'being qua being' and 'existing' which he demonstrates using mathematical set-theory. To begin to apply or understand the relationship between Badiou's notion of subjectivization and socially intervening art it is worth briefly outlining some of these fundamental concepts.

¹⁵⁹ Alain Badiou, (trans. and ed. Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens), *Infinite Thought* (London: Continuum, 2006), and Norris, Christopher, *Badiou's Being and Event: A Reader's Guide* (London: Continuum, 2009)

For Badiou the world can be understood as comprising multiplicities and situations. Being qua being is a pure multiplicity where no element is understood as existing in relation to any other. ‘Situations’ (that which comprise our existence), on the other hand, are a ‘presented multiplicity’ that are unified or structured by a ‘*count-for-one*’; a decision as to what belongs and does not belong to that situation.¹⁶⁰ One of Badiou’s key political problems is how situations change, or how new situations arise. Change, for Badiou, is not simply a matter of perception or even of epistemological shifts in knowledge (which are context specific or relativist) but instead arises from the identification and pursuit of *universal truths*. The identification or the appearance of a ‘truth’ is an event that fundamentally changes that situation or world and in so doing creates subjects.¹⁶¹

The trickiest part of Badiou’s philosophy, and the area where it appears to present a series of unending paradoxes and theoretical knots, is the exact manner in which something new enters and disrupts a world. For Badiou, a truth is defined by the fact that existing structures of knowledge cannot accommodate it. It is a supplement to what is thought to exist: something new and, as such, unidentifiable, that exceeds existing constructs; ‘a totally disruptive occurrence that has no place in the scheme of things as they currently are.’¹⁶² How then, we might ask, is this spectre - this truth that exists above or below our perceptive and linguistic capacities - to be recognised? I will return to address this with reference to artistic production in due course.

For now it is enough to say that this eruption of the new, the occurrence of the event, is fundamental to producing subjects. We can make a crude distinction between a subject, a (social) individual that is capable of being an agent of social change or an empowered actor, as opposed to one who is ‘merely’ existing. Perhaps this parallels Bourriaud’s opposition of the current ‘society of extras’ - or the Situationist’s passive consumers - to a

¹⁶⁰ Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens in, Badiou, Alain (trans. and ed. Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens), *Infinite Thought* (London: Continuum, 2006), p.8

¹⁶¹ Alain Badiou, (trans. and ed. Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens), *Infinite Thought* (London: Continuum, 2006), p.46

¹⁶² *ibid*, p.20

more engaged and conscious social and political agent. For Badiou the *emergence* of the subject and the event are inseparable. The subjectivising transformation occurs through that individual's recognition and subsequent fidelity to the consequences of the event:

A subject is born of a human being's decision that something they have *encountered* which has happened in their situation – however foreign and abnormal – does in fact belong to the situation and thus cannot be overlooked.¹⁶³

More importantly, the transformation from being to subject is not guaranteed to be a permanent one. Subjects, in order to retain their existence as such, must follow through the unforeseeable and indeterminable consequences of the event.¹⁶⁴ It appears that what we are faced with, in Badiou's view, is a demand to act in blind faith. By his own admission subjects are constituted by 'their utterance as follows "This event has taken place, it is something which I can neither evaluate, nor demonstrate, but to which I will be faithful."' ¹⁶⁵ We should be aware though that a reduction of Badiou's philosophy to stubborn belief is too easy and a cheap tactic towards avoiding engaging with potentially enlightening thought.¹⁶⁶ What we can glean from Badiou's seemingly contradictory or mystical instruction to recognise the unrecognisable, and then show fidelity to the unpredictable, is a better understanding of the experimental and speculative (as opposed to pragmatic) nature of art that intervenes at the social level and in concrete space.

To unpick and elaborate on the ramifications of Badiou's theory of the event for socially intervening art it would make sense to turn to his own writings on art. Indeed, art, for Badiou, constitutes one of the four domains of truth procedures (the other three being science, mathematics and love). It should be noted, however, that Badiou, like many

¹⁶³ Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens in, Badiou, Alain (trans. and ed. Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens), *Infinite Thought* (London: Continuum, 2006), p.5

¹⁶⁴ *ibid*, p.5

¹⁶⁵ Alain Badiou, (trans. and ed. Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens), *Infinite Thought* (London: Continuum, 2006), p.47

¹⁶⁶ See for example the interview with Alain Badiou on 'BBC HARDtalk' broadcast 24/03/2009 available to view at <http://video.google.co.uk/videoplay?docid=7936414602517427743#> [accessed July 6th, 2011]

contemporary philosophers who write of art - Jacques Rancière amongst them - tend to gravitate towards 'conventional' and representational forms of visual or performing arts to explicate their ideas (mostly painting, poetry or theatre) and are often dismissive or seemingly ignorant of more contemporary self-identified relational forms such as those addressed in this chapter.¹⁶⁷ It would only be fair to assume that this blindness on the part of such significant and well-respected thinkers is wilful, and assume that in the investigation of their writings we find just cause for it.

Badiou sees art as a vehicle for social change. He describes it, and artists, as capable of identifying and ushering in a new subjective paradigm 'outside the contemporary war between enjoyment and sacrifice.'¹⁶⁸ Yet the complex nature of his event denies us the too-convenient drawing of a parallel with the 'situation', 'intervention' or gallery-based happening of relational art. There is little chance that Badiou would extend the significance of the event as he sees it (the handful of which include the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ and the Chinese cultural revolution) into the terrain of artistic events such as those described in *Relational Aesthetics*. It would be equally unlikely, even, if he were to consider the large-scale public interventions or art activism by 01.org¹⁶⁹ or Reclaim the Streets¹⁷⁰ as constituting an event. This is due to the simple fact that such temporary interventions are incapable of bringing something new into the world. Rather they are the highlighting or composition of normally overlooked elements.

¹⁶⁷ Sophie Berribi with Stephen Wright, Jonathan Dronsfield and Jacques Rancière, 'An Exchange with Jacques Rancière', *Art, Art & Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods*, Volume 2, No. 1, Summer 2008

¹⁶⁸ Alain Badiou, 'The Subject Of Art' Lecture given at Deitch Projects - April 1, 2005 (transcript by Lydia Kerr) <http://www.lacan.com/symptom6_articles/badiou.html>

¹⁶⁹ *Nike Ground* (2003) for example where they installed a 'a slick, demountable, walk-in container' on Karlsplatz to garner opinion from the Viennese public about its (fictional) proposition to be renamed 'Nikeplatz'. See <<http://www.0100101110101101.org/home/nikeground/story.html>> [accessed July 6th, 2011]

¹⁷⁰ For an overview of this activist collective based on 'direct action in public spaces' see Will Bradley, Mika Hannula, Cristina Ricupero and Superflex, eds., *Self-Organisation: Counter Economic Strategies* (New York: Stenberg Press, 2006), p.251

To explain this subtle distinction between the new and the hidden further I would like to revisit the aforementioned *Intervention to Provide Healthcare to Homeless People* (1993) by WochenKlausur¹⁷¹ in which the collective lobbied for and facilitated the provision of free healthcare to the homeless and drug-addicted of Vienna. This had the effect of highlighting (and addressing) the existence and plight of the socially excluded of the city, as well as the previously concealed discrimination and subjugating power relations suffered by this social group. It might on the surface, then, appear as though it would qualify as an ‘event’ in Badiou’s terms. It gives visibility to something that was previously invisible. However, the subject or content of the art work (the inhumane treatment of homeless people by the state) already ‘belongs to the world’; it already exists. It is not *new*, just hidden, concealed and out of sight. Despite the best efforts of those who wish to ignore it, the plight of the homeless can be accounted for and addressed with perceptive tools *already existing* in the world. An artistic intervention that illuminates this blind spot does not, therefore, constitute an event; described by Badiou as ‘a break of the law of a world’.¹⁷² Instead, Badiou’s definition of art’s imperative is:

(To) create an artificial thing with the possibility to give an existence to the inexistent. And the proof that it is impossible. But the impossibility is a new form, a form of its impossibility. That is why we can always say art is a failure. Why? It is because the inscription of the inexistent is impossible. But we create a new form in which the impossibility of the inscription of the inexistent is something like a novelty.¹⁷³

So, Badiou gives art the task of describing that which does not currently exist in the world *through* the failed attempt at bringing it into representation. Somewhat disappointingly, in his lecture on the subject, Badiou’s example of this magical process is Monet’s water lily

¹⁷¹ Documented in Wolfgang Zingl, ed., *WochenKlausur: Sociopolitical Activism in Art* (Vienna: Springer-Verlag, 2001), pp.21 - 26

¹⁷² Alain Badiou, ‘The Subject Of Art’ Lecture given at Deitch Projects - April 1, 2005 (transcript by Lydia Kerr) accessed

<http://www.lacan.com/symptom6_articles/badiou.html> [accessed July 6th, 2011]

¹⁷³ Alain Badiou, ‘Art’s Imperative’ lecture given at The Drawing Centre, New York, 2006 <http://www.lacan.com/symptom7_articles/josefina.html> [accessed July 6th, 2011]

paintings that, apparently, effectively capture the impossibility of representing light.¹⁷⁴ It might be left for us to extend this understanding of a negatively defined truth, or novelty that constitutes an affirmative split with the world-as-it-is, into socially-sited or relational art. Unfortunately examples of such an occurrence are near-impossible without falling into the hyperbole of Badiou's own statement on behalf of the Impressionists. I might propose, for example, that the type of conversations that are generated in a socially-intervening artistic event like my own *Festival Of Pastimes* (2008) are 'inscriptions of the impossibility of the inscription of the existent'¹⁷⁵ because they ask unanswerable questions about the difference between leisure, work, labour and productive play in an attempt to 'trace the contour'¹⁷⁶ of a new form of human activity that is a resistant form of all-yet-none of these. But it will only ever be just that; a claim that is near impossible to demonstrate in the here-and-now.

If we are to understand art as capable as being in the same realm as Badiou's event, then, it follows that its political significance must be co-produced or, more extremely, completely out of the artist's hands. As Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens explain, Badiou's event only becomes an event when *recognised* as such:

Not only must an event occur at the evental-site of a situation, but someone must recognize and name that event as an event whose implications concern the nature of the entire situation. Thus it is quite possible that an event occur in a situation but that nothing changes because nobody recognizes the event's importance for the situation. This initial naming of the event ... is what Badiou terms an 'intervention'.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Alain Badiou, 'The Subject Of Art' Lecture given at Deitch Projects - April 1, 2005 (transcript by Lydia Kerr) <http://www.lacan.com/symptom6_articles/badiou.html> [accessed July 6th, 2011]

¹⁷⁵ Alain Badiou, 'The Subject Of Art' Lecture given at Deitch Projects - April 1, 2005 (transcript by Lydia Kerr) <http://www.lacan.com/symptom6_articles/badiou.html> [accessed July 6th, 2011]

¹⁷⁶ Alain Badiou, (trans. and ed. Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens), *Infinite Thought* (London: Continuum, 2006), p.48

¹⁷⁷ *ibid*, p.21

We are in danger here of falling into a semantic tar pit, confusing the artist's intervention with the 'intervention' by the event's recogniser. I am conscious that this alignment of artistic production in social space with Badiou's event is a forced one. It does, however, return us to the social and relational character of a transformative art. Art can only propose or offer the opportunity to be acted upon by its audience, participants or co-authors as a subjectivity-producing machine. It cannot force or determine this radical and rupturing effect. We can say, then, that artists do not *make* the event, but only increase the chances of the event. Where, accordingly, does the radical and empowering activity lie? Possibly in the education or the training of the audience or, as we might describe in Badiou's terms, human beings, to recognise and act in fidelity with these potential events? I will return to this form of pedagogy later but not before offering an alternative, more active, notion of the event that might apply to socially engaged art practice.

Joyful Encounters and the Production of the Common

In their latest instalment of the *Empire* series, *Commonwealth*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri describe a programme for social transformation that places agency and responsibility squarely in the lap of those who want to affect it. Emerging from the Autonomist Marxist tradition, the drive of the argument in *Commonwealth* is that the current form of capitalism - one that relies on autonomous and creative labour, intellectual property and the production of affects and languages - has created a unique opportunity for the dissolution of capitalist hegemony.

To explain this opportunity better, Hardt and Negri, following Foucault, make a distinction between biopower and biopolitics. Biopower is a term with which to describe the form of rule deployed by current post-sovereign states based on their supposed ability to preserve and offer a better quality of life, rather than to take it away.¹⁷⁸ Biopower describes late-capitalism well, where docility and compliance are ensured through the pacification and fulfilment of 'false-desires', that is, through the production of subjectivity that does not

¹⁷⁸ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), p.57

want for more than that which is granted by the dominant order. In distinction to this definition, they define biopolitics as ‘the power of life to resist and determine an alternative production of subjectivity.’¹⁷⁹

For Hardt and Negri this ‘alternative’ subjectivity is one that escapes the dialectic between private and public property and is instead committed to a production of the common. The common - emerging from the notion of ‘the commons’ - denotes both common resources such as land, water and access to information but also shared ideas or a horizon for the common good.¹⁸⁰ The common, therefore, not only exists, but is also actively produced.¹⁸¹ Furthermore, its collective production creates a new kind of subject.¹⁸² The logic goes that these socially produced subjects are capable of self-organizing in a radically new way, without leadership or the desire or will to power that has undermined so many historical attempts to form alternatives to capitalism. This is Hardt and Negri’s oft-cited model of ‘the multitude’.¹⁸³

I will return to the concept of the multitude in due course as, like many of Hardt and Negri’s proposals, it invites closer inspection and critique. First though, as a way of continuing the inquiry into the links between the production of subjectivity, socially intervening art and the event, I would like to focus on the activity that Hardt and Negri understand as producing the common-conscious, radicalized subject. Much like the other theorists described in this chapter, Hardt and Negri conceive of the subject as emerging from an affirmative split, break or rupture with the given world, which they refer to as an event:

¹⁷⁹ *ibid*, p.57

¹⁸⁰ *ibid*, pp. viii - ix

¹⁸¹ *ibid*, p. ix

¹⁸² *ibid*, p .x

¹⁸³ For a comprehensive overview see Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude* (London: Penguin, 2005). The term is also used by Paolo Virno in Virno, Paolo, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2003)

Biopolitics, in contrast to biopower, has the character of an *event* first of all in the sense that the “intransigence of freedom” disrupts the normative system. The biopolitical event comes from the outside insofar as it ruptures the continuity of history and the existing order, but it should be understood not only negatively, as rupture, but also as innovation, which emerges, so to speak, from the inside.¹⁸⁴

The key difference between the biopolitical event and Badiou’s, then, is that the former posits the subject as much more active in its creation; events do not only happen and are recognised retroactively, but are also produced by knowing subjects. Hardt and Negri surmise this distinction by referring to Badiou as offering an understanding of the event as ‘backward-looking’ whereas Foucault’s is more productive and ‘forward-looking’.¹⁸⁵ There is, however, something disingenuous about this reduction of Badiou’s concept to a passive recognition of the event. It overlooks the demand for fidelity to something unpredictable or unknowable that Badiou calls the ‘wager’¹⁸⁶ and that he understands as fundamental to the truth process arising from events. Badiou’s concept of ‘forcing’ and, one could suggest, even of faith, posit a much more active and ‘forward-looking’ subject than Hardt and Negri give him credit. In fact, the quotes from Deleuze that Hardt and Negri use to illustrate the anticipatory and productive nature of their event have more in common with Badiou than may be expected from such famously opposed philosophers:

If you believe in the world you precipitate events, however inconspicuous, that elude control, you engender new space-times, however small their surface or volume.... Our ability to resist control, or our submission to it, has to be assessed at the level of our every move.¹⁸⁷

Leaving aside, momentarily, the comparisons offered between Badiou’s and Hardt and Negri’s description of the event, I would like to focus more attention on the exact nature of

¹⁸⁴ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), p.59

¹⁸⁵ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri referencing Zizek’s criticism of ‘the multitude’, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), p.60

¹⁸⁶ Alain Badiou, (trans. and ed. Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens), *Infinite Thought* (London: Continuum, 2006), p.46

¹⁸⁷ Gilles Deleuze, in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), p.61

the biopolitical production of subjectivity as described in *Commonwealth*. Hardt and Negri talk of biopolitical activity, the moments of resistance and production opposed to biopower, as constituting an event. What, then, is biopolitical production? Essentially it is the ‘affective’, or, immaterial labour common to late-capitalism and the information economy; the ‘production of ideas, codes, images, affects, and social relationships’¹⁸⁸ but, crucially, framed by the experience of, and movement towards, the production of the common. To be clear, the acts of resistance and rupture that constitute an event for Hardt and Negri do not, on the face of it, appear as radically different to late-capitalist work, or, moreover for our purposes, relational art practice.

Any artist working in the socially-engaged or relational field will feel some affinity with Hardt and Negri’s description of the late-capitalist worker as being involved in a kind of labour which is much less concerned with material production but instead with the generation of relationships (good customer care service), the production of information, ideas and languages (marketing, advertising and intellectual copyright), and new models for gathering, sharing and distributing information (market research and public relations). Indeed, the mode of production for the relational or socially engaged art practitioner, which generally involves consultation, negotiation, the facilitation of conversations and encounters and so on, can feel like a mirror of the call centre, teaching or service-industry work that may well provide financial support to such a practice.

Not only is the form of activity posited as disruptive and radical by Hardt and Negri perilously similar to that of the dominant order but, as critics including Slavov Zizek are keen to point out,¹⁸⁹ so is the form of organization they favour:

the multiplicities of the multitude and its horizontal network structures mirror capital’s own decentred and deterritorializing deployment, and thus, even when

¹⁸⁸ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), p.172

¹⁸⁹ Slavoj Zizek, ‘Have Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri Rewritten the *Communist Manifesto* for the Twenty-First Century?’ *Rethinking Marxism*, 13:3-4, (2001), pp.190-198

thought to be resisting it, the multitude's actions inevitably repeat and reproduce capitalist rule.¹⁹⁰

This same critique, as it is applied to relational art, is commonplace. In the debates that I outlined earlier to describe the post-relational landscape it has been deployed regularly as a device to undermine the intentions and methods of collaborative art, whose favouring of decentred and non-hierarchical structures and open relationships between audience and producer is 'revealed' to be 'the same as' late-capitalist production.¹⁹¹ To date, these simplistic critiques have been returned in kind. Maria Lind, in her essay 'The Collaborative Turn', for example, simply states that late capitalism's embrace of collaboration does not mean relational or socially-engaged art is caused by it, rather is just part of same 'culture'.¹⁹² What we might hope to find in *Commonwealth*, then, is a way out of this unhelpful exchange via an articulation as to what makes radical affective labour and decentralised organization distinct from its conservative versions.

First, it should be noted that Hardt and Negri understand the form of labour proper to late-capitalism as inherently problematic for capital. This is because biopolitical production is most productive when autonomous, free and collective instead of privately controlled. Capitalist control and quantification is, as such, a fetter to biopolitical labour.¹⁹³ Biopolitical labour is also a training ground for new forms of life that *exceed* capitalism, producing subjectivities capable of self-management, and contributing towards non-corrupt forms of the commons.¹⁹⁴ So, the fact that radical activity or artistic production is *formally* similar to late-capitalist production is a problem for capital, not for those who wish to overthrow it. Hardt and Negri in this sense consciously subscribe to the much-contested view of Marx

¹⁹⁰ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), p.168

¹⁹¹ Maria Lind, 'The Collaborative Turn', in Billing, Johanna, Maria Lind and Lars Nilsson, *Taking the Matter Into Common Hands; On Contemporary Art and Collaborative Practices* (London; Black Dog Publishing, 2007), p.19

¹⁹² *ibid*, p.20

¹⁹³ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), p.303

¹⁹⁴ *ibid*, pp.296-299

that capitalism produces its own gravediggers.¹⁹⁵ They also, however, recognise that this crumbling away of capital will not be a purely spontaneous occurrence and that the antagonistic capacities bred in late-capitalist production require some catalysing, direction and organisation to come into full effect.

I have mentioned that the crucial difference between complicit and radical forms of affective labour and multitudinous organization is found in their framing by the horizon of the common. Hardt and Negri describe *corrupt forms* of sociability and the common (those that are conservative rather than radical) as being steeped in the logic of private property: these corrupt forms are the family, the company and the nation.¹⁹⁶ The non-corrupt form of the common, on the other hand, is based on co-operation and social production based not on sameness or identity but instead openness to alterity and a commitment to forming something shared and new.¹⁹⁷ This training in the common occurs through what Hardt and Negri describe as ‘joyful encounters’ - which should be made distinct from the conflictive social encounters that arise from private interests.¹⁹⁸ Crucially, these encounters can be actively organised:

Capital, in fact, is not able to organize joyful encounters in the metropolis but can only capture or expropriate the common wealth produced. The multitude must organize these encounters autonomously and put into play the kind of training required for the politics of the metropolis.¹⁹⁹

Hardt and Negri, then, make the production of radical subjectivities and the common sound as simple as ensuring that there is a proliferation of moments in life where we engage in joyful encounters that break us out of thinking between the poles of private and public property and instead point us toward new ways of being together. Such a position is remarkably similar to that found in *Relational Aesthetics*,²⁰⁰ where encounters with relational works and the forms of sociability they require of the audience can be understood

¹⁹⁵ *ibid*, p.311

¹⁹⁶ *ibid*, p.160

¹⁹⁷ *ibid*, p.124

¹⁹⁸ *ibid*, p.124

¹⁹⁹ *ibid*, p.256

²⁰⁰ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses Du Réel, 2002), pp.30-32

as a training ground or an experimental zone for new forms of life as well as producing the subjectivity – through a rupture in the rhythms of the everyday – that can support them.

Hardt and Negri recognise that it is not enough for encounters simply to proliferate, instead they must somehow accumulate their effect and become lasting encounters, capable of making the shift from spontaneous occurrences into strategic political organisation.²⁰¹ It is this ‘institutionalising’ of the encounter,²⁰² as well as the training involved in both ‘non-corrupt forms of the common’ and in the recognition of Badiou’s event, that I intend to explore in the third chapter of this thesis, as it proposes we understand art as intervening at a different level ‘beyond’ the individual and social.

Moments of Excess

A related but more anecdotal understanding of the rupturous quality of collective experience can be found in the articulations of activist and writing collective The Free Association. The specific manner in which its members describe the ecstatic and, as such, radicalising effects of shared ‘doing’ leads towards discussions of more direct forms of collective engagement that are not framed by the institutional art world.

Theoretically and politically, The Free Association shares grounding with Hardt and Negri. It is a collective that formed in Leeds around 2000 to unpick and reflect upon the changing face of activism and political action experimented with by the ‘new social movements’. Of its four members, two were involved in political movements in the 1980s including ‘Class War’. Other members had been introduced to politics through the anarchopunk scene but they came together around the anti-globalisation struggles in the late 1990s and early 2000s that has become to be known as the ‘movement of movements’.

²⁰¹ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), p.357

²⁰² *ibid*, p.357

What struck the members of The Free Association about these specific forms of protest including ‘Reclaim The Streets’ - to which I will return and outline in more detail in Chapter Three of this thesis – was the fact that, in distinction to the mostly single-issue, reformist and unionised protests that had characterised the 1980s, enjoyment played such a large role. Rather than simply rallying ‘against’ an element of government or capitalism, these ‘new social movements’ seemed to be more clearly ‘for’ something and, as such, found a legacy in both the student and worker’s movements of the Paris riots of 1968 and Italy of 1970s and 1980s. The Free Association labels these forms of collective action - illustrated by the ‘J18’ protests of 1999 in London and the ‘summit hopping’ protests best characterised by Seattle protests at the World Trade Organisation conference also in 1999 – ‘moments of excess’ because of their joyous and constructive, as well as antagonistic nature.

For The Free Association, such moments of excess can apply to any collective, creative activity that is framed by its antagonism or creation of an alternative to capitalism, those being, in its words, ‘a collective creativity that threatens to blow open the doors of their societies.’²⁰³ The Free Association posits a similar understanding of self-valorising collective activity building on the workerist and *autonomia* movement in Italy, understanding capitalism as always ‘catching up’ with self-directed activity rather than the reverse:

Our abstract potential always exceeds and tries to escape the conditions of its production (that is, the capital relation) ... In the most obvious sense then, there is an excess of life. In work, at home, on the bus, we produce a surplus of collectivity. This is our humanity, and it is this which capital is constantly trying to appropriate, harness, regulate or contain.²⁰⁴

The group writes briefly about such collective moments in terms of football matches, rock concerts, raves and dances. However, the practice to which The Free Association most often refers, and the context in which its writings were both distributed and intended to be

²⁰³ The Free Association, *Moments of Excess: Movements, Protest and Everyday Life* (Oakland: PM Press, 2011), p.31

²⁰⁴ *ibid*, p.32

read, is specifically that of political events and protests. The most convincing examples are when the collective suggest that ‘another way of understanding the links between identity, individuality and collectivity is to look at riots.’²⁰⁵ In a similar manner to that of the Notes from Nowhere collective who we will cover later, The Free Association is particularly concerned with the ‘sensuous’ aspect of collective action and of being in a crowd, which is ‘a physical thing ... collectivity is visceral.’²⁰⁶

Equally, showing their Autonomist Marxist roots, desire – in its Deleuze and Guattarian sense - is also a concept that is fundamental to such ‘moments of excess’:

We’re not following our ‘conscience’. We’re following our desire! It’s at events such as Gleneagles that we feel most alive, most human – by which we mean connected to the rest of humanity.²⁰⁷

The combination of sensuousness and the production and realisation of collective desire that exceeds the cold rationalism of capitalist life, is equivalent, for The Free Association, to ‘out of body experiences’²⁰⁸ And it is in this sense that we can conceive of a subjectivising rupture akin to ‘the event’. In its parlance, such ruptures are like the ‘famous duck/rabbit image. Yes, you can see it as one or the other, but once you have shifted perspective it’s impossible to revert completely to the view you had before.’²⁰⁹

We have here then an alternative articulation of similar concepts to those already covered in this chapter but born of a particularly localised practice. It is of interest that, although The Free Association comes from a milieu clearly influenced by Hardt and Negri, that there are moments where they demonstrate a greater affinity with the writings of Badiou that have been discussed in this chapter. For example when it is reasoned that ‘perhaps we won’t even recognise the rupture until after it has happened.’²¹⁰

²⁰⁵ *ibid*, p.37

²⁰⁶ *ibid*, p.45

²⁰⁷ *ibid*, p.45

²⁰⁸ *ibid*, p.46

²⁰⁹ *ibid*, p.47

²¹⁰ *ibid*, p.39

Regardless, I feel that what The Free Association brings to the table in such discussions - and the reason for including the collective as an endnote here when broadening a language for subjectivising ruptures and events in social space - is its ability to ground some of the more abstract theorising covered thus far in everyday experience. This is well illustrated in its summation of the willingness to show ‘fidelity’ to the event and its pedagogic quality:

Experiencing such a moment of collective creativity leaves you sensitised to opportunities to repeat them.²¹¹

Like Hardt and Negri and Badiou, though, The Free Association also recognises the limits of such social and concrete experience and the need for its organisation or institutionalisation that would avoid ossifying it and curtailing its radical potential. Again, these issues will be addressed in some more detail in following chapters but I would like to conclude with an overview of the ramifications for socially engaged art and social practice of the theories of rupture discussed in this chapter.

I began this chapter by outlining the post-relational critical landscape that most self-identified socially engaging art – that is, art that intervenes at the social level or in social space – must negotiate. My proposition is that the choice between an instrumentalised *or* a critically-distanced art is a false one; art can both consciously embrace its productive (rather than solely descriptive, representative or critical) capacities and retain distance from the recuperating powers of late capitalism. More importantly, it can achieve this through experiments with the creation of social situations in concrete social space. In order to evaluate practices that might be described in this way – relational, dialogic, interventionist, new genre public art, collaborative practices and so forth – we must begin to understand their impact not just in their immediate situation (either as pragmatic or utopian exercises) but instead look at how such works operate as subjectivity-producing machines.

²¹¹ *ibid*, p.108

We found in Bourriaud's description of Guattari's 'aesthetic paradigm', Badiou's 'event', Hardt and Negri's 'encounter' and The Free Association's 'moment of excess', differing models of ruptures, breaks or splits in 'the world as it is' that produce potentially radical subjects. Our task, then, is to try and understand how these differing models might offer a richer framework for the evaluation and production of socially intervening or socially sited work and offer a way out of the debilitating opposition between 'instrumentalised' and 'critical' art.

Guattari's suggestion that the displacement or 'unsticking' of the subject that occurs in aesthetic experience, followed by the redistribution or proposition of a new trajectory for these elements, can be understood as a socialising - or, at least, as a pluralizing - of the individual. It is a rupture in the normally fixed and immutable, individualised concept of the self that would make the subject better inclined towards a social subjectivity. There is no necessity for art to be a social experience in this model. That is, we could imagine the displacement and 'rupture' that occurs in aesthetic experience happening in front of a painting (or even television set as Bourriaud describes)²¹² as well as in a social situation created by an artist. I will, in the conclusion to this thesis, address the issues of spaces with greater or lesser resonance for this singularizing experience. The rupture, then, is aimed towards a social end but does not necessarily occur in that space. That is not to say we cannot apply this model to socially intervening works. If we were, perhaps we would be reappraising the uncomfortable, confusing and disorienting nature of the work – as Bishop has proposed – but whilst also considering the new trajectory it offers. The work of Artur Zmijewski, for example, certainly can be said to disrupt (for instance when various youth and community groups with conflicting ideologies and beliefs are invited to take part in a collaborative banner-making workshop)²¹³ but may be seen as failing to offer a positive 'new' trajectory.

Similarly Badiou's concept of the event denied easy alignment with socially intervening practice. In fact, the potential semantic confusion with terms like 'event' and 'intervention'

²¹² Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses Du Réel, 2002), p.97

²¹³ Artur Zmijewski, *Them* (2006)

make it neater to illustrate his concepts using individually encountered works in gallery spaces like those described in the first chapter. Badiou offers an important lesson for relational and activist practices alike though; that the truly radicalising practice is one which *traces around the inexistent* rather than simply describes, uncovers, or highlights existing ‘elements’ of our world. This is, naturally, difficult to illustrate but we might think of those practices that simply showcase normally overlooked collectives and social groups – such as Jeremy Deller’s *A Social Parade* (2004) – as less effective than those that attempt to find something new and thus far indescribable by questioning those identities, as, we might claim, does the work of the Zmijewski.

Finally, we looked at Hardt and Negri’s ‘joyful encounter’ and The Free Association’s ‘moment of excess’, the former of which, at first glance, appears to offer the most appropriate model for understanding the subjectivity-producing potential of socially intervening art. Hardt and Negri’s faith in the power of productive bodies and the social capacity of humans fits well with Bourriaud’s claims on behalf of relational practitioners. It is precisely this ease, though, of which we should be most suspect. Although Hardt and Negri’s concept of the joyous encounter and the production of the common propose a much more active and engaged role for artists – social change is simply a matter of organizing social situations where people work together, learn from each other and in so doing produce a ‘non-corrupt’ socialised subjectivity – it also proposes something along the lines of an art of social engineering. Art can be reduced to simple workshops in participation – Hardt and Negri are keen to follow Thomas Jefferson in declaring that democracy is only learned through doing²¹⁴ – and education in the identification of ‘corrupt’ forms of the common (these being any that are based on forms of individual property or gain). As such we can extract that Hardt and Negri, despite their commitment to the non-hierarchical and decentred multitude, propose a vanguardist, pedagogical model for artist. In this case we might ask, who is best qualified to teach, and what kind of co-operative models for the production of knowledge might help solve this apparent problem? I will return to this in the next chapter. The Free Association offer an alternative articulation of a similar concept but

²¹⁴ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), p.310

within a more antagonistic frame (joyous encounters can be riots and protests involving direct action) that puts primacy on the sensuous quality of the collectively experienced ‘moment’ and which I will also expand upon in subsequent chapters.

What we have to extract from these models of the subjectivity-producing rupture in social space is a broader and more complex understanding of the aims, methods and resonances for socially intervening art. We must look beyond the frame of the event or work itself for its impact. Relational art and social practice is not simply an illustration or demonstration of perfect models of sociability, neither is it pragmatic reform to local situations. Rather it can disrupt the flows of everyday life, trace previously indescribable truths that escape articulation or representation, and offer new experiences towards the co-production of the common. It is best understood, then, as a potential laboratory for joint-research²¹⁵ into as yet indescribable modes of social living. It is also – to borrow Badiou’s term - a ‘forcing’ of what might exist; of prospective ways that we might be together into the here and now. In this sense it is the collapsing of a desired (yet indeterminable) future into the present, not as a brief respite from things as they are, but as a method by which to catalyse that change. Following Badiou, we might say that the social situation created by an artist is the site of a wager, for participants to gamble and experiment in how things might be, and by bringing that future into the here and now, ensuring it is one step closer. This model fits Badiou’s own description of the activity of the avant-garde very well:

The avant-gardes activated formal ruptures in the present and at the same time produced – in the form of manifestos and declarations – the rhetorical envelope for that activation. They produced the envelopment of a real present in a fictive future. And they call this double production ‘new artistic experience.’²¹⁶

²¹⁵ I use the term here as Colectivo Situaciones do in ‘Something More on Research Militancy: Footnotes on procedures and (In)Decisions’, in Shukaitis, Stephen and David Graeber, eds., *Constituent Imagination: Militant Investigations Collective Theorization* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2007), pp.73-93

²¹⁶ Alain Badiou, (trans. Alberto Toscano), *The Century* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), p.139

The next challenge, then, is how to sustain and conceive of these individual ruptures and artistic experiences as something organised and composed. How do these individual rhythms begin to resonate with others and generate a tone that can be said to truly constitute a change in the world? This structural understanding of artistic intervention will form the subsequent chapters.

Chapter Three: Structural Intervention - Institutionalising and Sustaining Encounters through Aesthetic and Radical Education.

In chapter two I described how artists might intervene at the ‘social level’ or in ‘social space’ in order to produce a shift in subjectivity in the audience who encounter or participate in the work. The three theoretical models I used to frame this discussion all, to varying degrees, describe a rupture or break with the normal state of affairs that opens up space for a new subjectivity to form. These were Guattari’s ‘aesthetic refrain’, Badiou’s ‘event’, Hardt and Negri’s ‘joyful encounter’ and the ‘moments of excess’ described by The Free Association. It was suggested that artists by their intervention into social space aid the occurrence or recognition of such ruptures - that destabilise subjectivity modelled and ‘hardened’ by capitalism – and, accordingly, create conditions for new individual and socio-political orientation. Socially intervening art also creates moments in which new social forms are experimented with and in so doing helps to produce what Hardt and Negri have described as ‘the common’. A question to be addressed, then, is if and how such ‘displaced’ or ‘ruptured’ subjectivities find some new trajectory or shared horizon and, consequently, form political agency.

To briefly provide a political context; this notion of art as a continual displacement, disruption and experimentation finds a parallel in the social struggles against capitalism of the past twenty years that have both been inspired by and frame Hardt and Negri’s writing. Accordingly, we can propose that some of the problems these struggles face are also common to an art practice with socially transformative aims.

One such identified problem is that fluid and temporary resistance to capitalism is dictated by, and mirrors, the flows of late-capitalism. A pressing concern in these struggles, then, is the increasing requirement for some form of organisation of disruptive and joyous encounters that would allow them to create blockage in capital’s flow and provide meaningful resistance and alternatives to capitalism. As a result, and somewhat counter-intuitively perhaps, current discussions around how best to resist and organise against capital are focussed on *institutionalising* the moments of rupture and joyous encounter that

undermine capitalist logic. Such discussions provide a backdrop for this chapter and will be returned to in more detail.

By way of contextualising this chapter in relation to the thesis as a whole; in the introduction I made a distinction between the ‘individual’ level that has been addressed in terms of works that operate in perceptual space and communicate through mediated forms (objects, video, representations and so on) the ‘social’ level that can be understood as artists working with dialogic forms, temporary interventions in social space and intersubjectivity, and the ‘structural’ or, in Guattari’s terms, ‘environmental’ level, which will be the focus of this chapter.

As we have found in attempting to define other types of space it is not possible, nor particularly helpful, to aim towards comprehensive definitions. Nevertheless, I will begin with an overview of the sort of practices that might constitute art that intervenes at the structural level. I will then take this as a point from which to depart and follow a line of enquiry.

‘Structural’ can be a problematically loose term, in that it suggests we are looking at something both ‘beneath’ and ‘above’ the individual and social; we could be talking as much about Freud’s notion of the subconscious as about an economic framework. To a certain degree, the base or substructure has been addressed in chapters one and two. If, then, we were to concentrate purely on the ‘super-structure’ I would, for example, be proposing to analyse practices that deal with architecture - like Vito Acconci²¹⁷ - that might be seen as intervening at the structural level and in concrete space (and as such occupying the top-left box of my matrix). Or, I could be looking at artists whose practice is concerned with policy making, such as MAAP in Leeds;²¹⁸ or creative activism that aims to reform legal structures or bills, like the Surveillance Camera Players²¹⁹ can be said to. This would be seen as dealing with the structural level in spaces of representation. Another option

²¹⁷ Vito Acconci, interviewed by Freee, ‘Changing Spaces’, *Art Monthly*, Issue 332, Dec 2009, pp.1-4

²¹⁸ <<http://www.maap.org.uk/>> [accessed June 28th 2010]

²¹⁹ <<http://www.notbored.org/the-scp.html>> [accessed June 28th 2010]

would be to look at artists dealing with economics in a direct way; like WAGE (Working Artists and the Greater Economy)²²⁰ who fight for fair-pay for arts workers, or artists experimenting with alternative forms of economics like Timebanks²²¹ and LETS systems.²²²

The direction I choose instead is one informed by the previous discussion around art that intervenes at the social level. A theme can be extracted through the course of that discussion which I would like to illustrate by returning to two main points. First, Badiou's conception of the 'event' posits that it cannot be manufactured or anticipated, only recognised and committed to. We can intuit, then, that if we are to take an active position in social transformation some kind of 'training' in recognising the event is necessary. Second, and similarly, the fact that Hardt and Negri's theory that social transformation will occur through education in identifying corrupt forms of the common and through the proliferation of its experience also identifies a role for pedagogy. Indeed, Hardt and Negri put significant stress on the role of education and access to it, in reforming capitalism into an egalitarian, emancipative - and therefore unrecognisable - form.²²³

Might we consider, then, pedagogy and experimentation with educational forms as an intervention at the 'structural' level? Doing so would go some way to resisting a reductive 'superstructural' conception of structure and avoid potentially predictable questions of space dictating behaviour or economic determinism. Education is as 'bottom-up' as it is 'top-down' and as a result a more interesting lens through which to address art's role in the production of subjectivity and creation of political agency. The struggles over control of the mechanisms and forms of education, the most recent of which I will return to in due course, attest to the centrality of knowledge-production in social change.

²²⁰ <<http://www.wageforwork.com/>> [accessed June 28th 2010]

²²¹ <<http://www.leedscreativetimebank.org.uk>> [accessed July 6th, 2011]

²²² For example see an overview of the 'Ithica Hours' scheme in Will Bradley, Mika Hannula, Cristina Ricupero and Superflex, eds., *Self-Organisation: Counter Economic Strategies* (New York: Stenberg Press, 2006), pp.126-128

²²³ 'Something like a global education initiative would have to be instituted, which provides mandatory education for all, starting with literacy and working up to advanced education in the natural and social sciences as well as the humanities.' Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), p.308

Furthermore, the contemporary art world is presently rife with discussion about art, education and pedagogy. Conferences like the Serpentine Gallery's 'Deschooling Society',²²⁴ the recent publication of journals like e-flux's *Education Actualized* edited by Irit Rogoff²²⁵ and books including *Curating and the Educational Turn*²²⁶ have contributed to what is contestably being termed art's 'pedagogic turn'. Consequently there is a wealth of material to unpick and analyse in this area with which to reference the question of institutionalising forms of resistance to capitalism aimed towards social transformation.

Before returning to these examples of art practice and theory concerned with pedagogy it will be worth delving in to and expanding on what I mean by the 'structural' character of education. There are three related understandings I have of education as effecting structural change. One is to consider experimenting with new forms of knowledge-production, teaching methods and co-production as intervening into policy and as such a structural intervention in the same manner I described cultural policy reforms earlier. Second is that in initiatives like Free Art Schools, Independent Universities and the occupation and alternative use of educational facilities we are looking at intervention in concrete space that might *physically* institutionalise some form of resistance. Last, and perhaps most dense, is to consider the 'body of knowledge' produced in such experiments as contributing to a structure that Franco Berardi would call a 'paradigm',²²⁷ or, even, that we might think of as a 'narrative', 'ideology' or 'hegemony'.²²⁸ It is my intention to address each of these conceptions of pedagogy as a structural intervention throughout the course of this chapter. First, though, I will provide some context to the artistic and socio-political landscape in which these analyses are performed.

²²⁴ Hayward Gallery and Serpentine Gallery, 'Deschooling Society', Southbank Centre, London, 29th – 30th April, 2010

²²⁵ <<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/issue/14>> [accessed June 28th 2010]

²²⁶ Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson, eds., *Curating and the Educational Turn* (London: Open Editions, 2010)

²²⁷ Franco Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009), p.217

²²⁸ Antonio Gramsci, Joseph A. Buttigieg, ed. *Prison Notebooks* (New York City: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp.233–238

The Pedagogic Turn in Contemporary Art

As we found in chapter two, identified ‘turns’, particularly in the art world, warrant approach with scepticism. They run the risk of flattening out fundamental nuances and often conflicting motivations into a ‘style’ or a ‘concern’; as has occurred recently with attempts to retroactively package art of the 1990s as art ‘of the social’.²²⁹ The ‘turn’ in this case becomes a convenient device to package a range of disparate practices and in so doing glossing over the tensions and differences that constitute art’s critical potential. More often than not the similarities drawn are between the formal or methodological elements at the expense of an ethical or political analyses. Nevertheless, the growing interest within art and activist circles in critical pedagogy and alternative forms of (self) education and (collaborative) knowledge production is notable and, we can assume, not *just* a marketing device for some forthcoming *Afterall* anthology or Whitechapel reader.

In an attempt to circumvent contributing to a homologising narrative of artists’ experiments in the educational field I wish to use this chapter to unpick the various drives, motivations and political connotations for such experiments. I will begin by tracing what I see as two historical paths of autonomous and resistant education, the present crossover, which goes someway towards explaining the educational turn we are experiencing.

1. Resistance to the Neoliberal University

The first of these ‘paths’ is grounded in events of the last decade but its roots are much older. Currently, the increasing corporatisation of higher education, and its forced submission to a neoliberal agenda, is justifying critique and revolt across Europe and America.

²²⁹ Demonstrated by the conference organised by Former West and Afterall. ‘Art and the Social: Exhibitions of Contemporary Art in the 1990s’, Tate Britain, London, April 30th, 2010

Student occupations at the University of California²³⁰ and Middlesex University²³¹ in 2010 prompted speculation that a return to the politicised student body of the 1960s is emerging that found materialisation in student protests across the United Kingdom later in the year. The cynical and ill-founded distinction that is drawn between these recent strikes, occupations and actions and those of forty years ago is that now students are fighting to be part of the system rather than against it.²³² Such a lazy ‘observation’ is based in a misunderstanding over critiques of a culture of debt cultivated by the increasing costs of higher education and the reforms that are called for in the exploitation of university students as knowledge workers.

Whilst many students, postgraduates and staff are rallying against spending cuts and localised problems, such critique is directed at a much deeper level. As George Caffentzis has written ‘the new student movement can be seen as the main organised response to the global financial crisis.’²³³ As such it is not so much a movement that demands recognition and validation within the cognitive capitalist system but rather its fundamental critique, hence the popular slogan ‘demand nothing, occupy everything’.

The crucial point here, then, is that there exists a strand amongst the current dissatisfaction and wave of direct action occurring within the ‘walls’ of university campuses globally and the streets that does not seek to reform as much as produce alternative structures within the shell of the old university. So, we see in Middlesex that the occupying students protesting against plans to close the Philosophy Department are using the space to hold seminars and lectures from notable academic figures that feel affinity with such a cause. Initiatives like

²³⁰ Caffentzis, George, ‘University Struggles at the End of the Edu-Deal’, *Mute*, <<http://www.metamute.org/node/13271>> [accessed June 28th 2010]

²³¹ <<http://savemdxphil.com/>> [accessed June 28th 2010]

²³² Outlined in a presentation by Marc Bousquet at the conference organised by edu-factory collective, ‘Toward a Global Autonomous University: Cognitive Labor, The Production of Knowledge, and Exodus from the Education Factory’, University of London, London, 24th November, 2009

²³³ George Caffentzis, ‘University Struggles at the End of the Edu-Deal’, *Mute*, <<http://www.metamute.org/node/13271>> [accessed June 28th 2010]

the Really Open University in Leeds²³⁴ similarly seek to find spaces less dictated by the profit-making agenda of the university concerned with (commercially) ‘useful’ research.

Despite the emergence of the Bologna Process and the knowledge economy, ‘free’ and radical education projects, are of course, by no means unique to this era and have a history almost as long as that of capitalist industry itself. It is unnecessary to plot a history of such struggles here; suffice to say that movements like the Worker’s Education Association in the UK, the Work People’s Movement and the America Labour College Movement in America and the Folk High School movement in Europe provide practical precedents for radical autonomous education.²³⁵

There exists, then, a legacy of learners and workers dissatisfied with the economic and political conditions of their education, moved to create alternative structures. Furthermore, many of these experiments appear to have happened within art education (Bauhaus, Joseph Beuys’ Free International University); perhaps, as Stewart Martin speculates, because it is seen as a subject that escapes the normal rules of education.²³⁶ In the neoliberal landscape, however, this once free space is threatened by enclosure as art schools become subjected to the profit-drive and forced to become more ‘vocational’. Autonomous and radical education experiments by artists and within art education are as such taking on increased significance.

Despite current conditions hazardous to the existence of non-instrumentalised knowledge and the production of the ‘knowledge commons’,²³⁷ recent experiments in autonomous knowledge production should not be seen as separate from these historical labour-based movements. As such it is beneficial to revisit the political and theoretical framework that

²³⁴ <<http://www.reallyopenuniversity.org/>> [accessed June 28th 2010]

²³⁵ For an overview see Tom Lovett, ed., *Radical Approaches to Adult education: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 1988), xv – xxiii

²³⁶ Stewart Martin, ‘An Aesthetic Education Against Aesthetic Education’ in Paul O’Neill and Mick Wilson, eds., *Curating and the Educational Turn* (London: Open Editions, 2010), p.111

²³⁷ George Caffentzis, ‘Autonomous Universities and the Making of the Knowledge Commons’, Russell Scholar Lecture IV, Nov 18th, 2008, <<http://www.commoner.org.uk/?p=66>> [accessed June 28th, 2010]

accompanied these historical experiments and use them as a lens to scrutinize more recent experiments in autonomous knowledge production, particularly within the artistic field. Before attempting this, though, I would like to address the second ‘path’ that might explain the current trend for a pedagogical framing of art activity.

2. Relational Precedents

If we focus our attention away from the experiments in radical pedagogy born of a directly oppositional (to capital) or reformist standpoint another set of precedents for the pedagogic turn can be found in the pre- and post-relational landscape of contemporary art that was described in the previous chapter. It is important to trace this development as it demonstrates that the desire to produce alternative sites of knowledge production is not wholly dictated by a lack within, or failings of, capitalism or by an urge to reform it.

In her lecture at the ‘Deschooling Society’ conference, Claire Bishop identified the move towards a ‘project based’ methodology and conception of artistic output by contemporary artists as opposed to one based on ‘works’.²³⁸ I identified the seeds of this argument as present in her earlier critiques of relational practices as being laboratory-like or process-based. Bishop used this ever more holistic understanding of that which constitutes the artistic ‘work’ to explain the ‘turn’ towards pedagogy in art. Once artists begin to broaden the frame of their practice to encompass all the elements that inform and follow its creation – including the research, dialogue, contextualising information, subsequent responses and conversations – then it follows that the impact or ‘effect’ of such art is measured in broader terms also; to include what is ‘learnt’ as much as what is visible, produced or, even, felt.

I am here, interpreting and elaborating somewhat on Bishop’s proposed narrative that explains the focus on pedagogy in contemporary art, but such a concept finds support elsewhere. To trace this ‘organic’ development in art towards pedagogy I refer to those practices that Grant Kester has described as ‘dialogic’ and that are described in the previous

²³⁸ Claire Bishop at Hayward Gallery and Serpentine Gallery, ‘Deschooling Society’, Southbank Centre, London, 29th – 30th April, 2010

chapter as contributing towards the post-relational landscape. In his book *Conversation Pieces* Kester traces a history of practices emerging from ‘new genre public art’ that sought a less authorial and more collaborative and direct relationship with its audience. These practices also progressed a lineage of conceptual art that attempted (and failed) to resist commodification and co-option by the market-led art world by ‘dematerialising’, that is, by refusing to take the form of marketable objects.²³⁹ These parallel tactics have resulted in art practices that focus on the conversation and dialogue between audience-participants and the discourse emerging from certain investigations. We can cite Judy Chicago and her work *Dinner Party* (1979) or Group Material’s *Democracy* (1990) that aimed to link installations with ‘open, public discussions and town meetings’²⁴⁰ as precedents for this method.

The centrality of the dialogic and the discursive in contemporary art is reflected in the ubiquity of discussion events and ‘platforms’ that accompany (and oftentimes are the main event at) art festivals and biennials. The criteria for evaluation is now less focused on the quality of certain works or exhibits but the discussions that they prompt;²⁴¹ that is, importantly here, what can be *learnt* from experiencing and collectively reflecting upon art and its contextualising issues. Returning to Bishop’s thesis, this in itself can be seen to echo the research-oriented practice of contemporary artists who conceive of exhibitions not as end points but rather as punctuation marks in an ongoing investigative project to be shared with, and informed by, an audience. I will return to such practices in the course of the chapter.

²³⁹ Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object* (London: University of California Press, 1997), p.vii - viii

²⁴⁰ Brian Wallis, ed., *Democracy: A Project by Group Material* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1990)

²⁴¹ For example see the ‘platforms’ of Documenta 11 in 2001, the Tate Triennial’s ‘prologues’, 2008-2009, or the Manifesta 8 ‘Coffee Break’, 2009.

3. Reflection of Knowledge Economy

A final word should be given to a third, more pessimistic, explanation for the pedagogic turn in art. In the same manner in which the ‘social’ and ‘collaborative’ turns in art have been explained away as mere reflections of the immaterial post-Fordist production of late capitalism, the move towards evaluating art in terms of its capacity to produce new forms of knowledge can be cynically understood as a product of cognitive capitalism’s knowledge economy. Marion Von Osten airs such concern in a conversation with Eva Eggermann where she cautions against using terms like ‘knowledge production’ that slip into an economic language for education and can support the notion of artists as knowledge workers complicit with neoliberal agendas.²⁴² As discussed in the previous chapter, however, this parallel between the mode of production and artistic concerns should not be written off as a causal link but should instead be approached as a backdrop to the exploration of resistant and antagonistic artistic methods.

My aim in this brief sketching of a genealogy of the pedagogic turn is not to trace comprehensively every emergence of ‘pedagogical practice’ but to highlight its myriad motivating factors. As we have seen, whilst there is a history of radical educational movements conceived of as alternatives to an exclusionary or inadequate already existing system, not all experiments are born out of a lack or in opposition to (or for the preservation or reform of) existing institutions. This is not to suggest that such ‘organically’ emerging pedagogic practices that have precedents in artistic rather than social or political movements are less politicised – indeed the fact that they are less directly dictated by capital could be said to augment their radical potential – but instead to illustrate the need for an ethical and motivational, rather than purely formal, analyses when coming to terms with the pedagogical turn in art.

²⁴² Marion Von Osten, ‘Twist and Shout: On Free Universities, Educational Reforms and Twists and Turns Inside and Outside the Art World’ in Paul O’Neill and Mick Wilson, eds., *Curating and the Educational Turn* (London: Open Editions, 2010), pp.279-281

These varied incentives and motivations indicate a number of horizons and conceptions of that which constitutes a transformative or radical pedagogy, justifying deeper scrutiny of the aims and ethics of its various experiments in the artistic field. This investigation will form the rest of the chapter; by looking at different theories of radical education and thinking about how these frame and impact on contemporary art practices that have overt or discreet pedagogic qualities we can begin to get a better understanding of how artistic intervention can institutionalise itself or contribute towards an alternative structure that may lead towards social transformation.

Radical Pedagogy in Contemporary Art

As we have seen, the crossed paths between resistance to the neoliberalisation of education and the extension of relational practices into the discursive realm – both under an economy that deals in information and knowledge exchange – have made pedagogy a hot topic in contemporary art. For the purposes of this chapter, however, the fact that artists are ‘dealing’ with pedagogic forms is not sufficient. Identifying socially transformative strategies within art practice - those that might contribute towards the emergence of a freer more self-determined social sphere – implies the search in this pedagogic milieu for approaches that we can consider radical.

In this case I will take radical to mean both that which constitutes a break with the current order but also something that deals with the roots of the matter; that is, without precondition. Thinking about radical pedagogy in this way helps align the discussion with the rupturing ‘event’ or affirmative split that for Badiou is fundamental in political processes as outlined in the previous chapter. Furthermore it demands a more discerning approach to evaluating art practices dealing with pedagogy as well as a broader frame in which we might consider a practice’s qualities as educational.

Subsequently, I intend to move through a number of theoretical lenses for pedagogy and demonstrate how these might be used to evaluate the radicality or transformative efficacy of art practices. These lenses will include Marx and his notion of praxis; Antonio Gramsci

and the organic intellectual, Italian ‘workerism’ and militant or joint research, Paolo Freire’s ‘pedagogy of the oppressed’, and Rancière’s ‘dissensual’ and aesthetic pedagogy. Considering each of these lenses in the present day will involve referring to political contextualisation and activist theory which I will draw upon from recent critical philosophy including Berardi, Hardt and Negri, Chris Carlson, and Notes from Nowhere amongst others.

1. Marx and Praxis

To provide a foundation to talk about overt forms and methods of pedagogy I will begin by introducing the notion of praxis as it is fundamental to a radical, transformative understanding of joined theory and action, and, accordingly, education. Praxis (from the Greek word for ‘process’) took on political meaning when it became associated with Marxism; the root of which is commonly cited as being in Marx’s ‘Theses on Feuerbach’ which contains the well known quote that ‘philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point however is to *change* it.’²⁴³

Marx here famously calls for a more practical and grounded role for philosophy, one that is not separate from material struggles, rather than the purely abstract, contemplative and idealist position that it has occupied previously. For Marx all revolutionary activity must be ‘practical-critical activity.’²⁴⁴ This condition sets a precedent for ‘learning through doing’, and ‘bottom-up’ change. Indeed Marx’s proposition that ‘all mysteries which mislead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice’²⁴⁵ can be interpreted as placing the responsibility for radical action squarely in the lap of practitioners.

Most interesting, though, is Marx’s stress on sensuousness, not ‘sensuous contemplation’²⁴⁶ of past philosophy like Ludwig Feurbach’s but instead ‘practical, human-sensuous

²⁴³ Karl Marx, ‘Theses on Feuerbach’ in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works in One Volume* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1980), p.30

²⁴⁴ *ibid*, p.28

²⁴⁵ *ibid*, p.30

²⁴⁶ *ibid*, p.29

activity’.²⁴⁷ The language used here evokes a tactile and bodily concept of social change often overlooked in common perceptions of Marx as the aforementioned ‘economic determinist’ extracted from his later work. Here, as in Hardt and Negri and more contemporary autonomist and activist thought to which I will return in more detail later, there is a centrality of the body in learning about and changing the world.

Marx’s materialist model for revolutionary activity and stress on praxis finds expression in Marxist and anarchist-influenced political activism’s preference for workshops over lectures and of the co-production of knowledge through getting hands dirty together and ‘real-life’ experimentation rather than ‘abstract’ and ‘passive’ contemplation. This, however, is becoming increasingly recognised as a reductive and false reading of praxis and, it follows, of insurrectionary or revolutionary action. Attempts to deal with the apparent contradictions between ‘thinking’ and ‘doing’ are evidenced in publications like *Constituent Imagination*²⁴⁸ where models of ‘militant research’ and ‘militant praxis’ are developed to bridge the imagined divide between intellectuals and activists; more of which later. For now, it is worth considering how Marx’s ‘praxis’ might find expression in art pedagogy. I shall begin by looking in the most obvious site that being the art school. The method by which art has been taught and passed down, and as such that which constitutes an art education, has historically been a practical learning with students ‘learning’ art by exactly replicating the techniques of a master in the Academy workshop situation.

Later, broader but no less practical approaches in art education developed. These are exemplified by the Bauhaus that emerged from the Arts and Crafts movement and aimed to retain practical skills and handicrafts threatened by industrialisation through a similar set up of master’s workshops and apprenticeships.²⁴⁹ The Bauhaus’ legacy is the existence of Foundation courses,²⁵⁰ many of which retain the same structure of practical inductions through a range of techniques and disciplines. Even in independent and autonomous art

²⁴⁷ *ibid*, p.29

²⁴⁸ Stephen Shukaitis and David Graeber, eds., *Constituent Imagination: Militant Investigations Collective Theorization* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2007)

²⁴⁹ Frank Whitford, *Bauhaus* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000)

²⁵⁰ *ibid*, p.10

education experiments, including Joseph Beuys' seminars that developed into the Free International University, 'practical exercises' always played a crucial role alongside more 'theoretical experiments' as a method by which to help students 'come into movement' (themselves) and to discover new forms and ways of living.²⁵¹

Such practical-criticality finds current form in 'practice-led' PhDs and 'artistic research' the emergent nature of which causes a certain amount of controversy within academia and about which Mika Hannula has to say:

Artistic research means that the artist produces an artwork and researches the creative process, thus adding to the accumulation of knowledge. However, the whole notion of artistic research is a relatively new one, and, indeed, its forms and principles have yet to become firmly established.²⁵²

Indeed, the entire notion of 'artistic knowledge'²⁵³ is highly contested, (not least because it would presuppose some kind of non-artistic knowledge), and has the ill effect of heightening the territorial divisions between theory and practice that we identified earlier in political activism. Similarly, the perceived increasing intellectualisation of art taught in higher education and its orientation towards a research and project-based methodology is met with resistance and derision from artist-teachers who consider art to be something that

²⁵¹ Volker Harlan in Joseph Beuys (edited by Volker Harlan), *What is Art?* (Redhill: Clairview Books, 2004), p.5

²⁵² Hans Hedberg and Mika Hannula in Mika Hannula, Juha Suoranta and Tere Vaden, *Artistic Research: Theories, Methods and Practices* (Helsinki: Finnish Academy of Fine Arts, 2005), p.5

²⁵³ Jan Kaila, *The Artist's Knowledge 2: Research at The Finnish Academy of Fine Arts* (Helsinki: Finnish Academy of Fine Arts, 2008), pp.6-8

should not have to ‘justify itself’²⁵⁴ and is at odds with the world of art outside of the academy.²⁵⁵

Much of this cynicism, or fear, of the colonisation of the artistic field by intellectual theory is by no means a phenomenon unique to the emergence of practice-based doctorates. As Griselda Pollock commented in 1996 it has been a longstanding opinion that theory and art history is ‘dangerous’, often accompanied by an attitude that artists should not ‘get contaminated by all that discourse or you won’t be able to produce.’²⁵⁶ Whilst it cannot be argued that a theoretical grounding equates with ‘good’ art making - in fact oftentimes the opposite is true with work being highly illustrative or dependent on prior knowledge of various poststructuralist writing at the expense of aesthetic engagement – the retreat from, or exclusion of, ‘theory’ within art teaching is an often misguided and harmful overreaction.

Such logic can lead to conservative and complicit projections grounded in the ‘common-sense’ of the market-led art world or, on the other hand, a rejection of rational knowledge altogether. Indeed, art schools seem to be one of the ever-decreasing islands on which ‘key skills’ and the requirement for assessment can be creatively interpreted. The potential side

²⁵⁴ ‘To me the problem is that art schools have become too fixed on the model of the university; it’s too much to do with the idea of intellectual discourse, it makes art a kind of task, or a kind of worthiness, or something, instead of a pleasure... I found it awful, the idea that students had to justify what they did. I never thought anybody should have to justify anything; I don’t understand that.’ Michael Craig-Martin in David Mollin and John Reardon, *ch-ch-ch-changes: Artists Talking About Teaching* (London: Ridinghouse, 2009), p.11

²⁵⁵ ‘PhDs encourage the art of a project ... It’s quite hard for someone to make something because it doesn’t fit in with this big pattern of everything else.’ Simon Lewandowski in David Mollin and John Reardon, *ch-ch-ch-changes: Artists Talking About Teaching* (London: Ridinghouse, 2009), p.257

‘It worries me that art as research might not need an audience anymore as what’s tending to happen is a split between art as practice and art as research. The audience is just the PhD examiners or other universities; that worries me.’ Olivier Richon in David Mollin and John Reardon, *ch-ch-ch-changes: Artists Talking About Teaching* (London: Ridinghouse, 2009), p.309

²⁵⁶ Griselda Pollock in P. Hetherington, ed., *Issues in Art Education: Aspects of the Fine Art Curriculum* (London: Tate Publishing, 1996), p.24

effect of this ‘radical’ rejection of the ‘laws’ of contemplative academia is that it robs students of the capacities that might be required of them in order to effect any meaningful change in the artistic or political environment. I will elaborate on this point through the lens of Antonio Gramsci’s writing on the subject.

2. Gramsci’s Organic Intellectual

In Harold Entwistle’s *Antonio Gramsci: Conservative Schooling for Radical Politics* Gramsci’s seemingly contradictory approach to radical education is outlined as ‘the paradox: the pursuit of a radical political education through a traditional curriculum and pedagogy.’²⁵⁷ Indeed, Gramsci’s approach both to education and more broadly to radical social change seem somewhat outdated and historically disproven – relying as they do on his concept of working class hegemony – but a revisiting of his thought is valuable nonetheless in understanding the particular qualities of artistic pedagogy.

Gramsci gave pride of place to the rational, scientific and conventional knowledge that appears to garner so much distrust from apparently dissident approaches to education, reasoning that ‘if the subaltern classes are under the control of the hegemonic class, it is their own often superstitious, folkloristic conception of the world which is favourable to the *status quo*.’²⁵⁸ Not only did Gramsci believe that critical capacities were fundamental to an individual capable of effecting social change as they would be able to ‘understand the mechanisms of social control’²⁵⁹ but also that self-reflective and analytical tools are needed in order to ‘take an active part in the creation of the history of the world, be one’s own guide.’²⁶⁰ Here, we see a very early articulation of what writers like Stewart Martin term an

²⁵⁷ Harold Entwistle, *Antonio Gramsci: Conservative Schooling for Radical Politics* (London: Routledge, 1979), p.16

²⁵⁸ *ibid*, p.31

²⁵⁹ *ibid*, p.31

²⁶⁰ Antonio Gramsci, in Harold Entwistle, *Antonio Gramsci: Conservative Schooling for Radical Politics* (London: Routledge, 1979), p.33

‘education in autonomy’²⁶¹ or a variation on the question of ‘facilitating self-organisation’ that underlies this thesis. Gramsci’s conviction was that only with a solid grounding in ‘intellectual instruments’ such as linguistic skills, historical knowledge, and, even, training in the drudgery of work,²⁶² would a subject come into being capable of competing on the same terms as the dominant class and eventually imposing their hegemony.

It is worth considering for a moment how such logic can be identified in recent artistic discourse. Although it may appear outmoded, the desire for legitimate knowledge that would ‘arm’ learners with the skills in which to operate within (and against) the current hegemony is identifiable in a number of radical pedagogical art projects. For instance, Islington Mill Art Academy in Salford²⁶³ who, whilst having been set up as an alternative (and in fairly direct opposition) to what they saw as inadequate higher education opportunities in Manchester, has been keen to provide its members with the *same* knowledge and skills that would equip them to be artists (rather than artist students) that they might have paid for at university. Rather than enrolling on a university course the collective reasoned that it could more cost-effectively provide its members with such an education by way of reading groups, group visits, workshops and inviting artists to join them in discussions and projects. As worthy as this approach is, I feel that its radical nature is compromised by the fact that the critique applied to the university system has not been applied to conventions of the art world; where notions of who is qualified to call themselves artists and what constitutes an artistic act could have been unpicked. Instead, in this area Islington Mill Art Academy appears as quite comfortable to accept the institutional art world’s hegemony.

Another approach to thinking about how Gramsci’s transfer of ‘legitimate’ knowledge and empowering education finds form in contemporary art would be to cite those practices that

²⁶¹ Stewart Martin, ‘An Aesthetic Education Against Aesthetic Education’ in Paul O’Neill and Mick Wilson, eds., *Curating and the Educational Turn* (London: Open Editions, 2010), p.113

²⁶² Harold Entwisle, *Antonio Gramsci: Conservative Schooling for Radical Politics* (London: Routledge, 1979), p.23, p.24, p.41, p.54

²⁶³ <<http://islingtonmillartacademy.blogspot.com/>> [accessed June 28th 2010]

seem in line with a conservative schooling approach. Installations by groups like Chto Delat appear to hi-jack the gallery or exhibition for use as a space for conventional teaching techniques of dry historical information - for example in their 'wall drawing' time-lines of revolutionary collective political activity at the Istanbul Biennial²⁶⁴ - aimed at 'the repoliticisation of Russian intellectual culture.'²⁶⁵ Such techniques of disseminating intellectual materials – factual information, knowledge of history and current political affairs – that may equip a more critical understanding of the world via the gallery space are increasingly commonplace. This happens through time-line installations (Group Material, my own collaborative *Your Arms!* project with Yvonne Carmichael), free newspapers and publications (Retort), and video essays and documentaries based on historical events (Eyal Weizman). My recurring concern in such cases tends to be about the efficacy of the knowledge transfer process itself. Is the gallery, exhibition or international art festival an environment conducive to taking in information? How is it possible to gauge the audience's level of understanding and then appropriately 'pitch' such installations - that may or may not take into consideration the stretched attention spans of visitors and sheer volume of surrounding works - at an appropriate level? Can such didactic work avoid patronisation or elitism? Such questions clearly have no unified solution but perhaps return us to some of Gramsci's key concepts.

Gramsci's understanding of an intellectual elite did not carry any of the negative or oppressive connotations that we might at first associate with it. For although Gramsci believed that 'critical self-consciousness means, historically and politically, the creation of an *elite* of intellectuals ... there is no organisation without intellectuals, that is without organisers and leaders'²⁶⁶ this was not to be confused with a wholly vanguardist or right-wing notion of change that would be dictated and led by an 'outside' agency. First, Gramsci adhered to the notion – in a variation on Beuys' dictum – that anyone could be an

²⁶⁴ What, How and for Whom and Ilkay Balic, *What Keeps Mankind Alive?: The Guide* (Istanbul: Istanbul Kultur Sanat Vakfi, 2009), p.272

²⁶⁵ *ibid*, p.272

²⁶⁶ Antonio Gramsci in Harold Entwistle, *Antonio Gramsci: Conservative Schooling for Radical Politics* (London: Routledge, 1979), p.125

intellectual;²⁶⁷ hence his commitment to a fair schooling system for children in which proper assessment would prevent the privileging of children from better economic backgrounds. Second, and more importantly, was that the intellectual would be organic to the class which it led:

This means working to produce *elites* of intellectuals of a new type which arise directly out of the masses, but remain in contact with them to become, as it were, the whalebone in the corset.²⁶⁸

By this Gramsci was suggesting that the ‘traditional intellectuals’ - those tied to the old dominant class and worked to maintain that class’ hegemony - would either transform into or be replaced by intellectuals that were ‘actively committed to the achievement of working-class hegemony.’²⁶⁹ Furthermore the role of the ‘organic intellectual’ is a dynamic one that shares a reciprocal relationship with the ‘masses’ from which it has emerged in order that it remains embedded within the needs and concerns of that class.²⁷⁰ This dialectical, and to some extent fluid, relationship between both ‘sides’ is extended into a wider conception of social and political structures including pedagogic ones. As Entwistle writes:

The notion that every teacher is always a pupil and every pupil a teacher has to be extended to every kind of social relationship especially ‘between intellectual and non-intellectual sections of the population, between rulers and the ruled, elites and their followers, leaders and led.’²⁷¹

Whilst Gramsci’s concept of radical education certainly provides us with a foil to the less disciplined and more ‘free’ (but ultimately conservative and restrictive) pedagogy fought

²⁶⁷ ‘Although one can speak of intellectuals one cannot speak of non intellectuals, because non-intellectuals do not exist’ *ibid*, p.118

²⁶⁸ *ibid*, p.126

²⁶⁹ Harold Entwistle, *Antonio Gramsci: Conservative Schooling for Radical Politics* (London: Routledge, 1979), p.121

²⁷⁰ Antonio Gramsci in Harold Entwistle, *Antonio Gramsci: Conservative Schooling for Radical Politics* (London: Routledge, 1979), p.127

²⁷¹ Antonio Gramsci in Harold Entwistle, *Antonio Gramsci: Conservative Schooling for Radical Politics* (London: Routledge, 1979), p.127

for in some areas of art education,²⁷² it is not without its own shortcomings and contradictions. One such problem is the assumption of that which comprises ‘legitimate’ knowledge and can be considered appropriate ‘intellectual tools’ for the battle over hegemony. As I alluded to with Islington Mill Art Academy it is folly to blindly accept certain capacities and abilities as more useful than others and as such crucial to re-evaluate systems of control in contemporary forms of capitalism and the intellectual tools proper to them. I will later return to how these may have altered from Gramsci’s day. First though I would like to address a second, related, issue presented by Gramsci’s theory, that being the manner in which the dialectic between ‘elite’ and ‘masses’ is performed.

3. Autonomism and militant or joint research

Amongst a group of militant socialists for whom Gramsci’s theory provided a backdrop was Raniero Panzieri. In the 1950s Panzieri and a handful of Italian Marxists had a critical relationship with the Italian Communist Party (PCI) as they had experienced closely actually existing socialism and ‘glimpsed that the much vaunted “organic intellectuals” of Gramscian memory were now in practice organic only to the party machine.’²⁷³ What emerged from this critique of state-socialism and the idealism of Gramsci’s thought was to rethink the ‘necessary dialectical relation’ between class and political vanguard²⁷⁴ and to begin to deploy sociological enquiry ‘as the means to establish a new “organic” relation between intellectuals and working people, based upon the joint production of social knowledge “from below.”’²⁷⁵

Through the journal *Quaderni Rossi* Panzieri and militant intellectuals began to experiment with a method of ‘joint research’ between researchers and workers believing that ‘the

²⁷² See, for example his quite thorough ‘sketching’ of the form of the ‘common school’ in Antonio Gramsci (edited and translated by Joseph A. Buttigieg), *Prison Notebooks Volume II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) pp.210-214

²⁷³ Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), p.17

²⁷⁴ *ibid*, p.18

²⁷⁵ Stefano Merli in Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), p.22

registration of working-class behaviours and perceptions had a vital part to play in fostering self-activity.’²⁷⁶ Only through a constant analyses of the actual economic and social conditions of capitalism – with particular focus on those conditions as they affect workers as, for this group of intellectuals and activists, ‘labour is the site of struggle’²⁷⁷ - would a revolutionary constituent power emerge. Antonio Negri has outlined this inquiry as:

The practice of joint-research was simply the possibility of knowing, through inquiry, workers’ levels of awareness and consciousness as productive subjects ... it is also a general evaluation of the levels of exploitation each and every one of them suffers.²⁷⁸

Such joint research involved interviews and questionnaires with workers in the factory about the specific qualities of production-line work and how it affected them emotionally ‘outside’ of the factory. All this was a means by which to formulate a radical understanding of class composition proper to the emerging conditions of expanded work, or of the ‘social factory’.²⁷⁹

The legacy of this sociological Marxism ran through the Italian Classe Operaio, Workerism and Autonomia movements²⁸⁰ and is currently found in Negri’s (and others) influence on the activist and social justice movements mentioned earlier. The concept of joint research has been revisited of late as ‘militant research’ practiced by groups including Colectivo Situaciones who in turn are influenced by the actions of the Zapatista movement.²⁸¹ So,

²⁷⁶ Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), p.25

²⁷⁷ Antonio Negri, ‘Logic and Theory of Inquiry: Militant Praxis as Subject and as Episteme’ in Stephen Shukaitis and David Graeber, eds., *Constituent Imagination: Militant Investigations Collective Theorization* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2007), p.62

²⁷⁸ Antonio Negri, ‘Logic and Theory of Inquiry: Militant Praxis as Subject and as Episteme’ in Stephen Shukaitis and David Graeber, eds., *Constituent Imagination: Militant Investigations Collective Theorization* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2007), p.64

²⁷⁹ Mario Tronti in Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), p.38

²⁸⁰ See Steven Wright, *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), pp.1-5

²⁸¹ Colectivo Situaciones, ‘Something more on Research Militancy: Footnotes on Procedures and (In)Decisions’ in Stephen Shukaitis and David Graeber, eds., *Constituent*

what has prompted the renewed interest in intellectual, activist and artistic circles of the Italian social movements and with it a return to notions of radical inquiry and militant research? Negri posits in his article ‘Logic and Theory of Inquiry’ that one reason is the changed and dynamic nature of capitalism under the information economy that requires analyses and research in order to formulate appropriate methods of resistance.²⁸² Importantly, this shift in economic and labour conditions also demands new modes of inquiry. As Negri states:

A new series of problems arises ... due to the historical changes in class composition. What does inquiry as an ethico-political *dispositif* mean in postmodern society: not the Fordist society of the mass worker but that of the precarious, mobile, and flexible labour, the society of immaterial services and the hegemony of cooperation.²⁸³

How, then, has this urgency for knowledge around the conditions for workers in globalised neoliberal landscape been reflected in contemporary art? And can we find examples of inquiry and research methods appropriate to new forms of capitalism in the practice of contemporary artists?

A straightforward translation of the kind of joint-research practised in the pages of *Quaderni Rossi* into the gallery setting is the work of KP Brehmer where, in *Soul and Feelings of the Worker* (1978 – 1980), we are presented with a series of charts and diagrams that illustrate changes in an individual worker’s ‘mood and temperament’ over the course of a year, represented by various colours, text and spatial arrangements. Whilst not contemporary the decision by the curators of the 2010 Istanbul Biennial to include this work (one of the only works by a non-living artist) is significant. Their reasoning was that:

Imagination: Militant Investigations Collective Theorization (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2007), p.75

²⁸² Antonio Negri, ‘Logic and Theory of Inquiry: Militant Praxis as Subject and as Episteme’ in Stephen Shukaitis and David Graeber, eds., *Constituent Imagination: Militant Investigations Collective Theorization* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2007), p.62

²⁸³ *ibid*, p.69

given the current neoliberal uncertainties about the labour market and the reduction of social rights, Brehmer's work brings to the fore the need to question the basic conditions of labour beyond the efficiency of capitalist logic.²⁸⁴

Such urgency was reflected in the work, and the decision by the curators to display the work of Maria Ruido whose documentary video *Amphibious Fictions* (2005) 'researches the social, economic and emotional changes created by new working practices imposed on the traditional textile sector, situated in the industrial of Barcelona.'²⁸⁵ The presence of such documentaries, comprising interviews and narrative, often in video-essay format, are, to say the least, not uncommon in recent art exhibitions. Similar work approaches are taken by Alexandra Vaindorf in *Detour: One Particular Sunday* (2006 – 2008)²⁸⁶ that provides a portrait through intimate interviews of Eastern European women working as care workers in Italy, and also in the work of Ursula Biemman.²⁸⁷

Not all practices that we might understand as pieces of joint research focus on the contemporary nature of post-Fordist and precarious globalised labour, however. Steven Willats, through his work and semi-regular publication *Control*, experiments with graphic and diagrammatic methods for mapping, analysing and articulating various social relationships that are the distillation of months of focused research in specific locations; for example, a housing estate in Milton Keynes.²⁸⁸

We are, however, in danger here of confusing joint research with less radical or politicised anthropological or sociological methods that are also adopted by contemporary artists and are well discussed elsewhere.²⁸⁹ The distinction, crucial to this discussion, to be made between the sociological and radical pedagogy is achieved here through the frame of 'joint

²⁸⁴ What, How and for Whom and Ilkay Balic, *What Keeps Mankind Alive?: The Guide* (Istanbul: Istanbul Kultur Sanat Vakfi, 2009), p.79

²⁸⁵ *ibid*, p.233

²⁸⁶ Maria Cristina Giusti, ed., *Index Manifesta 7* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2008), p.106

²⁸⁷ For example *Performing the Border* (1999)

²⁸⁸ Steven Willats 'The Diagram as a Speculative Modelling Tool in Art Practice' in *Control*, Issue 18, April 2009, pp.8 - 11

²⁸⁹ Anthony Downey 'An Ethics of Engagement: Collaborative Art Practices and the Return of the Ethnographer', *Third Text*, 23:5, 2009, pp.593-603

knowledge production'. Can we consider documentary film makers as 'joint researchers' in the manner in which the Italian Autonomist Marxist's truly meant, that being, the properly 'organic intellectual', even when they may be operating as 'participant observers'?

This conundrum could return us to a discussion about 'real' collaboration, the nature of artistic authorship and hierarchical relations between subject and observer that I will return to in a more focused manner presently. For now though it is useful to be reminded of other types of inquiry that are performed by artists and evade the problems of authorial co-option by focusing on themselves as subject. There has been plenty of talk of the artist as the perfect model of the new precarious and globalised creative worker exemplifying all the traits, and subject to all the privileges and constraints, proper to the knowledge economy and creative industries. In these conditions works like Iona Nemes' *Monthly Evaluations* (2005 – 2009), where diagrams that record the artist's daily moods and feelings via a complex system of criteria and parameters, reframe what could be interpreted as purely autobiographical work into potentially radical pedagogic practice.

Such tactics do not by any means answer all of the problems raised by artistic versions of joint research. It would be wise to address here the manner in which 'joint research' has itself been recuperated in recent times into less politicised or antagonistic forms of 'action research', and even, worker's appraisal (particularly in its '360' guise).²⁹⁰ Questionnaires and interviews about how we feel in the workplace nowadays do not necessarily signify the first rumblings of dissent. More likely they are empty gestures and forms of control aimed not at resistant class composition but simply to increase the effectiveness of workers by making them feel 'listened to', and as such create a more tolerable work place achieved through inconsequential reforms.

In order for us to be able to unpick the radical and disruptive form of 'joint research' from its conservative cousin, then, we need to examine the political and ethical horizon of such experiments. We can, accordingly, suggest that a similar unpicking should be performed with the artist projects and videos discussed above. Does holding up a mirror to workers

²⁹⁰ <<http://appraisal360.co.uk/>> [accessed June 28th 2010]

about themselves and their working conditions necessarily translate into political action? If not, what function might it be said to play in radical praxis? Moreover, how do such practices overcome what Foucault has described as ‘the indignity of speaking for others’ or explaining people’s positions to them? How can we be sure that such joint research is ultimately empowering and not debilitating or pacifying? How might we overcome the privileged gaze?

I propose to begin to address such questions by moving on to explore other theories of radical pedagogy that are particularly focused on the teacher-learner relationship and that act as a timely reminder of Marx’s instruction that ‘the educator himself must be educated.’²⁹¹

²⁹¹ Karl Marx, ‘Theses on Feuerbach’ in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works in One Volume* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1980), p.28

4. Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and Rancière's Dissensual Pedagogy.

When speaking of radical pedagogy Paulo Freire's name seems obligatory. His writing on non-hierarchical, non-hegemonic forms of education and learning has become synonymous with the subject. That said, many of the ideas that are raised in Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* - first published in 1970 - have been addressed in previous areas in this chapter and thesis. Nevertheless, a brief overview of Freire's thought as it is articulated in this first book (many similar and expanded titles followed) will provide some additional tools with which to analyse the radical qualities of contemporary art-pedagogy.

Freire's concept of praxis is rooted in a kind of essentiality that would attract critical attention or be outright snubbed by most poststructuralist thought. Freire talks in terms of the 'humanization' of men that occurs through the 'praxis of struggle',²⁹² that being combined critical reflection and action. Even his concept of 'the oppressed' of this world seems somewhat antiquated although we can draw a more contemporary parallel with Hardt and Negri's definition of 'the poor' in *Commonwealth*; those who do not exercise free will. Paradoxically too, many of Freire's concepts predate the postanarchist and (post)-postmodern embrace of 'dissensus' and sustained fluidity that marks much contemporary thought, and it is this overlap that I will attempt to address and illuminate in this section.

Although Freire writes of a 'pedagogy of the oppressed' he understands this as only a first stage – an unmasking of the current conditions for what they really are and an empowerment of the disempowered – which would enact a second phase where there would be no oppressed to teach or learn, only 'man in the process of liberation'.²⁹³ The crux of Freire's thought is in the dissolution of the teacher-student divide. For Freire, the only radical pedagogy is one where 'through the dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers.'²⁹⁴

²⁹² Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2003), p.51

²⁹³ *ibid*, p.56

²⁹⁴ *ibid*, p.80

This is achieved in much the same manner that true joint research – for Freire termed as co-inquiry or ‘cultural synthesis’ - would be carried out, but such a method is subject to detailed elaboration in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Dialogue is at the heart of this methodology and the collaborative approach of specific problems. Freire describes a problem-posing pedagogy rather than what he calls ‘the banking method’ that assumes the teacher already has all the necessary knowledge for emancipation. Rather than teaching being a process of simple transfer of knowledge from teacher to student, or of student accessing and ‘withdrawing’ knowledge from the teacher, Freire envisages a process by which both teacher and student embark on a project together. The reason behind this in Freire’s words is that:

Problem-posing education affirms men and women as beings in the process of *becoming* – as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality.²⁹⁵

There are obvious parallels to be drawn here between Freire’s discursive and collaborative journeying through knowledge and those ‘dialogic practices’ and collaborative new genre public art projects previously cited, that include the Austrian activists-interventionist collective WochenKlausur and Italian artist duo Artway of Thinking. For both these groups a fundamental component of their methodology is the co-production of the project with the ‘audience’ who will experience the work. Unknown outcomes are favoured over closed and specific briefs. Many of Artway of Thinking’s projects revolve heavily around dialogue and the collaborative approach to collectively identified problems that may or may not find solutions.²⁹⁶

Freire and dialogic practitioners share in common an approach to discursive learning that embraces its long, difficult and unpredictable nature. Freire thinks it misguided for political

²⁹⁵ *ibid*, p.84

²⁹⁶ See for example Artway of Thinking’s project *Welcome in Venice* (2002) or the *Festival of the Sea* as part of ‘MultipleCity’, Panama (2003)

activists to think that ‘they ought to carry out the revolution without communication’²⁹⁷ and further stresses the essentiality of communication by understanding organisation as ‘the experience of learning how to *name* the world’²⁹⁸ as a collaborative and egalitarian exercise between teacher and taught.²⁹⁹ I will address this utopian understanding of the power of language to communicate and constitute struggle – and as such play a fundamental role in a radical pedagogy – in due course but beforehand I would like to examine some more contemporary variations of Freire’s ideas.

Jacques Rancière’s citation of Joseph Jacotot – the schoolmaster who subscribed to the notion ‘that one ignoramus could teach another what he himself did not know’³⁰⁰ - in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* has clear resonance with Freire’s theory of a less-hierarchical and straightforward teacher-student relationship. Rancière uses the story of Jacotot to illustrate a type of learning similar to the one posited by Freire in that it is achieved not through the ‘stultifying’ transfer of knowledge from teacher to student - that assumes the student’s knowledge is less legitimate than that of the teacher - but by problem-posing exercise similar to that proposed by Freire:

The ignorant schoolmaster ... does not teach his pupils *his* knowledge but orders them to venture into the forest of things and signs, to say what they have seen and what they think of what they have seen, to verify it and have it verified.³⁰¹

For Rancière, intelligence is an act of translating: ‘the poetic labour of translation is at the heart of all learning.’³⁰² As such pedagogy is articulated in spatial-temporal terms, as an act of travelling between different forms of knowledge each with its own ‘self-equality’³⁰³:

²⁹⁷ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2003), p.135

²⁹⁸ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2003), p.178

²⁹⁹ ‘No one can say a true word alone – nor can she say it *for* another.’ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2003), p.88

³⁰⁰ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2009), p.1

³⁰¹ *ibid*, p.11

³⁰² *ibid*, p.10

³⁰³ *ibid*, p.10

The distance the ignoramus has to cover is not the gulf between her ignorance and the schoolmaster's knowledge. It is simply the path from what she already knows to what she does not yet know, but which she can learn just as she has learnt the rest; which she can learn not in order to occupy the position of the scholar, but so as better to practise the art of translating, of putting her experience into words and her words to the test.³⁰⁴

Rancière deploys this concept of pedagogy to critique art that attempts to eradicate such distance; the culprits of which are those practices that naively believe the mediation of the spectacle (in Guy Debord's terms) can be eradicated and that doing so would de facto create conditions for a more empowered community. Rancière's main gripe with this concept is that it privileges action over contemplation - or in his terms 'spectatorship' - and ignores the radical and disruptive qualities offered by potentially conflicting readings of works.

We do not have to transform spectators into actors, and ignoramuses into scholars. We have to recognize the knowledge at work in the ignoramus and the activity in the spectator.³⁰⁵

For Rancière, art's radical potential is a parallel to that of non-stultifying teaching; it is in its capacity to offer up 'an unpredictable interplay of associations and dissociations';³⁰⁶ to create an aesthetic rupture. This, he illustrates by practices including Mallarmé's poetry and, mildly more up to date, Campement Urbain's project *I and Us* (2005). Both works' political efficacy, according to Rancière, is found in their ability to create a space where the tension between 'being apart' and 'being together' are played out. Here, then we can begin to pull out similarities between Rancière's role for art and Guattari's 'aesthetic refrain' or, even, Badiou's 'event:' a rupture in the fabric of the way things are.

Sadly, Rancière's commitment to an art of 'dissensual operation', and his reluctance to think beyond the point of rupture, leads him to some astoundingly conservative conclusions. First, he questions the idea that any kind of unmasking of the world as it is

³⁰⁴ *ibid*, pp.10-11

³⁰⁵ *ibid*, p.17

³⁰⁶ *ibid*, p.17

would necessarily lead to political action. Second, he reasons that because ‘aesthetic efficacy’ is produced by the negation of any determinate link between cause and effect³⁰⁷ - in an almost straight regurgitation of Adorno’s claim that ‘the function of art is to have no function’ - that anything that announces its own political intent, or understands itself as radical, is, by such an operation, not politically effective:

There is no reason why the sensory oddity produced by the clash of heterogeneous elements should bring about an understanding of the world... There is no straightforward road from the fact of looking at a spectacle to the fact of understanding the state of the world; no direct road from intellectual awareness to political action. What occurs instead is a shift from a given sensible world to another ... Such breaks can happen anywhere and at any time. But they cannot be calculated.³⁰⁸

In Rancière’s too-violent recoil from practices that might carry with them a whiff of didacticism, we are left with artistic and pedagogic models that serve not only as justification for the most conservative forms of art to make a claim for themselves as radical, but also denounce those practices that situate themselves against a political horizon. Rancière’s lesson for artists appears to be ‘stay ambiguous’, ‘don’t commit’ and in his understanding of the aesthetic community as a ‘community of dis-identified persons’ he appears to foreclose the possibilities for the emergence of a collective agency capable of effecting social change. Theorists including Hardt and Negri who wish to move beyond such an ultimately apolitical and debilitating postmodern outlook might find more affinity with similar - but crucially different – models of collective learning and rupture proposed by Argentinian militant research group *Colectivo Situaciones*, of whom I will touch on shortly.

Rancière’s mistake is in thinking that (artistic) activism favours action at the expense of reflection and that it also assumes naively a ‘direct path’ between ‘intellectual awareness’ and political action. As we have seen with earlier cited articulations of militant praxis contemplation and reflection – even that achieved by representational means – plays an

³⁰⁷ *ibid*, p.63

³⁰⁸ *ibid*, p.75

important role in contemporary social movements and art committed to social change. As Colectivo Situaciones puts it:

Research militancy does not distinguish between thinking and doing politics. For, insofar as we see thought as the thinking/doing activity that deposes the logic by which existing models acquire meaning, thinking is immediately political.³⁰⁹

Colectivo Situaciones' reflection is, however, emphatically directed towards the expansion of political capacities within its participants. Research militancy is concerned with the expansion of *potencia*; *potencia* being the Spanish word for 'power to' as in 'the type of capacity expressed in the statement "I Can"' as opposed to *poder* which is 'power over.'³¹⁰ In contradistinction to Freire, but in keeping with Rancière, Colectivo Situaciones address the 'excessive' quality of *potencia* that emerges through rupture or a break with the world as it is - by excessive here I mean that it defies articulation and straightforward transfer - whilst keeping in tact a political trajectory for such experiments:

How to write about the *potency* of an experience/experiment knowing that its *potencia* will not be transferred into the writing? What kind of writing can at least look for resonances? ... The writing has to be anti-pedagogical ... Research militancy is a composition of wills, an attempt to create what Spinoza called joyful passions, which starts from and increases the power (*potencia*) of everyone involved. Such a perspective is only possible by admitting from the beginning that one does not have answers, and, by doing so, abandoning the desire to lead others or be seen as an expert.³¹¹

Here, then, Colectivo Situaciones surmise many of the positions covered in this investigation into various perspectives on radical pedagogy and address some vital questions applicable to praxis, pedagogy and art practice; how to co-produce knowledge about that which exceeds language and, as such, cannot be communicated? How to follow a path when there is no clear destination? How to find resonances between struggles and

³⁰⁹ Colectivo Situaciones, 'Something more on Research Militancy: Footnotes on Procedures and (In)Decisions' in Stephen Shukaitis and David Graeber, eds., *Constituent Imagination: Militant Investigations Collective Theorization* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2007), p.75

³¹⁰ *ibid*, p.75

³¹¹ *ibid*, pp.78-79

open those up to a wider constituency without reifying and curtailing such exploratory processes? Such questions form the basis of my analyses in this final section where I will look at a broader conception of pedagogy that offers some strategies for addressing these issues.

5. Aesthetic and Sensual Education (New Social Movements and Constituent Imagination)

To recap; Rancière's theory of dissensual pedagogy and the aesthetic break (complemented by his writing on the 'distribution of the sensible') offers pride of place to artistic experience and production in social transformation. His theory stops short of what I would consider radical, however, because of a patronising and ill-informed understanding of art-activism and new social movements coupled with a seemingly uncritical stance on the institutional art world.³¹² The task that I set myself here, then, is - to talk like a Situationist for a moment – to rescue Rancière's theory from the jaws of bourgeois idealism.

What I would like to focus on this section, then, is the idea of an aesthetic education, proposed originally by Friedrich Schiller and not a small influence on Rancière's concepts. We can think here of aesthetic best as the opposite of anaesthetised – that is, unfeeling numbness. Stewart Martin has written that 'aesthetic education' is 'conceived as an antidote to the pathologies of the neo-dogmatism of reason and its idea of freedom, principally its abstractness or indifference to sensuous particularity.'³¹³ This returns us quite neatly to Marx's proposal for critical praxis being a 'human-sensuous activity'.³¹⁴ In order to think of this towards a radical pedagogy, we may have to consider the manner in which such sensuous learning occurs but also the specific political context in which it takes place. Following the Italian tradition we must ask how an aesthetic education performs in tandem

³¹² Dave Beech, 'Encountering Art', *Art Monthly*, Issue 336, May 2010, p.11

³¹³ Stewart Martin, 'An Aesthetic Education Against Aesthetic Education' in Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson, eds., *Curating and the Educational Turn* (London: Open Editions, 2010), p.115

³¹⁴ Karl Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach' in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works in One Volume* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1980), p.29

with an inquiry into the socio-political conditions in which it occurs. What are the intellectual tools proper to these conditions? First, we should begin by addressing the particular qualities of cognitive capitalism and their affects on the senses.

Franco 'Bifo' Berardi in his book *The Soul At Work* has outlined the current collective depression and pathology felt in contemporary capitalist society as a product of cognitive capitalism, developments in virtual and communication technology and their specific impact on work. The 'cognitariat', for Bifo, is the knowledge-worker who, having lived under the ideological pretence that work will offer some kind of spiritual fulfilment, is forced to spend all of their life in the precarious position between work and play, (unable to escape the former and equally unable to fully commit to the latter), ever deferring their desires to a future moment that fails to materialise. Moreover, the specific quality of this form of immaterial capitalism is the loss of sensuousness and of a diminishing part for the body in everyday life. As Bifo writes:

The removal of corporeality is a guarantee of endless happiness, but naturally a frigid and false one, because it ignores, or rather removes, corporeality: not only that of others, but even one's own, negating mental labor, sexuality and mental morality.³¹⁵

We can draw similarities here with Guy Debord's critique of the spectacle or even Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulacrum, both of which prompted Rancière's defence of 'distanced' experience, but Bifo's analyses is both contemporarily sited and thorough in its description of new forms of alienation and their concrete effects. The increasing velocity of modern communication, the fluidity and precarity of labor and the invisibility of forms of control are producing with them new psychological disorders rooted in the loss of sensuousness:

Within the postindustrial domain, we should talk of de-realization, rather than reification. The concept of alienation is then understood as: 1) a specific psychopathological category; 2) a painful division of the self; 3) a feeling of anguish and frustration related to the inaccessible body of the other, to the dis-

³¹⁵ Franco Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009), p.104

tonic feelings of a non-sympathetic organism incapable of living a happy relation with otherness and therefore with itself.³¹⁶

It is worth noting here that we can understand Bifo's position as the flipside of Lewis Call's or other postanarchist writers, or, even of Hardt and Negri, who have championed the emancipatory potential in the virtualisation of the everyday and labour.³¹⁷ Whilst such advocates have seen in new technologies the opportunity for the fluid, dynamic and ever-changing self and the removal of identity (as perhaps too does Rancière, though not in terms of virtual technologies) Bifo highlights the accompanying loss of communication and sense of isolation involved in this process of 'disidentification'. As such, for Bifo, 'the question of sensibility becomes one with politics' but one that is not wholly consumed by aesthetic sensibility for its own sake but rather how its experience can orient us towards a more compassionate and empowering social being:

Today the ethical question posed is a question of the soul, that is to say of the sensibility animating the body, making it capable of opening sympathetically towards the other.³¹⁸

Accordingly, Bifo proposes a more overtly politicised and active role for sensibility – one that is closely linked to notions of collective will and political agency – but without losing the stress on sensuous and localised experience that Rancière demands from the political experience. Bifo also talks of the artist's role as an aesthetic rupture but couples this with a reading of Guattari's schizoanalysis to clarify its specifically therapeutic dimension that would treat the depression experienced in capitalist life:

Depression is based on the hardening of one's existential refrain, on its obsessive repetition ... The goal of the schizoanalyst is to give him/her the

³¹⁶ *ibid*, pp.108-109

³¹⁷ See Lewis Call *Postmodern Anarchism* (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2002). Chapter 4, pp.117-139, and Nick Dyer-Witherford 'Cyber-Negri: General Intellect and Immaterial Labor' in *The Philosophy of Antonio Negri: Resistance in Practice* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), pp.136-162

³¹⁸ Franco Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009), p.133

possibility of seeing other landscapes, to change focus, to open new paths of imagination.³¹⁹

Before moving on to discuss some strategies to teach the unfreezing subjectivity hardened by capital I would like to address another rationale for placing desire and sensuousness at the heart of a radical pedagogy. Whilst it is important to comprehend the erasure of true desire and sensuousness performed by capitalism, this is not to suggest that capitalism does not have any place for desire and fantasy. On the contrary, the currency with which capitalism operates is precisely that of desires, dreams, the promise of pleasure, fulfilment and bodily gratification; all of which may have been denounced by radicals in the 1960s as ‘false desires’ but have endured as capitalism’s primary tools of control nonetheless.

The reason for this endurance is that in the postmodern environment there is no longer any need for capitalism to conceal its manipulation by the production of false desires or deployment of spectacle. Those subject to its control are simultaneously highly aware and apathetic, as Rancière has discussed in his article about the guilt surrounding representational experience. This scenario - where it appears we as subjects of capitalism are more than willing to have the wool pulled over our eyes and lead an ‘ironically’ consumerist lifestyle – has developed into a heightened form that led George Bush to boast about the exact manner in which fantasy and spectacle are used to maintain capitalist (in this case neoconservative) hegemony:

We’re an empire now, and when we act we create reality. And while you (journalists) are studying that reality – judiciously, as you will – we’ll act again creating new realities, which you can study too, and that’s how things will sort out. We’re history’s actors ... and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.³²⁰

Whilst in the past such statements would have been assumed as ammunition with which to undermine rule by such power - a case of revealing the Emperor’s nakedness - in the conditions of cognitive capitalism no such direct path between revelation and revolution

³¹⁹ *ibid*, p.216

³²⁰ George Bush in Stephen Duncombe, *Dream: Re-Imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy* (New York: The New Press, 2007), p.2

exists. Instead we might be better taking note of Gramsci's advice 'one must learn from one's adversary whom one should be careful not to belittle'³²¹ and begin to rethink the intellectual-practical tools of praxis proper to the struggle for power and its dissolution or redistribution in the contemporary age.

We could begin here to look at various tactics that have made use of the spectacle and false desire – not so much as a method of *détournement* aimed at revealing capitalism's 'true face', but rather in its deployment towards antagonistic ends. Such an approach is covered by Stephen Duncombe in his book *Dream: Re-imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy* or in Retort's writing about the World Trade Centre attacks. I would for the purposes of this discussion, however, like to take a different tack; looking specifically at how the experience of art might be understood as 'training' or co-production of knowledge of tactics by which to sense and awaken desire not dictated by capitalism.

As John Jordan pointed out in a talk at University of Leeds on 'Activist Geographies', 'capitalism is sexy' and, in such a context, the failings of the left can be understood as arising from an unwillingness or incapacity to compete.³²² The often dry, intellectualised and serious nature of critiques of capitalism from the left – grounded in economic and factual rationality – fail to engage with the dominant power on its own terms and as such have no real chance of communicating struggle outside of their own already existing community. In Jordan's opinion then the task at hand is to 'inject pleasure into politics'.³²³ An attempt at this pleasurable injection can be seen in anti-globalisation movement's adoption of carnival as a method of resistance illustrated in the Reclaim the Streets movement, the J18 Global Protests against the formation of the G8, and into the World Trade Organisation demonstrations in Seattle. These protests have taken forms not

³²¹ Harold Entwistle, *Antonio Gramsci: Conservative Schooling for Radical Politics* (London: Routledge, 1979), p.31

³²² Seminar Room 1.44, School of Geography, University of Leeds, March 16th, 2010

³²³ Notes From Nowhere, *We Are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anticapitalism* (London: Verso, 2003), p.174

dissimilar to social interventions and have embraced their artistic aspect and are currently being recognised by the institutional art world as ‘valid practice’.³²⁴

We could talk about such interventions in the same terms as I used in the previous chapters: as interventions into social space or joyous encounters with a focus on how they rupture everyday rhythms and re-appropriate space for common use. Here, though, it is fitting to reframe such temporary social events in terms of a sensuous learning that addresses the loss of corporeality identified by Bifo. Jordan writes:

Carnival brings the body back to public space, not the perfect smooth bodies that promote consumption on billboards and magazines ... but the body of warm flesh, of blood and guts, organs and orifices.³²⁵

In this sense, then, we can interpret the experience of being together in carnival or joyous protest as a practical workshop in (re)discovering bodily connectedness; not just with our own – through dance, movement, occupation of new space - but between individuals too, in the proximity of bodies joined by music, heat and sweat. Additionally, and specific to politically-oriented, non-sanctioned carnival, such experiences produce new possibilities and horizons through direct experience that ‘teaches us not to wait, but to live out the future we desire now.’³²⁶ Notes from Nowhere collective – of which Jordan is a member – has written about the sustained impact of such experiences and the manner in which we might begin to think about them in aesthetic-educational terms, as an education in autonomy:

The revolutionary carnival may only last a few hours or days, but its taste lingers on. It is not simply a letting-off of steam, a safety valve for society, enabling life to return to normal the next day. It is a moment of intensity unlike any other, which shapes and gives new meanings to every aspect of life ... tasting such fruit is dangerous, because it leaves a craving to repeat the exhilarating experience again and again.³²⁷

³²⁴ Gavin Grindon, ‘Art and Activism’, *Art Monthly*, Issue 333, Feb 2010, pp. 9-12

³²⁵ Notes From Nowhere, *We Are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anticapitalism* (London: Verso, 2003), p.175

³²⁶ *ibid*, p.182

³²⁷ *ibid*, p.182

Such claims, alongside those for the inherently radical nature of carnival, are to say the least, bald. We might ask how the ‘radical’ bodily experiences offered by a party in the street are *materially* distinct from that experienced in the ‘false’ environment of a commercial night club or in sanitised council-led community events. Cynics might also add that the rationale underpinning these actions bears worrying resemblance to the folklorish knowledge derided by Gramsci as ultimately debilitating. There is a danger that we could find ourselves in bind here, though, as the purportedly resistant nature of pleasurable politics lies precisely in its rejection of a logic of rationality. It is something, defenders would argue, that has to be felt and that cannot find full expression in language or theory.

Even if we were to accept this position, a related problem posed from ‘within’ the social movements is that of finding resonance between local experiments and building and maintaining constituent power. In order for these interventions and moments of sensuous dissent to gather a momentum that would preserve them against co-option and neutralisation by capital’s machinery and make them capable of affecting what we might call a paradigm shift, there needs to be some strategy by which to extend their duration and their capacity to communicate between each other.³²⁸ It would appear then that the search to find a common language, or a language of the common, for this form of resistance and radical pedagogy – one that is based in aesthetic rupture – is paramount. However, as we have discussed, sensuous praxis’ (rightful) resistance to being contained by language problematises such a straightforward solution. Colectivo Situaciones write that:

In an era when communication is the indisputable maxim, in which everything is justifiable by its communicable usefulness, research militancy refers to experimentation; not to thoughts, but to the power to think; not to circumstances, but to the possibility of experience; not to this or that concept, but to experiences in which such notions acquire power (*potencia*); not to identities but to a different becoming; in one word: intensity does not lie so

³²⁸ ‘We need the organizational consistency and structure to deal with real-life problems and be open to new desires, so we can move beyond the politics of the politicians and the paralyzing spectacle.’ El Kilombo & Michael Hardt in Conversation ‘Organizing Encounters and Generating events’, <http://inthemiddleofthewhirlwind.wordpress.com/organizing-encounters-and-generating-events/> [accessed June 28th 2010]

much in that which is produced (that which is communicable) as in the process of production itself (that which is lost in communication).³²⁹

A condition for radical pedagogy, it follows, is that it trains the teacher-learner to recognise that which is ‘lost in communication’. Here we can reference the conundrum we encountered in Chapter Two when discussing Badiou’s command that we show fidelity to the event, but can only do so retrospectively of the event itself. Casting our mind back we will remember that because it exists outside of the ‘world as it is’, the event resists articulation. I would suggest here, then, that aesthetic education points to a way out of this deadlock, as the *sensory attuning* offered by artistic experience can build the capacity to *feel* the event and, therefore, act as a first stage in showing fidelity to it. As such, we can begin to think about artistic practice as a form of pedagogy that has at its root the ‘practical, human-sensuous activity’ Marx understood as fundamental in social change. Importantly, though, such aesthetic experience should be coupled with a reflective understanding of why aesthetic experience constitutes a rupture and of its orientation towards a socially transformative horizon.

³²⁹ Colectivo Situaciones, ‘Something more on Research Militancy: Footnotes on Procedures and (In)Decisions’ in Stephen Shukaitis and David Graeber, eds., *Constituent Imagination: Militant Investigations Collective Theorization* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2007), p.81

My intention with this chapter was to explore artistic intervention at the structural level. Recognising the fact that ‘structural’ provides myriad interpretations I decided to look specifically at pedagogy as a structural intervention, reasoning that it can be considered to occupy a number of different spaces that we might consider structural; from the physical in the forms of buildings and institutions, through the representational including policy or curriculum, and into the perceptual in the form of the production of subjectivity.

I noted that currently pedagogy and surrounding concepts are drawing a great deal of attention and critique within contemporary art. I traced two paths from which this ‘turn’ could be said to have arisen; one concerned with opposing, providing alternatives to or reforming education institutions and as such having a legacy of autonomous knowledge production and worker’s struggles, and another growing out of artistic interests that have arisen in the development of dematerialised, discursive, dialogic and relational art practice. Additionally, I noted the economic conditions that should not be ignored as a determining factor in the artistic fascination with pedagogy.

Subsequently, I attempted to analyse what we might understand as radical pedagogy and its relevance to and presence within contemporary art practices by moving through a number of theoretical lenses related to pedagogy. These included Marx’s ideas of praxis as a radical practical-critical activity and how art education can be read as such; Gramsci’s concepts of the organic intellectual and the impact this may have on the dissemination of factual historical information and building critical capacities through art; the manner in which we might interpret Italian Workerist joint-research and co-inquiry as bearing relevance to current research-based practices; Freire and Rancière’s theories of dissensual pedagogy in terms of dialogic and representational practices; and last, ‘aesthetic education’ and the manner in which we might frame social interventionist practices and creative activism as a ‘sensual’ education.

In terms of ‘structural intervention’, then, we have explored practices that occupy physical space and have a critical-transformative relation with existing institutions through Free Art Schools and the occupation of universities, teaching methods deployed by artists in formal

art education which could be said to operate at a policy-making level, the use of representational spaces including exhibitions and galleries as a site for inquiry and learning, and events and actions that can be understood as spontaneous workshops in critical praxis.

It is important to consider now how these various spaces and techniques of intervention contribute towards not only a pedagogy that can be said to contribute towards a postcapitalist subjectivity – in that it ruptures and opens up space for new social and political possibilities – but the manner in which this formation of a radical pedagogy can lead to, or be considered as, ‘structural’ change. I proposed at the beginning of this chapter that the fact that pedagogy operates across the three ecologies in this thesis (mental, social and environmental) means that strategic changes in it might culminate in what we could call a paradigmatic shift; a change in knowledge and method that would reframe action and thought and provide a new horizon for political potentialities and social formation.

Bifo offers a more poetic, perhaps less grand, understanding of ‘paradigm’ that would make this structural change by art sound more realistically achievable:

The word “episteme” in the Greek language means to stand in front of something: the epistemic paradigm is a model that allows us to face reality. A paradigm is a bridge which gives friends the ability to traverse the abyss of non-being.

Overcoming depression implies some simple steps: the deterritorialization of the obsessive refrain, the re-focalization and change of the landscape of desire, but also the creation of a new constellation of shared beliefs, the common perception of a new psychological environment and the construction of a new model of relationship.³³⁰

This role for friendship in social transformation, political action and art is something I would like to continue to explore. It shares much with Hardt and Negri’s concept of the common and by extension of ‘the multitude’. It puts political and social action in the arena of pleasure and happiness and combats the unhelpful conception that a ‘politically

³³⁰ Franco Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009), p.217

committed' art practice must necessarily be a joyless, sacrificial one. I hope to have demonstrated through the course of my investigation into different models of pedagogy that sensory and material concerns are fundamental to social change and that socially engaged practice, even when framed by its educational capacity, does not necessarily have to be an impersonal and distanced one.

Another useful aspect to comprehending paradigmatic shifts and social change as shared friendships is that it guides us towards the concluding chapter of this thesis which will be concerned with the manner in which the various levels and spaces of intervention I have identified thus far find connection and resonance. To return to Bifo for a moment, he has this to say about Deleuze and Guattari:

‘They suggest that friendship is the way to overcome depression, because friendship means sharing a sense, sharing a view and a common rhythm; a common refrain (*ritournelle*) in Guattari’s parlance.’³³¹

The important word here for me is ‘rhythm’ which I believe to be a crucial concept in developing the notion that artists can intervene across a multitude of sites and levels towards an understanding of how such interventions can ‘compose’ social change. Not only do different spaces demand a consideration of specific artistic strategies and techniques but overall a conception of how these various interventions relay between one another and the regularity and tempo with which they occur will aid in increasing the efficacy of such interventions so that, as Negri puts it, ‘they are like waves that follow one another’.³³²

³³¹ *ibid*, p.215

³³² Antonio Negri, ‘Logic and Theory of Inquiry: Militant Praxis as Subject and as Episteme’ in Stephen Shukaitis and David Graeber, eds., *Constituent Imagination: Militant Investigations Collective Theorization* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2007), p.71

Conclusion

I set out with this thesis intending to provide a frame against which we can better understand and evaluate my practice by its contribution to ‘making a better world’. As I believe that many of the world’s ills and the qualitative poverty of everyday life can be greatly attributed to the political economic reality under which we live, the ‘better world’ I have outlined is one that differs from, or reforms elements of, capitalism to the point where it would be unrecognisable as such. The thesis has not been an exercise in situating art as part of a political programme or concrete plans for an alternative to capitalism - for example by demonstrating how art will make Communism a reality - but rather examined how the experience of art and its production help disrupt certain factors that naturalise capitalism and help maintain its dominance, as well as provide the foundation for experimentation with its alternatives. In this manner, I dare to call my practice a socially transformative one, or, in less confident moments, a practice with socially transformative intentions.

A line of enquiry within the thesis has been to demonstrate that a socially transformative art practice can take many forms. I have aimed to illustrate this via a spatial understanding of practices in terms of their intervention into, and operation across, different levels or ‘ecologies’, those being: the mental, social and structural. This has allowed us to draw comparisons and make linkages across multifarious practices ranging from gallery-based representational art in the form of video and photography, through social events and public interventions, research-based projects and into (alternative) pedagogical and economic models. This range of practices mirrors my own activity as a practitioner operating primarily in Leeds, a city whose economic and cultural landscape proposes its own set of problems and opportunities. For example, due to its notable lack of an art market or cultural infrastructure when compared to peer cities such as Manchester or London, there is a relatively enhanced role for DIY and non-institutional practices in their contribution to the fabric of the city.

This grounding in my day-to-day material experience has led me to include ‘self-organised cultural activity’ in the range of practices examined in the thesis. Yet another thread weaving through it, then, has been a comparison between the radical potential of institutional art practices and more informal, underground practices that are critical of, or maintain a distance from, ‘Art-with-a-capital-A’. This has led on to an evaluation of art taking into account both its reception by an audience and also by understanding it as a mode of production or labour. That is, I am not only looking at how the experience of engaging with art from an audience perspective is a transformative one, but also how the experience of making, producing and organising ‘art’ from the point of view of the artist or producer contributes to political and economic change.

I have demonstrated that in some cases this contribution is a practical or structural one. That is, that the ‘change’ affected by the art in question is visible and quantifiable, even if it is temporary. For example, when an intervention concretely addresses a social need under the auspice of public art (in the work of WochenKlausur for instance), or when an alternative ‘free’ art school is created, when an individual uses work time and resources to produce fanzines that critique the dead-end job in which he is trapped, or when relational practices create a convivial space in a gallery that act as temporal micro-utopias. I have suggested, however, that only to concentrate on these practical and immediate effects of art and cultural production is near-sighted. By that I mean to consider forms of resistance or experiments in producing alternatives to capitalism (by artistic means or otherwise) purely as pragmatic structural reforms is to overlook the ‘deeper’, longer lasting, but often invisible changes produced by such practices.

Taking account of this deeper level of intervention, then, has required a discussion of subjectivity and the manner in which subjectivity is produced by art and self-organised cultural practices. I have aimed to illustrate that the production of subjectivity is a factor common to all practices across the various ‘ecologies’, even those that are normally understood as practical or structural interventions.

To introduce this theme of subjectivity I looked at how representational art practices that operate in ‘perceived space’, or intervene at the level of the psyche, reflect and model modes of subjectivity that can be considered as disruptive to capitalist norms. This was performed initially by demonstrating how Deleuze and Guattari’s figure of the nomad and the contingent, non-essentialist subjectivity associated with it is reflected, experimented with, problematised and advanced in examples of contemporary art. Here, art practices were seen to perform a practical application and analysis of a subjectivity that refuses the sedentary and ultimately debilitating character of a fixed identity, whether that be national, ethnic, sexual and so on. By focusing on work by artists shown in Nicolas Bourriaud’s 2009 exhibition ‘Altermodern’ and ideas put forward in his subsequent book *The Radicant* we saw how art is a field in which the messy and often contradictory nature of a non-essentialist subjectivity is played out.

I then progressed to discuss how art is able to reflect and represent another model of subjectivity that can be seen to undermine the values of capitalism, that being ‘the amateur’. This required a discussion of practices that do not present themselves as the work of a professional and, in so doing, call into question the role of ‘work’ in the formation of the self. Two modes of reflection were examined, one where the amateur was represented through the work of professional artists (in Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska’s project *Enthusiasm* and in Jeremy Deller’s *Folk Archive* and *Parade*) and another where the non-professional subjectivity is embodied by or performed through the activity of the ‘artist’. The latter led us to discuss DIY and self-organised practices such as those described in Chris Carlsson’s *Nowtopia* and described by Gregory Sholette as cultural ‘dark matter’.

These two ‘models’ of subjectivity and the characteristics that they represent provided a foundation for subsequent discussions on the relation between art and the production of alternatives to capitalism found in the thesis. The first model, that of the nomad, represents an openness to alterity and the Other that is facilitated by art practices discussed as operating in both the social and structural level. The second, that of the amateur or non-professional, underpins much broader and far-reaching discussions about the relation

between labour, 'non-capitalist' activity, self-valorisation and the role of work more generally in postcapitalist society. As such, it is constantly in the background of, and floating above, any conversation of 'self-organised' activity, or practices that aim to operate 'in the cracks' of capital.

In the second chapter, I aimed to elucidate further on the common misrepresentation of 'socially concerned' art practice as being wholly pragmatic and devoid of aesthetic merit via a review of 'socially engaged' and 'relational' practices. By understanding such practices by their capacity to provoke a subjective 'rupture' as might conventionally be attributed to traditional and representational art practices (in the writings of Guattari, Badiou, Rancière and so on) I hoped to address some of the reductive readings that have been made of art practices that operate in social space. Such reductionism of socially engaged art to a purely pragmatic exercise has led to unhelpful oppositions being made between 'aesthetic, sophisticated and autonomous' art and 'practical, worthy but ultimately naïve and instrumentalised' social practice. Through this exploration and application of theories of the 'refrain', 'the event', 'the joyful encounter' and 'moments of excess', I attempted to recharge social practice with an aesthetic and subjectivising reading that is not opposed to more representational practices.

More significantly, the type of subjectivity produced in art that operates at the social level - that involves collective action, dialogue, participation and so on - was shown to be one that opens up onto the horizon of 'the common'. It was suggested that, in a more directly political update of the tenants of *Relational Aesthetics*, the collective experience offered by social practice is a training in intersubjectivity; a subjectivity that is open to alterity and constitution by 'the Other'. Furthermore, that this collective experience that 'exceeds' the closed individualism, self-advancement and cynical instrumentalism of capitalist relations, lays the foundation for the constitution of a social organisation of a new (that is postcapitalist) type described by Hardt and Negri as 'the multitude'. Again, these political extensions and organisational ramifications for the subjectivising affect of social art remain in the background and feed back into our evaluations of art's socially transformative potential at all levels.

Last, I looked at the manner in which the so-called pedagogic turn in contemporary art can be considered a movement of art practice towards intervention at the ‘structural’ level. This was fore-grounded in a discussion of practical experiments in autonomous education, such as the growing number of ‘free schools’ - the self-organised and politicised versions not to be confused with the for-profit ‘private’ universities and schools currently being proposed in the face of fee hikes and budget cuts in the UK - that emerged from international student demonstrations and occupations in 2010. I also considered the extent to which art education in general can be considered as challenging or breaking from traditional and capitalist modes of education that make a separation between the mental and practical capacities and privilege rational knowledge and hierarchical knowledge transfer. The underlying argument here is that education creates a type of subjectivity not only through the content of the knowledge it produces but also the form of that knowledge and the models of learning appropriate to it.

Accordingly, I looked at various theories of radical pedagogy from Gramsci, Autonomist Marxist investigation and militant research, the dissensual pedagogy of Paolo Friere and Rancière and forms of activism examining the manner in which they challenge notions of accepted knowledge, where this comes from and how it is produced. I used each of these as a lens to examine forms of contemporary art that in some way embody, demonstrate or apply the theories and in so doing reflect back upon and test their limits. Overall, I hoped to have illustrated that art and self-organised cultural practices embody an alternative type of learning and knowledge that exceeds the unfeeling, segregated and conservative rationalism of capitalism.

Through the investigation of various art practices – that operate across three ecologies - we have outlined the production of a specific subjectivity. We can propose this subjectivity has the following characteristics:

- It is non-essentialist – that is, it is critical of the notion of a fixed and rooted identity and embraces its own contingency.

- It is self-valorising – that is, it is constituted by acts of concrete doing as opposed to abstract labour in the service of capital.
- It is ‘common’ – that is, it is open to its constitution by the Other and able to recognise and show fidelity to this process as it occurs through collective experience.
- It is (dis)sensual – that is, it is able and willing to challenge accepted forms of knowledge, co-produce knowledge of an alternative sort and disseminate this in an appropriate manner.

I am by no means claiming this to be a comprehensive list of ‘radical’ characteristics or proposing a checklist against which to define a ‘postcapitalist’ subject. These are merely a list of tendencies pulled from the investigation of art and cultural practice dealt with in this thesis. Nevertheless, if I am to progress the narrative that these practices, and by extension my own, contribute to the production of postcapitalist subjectivity, then further analysis and expansion is required to justify such characteristics as non-capitalist or as resistant to capitalism.

The danger in such an analysis and justification would be to fall into the trap of creating binary oppositions and immutable distinctions between characteristics that are purportedly capitalist and those that are not. As I hope to have illustrated throughout the thesis, there is no uncontaminated ‘outside’ to capital; there are only cracks and temporal moments within it that are themselves ‘scarred’ by capital, but that nonetheless offer - in Deleuze and Guattari’s language - ‘a line of flight’ towards the creation of a new reality. The most useful model for conceiving of this relationship of inside to outside (of capital) has, I think, been in Lacan’s notion of the ‘traumatic kernel’ that we looked at in the first chapter in relation to the apparent paradox of a non-essentialist essentiality. Indeed, at the point of articulating the complicated relationship between antagonistic and complicit, resistant and appropriated, and capitalist and non-capitalist forms, poststructuralist theory becomes most

useful, and we could equally look at Derrida's '*differance*' or 'tremor' as appropriate precedents.

In practical terms though, I hope to have demonstrated throughout this thesis that even when non-capitalist and capitalist forms and practices share a certain structural or formal similarity it does not necessarily follow that they are identical in their political resonances. Just because, for example, the structure employed by a group running a free art school might contain elements or, indeed, echo entirely that of 'the institution' (by its deployment of group critiques or even of assessment methods) the quality of the knowledge produced will be different due to the motivations and ethics that bring such a group together. Likewise the distinction between entrepreneurial self-organised activity and antagonistic DIY activity may be difficult to make when evaluating such practices purely by their concrete, visible and self-evident qualities but the horizon against which these practices situate themselves and the ethics in which they are grounded make them fundamentally different. To extend an analogy made by Bourriaud in *The Radicant*, it is not so much a question of where we are, but where we are going to and why we are motivated to move in the first place. Problematising this is our inability to say where exactly it is that we are heading, but we can attempt to answer the latter issue to some degree.

Ethical Subjects

The question of postcapitalist subjectivity eventually comes down to one of ethics. Simon Critchley has demonstrated convincingly, in his book *Infinitely Demanding*, the process by which a subject is formed by their attachment to a set of ethical concerns, and thus provides us with one more method by which subjectivity is produced to consider in relation to the practices covered by this thesis. For Critchley:

The self is something that shapes itself through its relation to whatever it determines as its good ... However, one can go on and argue more forcefully that this demand of the good *founds* the self; or, better, that the demand of the good is the fundamental principle of the subject's articulation. What we think of as a self is fundamentally an ethical subject, a self that is constituted in a

relation to its good, a self - our self - that is organized around certain core values and commitments.³³³

The foundation of Critchley's argument is an understanding of the contingent, ruptured subjectivity that we have covered previously. Of specific interest here, though, is that Critchley understands the contingency of the subject to be determined by its irresolvable relation to the ethics by which it is constituted. As the self can never meet fully its 'ethical demand', a cyclical relationship is formed that keeps the subject in a state of flux.

On my view, ethics is the experience of an infinite demand at the heart of my subjectivity, a demand that undoes me and requires me to do more.³³⁴

The recognition of, and subsequent fidelity to, this ethical demand are outlined in terms of Badiou's event that we covered in Chapter Two. Critchley picks up on Badiou's readings of Saint Paul that explains the event and its subjectivising affects in terms of 'grace', 'faith' or 'conviction', 'love', and 'hope'.³³⁵ Whilst the event – for example a significant political upheaval or, in our case, the experience of an artistic intervention or the process of organising collectively within and against capital – is a political activity, of utmost significance for Critchley is that 'what is profiled in that event is an ethical universality that exceeds the situation.'³³⁶

This leads us then to consider that nature of the ethics that surround, are produced by, and experimented with, in artistic and self-organised cultural experiences. If we are to begin with the experience as a spectator, engager, consumer or appreciator of art then we can suggest that, at its best, the engagement with art requires an openness and embrace of the unknown, strange and unfamiliar. As we have covered in Bourriaud, Guattari and Rancière, the aesthetic experience is one of training in dislocation. This to me has important ethical consequences, in that, put very crudely, the experience of art – even in its most traditional

³³³ Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London: Verso, 2008), pp.20-21

³³⁴ *ibid*, p.132

³³⁵ *ibid*, p.46

³³⁶ *ibid*, p.47

forms – requires a shift from one’s own perspective to an other’s (most often the artist’s) and a willingness to have one’s expectations confounded. We see other models and explanations of this experience in writings on ‘the sublime’ and Lacan’s theory of sublimation described by Critchley.³³⁷

In both cases, however, there is some form of opening to alterity that occurs in the encounter with, and engagement of, art practices from an audience perspective. Whether that experience be one of rupture or transcendence, art in this sense offers a concentrated ‘hit’ of displacement, an affirmative split with the world as it is, and the catalyst for unforeseeable consequences. The ethical demand made by the appreciation of art can be said to be one of openness and acceptance as well as of discernment, commitment and faith. We can be said, then, to seek out artistic experiences for the feeling they demand – the opposite of the anaesthesia of capitalism – that engenders an ethics exceeding the concrete situation; openness, acceptance of the other, an embrace of displacement and a commitment to follow an unknown path are all ethical criteria applicable to many other situations than the experience of art.

The problem that I have with such a traditional notion of artistic experience and the ethics it produces is to do with the context and situation in which this displacement and rupture occurs. Throughout this thesis I have resisted allowing the line of enquiry to waver into an opposing of gallery-based, representational and, as such, more market-friendly art forms to those that are less ‘traditional’, institutionalised and potentially commercial. I hope to have shown multiple points of crossover between a variety of practices whether they be ‘dark matter’ or prominent institutionally-validated examples. That said, the point in highlighting such resonances is not to flatten out all art practices as ‘the same’ in a pluralist discourse, but rather to allow opportunity for more discerning critique of their relative merits. Accordingly I would like to begin to make an argument as to why the ‘rupture’ offered by art experienced outside of its ‘conventional’ setting - and better still, that foregoes its visibility as art - has more radical consequences.

³³⁷ *ibid*, p.69

Related to the above discussion on aesthetic appreciation and the production of an ethical subjectivity, it would seem logical that the best place in which to ‘appreciate’ art from a spectator’s point of view would be the purpose-built, ‘neutral’ setting of the gallery. From ‘white cube’ galleries, to biennials, to ‘cultural sectors’ of a city, the concentration of art into a specific or tailored setting where it is offered both ‘breathing space’ and potential readings with and against other works appears as natural and sensible. Whilst it undoubtedly has benefits, this approach - where art is separated into a specialised (most often professional) sphere - also has its critics. The common critique is based on a disagreement with the ideals and standardisation of the institutional art world and its active part in capitalist neoliberal ‘regeneration’ and gentrification. As Stephen Wright has put it:

In our economy which is increasingly based on the harnessing of what used to be art-specific competence - in other words, autonomy, creativity, inventiveness, which is exactly how post-Fordist capitalism functions - there is an increasing response from art and art-related practitioners who feel that they don’t want art just to be completely ripped off, to attempt to re-inject their competence elsewhere in a substantively different way... there are more and more professionally trained artists who have decided to forego producing art, and who are doing something else instead which, whatever it may be, doesn’t initially appear as art.³³⁸

I largely agree with the sentiment, but it is this kind of argument that leaves ‘underground’ art practices open to criticisms of ‘ghettoism’ and naivety in their belief of a safe space outside of capitalism, which, as we have demonstrated, is a myth or, if not, an unhelpful concept. Rather, I would make an argument against the unsavoury ethical consequences at the level of subjectivity rather than of structure that arises from institutionalised aesthetic experience.

To be blunt, aesthetic experience in the terms in which we have discussed it can be seen much like a therapy – indeed Guattari makes the links between aesthetic refrain and those provided in psychoanalysis quite clear. The subsequent risk in its institutionalisation and separation from everyday life is that it becomes more like a drug than an authentic

³³⁸ Stephen Wright, ‘An Exchange with Jacques Rancière’, *ART&RESEARCH: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods*, Volume 2. No. 1. Summer 2008

experience. Guattari articulates well the manner in which capitalism hardens potentially emancipative refrains into obsessive rituals:

The different components conserve their heterogeneity, but are nevertheless captured by a refrain which couples them to an existential Territory of myself. In the case of neurotic identity, sometimes the refrain develops into a “hardened” representation, for example, and obsessive ritual.³³⁹

In more cynical moments, I might liken the appetite that the art-going public have for ‘big name galleries’, and the culture industry more generally, as an example of this hardened representation, where aesthetic appreciation becomes an obsessive ritual codified by specific behaviours, measures of taste, and limited to designated spaces and times. What was once, or has the potential to be a genuine rupture in everyday experience becomes a predictable ‘high’ that soon loses its edge. Often, when listening to various arguments for the unique experiences offered by mainstream art culture, I am put in mind of the aging adrenaline junkie who is unwilling to accept that they have become numbed to the experience of extreme sports and theme parks because it is ‘part of who they are’. The sad outcome of this scenario, then, when aesthetic appreciation becomes consumption and spectacle, is the desensitization to the ‘event’; the exact opposite of the radical potential of art. The ethical landscape that is created by such hardened obsession - far from being one of openness, faith in alterity, commitment to the unfamiliar - becomes a clinging desire for the same, the validated and an uncritical sycophantic belief in and pursuit of (standardised) ‘excellence’.

This is not to suggest that the gallery form of aesthetic appreciation is ultimately flawed and unable to provide critical experiences; in keeping with the rest of this thesis I would like to point out that such ‘ruptures’ with capitalist subjectivity are able to happen in the most unlikely of spaces. Later in this chapter, I will return to talking about the role of self-organized, artist-led and independent gallery spaces that are formally similar but propose a very different ethical landscape. For now, though, I would like to take this as an

³³⁹ Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis; an Ethico-aesthetic Paradigm* (Sydney: Power Publications, 2006), p.17

opportunity to begin to discuss the ethical demand that arises in the activity of making and producing art, especially in its self-organised and collective mode.

So, whilst aesthetic appreciation – the experience of art from a spectator or audience point of view – has potential to create an ethical demand based on openness and an embrace of alterity, I would suggest that the act of producing art, particularly when undertaken in a consciously non-capitalist and co-operative or collective manner opens up onto a whole other set of ethical concerns that are antagonistic to capital. The ethics that both foreground and are produced by not-for-profit, concrete doing include co-operation, conviviality, friendship, commitment, and even love, all of which underlie a postcapitalist subjectivity.

Let us first remind ourselves of the capitalist ideology, particularly in its contemporary neoliberal form, against which we can compare a subjectivity capable of rupturing its discourse. David Harvey has written extensively on the structural details of neoliberal capitalism,³⁴⁰ but, for our purposes, I am more interested when he addresses the ideology associated with it:

[Neoliberal theory] takes the view that individual liberty and freedom are the high point of civilization and then goes on to argue that individual liberty and freedom can best be protected and achieved by an institutional structure, made up of strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade: a world in which individual initiative can flourish.³⁴¹

And, more particularly, when describing the emergence of neoliberal capitalism in the UK of the late 1970s and 1980s:

All forms of social solidarity were to be dissolved in favour of individualism, private property, personal responsibility and family values. The ideological assault along those lines that flowed from Thatcher's rhetoric was relentless and

³⁴⁰ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)

³⁴¹ David Harvey in Lilley Sasha, 'On Neoliberalism: An Interview with David Harvey', June 19th 2006, <<http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2006/lilley190606.html>> [accessed July 6th 2011]

broadly successful. “Economics are the method”, she said, “but the object is to change the soul.”³⁴²

More generally, we know - as did the utopian-socialists, anarchists, Marx and every other critic of capital – that (despite attempts made by late capitalism to appropriate social and co-operative forms) self-preservation and individual competitiveness are the foundations of capital, and that, furthermore, it rests on a belief that un-tempered human nature would be, as described by Thomas Hobbes, ‘the war of all against all.’ Questions of human nature will be dealt with in due course but for now it is clear that capitalism as an economic form that is grounded in the sovereignty of private property is incompatible with an *authentic* commitment to ‘the common’ and the dissolution of individual property. I am aware that I am simply, and very crudely, outlining the difference between the principles of capitalism and non-capitalist - communist, socialist and anarchist - forms of society, but it is a necessary context in grasping the true impact of the ethics that arise from and constitute non-capitalist activity.

In such a context, we are able to recognise that the social relations that are created in the cracks and gaps of capital - sometimes arising from a pragmatic desire to keep our heads above water - can ultimately exceed and overflow the lack that instigated them. In terms of co-operation as pragmatism, we can look to Hardt and Negri who have stated that, ‘Solidarity, care for others, creating community, and cooperating in common projects is for (the poor) and essential survival mechanism.’³⁴³ Equally, we can outline numerous self-organised and DIY projects that have been born out of a desire simply to make something happen when it appears no one else is going to help. An example in my own experience is through the art collective Black Dogs, which we formed as a means to ensure our BA degree show was of a standard we would be happy with but that ‘kept going’ and has subsequently developed a more distanced relationship with and politicised take on the institutional art world and capitalism more generally. Debates on the critical value and radical nature of our activity notwithstanding, I can say that what kept us going beyond the

³⁴² David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2006), p.17

³⁴³ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), p.180

solution to our initial ‘problem’ was the quality of the relationships and the unleashing of new desires that arose from operating in a not-for-profit and extra-institutional manner. It is important for us, when evaluating our activity and where to go next, to remember that DIY is *more fulfilling* and opens up onto more exciting possibilities than waged-labour.

As a historical precedent we can turn once more to the Autonomist Marxists who theorized the ‘ecstatic’ quality of co-operative and social labour that late capitalism relies on. Negri’s book *Marx Against Marx* was responsible for bringing richer knowledge of the history of struggles against the ‘social factory’ in 1960s and 1970s Italy to an English speaking audience as well as the new theories of resistance born from it. The spread of capital into social life created what autonomists called ‘the social factory’, but this had the positive effect of creating new sites and forms of struggle. Similarly, through the refusal of work, cracks and spaces were created for self-valorising activity that ultimately *exceeds* capitalism:

The central struggle of the working class as independent subject is to break capitalist control through the *refusal of work*. The logic of this refusal is the logic of antagonistic *separation* and its realisation undermines and destroys capital’s dialectic. In the space gained by this destruction the revolutionary class builds its own independent projects – its own *self-valorisation*.³⁴⁴

So, self-valorising activity – initiated in the spaces created in or left by capital - produces new subjectivities that capitalism is unable to immediately contain. In this example, then, we can see that the socialization and co-operation of workers creates a unity and consciousness that turns back against the capitalism that produced it.

Moving back to ethics, we see this ‘excess’ in the struggle against capitalism discussed by The Free Association whose members, as we covered in Chapter Two, were involved in ‘traditional’ union-based struggles in the 1980s and were party to the crossover into a more decentralized movement in the mid to late 1990s that refused to be dictated by capital in the same way. This transition in forms of protest, resistance and activism is related to the

³⁴⁴ Harry Cleaver in Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx* (London: Pluto Press, 1991), p.xxvii

changing nature of capital – as The Free Association reason, ‘Why travel 200 miles or more to demonstrate against capitalism when the capital relation is all around (and within) us?’³⁴⁵ – but also saw a qualitative change at the level of affects and emotions which we can understand as constituting an ethical landscape for the struggles; ‘First, the emphasis on having a good time, on laughter, their quality of not only being against capital, but also of going beyond capital.’³⁴⁶

Self-organised activity, in work, activism or art - because of its emphasis on autonomy and the creation of the new (within the shell of the old) - escapes the entrapment of what Nietzsche called ‘ressentiment’,³⁴⁷ or, otherwise put, the oppositional character that can lead to a wounded attachment to that which we oppose. It is a less paranoid, less frustrated and happier, friendlier site of struggle, but no less antagonistic for it. Furthermore, it is often based in camaraderie and friendship. But before we begin to appraise the conviviality and the positive emotive quality of self-organised activity too strongly, it will be necessary to talk about its relation to politics and struggle more concretely, lest we fall into an uncritical justification of potentially apolitical hedonism.

An example comes in the form of Jacques Derrida’s later work that explored the relationship between friendship and politics.³⁴⁸ Derrida’s formulation arises from a genealogy of friendship that involves a critique of the canonical model of friendship that he sees as being ‘phallogentric’ and based almost exclusively on brotherly understanding of friendship. Nevertheless, he describes friendship as the hidden referent in politics and crucial to democracy:

³⁴⁵ The Free Association, *Moments of Excess: Movements, Protest and Everyday Life* (Oakland: PM Press, 2011), p.25

³⁴⁶ *ibid*, p.24

³⁴⁷ ‘this need to direct one’s view outward instead of back to oneself – is the essence of ressentiment: in order to exist, slave morality always first needs a hostile external world; it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act at all –its action is fundamentally reaction.’ Friedrich Nietzsche (trans. Douglas Smith), *On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.22

³⁴⁸ Jacques Derrida (trans. George Collins), *Politics of Friendship* (London: Verso, 1997)

Democracy means, minimally, equality - and here you see why friendship is an important key, because in friendship, even in classical friendship, what is involved is reciprocity, equality, symmetry, and so on and so forth. There is no democracy except as equality among everyone.³⁴⁹

Later, Derrida augments this radical understanding of friendship and democracy with a similarly political reading of the concept of hospitality. Hospitality, we could suggest for our purposes, is a 'good', or an ethical demand, that arises from friendship. As an ethical criteria, then, it challenges the tenants of neoliberal capitalism, especially its 'assimilating' version of multiculturalism that seeks to standardise and homologise its guests:

I have to welcome the Other whoever he or she is unconditionally, without asking for a document, a name, a context, or a passport. That is the very first opening of my relation to the Other: to open my space, my home - my house, my language, my culture, my nation, my state, and myself. I don't have to open it, because it is open, it is open before I make a decision about it: then I have to keep it open or try to keep it open unconditionally. But of course this unconditionality is a frightening thing, it's scary.³⁵⁰

When I speak of hospitality I have in mind the necessity not to simply assimilate the Other, but that's an aporia ... I have to accept if I offer unconditional hospitality that the Other may ruin my own space or impose his or her own culture or his or her own language.³⁵¹

It is my opinion that such experiences of hospitality, of openness to contamination, disruption and even exploitation by the other, are more frequently and better experimented with in the frame of non-profit, non-market and 'autonomous' spaces or activity. The relative freedom that is gained when operating away from the constraints of professional standards and the need to make profit allows for a more generous, open and oftentimes (constructively) antagonistic relation towards one another. In this sense, we can begin to think of self-organised activity as a site where an alternative emotional and affective register is applicable and in which an alternative set of ethics are generated. Accordingly,

³⁴⁹ Jacques Derrida in Jacques Derrida and Geoffrey Bennington, 'Politics and Friendship: A Discussion with Jacques Derrida', presentation at University of Sussex, 1 December 1997, transcribed by Benjamin Noys <<http://hydra.humanities.uci.edu/derrida/pol+fr.html>> [accessed July 6th 2011]

³⁵⁰ *ibid*

³⁵¹ *ibid*

this ethical register constituted by values and commitments that are not wholly complicit and, indeed, at times directly in contradiction to those that sustain capitalism (individualism, competitiveness, manipulation, coercion and co-optation, assimilation, productivity at all cost and so on) produces a non-capitalist subjectivity.

It is worth recognising that as we talk about friendship and hospitality, particularly an unconditional hospitality we cannot overlook the role of love. Love appears as a political concept with greater frequency than might be expected in writings that have been used as theoretical frames for this thesis. This is, perhaps, because love - especially in relation to aesthetics - does a good job of conveying the strongly felt, yet impossible to fully articulate, desire that we associate with significant experiences. As The Free Association writes:

There are moments of rupture, the creation of new worlds. What previously seemed impossible suddenly appears quite rational. Such ruptures are a chasm that rational calculations or pre-existing interest can't cross. The political concept of love, which incorporates pre-rational, affective politics, seems more attuned to the task ... We can't just wish a political relationship of love into existence. Such experiences are concrete and specific, they can't be unproblematically universalized. We'd do better to treat them as trainings in love.³⁵²

Similarly, in Hardt and Negri's *Commonwealth*, large sections are given over to the fact of the experience of love being a constitutive event in line with the ruptures of aesthetic and social experience we have covered in this thesis:

Love is an ontological event in that it marks a rupture with what exists and the creation of the new. Being is constituted by love.³⁵³

But it is also understood as an unending process by which we learn to relate to each other and the world in a non-capitalist, 'common' manner that is tied up in the production of a

³⁵² The Free Association, *Moments of Excess: Movements, Protest and Everyday Life* (Oakland: PM Press, 2011), pp. 99-100

³⁵³ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), p.181

postcapitalist subjectivity.³⁵⁴ Hardt and Negri even have a few things to say about love's antithesis:

Evil is the corruption of love that creates an obstacle to love, or to say the same thing with a different focus, evil is the corruption of the common that blocks its production and productivity ... The struggle to combat evil thus involves a training or education in love.³⁵⁵

This 'educational' or pedagogic quality of love, echoed by The Free Association, also resonates with JK Gibson-Graham's economic theory in which they suggest that:

There are experimental practices that we can employ to re-educate ourselves, to convince our bodies to adopt fundamentally different attitudes "that we intellectually entertain as belief", thereby producing new affective relations with the world.³⁵⁶

And furthermore that:

We need to foster a "love of the world", as Arendt says, rather than masterful knowing, or melancholy or moralistic detachment. To do this perhaps we need to draw on the pleasures of friendliness, trust, conviviality, and companionable connection.³⁵⁷

What we return to here, then, is the idea of the conviviality, the pleasure, the 'fun' of non-capitalist activity as having some constitutive power in terms of the production of postcapitalist subjectivity. Furthermore, it gives new meaning when we say something is done 'for love and not money'; a phrase that I have found to be the most basic way of explaining non-capitalist and self-organised activity in practical situations. If this is how we are to explain such activity, then, we need to take love seriously as a political concept. The danger in doing this, as we no doubt risk here, is of slipping in to a moralistic stance that is,

³⁵⁴ 'Love is a process of the production of the common and the production of subjectivity.' Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), p.180

³⁵⁵ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), p.195

³⁵⁶ J.K. Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), p.7

³⁵⁷ *ibid*, p.6

at best, hippyishly apolitical and, at worst, in complete contradiction to the political project that is gestured at in this thesis, because of love's apparent grounding in a benign human nature.

This is a risk noted by Critchley when he writes that 'the problem with contemporary ethics is ... the risk of a moralization of politics and hence the risk of depoliticization.'³⁵⁸ but he sees this as surmountable in that a place for ethics in politics should:

lead to the development of alternative ethical frameworks. It might indeed lead to the cultivation of an infinitely demanding ethics of commitment and political resistance that can face and face down depoliticizing moralization.³⁵⁹

On the issue of 'human nature' - the elephant in the room in any critical discussion about either ethics or the affects and emotions related to various types of activity including the political and aesthetic - we return to the analogy of walking together. Human nature is not a fixed element that should act as a qualifying category that determines who can be in or out of the group, or what is and is not antagonistic to capital, but, rather, a process to be experimented with and shown fidelity to. As Hardt and Negri write:

The question is not what invariant defines human nature, in other words, but *what human nature can become*. The most important fact about human nature (if we still want to call it that) is that it can be and is constantly being transformed. A realist political anthropology must focus on this process of metamorphosis. This brings us back to the issue of making the multitude, through organization and self-transformation. Questions of good and evil can only be posed after the making of the multitude is initiated, in the context of its project.³⁶⁰

It is my hope to have demonstrated here that artistic and self-organised cultural activity is a site that produces and progresses a set of ethical values and principles that exceed the

³⁵⁸ Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London: Verso, 2008), p.130

³⁵⁹ Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London: Verso, 2008), p.130

³⁶⁰ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), p.191

norms of capitalism. As such, it produces a subjectivity that can be understood as postcapitalist, or, better, willing and capable of engaging in a project aimed at the realisation of postcapitalism. This conception of the relationship between social transformation and subjectivity is, as I have written, not a deterministic one – that is, the subjectivity outlined will not naturally or organically lead to social change as if it were simply a case of flicking switches in people and watching them set off on a course towards the destruction of capitalism – but I do understand it as a prerequisite to any lasting social change that might occur. The ability to think ‘beyond’ capitalism is grounded in our ability to recognise and articulate desires that exceed the principles of individual private property and the competitive, protectionist, essentialism this entails. I hope to have illustrated throughout this thesis that art plays a significant part in the realisation of, training in and experimentation with these desires.

I feel it necessary to offer some final words on the manner in which the content of this thesis reflects back on my own practice and my position as a self-styled ‘precarious artworker’. Over the course of this investigation – which is a dual one that has occurred in tandem with my practice - I have illustrated that the creation of aesthetic refrains in and across the three ecologies (mental, social and environmental) is a necessary and potentially socially transformative task, in so far as it contributes to the production of a postcapitalist subjectivity and the realisation of an ethico-aesthetic paradigm. I have gone further and suggested that there is a primary role for activity that has been described variously in this thesis as self-organised, DIY, informal, covert, ‘dark matter’ in creating the conditions for postcapitalism. In reference to my ‘precarious’ or ‘flexible’ position as an artist-with-or-without-a-capital-A, writer, educator, musician, member of workers co-operative, and as someone who sits on various steering groups and boards (many unwaged and all with varying degrees of relation to the capitalist sphere) I might well conclude that such uncertainty and variety is a condition to embrace rather than to curse.

Such a tack has difficult political ramifications, especially given that the majority of struggles ‘on the street’, that demand both my attention and participation as someone interested in social change, are based around the fight against precarity and proposed

austerity measures. I have empathy and show solidarity with such struggles, the most recent being demonstrations against the changes in pension contributions for teachers with a planned general strike later in the year. However, I find it difficult to get fully behind such reformist struggles knowing deep down that the conditions forced by austerity measures – the necessity to work across different fields rather than be able to securely specialise in one area and the movement of cultural production into the ‘margins’ of self-organisation – change little for me personally; my solidarity requires my imagining myself in a different position.

To talk, momentarily and somewhat apologetically, as a solipsist, I might suggest the current crisis of capitalism to be a moment ripe for inversion. I do not want to reform work but abolish it completely. Precarious and flexible labour conditions, for me, are not to be bemoaned but rather to be recognised as a nearing towards the communist ideal that ‘makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic.’³⁶¹ Put otherwise, the current crisis is a crisis we have created; capitalism is in its death throes. Rather than spending energy in resuscitating it, we are better taking these conditions, however difficult, as the starting point for a new creation. The same applies to the rhetoric and questionable policies of The Big Society and DIY government. The time is ripe for a ‘critique of overidentification’,³⁶² that is, not to resist such policies based on their patent inadequacy and ill-judgement, but to instead follow them through in a manner that exceeds the lack of authenticity in the original offer. It is disarmingly clear that the end point is the dissolution of government and political economy as we know it. My feelings are that art, and self-organised activity in particular, have been areas in which prefigurative experimentation - ‘jamming’ with postcapitalist ethics and methods - has been happening for a long time and can prepare us for the fallout of the dissolution of all that was thought to be solid. In this way, then, I hope, as an individual engaged in the experimentation and reflection on these

³⁶¹ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, ed. C.J Arthur, *The German Ideology* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1991), p.54

³⁶² BAVO, eds., *Cultural Activism Today: The Art of Over-Identification* (Rotterdam: Episode Publishers, 2007)

activities, to be making a contribution to the possibility of a better world; by being one voice in the choir, and an active contributor to a rich and improvised postcapitalist composition.

I am, however, not unaware of the potentially naïve optimism contained within such a position, not to mention the danger of crassly underestimating the magnitude or the impact that such measures will have; that is, exactly how bad things will get for many people even if I, by some stroke of fortune, manage to escape or ride out the crisis. Furthermore, in terms of a 'self-inquiry', no matter how deferred, the above conclusion demonstrates little other than that I have simply learned how to appraise and justify my own position and work. A more pressing issue, then, is how this particular inquiry shapes my future activity.

I described in the introduction to this thesis the manner in which my practice 'leads' the theoretical contextualisation and reflection I perform and as such they are presented here as two separate but interlinked modes of inquiry. This is not to suggest though that my reflection is relegated to the role of an afterthought, a retroactive justification. Rather the reflection becomes a demand made on the practice that feeds back into it, like the 'virtuous cycle' of the ethical demand Critchley has outlined. In my practice, my daily doing, something is produced that requires appraisal. This appraisal highlights the inadequacies and shortcomings of the practice and so informs subsequent activity. This activity never quite fits. It reveals itself as lacking in some areas, but, crucially, as producing an excess elsewhere and, as such, this excess moves the theorising forward. Such is one cycle - one rhythm - of my life activity. Another, that both resides within and surrounds this cycle, is the relation between ethics and politics. In the cycle of praxis previously described, certain ethical positions are produced, critiqued and tested. These ethical positions then inform how I judge political or socially transformative activity - that which I consider as contributing to a better world - and, accordingly, shape my activity. This, in turn, alters the ethical landscape that informs my judgement, and so on and so forth.

All that is left to do, then, is to return to the beginning that, in effect, is a return to uncertainty; although this time, perhaps, a better-informed uncertainty. This is to begin the

cycle, to start the beat once more, hopefully, with more excess and vigour and, if I have done my job sufficiently, with an additional critical friend in you, the reader.

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