

# **Speculation as a Mode of Production in Art and Capital**

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### Abstract

Why 'speculation as a mode of production'? The formulation conjoins the two senses of speculation pertinent to this thesis – the speculative praxis of art, and the speculative logic of capital. It also attempts to give a specific critical valence to the phenomenon of the 'creative industries' which was based on the ideological elision of these two registers of the speculative with the goal of founding a new regime of accumulation on their union. Since that time, we have seen the global economic and social crisis displace this idea from the centre of policy-makers' agendas as the always-latent coercive side of 'creativity' is revealed: creativity as a survival strategy for disinvested populations as 'wealth-creators' go on accumulating. At the same time, there are attempts to re-start accumulation on ever more marginal and self-exploiting grounds, at best as homespun alternatives rather than organized challenges to the dominance of abstract value. In this situation, it is more than ever necessary to find the points of convergence between the desires for capital maximization and social emancipation, and ways to disentangle them which the impacts of the crisis may bring to light. I take artistic production as my field of analysis because this is where these ideologies intersect most dramatically.

While speculative thought refers mainly to art and aesthetics, particularly in their connection to re-imagining social relations, the 'speculative logic of capital' can be broadly defined as the self-expanding, or self-valorising, dynamic of capital as such – speculation as social form - rather than a subset of it which can be named as 'the financial industry', although finance has specificities which are discussed in their own right. 'Speculation as a mode of production' thus refers to the open-ended processes of art and politics, as well as the overdetermined process of value expansion in capital. It seeks to encompass both a subjective and an objective mode for the social expression of capital in the ongoing era of neoliberalism. This period has witnessed the subjective qualities of creativity, flexibility and innovation become the objective factors of workplace productivity, while objective productivity itself shifts to the indeterminacy and risk associated with 'creative financial instruments' as the primary mode of capital accumulation. This thesis will draw a parallel between contemporary capital and contemporary art as they come to constitute the poles of a society structured around speculation.

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## Speculation as a Mode of Production in Art and Capital

### Preface

Nineteenth-century English craftsman and political organizer William Morris was known for his untiring championing of artisanal production as part and parcel of social revolution, and art furnished the prototype: 'Art is the expression of joy in labour rather than an exclusive luxury.'<sup>1</sup> Over a century later, the relationship between de-alienated labour, artistic labour and social change in industrial civilization has undergone many torsions and mutations. One of myriad illustrations of these would have to be the artistic work of Christine Hill, which consists of producing, enacting and collecting the activities and paraphernalia of small business. She both runs a small boutique in Berlin and thematises the processual aspects of this proprietorship as part of the enterprise, reflecting on a rapidly 'outmoded' but perhaps back-in-vogue form of artisanal trade which becomes ever less distinguishable from the economic profile of the contemporary artist. Another artist, Jeremy Hutchinson, upends Morris' rejection of industrial production by commissioning 'erroneous products' from East Asian factories. The resulting objects, the form of which Hutchinson leaves to the discretion of the worker in question – some are meticulously destroyed, others whimsically altered - then embody the loving, artisanal, 'concrete' labour of factory operatives who otherwise have no control over their work. Finally, Theaster Gates has forged a lucrative and critically significant career which has mobilized interest and investment in derelict historically African-American areas of Chicago through a complex and performative practice involving object-making, advocacy and the physical rehabilitation of spaces, a sort of benign artist-*run* (rather than art-led) gentrification. What can all these practices be said to share, however provisionally? They straddle artistic and non-artistic types of labour, gambling on an artistic practice reaching past art – but by means of art - for a critical purchase or real-world effects where art has no pre-existing claims. This is the characteristic gesture of 'speculation as a mode of production'.

Why 'speculation as a mode of production'? The reason for choosing this formulation is that it conjoins the two senses of speculation relevant here – the speculative practices of art, and financial speculation as an intensification of capital's intrinsic tendency for future-oriented growth. It also attempts to give a specific critical valence to the formation 'creative industries' which was based on the ideological elision of these two registers of the speculative with the goal of harmonising them and founding a new regime of accumulation on this synthesis. While speculative thought is a constant feature of art, particularly in its political dimension, 'financial speculation' can be more broadly defined as the self-expanding, or self-valorising, dynamic of capital as such which is highlighted in value-form analysis – speculation as social form - rather than a subset of it which can be named as 'the financial industry', although this more specific focus is not excluded.

Given the fading prominence of the 'creative industries' discourse in UK economic policy and beyond, it is still worth asking in what sense more recent ideologemes such as 'Big Society' continue to refer to the affect and subjectivity of a perhaps more socially inflected notion of 'creativity', that of co-operation and self-organisation, in order to solicit the kind of legitimacy for accomplishing deeply regressive agendas that in earlier periods would have been sought by addressing the creative individual.

Hence, 'speculation as a mode of production' refers to the open-ended processes of art and politics, as well as the overdetermined processes of the increase of value in capitalism. In this way, it seeks to encompass both a subjective and an objective mode for the social expression of capital in the present and the recent past, the period of neoliberalism. This period has witnessed the subjective qualities of creativity, flexibility and innovation become the objective

factors of workplace productivity, while objective productivity itself shifts to the indeterminacy and risk associated with 'creative financial instruments' as the dominant mode of capital accumulation. Financialisation augurs a normalization of speculative processes as the core logic of capital accumulation. This is reflected in the social field in the institutionalisation of speculative processes (such as 'risk') in governance, work and welfare. The exploitation of risk (or risk-based exploitation) as the cornerstone of social reproduction in this period can be substantiated through a panoply of empirical studies and argumentation, but the concern here is to draw a parallel between contemporary capital and contemporary art as they come to constitute the poles of a society structured around speculation, reflected in social practices as diverse as systems of welfare provision to the constitution of the self and the image of work. The subjective experience of speculation becomes economically codified as 'creativity' in the neoliberal labour market. As a consequence, creativity becomes, paradoxically, a characteristic of abstract labour – the generic category for the social institution of wage-labour in a capitalist society, indifferent as to content. This thesis will argue that such a shift heralds the conversion of the hypostatized creativity of art into a pre-eminent instance of speculation as a mode of production, since art becomes no longer just a commodity in the market or a gratuitous activity but a tool of socialization and re-valorisation of land, populations and political entities. It thus takes on a new instrumentality relative to the autonomy and heteronomy assigned to art by Marxist critics such as Theodor Adorno .

The profound structural analogy between art and money is that each represents instances of self-valorising value, insofar as both are social mediations which are anchored in a self-referential or reflexive circuit of valorisation – critical value in art is generated from

transactions within its semantic domain, much as in speculative finance (or 'fictitious capital', in Marx's terms) money generates more money through transactions internal to financial markets. This homology, revealing both art and money as marked by the nebulosity and reflexivity of value claims, has been picked up by artists who collide so-called 'critical value' with 'capital value' in works exploring the social and formal correspondences between works of art and money. But the discussion of this symmetry is intended chiefly to illuminate another pole of art's relation to the real abstraction of the capital relation, one which is constituted by the homologies between art and a self-motivated and creative labour-force increasingly encouraged to see itself as an investment, i.e., to model itself on the endless productivity of capital rather than labour, but a financialised capital which expands endlessly and riskily without identifiable sources of surplus-value, or even property rights, to draw upon.

One aspect of this is the re-invention of labour as 'human capital', a shift which serves to eliminate labour as a separate and potentially antagonistic pole in the capital-labour relation. Labour also experiences itself as capital in its direct relationship to the financial system through the privatisation of social reproduction. This is the subsumption of key public assets such as pensions, housing and education into credit markets; public provision founded on social solidarity into commodified market assets founded on self-investment. Thus we can propose that speculation as a mode of production also implies a becoming-speculative of reproduction as well. This is where art becomes important, as it projects and promulgates forms of community and sociality, whether ideally or participatively, that re-socialize the subject of human capital and 'ask questions' in times of political quiescence. Art's ability to add value to places and situations with subjective and incalculable means gives an



emancipatory imago to labour and material conditions grown ever more exploitative, opaque and unalterable, and to its subjects, who seek to 'add value' to themselves as creative commodities ) in the labour market (in perverse continuity with Marxian understandings of the 'peculiar' commodity of labour-power as the only one capable of 'adding value' .

With art undergoing a dissemination over the last fifty years into social practices, policy frameworks and economic activities outside its usual domain, it is 'instrumentalised' or gets nearer to 'use-value', departing from its formal, or even structural, correspondence to pure exchange-value or, the 'absolute commodity', in Adorno's terms (absolute because the autonomous artwork is principally without use-value). At the same time, its constitutive other since the Modern era, wage-labour, comes to be decided more and more under the aegis of creativity, with use-values increasingly eclipsed by the 'exchange-values' of capacities and potentials rather than products, and wages frequently deferred or cancelled in favour of 'experience'. This emphasizes the ambiguity of 'use-value' in a society dominated by the form of value, and the ongoing structural proximity of art and capital in their common definition by exchange-value, despite, or even more firmly because of, a tendential emphasis on the use-value of art by its administrators. This use-value may be indissociable from exchange-value, as in arts-led property development, or it may be deemed indirectly useful if targeted at 'problem' communities - boosting economic participation, entrepreneurial habits and social cohesion. Here, art and labour, creativity and training, become harder and harder to tell apart. The growing proximity between art and labour starts to emerge as a zone of indistinction, signalling a re-shaping of labour by capital in its own mutable and restless image. Art, with its problematic relationship to use-value, emerges as a disciplinary apparatus able to differentiate between human capital which can and cannot be valorised, those who can

identify with their creativity as capital and those who cannot. This seems to call for a re-consideration of the role of use-value and labour for capital in its speculative mode of production and correspondingly what strategies can serve to displace or negate it.

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Quoted in press release for Christine Hall's *Small Business* exhibition at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York, 17 November – 22 December 2012. Also used in 2008 for an 'Art. Design. Jewellery. Exhibition.' at Zurich's Sold Gallery: "For the first time ever OH DEAR presents her work at a solo exhibition and thereby enriches the international art jewellery scene. Simple and graphical. Subtle and delicate. Brute and romantic. Honest. Narrative, and always with a slight wink.'[http://www.spare-magazine.com/index.php?men1=2 & outside=587](http://www.spare-magazine.com/index.php?men1=2&outside=587) Both accessed 18 November 2012. The original source for this quotation turned out to be untraceable.

## **Speculation as a Mode of Production in Art and Capital**

### **Introduction**

'Speculation as a mode of production' is a heuristic term which I am introducing in order to more closely examine the dimension of capital which seeks to directly commodify subjectivity and social relations as individual capital. It thus aligns the characteristic mode of capital accumulation -self-expanding value - with the self-realization of the subject. 'Speculation as a mode of production', then, attempts to conceptualize the relationship of artistic speculation to speculative capital as a biopolitical device for the production of subjects who identify with capital immanently, rather than ideologically. The historical mutations of art and of labour in capitalist modernity provide the key to such an examination, which will be conducted predominantly with the tools of value-form analysis and Marxian critical aesthetic theory. Here, the generic social form of labour in capital – abstract labour – and the generic form of artistic production – non-labour – will serve as the parameters of the inquiry, as they engender forms of subjectivity and subjectivation in attraction to and repulsion from the 'automatic subject' of value.

### **Speculation and Abstraction**

Speculation as a mode of production is marked by the dependence of normal accumulation on the de-valorisation of labour and social reproduction rather than the expansion of total social capital.<sup>1</sup> As capital's main product has always been the class relation between capital and labour which ensures capital's expanded reproduction, it is necessary to track whether these circumstances engender a shift in this class relation. For this, we need to return consistently to the categories of real abstraction and abstract labour in order to see how the shift from production to speculation unfolds in the production of subjectivity and in the social division of labour, an account to which art, as a form of 'emancipated labour', is essential. The

parallels between the contemporary articulations of art and labour, as well as the blurring of their distinctiveness, allows us to track this shift. The notion of speculation as a mode of production can be elucidated by reference to the industrialization of creativity, as well as the refashioning of state cultural support for the arts in line with neoliberal social and economic policy. These are all aspects of the dominance of the value-form in arenas of social production and reproduction which neither produce value in the classical sense nor seem amenable to the law of value as a measure of what they do produce.

A critique of political economy that would be adequate to this context should be interested in the place of art in these processes because the artistic mode of production is often used as a dissimulation of capitalist work, a way of hooking the affective investment in the escape from alienated work onto the imposition of free labour. While it is crucial to distinguish the unpaid intern in a cultural centre from the artist producing commodities or just 'research' for an uncertain market, in either case the valorisation of creativity is a mode of producing subjectivity that aligns the interests of workers with the speculative nature of capital, a way of installing speculation at the most intimate levels of subjective existence (whereas the 'ordinary' instance of the wage-relation sees the interests of labour and capital aligned through the wage, which is separable from the person). This calls for a delineation of the current determinate forms of 'real abstraction' as they both exceed the politics of labour and the forms of class belonging they presupposed, and prefigure other ones.

The prism of recent post-conceptual art, with its ontology of self-expanding and self-referential value is apposite here. Although Conceptual Art was initially impelled by anti-commodity principles (the famed, and famously misleading, 'de-materialization' thesis), it

actually reflected and anticipated a transition in capitalism from an economy centred on the production of industrial commodities to an economy centred on the control of intellectual property, trade in speculative assets, and financialised modes of accumulation while post-object art forms such as performance forecast a shift to (self-) 'performance' as the standard metric of all labour. Further, at a more generic level, art has a symmetry with capital in both its formal independence from labour, particularly in the moment of money capital, and the disavowal of its dependence on labour as the source of value. The re-contextualisation of non-artistic modes of labour and social processes within art, which is specific to art produced in the last few decades (and which, according to some, has been a red thread of Modernism much earlier, since Duchamp and Dada) presents an analogy with the extension of the commodity-form to previously un-capitalised or de-commodified sectors of social production. Thus we can see contemporary art as enacting a species of 'primitive accumulation'. From this standpoint, art in the era of speculative production has to be compared both with the category of abstract labour as generic social productivity structured by the wage and the value-form and with the category of money as self-valorising value as the two key expressions of real abstraction in capital. Such an investigation would start with analysing the fetishism of creativity as a kind of commodity-fetishism. In this, 'creativity' appears as a further and an exemplary case of the attribution to capital of the capacities of social production, capital as the 'body of the despot' Marx termed the basis of the 'Asiatic mode of production'.<sup>2</sup> Labour is represented in the 'creative economy' via an analogy between the infinite productivity of the creative subject and the infinite productivity of capital, an analogy which evokes ideological terms such as 'human capital' in neo-liberal governance and economics. The reification of creativity means equating it with the self-valorising capacities of capital, and effacing concepts of creativity which resist integration into a value

chain or which could be understood as more broadly social or transformative, rather than individualizing and profit-oriented (and profit more often for the rights-holder than the 'bearer' of such creative labour).

On this path, it is also imperative to take into account how the current phenomena of capitalist crisis are accelerating the objective and affective hollowing-out of the content of labour, whether it is the degradation of working conditions, an absence of overt class struggle or any subjective attachment to the job. The de-valorisation of labour-power as reflected in escalating unemployment but also the deficit cutbacks in the reproductive sphere exposes the contradiction between the rigid rule of the value-form over the mode of production and the dogma of 'flexibility' as the template for capital and 'human capital' alike. Labour's material identification with capital intensifies as credit rather than wages come to guarantee the necessities of life in times of plenty and austerity alike, suturing the interests of capital and labour closer together. Thus, the ideologeme of 'human capital' comes to embody a truth, the truth of social abstraction as it is experienced on the most prosaic and inescapable level.

### **Art as Abstract Labour?**

Abstract labour is the category Marx uses to define the specific form of social labour as it is performed in capitalism – value-producing labour. It overdetermines concrete instances of labour insofar as they are generic and interchangeable instances of labour for a wage. Yet there must be a qualitative change when this abstraction infuses the concrete to the extent that generic creativity (potential as such rather than a specifically skilled potential) becomes the archetype of capitalist work. On its face, proposing the notion of art as abstract labour is problematic because art production is not value-producing labour. It is a social institution

which mediates value produced elsewhere but which operates at a distance from the law of value as it structures wage-labour. Abstract labour may happen within art production, when outsourcing and industrial methods enter into the production process, but not directly in the concept of art production itself, which is aligned with an artisanal logic. Yet, when art comes to emulate other kinds of activity in its post-conceptual trajectory, including many which would be subsumed under 'labour', and when labour is increasingly performed under the aegis of qualities such as creativity, flexibility and indeterminacy, in the profile of the 'creative industries' as much as the temp-agency service or factory worker, art can be thought in a new conjunction with Marx's definition of abstract labour.

### **The Falling Price of Abstract Labour**

Part of the growing confusion between what constitutes artistic labour and abstract labour, aside from the promotion of generic creativity as the condition for all work, is the health of the art market and the elevation of the globally mobile entrepreneurial artist. This coincides with worsened conditions for those in employment, and the escalation of structural unemployment. It is unsurprising that artistic labour should grow more appealing as abstract labour is increasingly socially and economically de-valued. In the current moment, abstract labour as labour performed under the rule of the value-form grows more socially coercive inversely to the numbers fortunate enough to find situations of gainful exploitation, even fewer of which are productive of surplus-value – the latter a situation compounded by the spread of market-emulating models in the public sector. This is an outcome of the secular tendency to maintain the rate of profit through the de-valuation of labour. This de-valuation is triggered by factors like technological change, the expansion of the global labour market, and the shifting of resources from investment in surplus-value producing industries

('productive' capital) to speculation (financial capital as the primary form of accumulation). The de-valuation of labour is corollary to a de-valued capital when less surplus-value is generated by workforces shrunk by automation and job export. This surplus value then has less chance to be realized when that workforce becomes a shrinking market – a quandary which can temporarily be patched over by the credit boom, consequent on decades of restrictive monetary policy in the West that seeks to keep wages and inflation down to enhance profitability. This can be discussed in terms of a kind of 'fiscal Keynesianism'<sup>3</sup> wherein demand is boosted through interest-rate manipulation and credit instruments as real wages sink or flatten out. While this or other variations on the theory of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall will not form a substantial part of my exposition, it deserves mention as an influential factor in the changing circumstances for labour in recent decades, in the West and increasingly elsewhere. De-valuation of this kind is also behind the 'realization problem' that drives the switch to financialisation as the major strategy of accumulation. Such 'speculative capital' is often contrasted to the more socially responsible 'productive capital'.

### **Is There a Speculative Mode of Production?**

However, the argument here will be that speculative capital is not unproductive capital but that speculation itself constitutes a mode of production. Here I agree with Christian Marazzi when he puts forward the proposition that 'financialization is not an unproductive/parasitic deviation of growing quotas of surplus-value . . . but rather the form of capital accumulation symmetrical with new processes of value production.'<sup>4</sup> This would be heterodox going by Marx's sense of the term 'productive capital' to mean capital that extracts surplus-value from labour and reinvests it in expanding production, rather than capital that grows through derivative transactions, which would be termed 'fictitious capital'.<sup>5</sup> Yet what has to be



considered here is capital's contradictions and the solutions it has found to them since Marx's time, such as the hypertrophied growth of the financial sector to address issues of stagnation of profit rates and find new areas of investment. This shows that we have to be attentive not just to capital's operations under particular historical conditions, but to the status of finance as capital in its, so to speak, pure state:  $M - M'$ .<sup>6</sup> The production of anything is just a detour to the augmentation of money. How does such a 'pure' state function when it attains a social dominance on the scale observable in the present moment? Does the freedom of self-valorising value come to be identified with the freedom of the human subject, and how? Does art as the designated realm of the unconditioned and experimental in social life, in every way opposed to regimented and oppressive wage-labour, provide a topos to understand this? A caveat here is that I am considering art not so much in its character as an exceptional commodity but at a more integral analytic level as an activity that harbours emancipatory agency which can be commodified *insofar as* or *because* it seems to counter the universality of alienation and value. The utopia of money likewise seems to rest on the premise of escaping the contradictions of life overdetermined by the value-form. In this sense, both art and capital exert an ideological force through and against the negativity and constraint represented by labour. The expulsion of labour is more evident in financialised capitalism and in post-conceptual art practices, characterized as they both are by formal systems of validation and a denegation of the object, if industrial capitalism and 'pre-conceptual' art amplified labour and the aura of the material object. These tendencies then come to increasingly rebound on the properties of abstract labour.

We are now in a position to see the valorisation structures of art and the valorisation of capital as the two determinants of contemporary regimes of managing and performing labour. The

affinities and antagonisms between the speculative activity of art and the speculative activity of capital as the parameters of contemporary work happen through a reliance on what is most 'generic' in the subject common both to 'socially engaged' or otherwise expanded art practices and what is provisionally termed 'immaterial labour'. It is principally in this sense that it might be revealing to inquire whether art does not in fact become a variant of 'abstract labour' due to its codification of the 'generic' of human or social activity and due to the migration of creativity out of its association with art to become the byword for all labour. Does this perspective enable us to find antagonisms capable of being generalized to contemporary work which would be undetectable from the viewpoint of abstract labour as simply coextensive with wage-labour? A central notion here will be that the constitutive indeterminacy of the aesthetic driving the speculative mode of production can become an active negativity essential both for a rupture with that mode of production and for instituting the speculative as social change. For this we need to evaluate both the negativity and the progressive dimension of *abstraction* as discussed by Marx in order to dislodge art from its compensatory or affirmative role in the dominant formation of labour and capital united by speculation.

### **Chapter Outline of Thesis**

The first chapter will delineate the specific form of subjectivity that belongs to speculation as a mode of production. For this, I will first distinguish 'speculation as a mode of production' from the category of 'financialisation' as an account of speculative markets exerting an increasing influence on social, economic and political life in recent decades.

The understanding of subjectivity that is relevant here is of subjectivity as something which is thoroughly social and historical. As a social and historical category, the notion of subjectivity

at stake here calls initially for an ideological critique of the 'creativity' which models subjectivity on self-valorising value in line with the social dominance of self-valorising value in the shape of financialised capital. The concept of real abstraction joins up with that of the fetish character of the commodity to frame a definition of ideology which is generated reciprocally, if sometimes obliquely, with social reality, as that reality comes to be increasingly permeated by ideas of human nature as self-valorising value. This will lead to a discussion of 'human capital', tracing its basic features to the economic and discursive shifts usually named 'neo-liberalism' through a reading of, primarily, Michel Foucault's lectures in *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Jason Read, Gary S. Becker, and Michel Feher. The consolidation of a model of personhood based on the entrepreneur and/or the consumer which these accounts reconstruct and, in Becker's case, represent, have certain consequences. On the one hand, there is the reversal entailed by the notion of the capitalist as a worker and the worker as the owner of 'human capital', which both appropriates and cancels the political subjectivity of work as alienation, and, on the other, the monadic notion of experience that stems from this consumer personhood, which leads to a politics construing change on exclusively personal and self-maximising grounds, bearing out the truth of 'human capital' ideology (which, like all ideologies, creates the grounds for its own legitimation). These accounts, however, do not exhaust the story of how the open-ended contingency of creativity becomes reconciled with value in the production of subjectivity. Later in the thesis, I approach this process through the category of 'real subsumption', thus attending to how (social) subjectivity is shaped by the structures of production and property. The contiguity between empowerment and exploitation is starkly present in the notion of 'human capital', though in some ways this is a re-statement of the much older appropriation by capital of the liberal notion of 'freedom', an individual freedom which is then extrapolated to corporate formations such as business and

the state and is opposed to collective formations such as workers' self-organization. The elision of economic rationality with the generic transformative capacity of the human that Marx terms 'species-being' is summed up in 'human capital', but also points beyond itself. To make that more precise, I will be referring briefly to the arguments of Jean-François Lyotard, who in *Libidinal Economy* tries to disrupt the reconciliation between human and capital with a negative anthropology of excess, waste and intensity.

The second chapter will start with a comparison between the foregoing depiction of waste and uselessness as a decisively *aesthetic* project of negation which can be extended to the increasingly socially displaced, politically inchoate and materially atomized role of labour in capital.<sup>7</sup> What is meant by an 'aesthetic project of negation' will be established by reference to the Kantian and post-Kantian tradition of Romantic aesthetics,<sup>8</sup> including the work of Marxist critical aesthetic theorists such as Theodor Adorno and Stewart Martin, which sees art operating at a constitutive distance to socially useful activity. It will trace the disjunction between labour and freedom in the vision of human autonomy proposed in this legacy of critical aesthetics: the well-known dialectic of autonomy and heteronomy. In the critical vision of post-Kantian and Romantic aesthetics, unlike in e.g. autonomist Marxism, human freedom cannot result from the *appropriation* of humanity's productive powers – labour – from capital, since labour is understood as always and by its nature unfree or compulsory, counterpoised to play as the definitively human capacity for free and purposeless creation.

Interestingly, there is a similar dissonance between creativity and labour in the industrialized creativity of the 'creative economy'. The rent-seeking forms of value-extraction typical of this economy try to sever all social or ontological links with labour, preferring to valorise

commodities whose component of labour seems to have dropped down to almost no value, as in digital products and the marketing data valorised by Facebook. This is also the case in those instances of 'creative industries' where market metrics proletarianise 'creative labour', or subsume that which has so far not been subsumed as value-producing processes: areas of cultural or knowledge production that operate on public subsidy. The tensions and contradictions which emerge not only in labour thus uncertainly subsumed, but in the subsumption of all labour in capital will be developed through an exposition of the arguments of Moishe Postone and Christopher Arthur on, respectively, abstract labour as the definitive form of capitalist social relations and on 'counter-production', labour's resistance to total incorporation in the process of value expansion.

The question of autonomy and heteronomy frames the inquiry into the constitutive bind of art as being both like and unlike socially necessary labour in capitalism. Art as a realization of freedom as posed by Romanticism discloses its implicit contradiction – its denial of labour, in which it also opposes Marx's concept of 'species-being' – but also that this contradiction cannot be eradicated by 'socializing' art or dissolving its distinction from labour since art does contain a yet-abstract freedom from capitalist work, capitalist time and capitalist value, a freedom which is only accessible through and despite its commodity status: the condition of its critical distance.<sup>9</sup> What happens to this dialectic under the conditions of industrialized creativity and the degeneration of labour as a political and economic category – eroding the specificity of both art and labour in the process? The figure of the artist as a mediator, manager or entrepreneur co-ordinating disparate and multiple kinds of activity, including the labour of others, will be explored from its Conceptual and post-conceptual trajectories, citing artistic practices that have attempted to translate labour into art, as well as artists who have

enacted pointed analogies between the value structures of art and money, such as Robert Morris, Maria Eichhorn, Jan-Peter Hammer and others. This managerial-investment strand of contemporary art as one manner of reflecting on the emergence of a generic artistic subjectivity after Duchamp and after Modernism will be discussed in counterpoint with the 'workerist' strands thrown up in relational and participatory forms anticipated by the 1960s and 1970s practices, where I single out 'The Trainee' (2008) by Pilvi Takala. Here I will allude to the critical investigations of John Roberts on 'de-skilling' and 're-skilling' as categories of art's relationship to labour. In all these cases, what is at issue is using the abstraction of activity possible in art production as a point of leverage in the relations of production and power that obtain in the 'real world', in real abstraction. As has been observed in recent curatorial and art-critical interventions, the figure of the artist as service provider rather than maker of objects coincided with the transition from goods to services in economic primacy in the West.<sup>10</sup> Yet, whatever the homologies between art and labour, the thematizations of labour in art, or the role of art in social inclusion agendas ('regeneration', 'employability'), the social division of labour in capital dictates that art is the exception upholding the rule of the universality of labour determined by abstract value. The self-legislating uniqueness of art provides a model for human autonomy, even a political vision of such autonomy achieved, only on the condition it is separated from the heteronomy that is the rule elsewhere.<sup>11</sup> Thus it is self-cancelling as well as self-legislating and the history briefly sketched out above can also be viewed as examples of self-cancellation, the attempted negation and re-vindication of the exceptionality of the artistic subject and her work which is not labour. The artist as a 'blue-sky' thinker is not solely the preserve of 'creative industry' ideologues, seeking to re-shape all forms of work into infinite self-realization without guarantees. This conception also prevails within the institution of art.<sup>12</sup> This chapter will be about tracking the philosophical, aesthetic

and critical quandaries of the position of the artist as a prototypical worker in the age of creative abstract labour, and will try to reformulate them in terms of the negativity inherent in the indeterminacy of generic creativity as a rule for labour; or, in terms recognizable to Adorno, the negativity that marks autonomy as the scar of its break with the heteronomous. Throughout, I will be using 'indeterminacy' in the sense given to it by Immanuel Kant in his definition of the role of indeterminacy in 'aesthetic judgement' and the 'free play of the faculties'.<sup>13</sup> I will contend that the passage through labour for art, and the passage through art for labour are both crucial; the creative subject of labour needs to traverse the de-subjectivation, materiality and illegitimacy of artistic activity, while artistic production needs to traverse the negativity of abstract labour as its own most intimate parameter. Negativity is also a question pivotal to the calculations of profit and risk that animate financial markets. I will finish by taking a look at contingency, probability and temporality as they operate in speculative finance as ways of mediating negativity and entropy. Speculative finance is a form of valorisation predicated on the arbitrage of value asymmetries in time, provided that the homogeneous and empty time of capital extends indefinitely into the future. Financialisation's main social form, debt, provides a perfect illustration of how the future (and the present) is cancelled by the expansion of value. However, the priority of finance and its regimes of debt-servicing eventually starts to menace value's expansion by restricting production and consumption, as we see now.

In the third chapter, I would like to continue and deepen the analysis of the autonomy/heteronomy distinction that renders art both the constitutive exception and the inverted mirror image of 'unfree' labour by looking at the immanence of freedom to the concept of capital. The contrast between the 'coercion of the economic' and the reign of 'perfect liberty,

equality, property and Bentham' was picked out by Marx as the key difference between previous modes of production and capitalism, with its strict separation of the political and economic.<sup>14</sup> Further, this separation was integral to the radical disconnection between the idealization of the free marketplace as the template for all social interaction, and the hidden abode of production' (and reproduction, as we will see). The existence of two realms which were fully interdependent – the formal equality of politics and state institutions and the substantive inequality of the relations of production and economic institutions - is grounded on a mystification of equality which, on the one hand, sees economic and political freedom as utterly separate, and on the other, makes no distinction between the mutual antagonism of a civic freedom which render all citizens equal before the law and private property which is predicated on class hierarchy. Marx contends that such a notion of equality is both modelled upon and echoes the equality of commodities in a market, which would make the liberal concept of equality a species of commodity-fetishism.<sup>15</sup>

The voluntary nature of the contractual relation at the heart of capitalist social relations is of paramount importance, as it is the axis of both stability and instability of those relations. The domestic labour debates in Marxist feminism and the Wages for Housework campaign, as well as the rise of practices redolent of the service sector in Conceptual and post-conceptual art, (such as the 'Maintenance Art' of Mierle Laderman Ukeles in the 1970s – housework in museums), interestingly captures these tensions in the sphere of reproductive labour. Here, the voluntary was used as an ideological bulwark *against* the wage-contract, with the help of regressive notions of gender that portrayed women as finding their fulfilment in the home; hence, the demand for a wage was seen as key to breaking this alliance, and then as potential leverage to challenge waged exploitation as well. The imbrication of 'free' and 'unfree' labour



as different relations to the primacy of abstract labour are emphasised in the example of housework as an art practice, as it throws a light on not only the blurring between service-sector work and its appearance in the institution of art either in representational or performative ways, but on the reliance of that institution, and the broader dimensions of the 'creative industries', on unpaid work and feudal and informal species of labour relations. In all these cases, the desire to escape from alienated and alienating work becomes a mechanism for imposing work, and the voluntary nature of the capitalist contract is suspended, or rather, the 'contractual' aspect is split off from the 'voluntary', which grows at its expense. Here, envisioning the institution of art to be as much subordinated to abstract labour as any other workplace can help us examine how much affective investment in capital's promise of freedom subsists as a subjective refusal of capitalist relations of production that objectively reinforces them. Just as the kinds of labour and subjectivity operative in art enter into new relations to abstract labour under conditions of a generalized and industrialized creativity, labour re-configured as limitless creativity enters into a new relation with the structurally crucial voluntary aspect of the capitalist social contract – as well as modifying the relationship between potentiality as the content of labour-power and labour as the substance of value.

The boundaries between art and labour become indistinct with the expansion of finance and the expansion of art in the speculative mode of production; yet it is the loss of identification with the source of employment and the growth of its existential as well as objective contingency that argues not just a crisis of class politics, but a crisis of reproduction of the class relation. The de-valorisation of labour-power as reflected in low or stagnant wages and dwindling conditions and the retrenchment of the 'social wage' of the welfare state is both a result of and a precondition for this crisis. From the side of capital, value can now be extracted

twice: in the workplace, and through the credit system into which workers become integrated through the necessary recourse to personal finance for education, health care, acceptable standards of consumption, etc. This is speculation as an unavoidable way of life for those who do not control the means of production and reproduction, and for those who do, a de-valourised labour force subject to a de-valourising capital which can at least generate wealth for itself through their securitised debt. The use of debt as a policy instrument to discourage working-class militancy and social demands is hardly new – the federal promotion of home ownership through mortgage subsidies since the 1930s had just this character, and this historical trend is crucial to the American 'cultural preference' for home ownership that fuelled the subprime mortgage crisis. And further back, Marx already in *Capital* speaks of 'the public debt' as a major tool of capitalist discipline over the working class on a global scale. However, debt acquires a new ubiquity and hegemonic quality when the working-class is recomposed in the image of speculative capital. Here it would be relevant to again mention the 'tendency of the rate of profit to fall', the Marxian principle (and inveterate bugbear of Marxist economics) that with technological change, fewer wage-labourers are required and the greater the numbers of the population expelled from production. As labour is the substance of value, minimizing labour means that there is less surplus-value produced, and the profit rate (eventually, given an equality of technology and enough market saturation) plummets, thus the attempts to maintain it through financialisation and rent-seeking, much of which is enabled by precisely those technological changes tending to expel labour from the production process.<sup>16</sup> The constant absorption and expulsion of labour is perhaps one of capital's main contradictions. While capital's attempt to solve this contradiction with the 'flight into credit' and speculative valorisation is historically not new, if exacerbated in the recent past and in the present, the re-composition of workers as speculative 'human capital'

throws up yet another set of contradictions. Some of these are posed by the re-configuring of artistic practices through the politics of wage labour, which is seen as a re-politicization of the speculative 'creative' subject as it is reproduced in the institutions of art.

This chapter will then re-visit some of the themes in the second chapter on Romantic aesthetics and the role of art in the vision of an emancipated human community, which will be developed in chapter four as well. I will inquire into what is meant by a specifically *aesthetic* form of negativity with relation to the 'generic' as it comes to define post-Duchampian artistic practices and 'post-Fordist' labour alike. Here, I will be engaging chiefly with Giorgio Agamben's analysis of the 'groundless ground' of the aesthetic subject<sup>17</sup> and Kant's concept of aesthetic judgment.<sup>18</sup>

In the fourth and final chapter, I intend to ground my account of how forms of creative labour operate at a distance to the law of value without thereby being antithetical to or subversive of the value-form. I start out with Thierry de Duve's account of the emergence of 'whatever' as the parameter for art production after Duchamp: the modern abstraction of 'purposeless purpose' is fulfilled by the post-modern indeterminacy of what qualifies as art.<sup>19</sup> A roster of creative practices whose mode of production is artisanal, with value captured in primary and secondary markets, such as art, or more industrialized forms which capture value primarily through intellectual property regulations, can be termed 'speculative' because, like financial capital, their economic base consists of value produced elsewhere (although there have been arguments that the augmentation processes of 'fictitious capital' is strictly speaking production of value, rather than capture of future value produced by labour).<sup>20</sup> As Ben Fine and Costas Lapavistas note, 'the forms of value become the general means for facilitating

economic intercourse regardless of the relation of particular activities to abstract labour.<sup>21</sup>

Although I will attempt in this thesis to widen the definition of 'abstract labour' so that it can encompass precisely those 'particular activities' that Fine and Lapavistas claim are unrelated to it, the point that it is the forms of value we should be looking at is salient, as it is precisely through tracing those relations that the generic social form of labour operating at this historical stage of capital can be determined.

The previous chapters will have depicted the erosion of subjective identification with work as an erosion of the division between art and labour. This makes it possible to see the coming-together of art and labour on the common ground of 'uselessness', with labour emulating art in its performativity and uncertain relation to value-production. The artwork is an 'absolute commodity', according to Adorno, because in it is present only exchange-value; art is by definition not an object of utility, and has no use-value. If, as is increasingly the case, many forms of work for a wage can also not lay a claim to be producing 'use-values', while many artistic projects are undertaken for socially useful ends, this allows us to see the contingency of the prevalent notion of 'use', mediated as it is by exchange-value. The delegitimation of use-value has so far meant an escalation of exchange-value, and has strengthened the grip of value. The confusion between exchange-value and use-value in the 'self-valorisation' of human capital is perhaps the most glaring symptom of this, followed closely by 'socially engaged practices' in contemporary art.

The elimination of the value-form, rather than the affirmation of the power of labour, is the essential ingredient to displacing capitalism. The generic and alienating character of abstract labour means that (contra much orthodox historical materialism) labour has no positive

content to be affirmed (labour only has value for capital), while its empirical blurring in the spread of modes of exploitation that do not produce value and tend, if anything, toward non-reproduction of older and more typical valorisation mechanisms (speculation opposed to investment, for example), or which do not produce use-value, like finance and art, all point to the value-form as the pre-eminent object of critical praxis, and to the necessity of widening the margins of waste and unproductivity having the (contingent) potential of negating the continued domination of the value-form which for now they merely exemplify. Such an understanding would foreground social reproduction as prominently as I have so far foregrounded the equivocal forms of labour which tendentially and ideologically narrow the gap between the valorisation of labour and the valorisation of capital under the aegis of creativity. The idea of art itself as a form of social reproduction is important here. It will be developed in two ways, one with regard to art as an 'automatic subject', and the artist as the reproducer of herself as an instance of this subject, and the other with reference to the practice of UK's Artist Placement Group, who sought to come up with a new concept of socially necessary activity for the artist which placed the artist squarely in the midst of economic and administrative activity as a producer of speculative value. This example corroborates the contention that use value and exchange value cannot be thought outside the social form of value as it obtains in a capitalist society, and art registers use or uselessness according to the changes undergone by this social form. What happens when both use and uselessness are sublated in the form of the speculative? Such an indistinction, as it obtains for labour and for art, can be held to be symptomatic of barriers to accumulation reached by the speculative mode of production, as well as the forms of antagonism that can arise from this impasse.<sup>22</sup>

In the thesis conclusion, I try to both recapitulate the thesis' central arguments and point to some further directions for research in how to specify art for speculation as a mode of production. While the thesis mainly dwelt on art's relationship to abstract labour in the regime of the speculative, future substantive work needs to be done in examining 'value-reflexive' and 'value-critical' practices in art, where the logic of value relations becomes both the principle and the content of the artwork. This would also imply a closer analysis of how art functions in its own markets, markets which can in many ways be considered paradigmatic for speculation as a mode of production.<sup>23</sup> I additionally sum up the implications of the previous chapter's discussions of subsumption as a determination of art's relationship to labour and to value by mobilizing the categories of 'imaginary subsumption' and 'intrinsic value' as apparatuses that instil value relations on terrains where they seem neither relevant nor necessary according to the ostensible logic of capital. Besides allowing us to think of the salience of 'exceptions' to value, such as art, for capital accumulation, there are specific historical reasons which obtain on the importance of such 'imaginary subsumption' for resolving crises of accumulation, such as driving down the cost of labour-power, naturalizing capital logics as disciplines for all kinds of activity, and making labour disappear under the guise of freely chosen social reproduction as well as debt. I then return to aesthetic judgement via the category of the 'generic' as an increasingly normative, but also abstract, parameter for both art and labour. Finally, I suggest that 'artistic research' can operate as practical critique by exploiting the indeterminacy of the aesthetic with respect to use and exchange in order to disrupt the operation of commodity logic in present-day knowledge production, as well as the academicism of art-institutional invocation of radical themes and histories. It would have to be a mode of disruption which developed forms of partisanship that would axiomatically go beyond 'asking questions', but also beyond the enactment of

political forms within art as edifying spectacle. These two directions – a socially reflexive form of partisan artistic research and 'value-reflexive' practices – constitute the trajectory for carrying the current project forward. A project which can be summed up as reflecting on the volatile relations between value and its others through the lens of art, and its structural contradictions.

Although the range of arguments and references alluded to so far may appear forbiddingly broad, encompassing ideology critique, political philosophy, critical political economy, Marxist social theory, aesthetics, and art history, the scope of the thesis is focused around three questions. Can the category of 'abstract labour' in Marx help to chart the changes in the production of subjectivity and the production of value in the present conjuncture? Does art enter into another relation with abstract labour when creativity, relationality and performance are the watchwords of the integration of labour with capital? And does the particular mode of open-ended speculative practice contained in art production stand to reveal new potentials for negation and antagonism when it becomes generalized (in the experience of social relations such as work and the accumulation strategies of financialised economies)? The proposition 'speculation as a mode of production' will rest – or drift – on the credibility of the answers.

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- <sup>1</sup> Karl Marx writes about 'total social capital' in the second and third volumes of *Capital*. See *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume Two, David Fernbach, trans., London: Penguin Books, 1992, pp.177, 184, 427-30, 468-71; and *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume Three, David Fernbach, trans., London: Penguin Books, 1991, pp. 266, 273-4, 326-30, 364.
- <sup>2</sup> 'The more capitalism puts to work the collective and social powers of labor in the form of science, knowledge, and machinery, the more capital itself appears to be productive. This then constitutes the link between capitalism and ancient despotism.' Jason Read, 'A Fugitive Thread: The Production of Subjectivity in Marx', *Pli* No. 13, 2002, pp. 125-46: 135.
- <sup>3</sup> The term 'fiscal Keynesianism' is used additionally as a category to discuss the proactive tax policies wielded by the state and its regulatory agencies to boost the incomes of businesses and the better-off. See Stephan Richter, 'Fiscal Keynesianism for the Upper Classes', *The Globalist*, 1 October 2010, <http://www.theglobalist.com/storyid.aspx?StoryId=8722> The sociologist and political scientist Colin Crouch uses the term 'privatised Keynesianism' in his 'Privatised Keynesianism: An Unacknowledged Policy Regime,' *British Journal of Politics & International Relations*, Vol.11, No. 3, pp. 382–99.
- <sup>4</sup> Christian Marazzi, *The Violence of Financial Capitalism* (New Edition), Kristina Lebedeva and Jason Francis McGimsey, trans., New York and Los Angeles: semiotext(e), 2011, p. 48.
- <sup>5</sup> Marx develops the category of 'fictitious capital' in chapters 29-32 of Volume Three. See *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume Three, David Fernbach, trans., London: Penguin Books, 1991, pp. 594-679.
- <sup>6</sup> It can further be argued that even the commodity can be dispensed with in the expansionary drive of capital (including the commodity of labour-power), although it would be arguable whether this constituted a specifically capitalist instance if value is not being produced – the response to this could be that the surplus-value is being produced but not directly in this circuit. The financial circuit does however exert a claim on that surplus-value whether or not it is actually being produced, e.g. mortgages being paid with wages earned by the debtor while in employment where surplus-value was being produced for the employer. In other words, the dilemma of the credit crunch. The formula M-M', used by Marx to discuss "interest-bearing capital" 'further expresses the fact that it is the exchange-value, not the use-value, that is the decisive inherent purpose of the movement. It is precisely because the money form of value is its independent and palpable form of appearance that the circulation form M-M'-M' . . . , which starts and finishes with actual money, expresses money-making, the driving motive of capitalist production, most palpably. *The production process appears simply as an unavoidable middle term, a necessary evil for the purpose of money-making.*' [emphasis mine] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume Two, David Fernbach, trans., London: Penguin Books, 1992, p. 137.
- <sup>7</sup> Marina Vishmidt and Anthony Iles, 'Work, Work Your Thoughts, and Therein see a Siege', in *Communization and its Discontents: Contestation, Critique, and Contemporary Struggles*, Benjamin Noys, ed., Wivenhoe/New York/Port Watson: Minor Compositions, 2011, pp. 137-50.
- <sup>8</sup> The formation of post-Kantian Romantic philosophies of the aesthetic cannot be taken as a whole, or linked as closely to Kant's project as I do here. It is important to point out that the early Romantic writers (prior to the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) such as Novalis and the Schlegels differed from Kant in that their aesthetics were not subject-bound but based on the relationship between humanity and nature. As a result, the horizon of aesthetic universality for them was not confined to the rational spirituality of the subject, but distributed all through the natural world. For more on this, see *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism* by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy (Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester, trans., Albany: SUNY Press, 1988).



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- <sup>9</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, Robert Hullot-Kentor, trans., London: Continuum, 2004.
- <sup>10</sup> See, among others, Sabeth Buchmann, 'From Systems-Oriented Art to Biopolitical Art Practice', *Media Mutandis: A NODE.London Reader*, Marina Vishmidt, et.al., ed., London: NODE.London, 2006; Helen Molesworth, 'Introduction', *Work Ethic*, Helen Molesworth, ed., Baltimore and University Park, PA: Baltimore Museum of Art/Pennsylvania University State Press, 2003.
- <sup>11</sup> I am here drawing on Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Werner S. Pluhar, trans., Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987; Adorno, as above; Stewart Martin, 'Artistic Communism – a Sketch', *Third Text*, Vol. 23, No. 4, July 2009, pp. 481-494.
- <sup>12</sup> 'Judged from this perspective, contemporary artistic production offers itself as a major opening for speculating about different aspects of the world, its sentient aspect, its political dimension, its ability to establish relationships between things, between subjects and matter, and so on. In short, to think about and generate ideas – ideas that appear to us in the most distinct forms – is art's great virtue.' MACBA, *The Uncertainty Principle*, exhibition press release, 15/05/2009 - 12/06/2009 Capella MACBA (Museu d'Art Contemporani Barcelona), archived at [http://www.macba.es/controller.phppp\\_action=show\\_page&pagina\\_id=33&inst\\_id=26288&lang=ENG&PHPSESSID=lv8lkfv4s9s013t6ur0p01o940](http://www.macba.es/controller.phppp_action=show_page&pagina_id=33&inst_id=26288&lang=ENG&PHPSESSID=lv8lkfv4s9s013t6ur0p01o940)
- <sup>13</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, as above.
- <sup>14</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume One, Ben Fowkes, trans., London: Penguin Books, 1990, p. 280.
- <sup>15</sup> 'The secret of the expression of value, namely the equality and equivalence of all kinds of labour because and in so far as they are human labour in general, could not be deciphered until the concept of human equality had already acquired the permanence of a fixed popular opinion. This however becomes possible only in a society where the commodity-form is the universal form of the product of labour, hence the dominant social relation is between men as possessors of commodities.' Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume One, as above, p. 152.
- <sup>16</sup> 'Generally, the changing class relation within the last thirty years must be understood against the background of capital's furious struggle against the falling rate of profit. The headlong flight into credit is one aspect of this. Outsourcing is another. It is one of a whole series of offensives to lower the value of an already significantly inessential labor force. This movement is not prompted by whim or cupidity on the part of the capitalists. It is the condition for reproduction of the social relation, i.e. between capital and the proletariat.' Bruno Astarian, 'Crisis Activity and Communisation', 2010, available at <http://www.hicsalta-communisation.com/textes/activite-de-crise-et-communisation-5?aid=193&pid=179&sa=1>
- <sup>17</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, Georgia Albert, trans., Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.
- <sup>18</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, as above.
- <sup>19</sup> Thierry de Duve, *Kant After Duchamp*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996.
- <sup>20</sup> See Jan Sailer, 'Securities: The Purest Form of Abstract Wealth. A Re-evaluation of the Concept of "Fictitious Capital"', paper delivered at the Marx and Philosophy conference, Institute of Education, London, 2010, available at <http://marxandphilosophy.org.uk/assets/files/society/pdfs/sailer2010.pdf>
- <sup>21</sup> 'While labour might not result in value, the form of value can be appropriated by economic phenomena unrelated to labour (as can also happen with the culture and language of commercial exchange). 4 [...] Capitalist economic activity tends generally to acquire the trappings of commodity markets and adopts a complex array of forms of value (money prices, demand, supply, profit rates, and so on), whether these truly reflect the nature

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of the particular activity or not.' Ben Fine and Costas Lapavistas, 'Markets and money in social theory: what role for economics?' *Economy and Society*, Vol. 29, No. 3, August 2000, pp. 357–82: 364. I discuss this in terms of 'imaginary subsumption' in the concluding section of this work.

<sup>22</sup> 'Opposition, resistance, to capitalism's "plan" for austerity, its need for destruction, decomposition, cannot be focused on the wage, or wage level, of the individual worker, or sector of workers. Nor can it be based on demands for "full employment." Better might be a demand for full *unemployment*, with all needs met through the seizure of property. That is better, but not good enough. The response of a movement to build class struggle must grasp the social costs of the reproduction of capital as a whole and that it is those social costs of the totality of reproduction, not just the costs of machinery, of labor power, of transportation, but the total cost of the social organization built up and essential to capitalist accumulation, that now constitute the impairment to accumulation.' *The Wolf Report: Nonconfidential analysis for the anti-investor blog*, 'Here Comes, There Goes - The Other Hand Clapping; The Other Shoe Dropping; The Other Lung Collapsing' 5 February 2010, <http://thewolfatthedoor.blogspot.com/2010/02/here-comes-there-goes.html>

<sup>23</sup> A possible though not entirely satisfactory position on this is staked out by Suhail Malik and Andrea Phillips, who draw on the 'capital as power' thesis of Nitzen and Bichler when they contend that the art market is the clearest illustration of the divorce of prices from production for capital in general, and the 'sabotaging' (exclusion-generating) power of private property is *the* hallmark feature of capital as a social form. Thus it is the hermetic designation of some goods as beyond 'normal exchange' that drives the art market and illustrates in its barest outline the fundamental principles of 'capitalization' for capital (setting of prices unrelated to production or 'fundamentals'). See 'Tainted Love: Art's Ethos and Capitalization' in *Contemporary Art and its Commercial Markets: a Report on Current Conditions and Future Scenarios*, Maria Lind and Olav Velthuis, eds., Stockholm and Berlin: Sternberg Press and Tensta Konsthall, 2012, pp. 209-42.

## Chapter One

### The Subjectivity of Re-structuring and Re-structuring Subjectivity: Human Capital and Beyond

#### Introduction

In this chapter I would like to make my initial approach to considering the changing relationship between the ostensibly opposed activities of art and wage-labour by considering the key neoliberal concept of 'human capital'. Human capital marks the reconciliation between free creativity and alienated labour under the sign of capital expansion, now re-located to the scale of the individual. The autonomy of art and the heteronomy of labour, which put them into an uneasy but fruitful dialectical relation, starts to erode as the identities of the artist and the employee start become less clear in the period of capital's re-structuring often referred to as neoliberalism. Given the attacks on the wage and on working-class movements in this era, alongside its promotion of the infinite flexibility of 'the creative', 'human capital' emerges as not just a piece of economists' jargon, but the structural imperative to self-invest and self-expand like capital, without capital's social power and guarantees. My contention here will be that 'human capital' is the pre-eminent figure which both describes and allegorizes the socialization of capital through the use of creativity. We would then need to think what kinds of negativity to the forms of life propagated by capital through the modalities of labour and art continue to inhere in them, despite and against this deployment: a negativity founded on their shared recalcitrance to value-expansion. Such negativity, coupled with the affirmative side represented by the imperative to self-invest and self-expand (valorise) - linking the subjective to the social - together constitute what I am calling 'speculation as a mode of production'.

In this light, there is a need to significantly re-think the Adornian schema of art as the 'absolute commodity'. Art, in this schema, draws its critical and utopian impulse from the

insoluble bind of being caught between autonomy (answerable only to self-given laws and setting its own parameters of value) and heteronomy (being marked by capital value in its production and circulation). Recent developments in the labour market have seen this critical and utopian impulse of art commodified and turned into work under imprimaturs like 'creativity' and 'flexibility'. It has been noted that the traditional critical standpoints which see art either as detached from the instrumentality of economic and political activity or as progressively dissolving into living praxis, have both become exhausted at this stage in history.<sup>1</sup> Yet it is important to keep in mind that this exhaustion is not simply one of critical models, but of a certain understanding of where art ends and social life, particularly the role played in it by labour, begins: an understanding shaped by capital's own needs, as well as resistance to them. The crisis of models that dictate either critical distance or immersion as proper to the emancipatory potential of art is rooted in concrete historical developments of capital as *value in motion*, which inevitably tends to erase distinctions between types of productive activity – such as art and labour – while upholding the hierarchies of exploitation. Along with this, the current financialised phase of capitalism intensifies 'real abstraction' as it attempts to reconcile the difficulties of measuring value produced by labour with the valorisation imperatives of 'fictitious capital'.<sup>2</sup> In that sense, the shifts in the relationship between art and labour have to be placed in a more fluid and idiosyncratic, possibly even 'negative', dialectic than they have been hitherto. It is the relationship between art and labour that is crucial to understanding how the 'speculative mode of production' operates also as a mode of production of subjectivity when creativity has become workplace discipline, while art has become an element of social remediation by the state and an analogue of 'self-valorising value' by the market. Thus, my argument will be that the Adornian schema is worth retaining, and that re-conceiving the critical utopian impulse of art under the current conditions requires us to read the anomalous, specific and opaque aspects of art as a social practice

through Marx's category of abstract labour, at least as a hypothesis. The main point of doing this is not only to attest to the viability of Adorno's negative dialectic of art as indispensable to a dialectical notion of the relationship between art and labour in neoliberal capitalism, but to locate a core of negativity and refusal in the generally ameliorative and frictionless role art is called upon to play; not solely when rendered in the terms of 'creativity' or 'becoming-artist' of every worker whose workplace no longer has guarantees or collective bargaining, but also in the financialised restructuring of public services, regional development and other instances of large-scale 'risk' that have 'instrumentalised' the contingent modes of valorisation that were once the almost exclusive preserve of art. Such a negativity, furthermore, travels to the very heart of the opposition between labour as the producer of use-values and art as producing indefinite or no value; their gradual merging highlights the dependency of use-value on exchange-value in capitalism, both categorically and structurally, and evacuates 'use-value' of the normative or emancipatory currency given it by the orthodox Left, in tandem with affirmations of 'productive labour' and 'real economy' – which would have been deemed misguided, if not outright category errors, by Marx.

Here I would like to demarcate my use of the terms 'speculation as a mode of production' and 'financialisation'. There is clearly a need to distinguish my account of speculation as a mode of production from financialisation as a secular tendency in capitalist accumulation in the decades since the advent of neoliberalism as the organizing logic of state finances and social contracts. The secular tendency of financialisation is well defined by Costas Lapavistas, who writes that financialisation is a change in balance in the economy between production and circulation, and entails a vastly extended role for financial institutions and intermediaries in corporate financing and in incorporation of workers' incomes, whether that be through borrowing (consumer credit, mortgages) or assets (pensions, insurance). The sphere of

circulation expands dynamically in comparison with the sphere of production:

In some respects the financialisation of major developed countries during the last three decades is apparent to the point of triviality. The financial sector has grown relative to the rest of the economy, including with regard to labour employed; financial assets have become a large part of the assets of non-financial corporations; individual borrowing for housing, consumption, education, and health has grown substantially, as have individual assets held for pensions, insurance and so on; global financial markets have become increasingly integrated; international money and capital flows have reached unprecedented levels. The list could be easily extended.<sup>3</sup>

Other commentators such as David McNally discuss financialisation in terms of floating currency, deregulation, and the resulting vast expansion of risk and volatility of value measures throughout an increasingly integrated economy processing millions of micro-trades per second in products with fictitious value claims such as derivatives: 'Currency markets thus seemed to offer a capitalist utopia in which money breeds money', while Swiss economist and theorist Christian Marazzi calls financialisation more generally 'the form of capital accumulation symmetrical with new processes of value production'.<sup>4</sup> What is meant by these 'new processes of value production' will not be discussed extensively in this work. It can be suggested however that Marazzi would include concepts such as the 'becoming-rent' of profits, as well as the rather capacious one of 'biocapitalism', which seems to be a conjugation of Foucauldian bio-power with the autonomist argument about the real subsumption of all social life in the current development of capital, leading to its 'crisis of measure'.<sup>5</sup>

However, my notion of speculation as a mode of production, or the speculative mode of production is both narrower and wider than this – narrower within the parameters I've defined with regard to art and the production of a capitalistically self-valorising subjectivity, but also broader as it attempts to use this account as a basis for thinking about which forms of negation and abstraction emerge from that situation to enable us to get an idea of the

structural determinations for the subjective character of current struggles, or as yet unarticulated potentials within them.

Following on from this, if in some ways preliminary to it, the term 'production of subjectivity' under the conditions laid out above needs to be determined. Although this thesis will attempt to do so largely through a reading of Marx and Moishe Postone, it will be recognized that the concepts of 'human capital' and 'labour-as-capital', as well as a new proximity between art and abstract labour, also have strong bearing on the question of how the speculative mode comes to take hold of subjectivity and class relations, foremost as an erosion of antagonism and only latently as a force of contradiction.<sup>6</sup> Thus a discussion of 'human capital' as the emblem of the production of subjectivity in the current phase of capitalism will take centre stage in this chapter. The specific 'figure' or 'character' of speculation as a mode of production is human capital because it refers to the subject whose infinite capacity for creativity and self-invention aligns her with the structure of capital as self-valorising value. The humanization of financialisation, in other words. Such an analytic framework, however, needs to consider the structural role of speculation in social reproduction as well as the production of the subject. This means the worker's investment in the health of capital and the financial system as her reproduction and consumption requires instruments of credit such as mortgages, credit cards, pension funds and so forth in an era of depressed wages and greatly diminished working-class bargaining power and cohesion. The subjects of the speculative mode of production would include also artists, whose labour is un-valued (unwaged) and it is only their products which appreciate or depreciate in the art market. I will examine more closely in Chapter Three how artists both recognize and try to break the link between art and financial speculation.

## Ground-clearing

At this stage, some caveats are in order. To counter the proposition that this is a variant of the argument from 'immaterial labour' (that sees a novelty and unprecedented political potential in the assimilation of the full spectrum of subjective and relational human capacities into the reproduction of capital, once the multitude throws off the attentions of the capitalist vampire), it needs to be stated that such an assimilation argues the power of capital rather than the power of labour, and that such capacities are not generically human but fully social and historical, thus in great measure created *by* capital. Labour in capital is social cooperation for capital and not an autonomous agent of constitution of another mode of production. The agency of labour emerges through antagonism and the determinate negation of its existence as labour, although it may first have to emerge as a political subject in and through its condition as labour for capital. Here, we would also have to think of the immanent overcoming of 'dependent labour' proposed by the thesis that the emergence of the 'general intellect', advanced by technological development and forms of socialization, implies that workers are now their own means of production or 'fixed capital' and all that remains is the political project of throwing off the parasitic exploitation of the capitalist class. With regard to this point, the counter-claim can be made that the capitalization of the 'general intellect' is a measure of proletarianization and impoverishment; rather than a co-optation of the productive powers of the multitude by capital, it is a mark of the de-valorisation of labour, and a symptom of the valorisation crisis of capital. The productive powers of labour appropriated as the productive powers of capital – money that works, while labour is a cost – are rather always the productive powers of capital, except, as we see in the current unfolding crisis, they are less and less 'productive'.<sup>7</sup>

The scepticism expressed here about rich and polyvalent concepts like 'self-valorisation' or



'immaterial/cognitive labour', concepts with long histories in Marxist theoretical debate and movements, is articulated as such in order to bracket off those kinds of analysis from the exposition of the role of 'creativity' in the re-structuring of capital and the changing conditions of labour at issue here. Elsewhere in this thesis, I will be employing other concepts from the 'autonomist' or 'post-Operaist' trajectory of Marxist thought such as 'antagonism', 'refusal of work' and 'class composition', since I am interested in how the dialectical core of those concepts can be fleshed out when brought into relation with the more Hegelian variants of negativity I am working with in the project of developing 'speculation' as a structure of art and labour in the current stage of capital. However, 'self-valorisation' taken as the creation of social and productive relations autonomous of capital for their reproduction and expansion seems to me like a political concept thinkable in times of social contestation or even insurrection, and it can be discussed to what extent capital 'paves the way' for these to emerge, but this is not my object here. My object here is rather the various forms of dependency between the self and the valorisation of capital. This is why I am advancing a somewhat polemical proximity between 'human capital' and 'self-valorisation', as well to underline the inaptness of the concept of self-valorisation for describing the imposed atomization and precarity of contemporary labour-in-debt. The abolition of work and value relations is a precondition for 'self-valorisation' to be put forward as a coherent concept. The alternative is to draw on the re-structuring of work by capital – in which workers are encouraged to think of themselves as individual profit centres - as a cue for thinking the autonomy of labour, which is a move as politically problematic as it is philosophically, drawing as it does on an 'ontology of production'.<sup>8</sup>

The elision of the antagonism between labour and capital in 'human capital' theory is not an ideological confusion, but a facet of ideology in a Marxian sense, that is, real abstraction, the

actual existence of abstractions such as value in the concrete phenomena of social life. An example would be the debt burden and privatised social services which reduce the incentive for workplace militancy, while the dwindling of workplace militancy reinforces the truth of atomisation which supports the 'human capital' version of human nature and its social implications. With the secular expansion of the 'community of capital' to fill the space where working-class interests used to affirm themselves, can the status of 'human capital' provide a new avenue for a challenge to the 'whole' on the immanent ground of capital, with the possibility of a defence of separate interests bereft of both the illusion of integration and the illusion of autonomy?

The relevance of art to the narrative of 'human capital' is not its proximity to discourses of self-valorisation but its separation from the productivity orienting those discourses. There is, however, a production of subjectivity characteristic of art as a type of labour which is not capitalist work. The production of subjectivity in art is defined by a notion of freedom which is both isomorphic to, and irreducible to, the model of freedom as self-valorising value which is proposed both by 'human capital' and 'creative economy' narratives as well as the 'immaterial labour' concept. Art functions with an immanent set of laws and generates products and activities which are not productive of value even though they can attain a price; although it will be proposed that the capitalization of art now happens in many other ways. These are closer to the principles of human capital as a way of describing and regulating capitalist work and workers at a time when labour is vanishing as a self-conscious social or political agent – not only due to capitalist re-structuring (globalisation, anti-union laws) but labouring subjects' own desire not to work and not to be workers. It is primarily the potentiality (and actuality) of art as a mode of 'unproduction' and de-subjectivation which concerns us here, one which seems key to an understanding of class struggle starting from the current outlook

of financialised austerity, de-composition and division. Or, to put it differently, the potential productive desire *not to work*, and to what extent that terrain can be recaptured from the mimesis of self-valorising value which no longer assigns a time or place to work. This would be the question of what other kind of speculation is conceivable here: a speculation that registers the impact, the radical deformation wrought by the other, financial kind, rather than posing an ineffectual, spiritualised opposite to it.

A final note on the distinction between this inquiry and much of the autonomist-inflected theory that works with the term 'self-valorisation' would be to establish that looking to the extant capitalist relations of production to derive the forms of their overcoming is important but can only get us so far, apart for the truism that the form taken by the current regime of valorisation will inevitably harbour contradictions which might be turned against it. The very notion of emancipation at issue stems from that regime, as Marx notes in this passage on the relation between abstract labour and abstract equality, and it couldn't be otherwise:

The secret of the expression of value, namely the equality and equivalence of all kinds of labour because and in so far as they are human labour in general, could not be deciphered until the concept of human equality had already acquired the permanence of a fixed popular opinion. This however becomes possible only in a society where the commodity-form is the universal form of the product of labour, hence the dominant social relation is the relation between men as possessors of commodities.<sup>9</sup>

Further to this, we can think of Alfred Sohn-Rethel's argument that it is the rise of abstract commodity exchange that first engenders the characteristic categories of abstract thought such as linear time, quantity, quality, and equivalence, or even of John Locke's rooting of political liberty and equality in private property rights, which begin with possession of oneself and one's labour-power as an exclusive proprietor.<sup>10</sup> And of course, historically and still, such mainstays of contractual individualism and abstract, or civil, equality are far from universal as

'fixed popular prejudices', since vast numbers of persons continue to exist who are commodities rather than commodity owners, or are otherwise not endowed with the full complement of civil personhood (slaves and subjects of various kinds of bonded labour, illegal migrants, in all their gendered and racialised stratifications).

Finally, we should also take into consideration Michel Foucault's proposal, discussed also by Michel Feher and Jason Read, that the subject of exchange outlined by Marx above is precisely that subject that has been made obsolete by the neo-liberal subject of competition.<sup>11</sup> The subject of competition speculates on his/her abilities, and takes only individual advancement into consideration, which is mirrored back to her by the decomposition of collective structures, such as class. There is no longer a presumption of equality of values obtaining here, i.e. a hard day's pay for a hard day's work, but only unequal awards attainable by merit. The fetish of the wage is displaced by the fetish of individual effort as the bedrock of justice and equality in capital – fetishes because in both cases they conceal the state of power relations obtaining between capital and labour, depicting expropriation as fair exchange, compulsion as choice and submission as sovereignty.<sup>12</sup>

In this sense, the objective re-structuring of the workplace and welfare state bears out Marx's argument even if the figure has changed: it is not until the concept of human competition has acquired the permanence of fixed popular opinion that we have a dominant social relation between people as possessors of human capital. In a similar fashion, the model of freedom posited in and through art is eminently one of competitive particularity rather than abstract equality. Art has of course long been considered a haven of particularity and non-equivalence over and against the dominance of abstract exchange elsewhere in capitalist society.

However, in a financialised capital which is driven precisely by the non-equivalence of values

and profits from arbitrage between them, as well as the effect of ideologies of competition on the 'equal exchange' presumed in the wage contract, those assumptions are long due for re-examination. This is all the more so, given the role that art's status as a haven for particularity and non-fungible relations between objects and persons has consistently played in legitimating the very converse of those relations which obtain elsewhere in bourgeois society, since it makes a place for them to exist in 'relative autonomy'.<sup>13</sup>

### **Fetishism and the Production of Subjectivity**

The notion of art as a sort of talisman or substitute for a freedom denied elsewhere in capitalist social relations seems to bring us closer to a discussion of fetishism, especially when it is art objects that are often invested with this fetishised freedom, in common with, if not identical to, all other commodities. If we can say, with Marx, that the chief product of the capitalist mode of production is the production of the class-relation, then the production of subjectivity is inseparable from that relation.<sup>14</sup> This subjectivity can be described as the internalisation of objectivity as a fetish, insofar as the structure of commodity-fetishism is replicated in the reification of historically specific social relations as timeless and natural. Just as the social relations of production are effaced in the circulation and consumption of the product, the historical processes which slowly, aggregatively and contingently ensure the reproduction of class relations in capital are effaced in the present of that development. They acquire an affect of inevitability in their designation as natural laws and market mechanisms, a set of universals that constantly reproduce, and in reproducing deny their basis in, the class relation. 'The advance of capitalist production develops a working class which by education, tradition and habit looks upon the requirements of that mode of production as self-evident natural laws.'<sup>15</sup>

This fetishism is in many ways an invariant of the capitalist mode of production, and is also

tied to that mode of production being the first to legitimate itself with reference to equality and freedom. However, it may be argued that the global re-structuring of accumulation in the last four decades or so over the period which has been contentiously labelled as 'neoliberal' or 'post-Fordist' has seen an intensification of that fetishism as the objective condition for the production of subjectivity linked to the class position of the wage-worker, certainly in many parts of the West and the 'developed world' more generally.

Financialisation has introduced a new common sense into existing ideological alignments around production, consumption, wealth and perception of self.<sup>16</sup> The logic of financialisation creates the conditions for this logic to exert objective validity and self-evidence. The ability to obtain credit becomes more decisive than the level of wages earned in the feeling of affluence and access to social wealth, and the ability to obtain credit, for housing as a key instance, generalizes the stakes in the health of an exploitative financial system, while impacting the viability of traditional measures to improve a collective position within it, such as going on strike. Investment in the cultivation of one's putatively marketable skills acquires objective validity in times of disinvestment from public education and reduction in employee benefits.<sup>17</sup> In the course of lectures collected and published in English as *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Michel Foucault traces the origins of neoliberal subjectivity to the introduction of a split between labour as an income stream and labour as a political identity. It can be noted, however, that Foucault's account of neo-liberalism does not contain an account of the class relations and class character of this ideological formation, in common with the rest of his project.

This split then guides the *material* identification of the worker with capital rather than with the work she does; her work is no longer a source of collective social identity, and is frequently

unsatisfactory as an income stream as well. Political identification then stems from what neoclassical economics, human capital theory, as well as connectionist-network theory, terms 'interests,' which may occur in the reproductive sphere or consumption rather than in the workplace. Rather than the 'social factory' thesis of Italian Autonomist Marxism, which saw the antagonism of the labour-capital contradiction diffusing throughout society, this is the eradication of antagonism in the diffusion of capitalism as co-extensive with the social field, with choice rather than change establishing the horizon of the social world:

Neoliberalism can be considered a particular version of 'capitalism without capitalism', a way of maintaining not only private property but the existing distribution of wealth in capitalism while simultaneously doing away with the antagonism and social insecurity of capitalism, in this case paradoxically by extending capitalism, at least its symbols, terms, and logic, to all of society.<sup>18</sup>

Here it would be pivotal to consider to what degree it is precisely the vehicle of 'creativity' that mediates the extension of capitalism to all of society. Creativity rephrases Hobbesian competition in an uneven labour market, riven by Virno's 'opportunism' and 'submission' in the markedly friendlier terms of novelty and rebellion.<sup>19</sup> With Foucault, however, we would also need to decipher the link between notions of creativity in reconstituting workers as infinitely self-enhancing assets or 'human capital' and governmentality. While this can only be touched on here, creativity as a complex of overt and implicit presuppositions about the relation between labour and value does not just generalize the 'creativity of capital to labour but marks the point where management intervenes in labour, where management is internalized. The mobilization of the entrepreneur is guided by creativity as both a productive norm at work and a way to transcend the constraints of labour while of course not escaping the demands of value. Creativity thus marks the joint between self-management and self-exploitation, autonomy and heteronomy. The capacity of creativity to be easily internalized as a workplace norm renders it the form of governmentality that obtains specifically in the

workplace, even as the entrepreneur can principally operate anywhere, most visibly in cultural field and as a labour template for the putatively autonomous artist. Creativity thus functions as capitalist populism, assuring every exploited worker and discontented artist that capital's interests and their social interests coincide in the performance of labour that is inventive, fulfilling and that would be a joyful experience whether or not there was money involved.

### **Real Subsumption and the Rise of Human Capital**

As noted in the Introduction, the figure of 'human capital' is pivotal at this stage of the inquiry since it depicts quite crudely how the subject is both structurally and ideologically situated as a site of capital accumulation through the premise of self-investment and self-realization, a personalized autonomy of capital available to each and every creative producer. Here I will start out by examining the nature of the link between the production of subjectivity and the idea that we are living in an era of intensified 'real subsumption' (the capitalization of all social and natural life, in many accounts).

Following the preceding discussion, it may now be proposed that rather than subjectivity becoming the ground of resistance through and against the inscription of affect, social relations, etc. into the process of capitalist valorisation, the extent to which subjectivity is incorporated into the valorisation processes is rather the extent to which it ratifies those processes as subjective truths. Much recent work has discussed this process of incorporation, or, put otherwise, the extension of commodity relations into hitherto untouched domains, as a type of 'real subsumption'. This is a way of placing into a social and subjective register Marx's distinction between formal and real subsumption as the the shift from capital as a quantitative agent (superficially taking hold of or interposing itself into existing relations of production) to a qualitative agent (transforming relations and techniques of production from the ground up to fit its valorisation requirements).



However, the dimension of subjectivity in the reproduction of the class relation is something other than its direct valorisation at work. With the shift from surplus-value extraction in industrial production to the commodification of services on the one side and 'cognitive industries' on the other, the role of subjectivity in abstract labour is no longer simply generic subjectivity, 'merely congealed quantities of homogeneous human labour' which appear in the shape of commodities, but the commodification of that abstraction as economically viable 'creativity'. Capital's realisation problem – the commodities may not be sold, the labour might not have been socially necessary – then migrates into the production process and becomes recursive: this creativity might not happen, and might yield neither surplus-value nor profit in the form of rent. This financial trade may fail, or this intellectual property might not ever be produced. Indeterminacy and contingency become both the conditions of work, and the conditions of failure. The consequences have been elaborated in the work of theorists such as Paolo Virno and Christian Marazzi, with Virno developing a political-economic anthropology of the 'post-Fordist' workplace whose salient quality is 'opportunism', the capitalisation of behaviours, affects and habits acquired in social life outside the workplace to maximise success in a workplace that is seen not as bounded in time and space but as coincidental with the subject's personal trajectory. He also delineates the importance of rule-following behaviour, bureaucracy and arbitrary hierarchies.<sup>20</sup> Generic subjectivity would mean here a standardised assemblage of tenets like individual freedom and the development of 'creativity' (personal and social). It is materially predicated upon the ability to do anything whatever, to follow arbitrary orders and submit to contingent hierarchies. Such a detached adaptivity is the genuine emblem of 'real subsumption' as a term for these social and subjective conditions, a naturalisation which is no longer experienced as either natural or imposed, but simply as what is the case, a facticity which may be accommodated or avoided

but is too trivial and transparent to be worth challenging. On this point, Stefano Harney refers to 'logistical subjectivities':

...subjectivity that mines information for compatibility, one that can plug itself in anywhere, without an adapter, as the laboring conduit between disparate forms of information, goods, cultures, languages, finances and affinities. This logistic subjectivity is the one we talk about when we talk about our teaching, when we say it is not the content of the play or poem or ethnography we are teaching that transfers skills to the student, but some general capacity to move between such contents, connecting them in a process of lifelong learning.<sup>21</sup>

This is the formation of human capital that would recognize itself as such and valorise, without being too concerned over how that value is compounded or to whom it accrues. As the law of value is the highest law in the only possible world, it is a sheer waste of time to conspire against it. The subject of human capital should see neither a practical nor critical difference between the goals of capital and individual goals, since self-valorisation is common to both, regardless of how this is achieved.

The significance of the insertion of 'creativity' into 'abstract labour' - the social form of capitalist work - and its relatively recent promotion in neoliberal economic restructuring, is not that the interests of wage-labour are identified with the interests of capital – this is an ideological desideratum of capital from its beginning, as is the attempt to ease any distinctions between the interests of capitalist valorisation and the 'general social interest', as it were. The difference now may be that this interest has absorbed any differential logics into the *practical* immanence of the logic of capital to any social participation or self-definition. It is not simply labour which is alienated, but all other human capacities, simply through their potential to produce value from generic 'creativity' (the generic is what makes it analogous to abstract labour), even if no actual value is or can be produced.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, the contingency of financialised accumulation comes to be identified with the contingency of social freedom as such, even as it sets rigid constraints for that freedom in its delimitation of

access to social wealth. Ultimately, then, it comes to stand for the cancellation of this contingency, as human capital can in its definition only maximise along the same trajectory as capital. It will be examined further on if this is necessarily the case, using Michel Feher's 'Left' articulation of human capital.

Given that 'the socially productive power of labour develops as a free gift to capital', at a time of dissolution of the political claims of organized labour and their inability to raise the price of labour or influence life prospects for the majority of workers, the position of capital seems more desirable.<sup>23</sup> The resilience of capital as its political claims are promoted by the state in a time of capitalist crisis contrasts unfavourably with the negligible impact of such claims from workers or the unemployed. The practical repudiation of workers by capital and state – this encompassing both political claims and availability of employment – testifies to the ideological rejection of the social claims of work and its constraint on the freedom of capital as the hallmark of neoliberal restructuring. This has been accompanied by an unprecedented intensification of work, showing an almost inverse correlation between the social validation of labour and the average level of exploitation. The highest levels of exploitation seem to co-exist with a subjective refusal of work by those in the most menial to the most relatively elite circumstances, an attitude that encompasses dissociation from transient or degrading employment conditions to the embrace of work as an economic recognition of the subject's spontaneous creative inclinations. Such an acquiescent modality of refusal raises the question of whether work has first to be recognized in order to be refused, which touches on a much more substantive debate about the role of recognition and representation in movements for social change, as well as the dialectics of affirmation and negation that Marx takes over from Hegel. Conventionally, it would seem to be impossible that a working-class negate itself as a working-class without first coming to a practical awareness of itself as a working-class in

antagonism with an owning class. But there may be other modes of political agency conceivable in the absence of this awareness or the clear distinctions they require, an absence which reflects structural changes in the 'real abstraction' of capitalist organization and socialization, as much or more than it does any deficit of politics. A self-negation of the working-class in order to subjectively identify with capital makes sense when capital has made work disappear by making it so general it is no longer experienced as particular, if it is experienced at all.<sup>24</sup>

It might help to examine 'human capital' in light of the point made by Jason Read that the advance of neo-liberal doctrine over liberalism lay precisely in its move to bring labour back into the picture with the notion of 'human capital'.<sup>25</sup> Much as Marx demonstrated that the relationship of concrete social labour to the abstraction of value was 'abstract labour', the theorists of 'human capital' were concerned to demonstrate that the abstraction of labour could be resolved by positing the capitalist as a worker, and the worker as proprietor of a labour-power redefined as 'human capital'. The original theorist of human capital, and the one cited most frequently by Foucault in his lectures on neoliberalism is Gary S. Becker (who was building on a line of research initiated by T.W. Schultz and other Chicago School economists in the 1950s). The idea of human capital is essentially that of applying cost:benefit analysis to 'intangibles' such as education, family, health or cultural interests and viewing them as rational investments made by individuals in their employability, social mobility and financial security:

Schooling, a computer training course, expenditures on medical care, and lectures on the virtues of punctuality and honesty are capital too in the sense that they improve health, raise earnings, or add to a person's appreciation of literature . . . Consequently, it is fully in keeping with the capital concept as traditionally defined to say that [these expenditures] are investments in capital. However, these produce human, not physical or financial, capital because you cannot separate a person from his or her knowledge, skills, health and values the way it is possible to move financial and physical assets while the owner stays put.<sup>26</sup>

Though showing a risible parochialism, which is permeated by class anxiety while rejecting any analytic significance for class ('Many studies show that education promotes health, reduces smoking, raises the propensity to vote, improves birth control knowledge, and stimulates the appreciation of classical music, literature, and even tennis. '),<sup>27</sup> this account displays the habitual features of Chicago School economic analysis in its inheritance of the classical economists' version of capital as a neutral and ahistorical term for a 'stock' of useful materials which can be optimally mobilized in the same way regardless of productive relations, and its utilitarian reading of subjectivity, as well as in its downplaying of collective structures or political activity as influential in the life chances of 'human capital', with an emphasis on paid work and commodified education as the main determinants of those chances, as well as the driving forces of social change. It is clear that the ideological thrust of the concept of 'human capital' is precisely to eradicate any analytic or critical distinction between labour and capital, between owning and not owning the means of production. With 'human capital' *everyone* owns the means of production, since each individual is in fact her own means of production. The status of 'human capital' does evolve from the time of its initial enunciation. For Becker and his econometrics in the 1960s, charted by Foucault in the 1970s, the human is still 'fixed capital' which can be measured.<sup>28</sup> In the 1980s, 'human capital' had been eclipsed by the more aspirational figure of the 'entrepreneur', the mobilizer of her and others' human capital in an 'enterprise society', insofar as there was a society. By the 1990s and 2000s, a far more nebulous notion of 'creativity' had come to dominate policy analysis, management theory and economic prognostications. Creativity could not really be measured, but it could be valued. It signalled the indeterminacy of a 'new economy' where management was the only measure of a precarious and fugitive 'value'. In the present era, however, of unwinding asset values and contracting markets and services, ideologemes such as the 'Big

Society" and 'the nudge', along with behavioural economics seem to be putting 'human' and 'social capital back on the agenda. This becomes dramatically evident in the coming deflation of the 'student loan' bubble and the incipient trade in 'human capital futures'.<sup>29</sup> We can conjecture that this announces the convergence in speculative finance of labour-power as variable capital with the 'stock' of Becker's notion of human capital.

From another perspective, the relevance of human capital is immeasurably expanded with the ascendancy of 'creativity' as the general baseline for much contemporary work. As creativity is both indeterminate and intimate to the worker, it is a variable whose valorisation would seem to oppose the law of value, with its emphasis on definite outcomes within finite time frames, the relationship of the price of labour to the time worked. If we turn now to art, it can be said that it is the centrality of 'creativity' to the artisanal mode of production through which most art is made that makes its structures of valorisation and validation so inimical to the law of value as it applies elsewhere, and that the spread of 'creativity' to this 'elsewhere' introduces certain aporias in how waged, rather than artisanal, labour is to be valued, and what value, if any, it actually produces. It has been observed that this ostensible loss of measure should perhaps be more accurately termed a 'granularity' of value as the distortions introduced by the subsumption of 'creative' activity into capitalist processes of valorisation are resolved by the accounting of targets, outcomes in the public services and the intellectual property regimes common to both public and private sector businesses. But what may be more apposite to this inquiry is both how 'human capital' can be discussed with regard to the category of 'abstract labour' and whether labour reconfigured as capital can still harbour any transformative capacities. It is important to examine these points as they are germane for the argument that the expansion of 'creativity' constitutes art – as creativity's originary domain in bourgeois society – as a form of abstract labour, and that the precondition of this kind of

generalised social creativity is the subjectivity of 'human capital' as a labour-denying vector of risk-embracing and self-valorising value. This will in turn provide the bedrock for the investigation of whether art – as the major sphere of codification of this creativity, and one which seems to enter into a direct relation with capital without the mediation of wage-labour - offers a form of subjectivity negating of or contradictory to labour which is different from human capital's cancellation of labour modelled on capital. As mentioned, the hypothesis that art is becoming a *kind* of abstract labour will have to be tested further in order to answer this question. First it may be important to delimit precisely what is meant by 'abstract labour' in this analysis.

### **Abstract Labour: an Abstract**

In the first volume of *Capital*, Marx defines abstract labour as the general category for all labour performed in capitalism. This is without regard to the diversity of concrete labours, insofar as the rendering of all labour homogeneous by value is the specifically capitalist mode of existence of the transhistorical category of human productive activity that is referred to as labour.<sup>30</sup> It is eminently not labour performed for its own sake, or labour performed to satisfy needs however these are defined, but labour performed for the generation of surplus-value. Again here we see the dilemma of attempting to fuse the polarities of 'art' and 'abstract labour', since it is evident that art does not partake of the logic of abstract and undifferentiated productive activity performed to generate surplus-value; it is the very epitome of concrete, particular and self-directed activity, which is why it has always held the character of the constitutive exception in capitalist modernity, the 'unconditioned, in Kant's terms.<sup>31</sup> But if the purpose of bringing the terms 'art' and 'abstract labour' into proximity is to highlight the mutual interpenetration of art's characteristic modes of production (creativity in all its facets) with the humdrum world of work, then it may perhaps be revealing to follow how abstract labour functions as a form of *social domination* rather than just a technical

category for value-producing labour. This discussion will be expanded in the second chapter's focus on the specific determinations of the links between art and abstract labour in the present, so will have to be relatively cursory for now.

Moishe Postone helps here. He seeks to delineate the concept of 'abstract labour' as not simply a term for the homogeneous quality of labour in capitalism which is the substance of value across heterogeneous commodities – the 'form' of that value - but also as a category central to capitalist social relations dominated by real abstraction; the form for 'values', as it were.<sup>32</sup> The salience of Postone's representation of 'abstract labour' as a social mediation rather than as the general analytic category for innumerable concrete labours or as a physiological quantum of average socially necessary labour is that it emphasizes the fetishistic character of labour performed in capitalism, that is, labour produced under the value-form. In this it obviates both the 'essentialist' stance frequently assigned to Marx's conception of labour as affirming a transhistorical constant of human interaction with the world, and the tensions implicit in the retrieval of a concept of 'living labour' within and against abstract labour which is found in many post-autonomist accounts.<sup>33</sup> Postone develops a concept of 'abstract labour' as 'abstract social domination' which functions in the absence or occlusion of direct social relations, installing labour as a mediation which takes on the status of an 'objective' fact for productive and social relations:

*[[I]t is the social function of labor which makes it general. As a socially mediating activity, labor is abstracted from the specificity of its product, hence, from the specificity of its own concrete form. In Marx's analysis, the category of abstract labor expresses this real social process of abstraction; it is not simply based on a conceptual process of abstraction. [...] commodity-producing labor, in the process of objectifying itself as concrete labor in particular use values, also objectifies itself as abstract labor in social relations. [...] overcoming capitalism would entail the abolition – not the realization – of the "substance," of labor's role in constituting a social mediation, and, hence, the abolition of the totality.*<sup>34</sup>

In Postone's account, '[I]labour as such does *not* constitute society per se; labour in capitalism,



however, *does* constitute that society'.<sup>35</sup> It is the extent of this dominance which must be contested and mystified by 'human capital'; it must efface both the centrality of value-producing labour to the reproduction of capital and social life in capital (total social capital, in Marx's term), and the centrality of this labour to the experience of the subjects of social relations in capital. Again, insofar as the structure of the reproduction of capital relies on the incorporation of the productive powers of labour, effacing labour in its own augmentation, the specific ideological shift announced by 'human capital' is not a novelty. It is the specific ways in which the 'human capital' notion acts to eliminate labour ideologically which need to be investigated. The mode of production of subjectivity offered by 'human capital' has already been described as mimetic of capitalist valorisation and indexical of the real subsumption of subjectivity to this mode of valorisation. It is also of interest to the critique of labour in capitalism, as traced above in Postone's position, which informs the position adopted in this thesis. It is, in fact, of singular interest, since it is the clearest illustration of the ideological erasure of labour which is elsewhere being practically erased by changes in technology, the differential expansion of the global market in labour, and the spread of de-industrialisation and de-valorisation of labour in the West; as pointed out earlier, it is a way of 'including out' labour (inclusion through absorption) which establishes a marked symmetry between the ideological stance of neoliberalism and the actual movements of capital. Such a symmetry discloses a further symmetry – the reflection of the objective economic circumstances of the speculative mode of production in the self-understanding promoted to workers, and often imposed on them by the conditions of existence rather than as a matter of faith. The indebted subject, for instance, is a site of accumulation for financial entities, and forms a source of 'human capital' for them as much as a stock of 'human capital' for herself.

This seems to position 'human capital' as an 'objective social mediation' in the same way as

Postone has argued for the category of 'abstract labour', or, perhaps, a pretender to its place which underlines the diminished social and political claims of labour. Not through the overcoming of capital, as Postone notes is the purpose of the negation of labour as objective social mediation, but in order to universalize it as the only horizon.

### **Self-Appreciation?**

The concept of human capital has often been conjugated with 'creativity' in the publications of sociologists offering new paradigms for urban development and the shaping of labour-markets to the policy planners of post-industrial metropolises. Perhaps the most well-known of the proponents of human capital theory in the more palatable guise of 'creativity' as factor in governance and growth is Richard Florida.<sup>36</sup> His formulation of the 'creative city' enjoys tremendous influence, as well as tremendous on-the-ground impact, an influence which has not significantly waned from the 'boom' years of the early-mid 2000s in which it first took hold up to the changed landscape of the austere present. Florida is an avowed social and market liberal with a vision of re-fashioning cities in the image of a 'creative class' who engage in an elite consumption and self-reliant production ecologically and economically appropriate to slimmed-down welfare states and de-industrialised urban cores. Interestingly, Florida, as an erstwhile Marxist, retains the language of class in his programme of bohemian embourgeoisement, although it is a class formed entirely by forces of circulation and consumption, with the larger forces homogenizing urban areas as habitats for the moneyed and creative kept firmly in abeyance in his analysis (though he does acknowledge that the most 'creative' will eventually be displaced by the less creative of greater means). For Florida, 'human capital' is, as for most mainstream academic sociologists, a neutral descriptive term, useful to analyse e.g. different life prospects amongst e.g. more or less entrepreneurial individuals from 'communities' with different economic and ethnic attributes. The reference to 'class' is a shorthand and has no heuristic or critical bearing on the embrace of the reified

conceptual vocabulary of orthodox economics this variant of academic sociology takes as its benchmark.

The sociologist Michel Feher proposes a somewhat different take on 'human capital', finding a set of implications which could be qualified as a 'Left' reading of the concept. His point of departure coalesces around the simultaneous rejection and appropriation by earlier (19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> c.) Socialist movements of the concept of alienated labour. Liberal ideology sought to frame workers as free owners of labour-power whereas in practice they were neither free nor owners; however, it was precisely the 'empty promise' of liberal freedom that they took on and sought to realize in agitating for workers' power, legitimating their cause in those universal and humanist terms. With the evacuation in recent decades of the strength and visibility of labour movements, Feher moves to considering what aspirations are embodied but programmatically obscured in the notion of 'human capital'. The 'dominant subjective form' of human capital 'allow[s] it to express aspirations and demands that its neoliberal promoters had neither intended nor foreseen'.<sup>37</sup> These aspirations and demands, for Feher, rest largely in the fact that 'human capital' has been explicated in terms which allow for non-economic benefits to enter into the assets proper to such capital. But this is not sufficient, since writers such as Schultz and Becker project a 'utilitarian' view of profiting from accumulated potential ('fixed capital') which is at odds with the neoliberal era of constant value appreciation in the short-term; in other words, there is a shift from 'monetary and/or psychic income' to self-appreciation in 'stock value'.<sup>38</sup> It is this 'self-appreciation' which describes the agency of the subject of 'human capital', a self-appreciation which goes beyond divisions between production and reproduction or production and consumption, and maintains a 'portfolio of conducts' for a self envisioned as a stock value. Paradoxically, such a financialised grasp of subjectivity is the condition that must be appropriated and taken as the

ground of contestation for a 'Left adequate to neo-liberalism'. In Feher's view, this has to be a contestation over the best ways for this human capital to self-appreciate. Rather than being possessors of labour power or owners of their human capital, a relationship between a distinct person and a distinct commodity which can be alienated, the subject of human capital is rather an investor or 'speculator' in her accumulated value.

Feher proceeds in his argument by outlining the New Left critique of the workers' movement as reproducing the structure of capitalist subjection in its embrace of humanist norms of liberal freedom – a critique which was also extended to the State socialist (or State capitalist) bloc, a critique since then codified mainly through the Foucauldian term of 'governmentality'. The contention was that this subjection militated against a revolution in society along the axis of autonomy and self-realization, or any social change which exceeded the metabolics of class interest or universalizing moral norms. 'Human capital' thus registers the mainstay of New Left politics, 'the personal is political' (though it is debatable as to how representative this was as a tenet on the New Left before second-wave feminism came along), and the 'personal is political' forms the cornerstone of the social claims of 'self-appreciation': 'the contest [for the] conditions under which we may appreciate ourselves is politically decisive.'<sup>39</sup> This coming to terms with the legacy of the 'new social movements' in their purported historical eclipse of the 'workers movements' means that human capital provides a vehicle for radicalising the neoliberal condition from within, relaunching a politics of the personal in a time when the collective dimension seems to have become radically inaccessible. Aspirations which take no cognizance of the split between life and work are exemplary of the radicalising potential of 'human capital'. Examples of this direction include the programmes of 'flexicurity' and the 'guaranteed social wage' which aim to further workers' navigation of capital's demands for flexibility by giving them social and professional latitude to increase their human capital in or

out of work.<sup>40</sup> It also manifests in struggles over intellectual property, which can be framed as challenges to the property relations that stand in the way of access to social wealth – the enclosure of non-scarce resources.

Feher's account of the subversive potential of human capital, while suggestive and insightful in many points, is not ultimately persuasive. Its main flaw is the failure to consider the totalising logic of capital, which need not be or even principally is not coextensive with the 'self-appreciation' of human capital. The logic of capital is totalising and the potentiality of subjects is indeterminate. They cannot coincide; or, rather, they can, but only in the interests of capital.<sup>41</sup> Human capital would then simply name the site where the incompatibility between accumulation of value and any other priorities is posited and then foreclosed by the terms of neo-classical economics. 'Self-appreciation' seems to be substantively identical to 'self-valorisation', and is thus subject to all the contradictions of an affirmative use of that term in post-Operaist or 'immaterial labour' analyses; the self in question has to be affirmed either in terms of self-valorising value or productive labour-power. It remains murky whether the replacement of a possessive relation to a labour-power which can be alienated by a speculative relationship with a self configured as a portfolio of assets can be seen as an advance over the liberal-era obfuscation of the links between production and reproduction. Such an assessment seems to be tendentious, and this is underlined in the discussion of the progressive aspects of the logic of human capital. 'Flexicurity', while perhaps an admirable effort to wrest some room to manoeuvre for a significantly inessential labour force from the incessantly de-valorising imperatives of capital, succeeds to the extent that it thwarts those imperatives. It presumes the existence of regulation, which is a codification of competing and non-congruent interests rather than an affirmation of capital's interests on its own behalf, or, even more implausibly, a corporatist conflation of interests (even if this is usually the way

labour regulation is portrayed). So long as labour is a dependent variable of capital, which it constitutively has to be for capital to exist, it can neither recognize nor advance its interests by identifying them with those of capital; nor, significantly, can it jettison or reshape the nature or role of 'interests', as Feher claims for the 'new social movements', by reverting to one of the poles in the social field that those new social movements attempted to displace or expand, that is, a social field polarized by the labour-capital relation. Similarly, the challenge to intellectual property regimes from the standpoint of human capital appreciation runs into the same problem that Marx diagnosed in the use of 'equality' as a terrain of social claims between labour and capital: between equal rights, force decides. Between two capitals, force decides, and it's not human capital which is currently in a position to mobilize that force. A negation of the logic of capital as a social mediation is at stake – coupled with an affirmation of another logic - overtly or covertly, in both the 'flexicurity' and the intellectual property scenario; it is disingenuous to repudiate the role of such a negation, although the nature of the negation or the counter-logic/s may be rightfully investigated. Finally, and not inconsequentially, the appreciation of human capital, although an intriguing thought experiment for political theorists, would appear to have very little mobilizing force for collectivities; it is doubtful whether the political claims Feher identifies with 'human capital' could be advanced using the terms of 'human capital'. Humanism dies harder than he imagines, which is why capital seeks recourse to 'human capital' in the first place. The incongruity rather than the harmony of the combination should be the focus.

### **From Self to Species-Being**

However, Feher's point about the necessary reference to some universal concept of freedom for the development of a political subjectivity can be approached more extensively. The inadequacy of either abstract labour or human capital to a substantial concept of socially

determined human freedom is related to the unfreedom portended by the domination of value in both of these social forms. Therefore, a few articulations of social activity untethered from the value-form - such as 'species-being' in Marx, 'libidinal economy' in Lyotard, and the 'purposeless purpose' of art in Kantian and Romantic aesthetics – are several vectors which could be examined here insofar as they prefigure some aspects of the 'abolition' of an abstract labour involved also in the production of subjectivity as well as the reproduction of capital.

In the 1844 *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Marx puts forward the idea of species-being as the defining characteristic of humanity in distinction both from other animals, and from a humanity subjugated by alienated labour:

Man makes his life activity itself the object of his will and of his consciousness. He has conscious life activity. It is not a determination with which he directly merges. Conscious life activity distinguishes man immediately from animal life activity. It is just because of this that he is a species-being. Or it is only because he is a species-being that he is a conscious being, i.e., that his own life is an object for him. Only because of that is his activity free activity. Estranged labor reverses the relationship, so that it is just because man is a conscious being that he makes his life activity, his *essential being*, a mere means to his *existence*.<sup>42</sup>

The *real, active* orientation of man to himself as a species-being, or his manifestation as a real species-being (i.e., as a human being), is only possible if he really brings out all his *species-powers* – something which in turn is only possible through the cooperative action of all of mankind, only as the result of history – and treats these powers as objects: and this, to begin with, is again only possible in the form of estrangement.<sup>43</sup>

This second passage presents a dialectic of 'estranged' or alienated labour, which accords with the idea that capital is a progressive force in history, rending asunder traditional social relations and de-mystifying them with the universal solvent of the value-form (albeit re-mystifying them in commodity fetishism). Following Hegel, humanity can historically appropriate its species-being only after the separation from and objectification of its productive powers in alienated labour. From this, it is clear that it is not in appropriating its

labour from its alienating conditions that humanity can recover or posit its species-being, but in appropriating its species-being from alienated labour. Species-being is the open-ended indeterminacy – species-becoming is more apt than species-being – which can be realized only after it has passed through the historical stage of abstraction and homogenization as labour in capital; from labour's earlier status of religiously or politically grounded duty to the social mediation of value-producing labour, which is purely formal and axiomatic. The negativity of this abstract social domination is, in the Hegelian schema Marx is tracing here, inseparable from humanity's emergence out of its 'pre-history' in the appropriation of its 'species-being' as the capacity to transform the conditions of its life. Species-being is elsewhere defined in terms reminiscent of Giambattista Vico's writings on history as the science most transparent to human knowledge because it is made by humans; thus, species-being is simply the presupposition that the human species is the only species that can act self-consciously in changing its environment and change itself in the process.<sup>44</sup> Hence the call for a negation of that estrangement of its powers which has been a necessary stage on the way to the emergence of the human species from 'pre-history'.

### **Value Equals Zero**

This is the dialectical schema which is questioned by Jean-François Lyotard in his early book *Libidinal Economy*. For him, the negation of the negation which structures the concept of species-being, and traverses much of Marx and Marxism, carries a theological freight. The impetus driving his investigation seems to be a kind of perverse and non-Hegelian 'tarrying with the negative', that is, dwelling in the mediation of alienated labour or excavating the alienation of labour as the site of a non-productive and excessive fetishism. Production and exchange must both be demolished for a libidinal economy that dispenses with ratio, basing itself instead on struggle and on affect, rather than affirming a harmonious vision of liberated production at the basis of its critique. It preserves and exacerbates the negativity of Marx's



vision of the proletariat as the self-annihilating agent that in doing away with its status as proletariat annihilates the entire order – but the proletariat is now formulated as a *disease* of capital, and the first victim of this disease. The emptying-out of ties and social orders, the subjugation to the empty form of value and the disaffection and intensity produced thereby are evoked as the corrosive agents of capitalist social organization rather than the justified collectivity of workers organized for the advancement of their interests. But these affects and conditions are also agents of propulsion, like the schizophrenic assemblages in the work of Lyotard's contemporaries Deleuze and Guattari. The 'tyranny of the sign', be it the revolution, the proletariat, democracy or capital, is seen as a domestication of this corrosive emptiness of the form of value, which is at its height in the speculative circuit, M-C-M' ('The Nihilist Theory of the Zero of Credit'):

We must grasp that currency (more generally every object in the system of capital, since they are commodities and therefore currency), actual or potential, is not merely a convertible value in a universal process of production, but *indiscernibly* (and not oppositionally, dialectically) a charge of libidinal intensity. We must grasp the fact that the system of capital is not the site of occultation of an alleged use-value which would be 'anterior' to it – this is the romanticism of alienation.<sup>45</sup>

The romanticism of alienation lies also, for Lyotard, in the assumption of a positive or whole subject who can collectively appropriate and produce use-values once that subject and those use-values are liberated from the impositions of capital. This kind of subject of alienation, an owning subject whose subjectivity can be alienated and recaptured like a property, needs to be countered by a subject that comes into being *through* alienation and whose radical dispossession is the starting point of any elaboration of non-capitalist life.<sup>46</sup> This lends another valence to the foregoing discussion of 'human capital', as it can be proposed that that concept at the same time dispenses with the alienated subject (the worker) while recuperating it in virtually the same gesture with the ideal and centred subject of appreciating values – or better, in Feher's terminology, an investor in a portfolio of assets. It would seem

that in either case, there is an unexplored possibility for antagonism, dispersion and non-identity which is constitutive of the negativity of the capitalist subject, whether figured as a worker or as self-entrepreneur.

What is important for Lyotard (as it was for contemporaries such as Jean-Joseph Goux and, in a different key, for Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari) in demoting the subject of alienation in favour of a de-subjectivation that would be the potential destruction of the sign, the symbolic (Lacan) realm which organizes the productive relations of the subject in relation to not just an alienating but a monstrous objectivity.<sup>47</sup> The destruction of the sign is accompanied by the destruction of the body, e.g. in industrial labour. This is the impact of capital's de-subjectifying operation, which operates directly on the libido.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, it is important to frontally take on this de-subjectifying operation by capital – which is now an accomplished historical fact – and exceed it in negativity until it shatters, rather than pine for a wholesome subject to be re-captured or emancipated.

By locating the site of subversion of the value-form within the value-form, the destruction of capitalist labour in the abstraction of that labour, Lyotard attempts to short-circuit the transitive equivalences of the dialectic by displacing the negativity inherent to dialectics and leveraging it against the positive signs which dialectical negation ultimately guarantees. The moment of negation is extended into a monstrous affirmation, a sort of dialectic-proof sublime rather than a Hegelian synthesis, an economy without equivalence, and certainly not the equivalence between the Rational and the Real. With regard to the notion of species-being adumbrated earlier, the notion of the subjectivity of labour as intrinsically excessive and perverse evokes a species-being as dedicated to its own destruction as to its realization, or rather, realization through destruction, with capital as the agent facilitating this trajectory.

The implications of *Libidinal Economy*'s 'theory of the zero of credit' (rather than the 'labour theory of value') for the speculative mode of production cannot be developed further here, although it is very suggestive. For now, we can note that Lyotard's discussion of libidinal economy offers one further direction for the analysis of 'human capital' as an ideological term which takes the measure of the superfluity and waste, the negativity of labour, and supersedes it with the open-ended indeterminacy, the 'zero' of capital, as a new name for the relation of labour – that does not want to be labour, a subjectivity that does not recognize its singularity in labour – to a capital which has absorbed and erased abstract labour not simply as a means to valorise itself, but as a means of signification. We can then wonder if species-being is recuperable from abstract labour when it seems the only way for labour to gain recognition is to either disappear into capital or become capital. This reflection would also have to address how to think about the negativity and excess represented by labour at a time when accumulation has again become 'primitive' enough to not only seek to absorb previously de-commodified goods, but consign large portions of the global population to the status of 'excess' and 'waste'. The negativity and excess posed by labour as capital's antagonistic source of value mutates into the negativity borne by capital with respect the excess posed to it by ever-more unproductive human life that stands no chance of being or accumulating 'human capital'.<sup>49</sup>

But closer to the topoi of this work, we could also venture that insofar as the rationalization of 'creativity' is one of the principal symptoms of the insertion of 'species-being' into abstract labour, this is simply the reality of commodity fetishism extended from social relations to the constitution of subjectivity. Just as in Lacan 'there is no sexual relationship' because of and despite the fetishisation of the Real (the authenticity impossibly borne by this kind of

relationship), there is no relationship between capital and labour when commodity fetishism has reached this stage because the distinction has ceased to apply. And yet labour, as the source of surplus value, is still the negativity to capital's pure self-valorising value, even when, or especially when, it is folded into capital as subject. And if this negativity is most easily grasped as a loss of the social salience of labour, the dominance of abstract exchange and the metastasis of value in all relations, it comes into a new proximity to the form of labour which has always been defined as non-labour since it only produces exchange-value and not use-value in capitalism: art. An art which has itself been detached from its material and ornamental affiliations to subsist as the exercise of pure subjective freedom.<sup>50</sup> In what way can we speak of art and labour thus coming onto a shared terrain of 'uselessness', albeit with radically different experiences of the rule of the value-form in their respective performance? As Marx says in the chapter on the commodity, 'If the thing is useless, so is the labour contained in it; the labour does not count as labour, and therefore creates no value.'<sup>51</sup> This phrase, unrelated to such discussion of art's role in capital as there is in Marx but pertinent to mine, will guide the next chapter's explorations. What is artistic labour's relationship to the value-form, how does this reflect the transformations in the space of waged work, and how does the form of value itself change under the torsion of financialisation and its 'absolute contingencies'?<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dmitry Vilensky, 'Activist Club or On the Concept of Cultural Houses, Social Centers & Museums', *New Productivisms*, eipcp/Transversal web journal, <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0910/vilensky/en>

<sup>2</sup> The terms here can be differentiated much more than a passing reference will permit. My account of these concepts draws on the following: for real abstraction, see Alberto Toscano, 'The Dead Pledge of Society: Methodological Problems and Political Consequences of "Real Abstraction"', paper delivered at the Marx and Philosophy conference, Institute of Education, London, 2010, available at <http://marxandphilosophy.org.uk/assets/files/society/pdfs/toscano2010.pdf>. For the notion of a 'crisis in measure', see Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, 'Value and Affect', *boundary*, Vol. 26, No. 2, Summer 1999, pp. 77-88. For 'fictitious capital', see Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume Three, David Fernbach, trans., London: Penguin Books, 1991, pp. 594-679 and Loren Goldner, 'Fictitious Capital for Beginners: Imperialism, "Anti-Imperialism", and the Continuing Relevance of Rosa Luxemburg', *Mute*, Vol. 2, No. 6, 2007, pp. 52-71.

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- <sup>3</sup> Costas Lapavistas, 'Financialisation, or the Search for Profits in the Sphere of Circulation', Research on Money and Finance Discussion Paper No. 10, 11 May 2009 at <http://www.researchonmoneyandfinance.org/media/papers/RMF-10-Lapavistas.pdf>; see also the concise discussion by Thomas I. Palley of The Levy Economics Institute of Bard College, 'Financialization: What It Is and Why It Matters': 'Financialization operates through three different conduits: changes in the structure and operation of financial markets, changes in the behavior of nonfinancial corporations, and changes in economic policy', Working Paper 525, December 2007, p. 2. [http://www.levyinstitute.org/pubs/wp\\_525.pdf](http://www.levyinstitute.org/pubs/wp_525.pdf).
- <sup>4</sup> David McNally, 'From Financial Crisis to World-Slump: Accumulation, Financialisation, and the Global Slowdown', in *Historical Materialism*, No. 17, 2009, pp. 35–83:56. See also McNally, *Global Slump: The Economics and Politics of Crisis and Resistance*, Oakland: PM Press, 2011; Christian Marazzi, *The Violence of Financial Capitalism* (New Edition), Kristina Lebedeva and Jason Francis McGimsey, trans., New York and Los Angeles: semiotext(e), 2011, p. 48.
- <sup>5</sup> For a theory of the 'becoming-rent' of profits, see Carlo Vercellone, 'The New Articulation of Wages, Rent and Profit in Cognitive Capitalism', paper given at the Art of Rent seminar, Queen Mary, University of London, 29 February 2008: [http://halshs.archivesouvertes.fr/docs/00/26/55/84/PDF/The\\_new\\_articulation\\_of\\_wagesHall1.pdf](http://halshs.archivesouvertes.fr/docs/00/26/55/84/PDF/The_new_articulation_of_wagesHall1.pdf). Marazzi discusses 'biocapitalism' in his paper 'Financial Entropy: The Struggle Within and Against Empire', given at "Empire: A Retrospective", The University of Pittsburgh, 18 November 2010: '[...]biocapitalism, that is, the mode of production which has as its object the exploitation of the totality of social life'. He also mentions it in *The Violence*, referring to Codeluppi's *Il biocapitalismo. Verso lo sfruttamento integrali di corpi, cervelli ed emozioni*.<sup>10</sup> Previously, capitalism resorted primarily to the functions of transformation of raw materials carried out by machines and the bodies of the workers. Instead, bio-capitalism produces value by extracting it not only from the body functioning as the material instrument of work, but also from the body understood as a whole." 'p. 49, as above.
- <sup>6</sup> Randy Martin, Dick Bryan, and Mike Rafferty, 'Financialization and Marx: Giving Labor and Capital a Financial Makeover', *Review of Radical Political Economics*, Vol. 41, No. 4, Fall 2009, pp. 458-72.
- <sup>7</sup> Although support for the autonomist view is generally derived from 'The Fragment on Machines' section in the *Grundrisse*, it can be noted that several passages in the first volume of *Capital* published ten years after the *Grundrisse* notes were written show that Marx was decisive on the point that the productive powers of labour are a function of the aggregative and mobilizing activity of capital, and serve to reproduce capital and the capital-labour relation rather than augment the independent power of labour as an antagonistic class or its ability to realize another mode of social production. This is not to deny that the class struggle and eventual political emergence of the working-class as a force of social re-composition are some of the unwanted contingencies of capital's reproduction of a working-class for its valorisation needs, which is part of the reason capital is considered a historically progressive agent. 'Being independent of each other, the workers are isolated. They enter into relations with the capitalist, but not with each other. Their co-operation only begins with the labour process, but by then they have ceased to belong to themselves. *On entering the labour process they are incorporated into capital*. As co-operators, as members of a working organism, they merely form a particular mode of the existence of capital. [...] Because this power costs capital nothing, while on the other hand it is not developed by the worker until his labour itself belongs to capital, it appears as a power which capital possesses by its nature – *a productive power inherent in capital!* *Capital*, vol. 1, p. 451. Further on, on page 453, we find 'Just as the social productive power of labour that is developed by co-operation appears to be the productive power of capital, so co-operation itself ... appears to be a specific form of the capitalist process of production [...] this social form of the labour process is a method employed by capital for the more profitable exploitation of labour, by increasing its productive power.' And on page 482, we see that the 'general

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intellect' names the process of cognitive proletarianization: 'The possibility of an intelligent direction of production expands in one direction, because it vanishes in many others. What is lost by the specialized workers is concentrated in the capital which confronts them. It is a result of the division of labour in manufacture that the worker is brought face to face with the intellectual potentialities of the material process of production as the property of another and as a power which rules over him. [...] It is completed in large-scale industry, which makes science a potentiality of production which is distinct from labour and presses it into the service of capital.' [all emphases mine] Further, every expansion of productivity is an index of the de-valorisation of labour-power: 'for everything that shortens the necessary labour-time required for the reproduction of labour-power, extends the domain of surplus-labour'. (p. 470). Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume One, Ben Fowkes, trans., London: Penguin Books, 1990.

- <sup>8</sup> Scott Cutler Shershow has an illuminating discussion of this in the fourth chapter of *The Work and the Gift*. He writes 'Autonomist Marxism [...] responds to this perceived crisis [the historical crisis of work e.g. in the West] not merely by reaffirming the creative potential of the laboring subject but also by wholly grounding itself in an ontology of production.'; 'autonomist Marxism as a whole always centers on some such identification of a fundamental historical rupture or crisis *within* the realm of work, which in turn makes possible a new liberation of work'. *The Work and the Gift*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005, pp. 64-6.
- <sup>9</sup> *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume One, as above, p. 152.
- <sup>10</sup> Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology*, Martin Sohn-Rethel, trans., London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1978; John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967.
- <sup>11</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-1979*, Graham Burchell, trans., Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008; Jason Read, 'A Genealogy of Homo-Economicus: Neoliberalism and the Production of Subjectivity', *Foucault Studies*, No. 6, February 2009, pp. 25-36; Michel Feher, 'Self-Appreciation; or, The Aspirations of Human Capital', Ivan Ascher, trans., *Public Culture*, Vol. 21, No.1, 2009, pp. 21-41.
- <sup>12</sup> Marx writes of the wage contract that 'All the notions of justice held by both the worker and the capitalist, all the mystifications of the capitalist mode of production, all capitalism's illusions about freedom, all the apologetic tricks of vulgar economics, have as their basis the form of appearance discussed above, which makes the actual relation invisible, and indeed presents to the eye the precise opposite of that relation.' *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume One, as above, p. 680.
- <sup>13</sup> Suhail Malik has done some provocative work here – see his 'A Boom Without End? Liquidity, Critique and the Art Market' (*Mute*, Vol. 2, No. 6, 2007, pp. 92-9) for a brief analysis of how the critical culture of art sustains its desirability as an asset class for investors: 'The critical purchase contemporary art has is now a method of legitimation rather than de-legitimation of dominant power as it is financially driven not despite but because of its ostensible content and claims with regard to cultural politics. In order to service the deployment of increased fiscal liquidity into the legitimating figure of critical cultural politics, it is important that art's critical claims do not disappear.'
- <sup>14</sup> 'Capitalist production, therefore, under its aspect of a continuous connected process, of a process of reproduction, produces not only commodities, not only surplus-value, but it also produces and reproduces the capitalist relation; on the one side the capitalist, on the other the wage-labourer.' Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume One, Ben Fowkes, trans., London: Penguin Books, 1990, p. 724, and *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, Martin Nicolaus, trans., New York: Penguin, 1973, p. 512: 'The production of capitalists and wage labourers is thus a chief part of capital's realization process. Ordinary economics, which looks only at the things produced, forgets this completely.' See also Mario Tronti, quoted in Nicholas Thoburn, *Deleuze, Marx and Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003): 'the "maintenance of

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capitalist relations as a whole across society, such that Capital's process of socialization becomes the specific material base upon which [the process of development of capitalism] is founded." (Tronti 1973: 98).

<sup>15</sup> *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume One, as above, p. 899.

<sup>16</sup> See Randy Martin's *The Financialization of Daily Life* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002) for an analysis of an emergent financial common sense through the mediation of personal finance in economic, spiritual and social realms around the time of the dot.com boom.

<sup>17</sup> 'Rather than being *persuaded* by the power of neoliberal arguments, people are *trained* to view themselves as rational benefit-maximisers, those elusive creatures of economic theory. This training takes place through a forced engagement with markets, not just in our economic activities, but in every sphere of our lives . . .' 'Life in Limbo,' Turbulence Collective, *Turbulence* journal, issue 5; December 2009, also at <http://turbulence.org.uk/turbulence-5/>

<sup>18</sup> Jason Read, 'A Genealogy of Homo-Economicus', as above, p. 16.

<sup>19</sup> Paolo Virno advances these concepts in the endeavour to describe the 'attunement' or 'mood' of contemporary labour in a number of his published writings, for instance in *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito, Andrea Casson, trans., Los Angeles and New York: semiotext(e), 2004.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>21</sup> Stefano Harney, 'The Real Knowledge Transfer', *Social Text*, Periscope web journal, 6 August 2010: <http://www.socialtextjournal.org/periscope/2010/08/the-real-knowledge-transfer.php> .

<sup>22</sup> This can be understood in the empirical sense of the alienation of time, for instance in workfare and work-readiness programs for the unemployed, or the alienation of all free time as potentially productive time for 'freelancers', the domination of work as a disciplinary force even as the percentage of those held to be superfluous to the labour market grows. The 'surplus population', always structurally indispensable to capitalism, assumes another iteration in periods of 'sovereign-debt' cutting, as its maintenance becomes a matter of state fiscal solvency rather than private enterprise, or the means by which the state can virtuously emulate the rationalising capitalist. 'The public debt becomes one of the most powerful levers of primitive accumulation'. (p. 919, *Capital*, Volume One) Or it can be posited in a more ontological sense, as does Giorgio Agamben in his essay 'The Face': "This means that an integrated Marxian analysis should take into consideration the fact that capitalism (or whatever other name we might want to give to the process dominating world history today) not only was directed to the expropriation of productive activity, but was also and above all directed to the alienation of language itself, of the communicative nature of human beings.' *Means Without End*, Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino, trans., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, p. 96.

<sup>23</sup> *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume One, as above, p. 451.

<sup>24</sup> The 'radical impoverishment' of the *vogelfrei* working-class Marx refers to has to be considered in light of his remark that while it is a misfortune to be exploited, it is a greater misfortune not to be, and that this is the condition many proletarians (anyone who does not own their means of production or have an independent income stream) are facing today.

<sup>25</sup> Jason Read, 'A Genealogy of Homo-Economicus: Neoliberalism and the Production of Subjectivity', as above, pp. 31-2.

<sup>26</sup> Gary S. Becker, *Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis with Special Reference to Education*, 3rd Edition, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993, p. 16. Becker tellingly makes a passing reference to the slave trade as a market in 'human capital' in the 'Introduction to the Second Edition': 'I also drew on evidence for slaves, the one example of an explicit market that trades and prices human capital stocks rather than simply the services yielded by those stocks. A major and insightful study has recently appeared that

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interprets the market for slaves in the United States in terms of the theory of investment in human capital.' pp. 9-10.

- <sup>27</sup> 'Although the civil rights movement clearly contributed to greater job opportunities for women and other minorities, it is far from the whole story. This can be seen from the fact that women progressed most rapidly under the Reagan administration, which was opposed to affirmative action and did not have an active Civil Rights Commission. In my judgement, women advanced primarily because of their greater attachment to the labour force.' Gary S. Becker, *Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis with Special Reference to Education*, as above, p. 19.
- <sup>28</sup> In a ground-breaking article from 2009, Morgan Adamson notes that the 'novel aspect of the invention of human capital is not merely that it measures the capacity of human labour, but it does so in a manner that [...] draws upon an economic framework modelled on the valuation of fixed capital. In essence, the technology of human capital produces its object, human ability conceived of as a fixed form of capital, in order to measure it.' 'The Human Capital Strategy', *ephemera: theory and politics in organization*, Vol. 9, No. 4, 2009, pp. 271-284:272.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 271. The essay explores 'the development of the concept of human capital as a system that measures the value of education in order to produce a zone for financial speculation in human knowledge as capital, arguing that this process is in line with Marx's theorization of the transfer of the productive capacities of society to fixed capital in the *Grundrisse*.'
- <sup>30</sup> 'The general value-form, in which all the products of labour are presented as mere congealed quantities of undifferentiated human labour, shows by its very structure that it is the social expression of the world of commodities. In this way it is made plain that within this world the general human character of labour forms its specific social character'. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume One, as above, p. 160. See also passages on pp. 128, 129, 155, et.al.
- <sup>31</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Werner S. Pluhar, trans., Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987, p. 131.
- <sup>32</sup> Postone's development of the category of 'abstract labour' makes for an informative comparison with Alfred Sohn-Rethel's attempt, in his *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology*, to ground his category of real abstraction in another formal category in Marx, the category of exchange. However, as has been pointed out by Roberto Finelli and Alberto Toscano, the abstracting mechanism of exchange is not specific to the capitalist mode of production, undermining Sohn-Rethel's critical account of how categories of thought are ideologically rooted in the loss of concreteness pervading the social once trade in equal and fungible commodities is generalized as a 'social synthesis'. In their account, and in Postone's, it is abstract labour which is the specifically capitalist mode of rendering equivalent, posing a better starting point for a derivation of conceptual and social categories from the dominance of real abstraction. This in turn refers to the dominance of the commodity in social relations in different historical epochs, with the centrality of 'abstract labour' signalling the apex of this domination in capitalism. Postone encapsulates the problem in a footnote in his book: 'Sohn-Rethel does not distinguish between a situation such as that in fifth-century Attica where commodity production was widespread but by no means the dominant form of production, and capitalism, a situation in which the commodity form is totalizing. He is, therefore, unable to ground socially the distinction, emphasized by Georg Lukács, between Greek philosophy and modern rationalism'. *Time, Labor and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993; note 90, p. 156.
- <sup>33</sup> The 'essentialist' stance is both a Marxian and anti-Marxian theme. It is a relative commonplace of 'post-Structuralist' and even 'post-Marxist' political theory and sociology; there are textual references in Marx of course that do support this critique, and it is probably Foucault and Derrida who have contributed the most to



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its elaboration, not to mention the tradition established by 'dialectical materialism' which has never had a dialectical conception of labour in capitalism. The problematics of the 'living labour' approach are manifested in some of Negri's writings as well as in Thoburn (op.cit.) and in Read's *The Micro-politics of Capital: Marx and the Prehistory of the Present* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2003) which is on the whole a very nuanced and rigorous attempt to conjugate Althusser, Negri, Deleuze and Guattari and Italian Autonomist feminism into a 'politics of subjectivity'-oriented reading of Marx. Important for this thesis is that the dialectics of labour are not internal to labour but to the value that organizes it, meaning, 'good' labour cannot be affirmed within and against 'bad' labour (and it is in fact the 'workerist' writings of Mario Tronti and Raniero Panzieri which provide the most succinct support for this idea), since this would remain trapped in the dual nature of capitalist value. Thinking through 'real abstraction' allows us to dismantle an affirmative emphasis on 'use-value' which superficially promises an exit from social relations dominated by 'exchange-value'. Such an encounter calls for a reckoning with the dwindling component of use-value in the value-form dominating abstract labour, which further minimises the chances of a practical or critical route to anti- or post-capitalist social relations via a recuperation of the use-values produced by labour; it is no longer possible to take the standpoint of 'labour' for the purposes of critique of capital. This is a point which is also pivotal to the more structuralist and Hegelian currents of communism theory, exemplified by *Théorie Communiste* and *Endnotes*, respectively. Below, we will see the sociologist Michel Feher avow this point from another perspective.

<sup>34</sup> Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor and Social Domination*, as above, pp. 152-153, 157.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>36</sup> Richard Florida, *Cities and the Creative Class*, New York and London: Routledge, 2005; *The Flight of the Creative Class: The New Global Competition for Talent*, New York: Harper Collins, 2005; *The Rise of the Creative Class Revisited (10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition)*, New York: Basic Books, 2012.

<sup>37</sup> Michel Feher, 'Self-Appreciation; or, The Aspirations of Human Capital', as above, p. 25.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>40</sup> Sonja Bekker, Ton Wilthagen, Per Kongshoj Madsen, Jianping Zhou, Ralf Rogowski, Maarten Keune, Andranik Tangian, 'Forum: Flexicurity - a European Approach to Labour Market Policy', *Intereconomics*, Vol. 43, No. 2, 2008, pp. 68-111.

<sup>41</sup> A relevant note to this comes in Bryan, Martin and Rafferty's 'Financialization and Marx: Giving Labor and Capital a Financial Makeover': 'For labor to "really" be on the same footing as capital would require that labor could take on the risk management capacities of capital. The most fundamental of these is limited liability, which is now integral to the corporate form of capital. For labor, this would involve the construction of a fictive legal entity that stands for labor but is not itself labor. But the accumulation of capital is predicated on the fact that the worker cannot be separated from their labor power: *the worker is concurrently commodity capital and variable capital*, and the difference in these values is the basis of surplus value. To separate these dimensions in the name of risk management would negate the process of surplus value creation. Accordingly, capital's core risk management strategy must systematically be denied to labor'. As above, pp. 469-70. [emphasis mine]

<sup>42</sup> Karl Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', *Early Writings*, Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton, trans., London: Penguin Books, 1992, p. 328.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 386.

<sup>44</sup> Giambattista Vico, *New Science: Principles of the New Science, Concerning the Common Nature of Nations*, David Marsh, trans., London: Penguin Books, 1999.

<sup>45</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, Iain Hamilton Grant, trans., London and New York: Continuum, 1993, pp. 78-9.

<sup>46</sup> Due to the nature of his philosophical project as well as the specific concerns in this book, Lyotard is compelled

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to underplay the extent to which this conception also held for Marx, ran through Hegel, and flourished in anti-work, left-communist and critical theory currents among Marx's contemporaries and later adherents, such as Paul Lafargue, Walter Benjamin or Theodor Adorno.

<sup>47</sup> Jean-Joseph Goux, *Symbolic Economies After Marx and Freud*, Jennifer Curtiss Gage, trans., Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990; Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, trans., London: Athlone Press, 2000.

<sup>48</sup> '... the body-zero with its capitalist function, whereas its alleged *use* is never anything but the blow-by-blow bargaining of the exchangeabilities between organs. We must not even say that this body is then perverted or perverse, since it never *is* anything at all (but it *is this nothing*), and therefore cannot be *diverted* from any predetermined use.' (Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, as above, p. 178) The best-known passages, however, which develop this idea – if not the best-known passages in *Libidinal Economy* full-stop – are probably the 'scandalous' paean to the joy of alienated labour: '... there are errant forces *in* the signs of capital. Not in its margins as its *marginals*, but dissimulated in its most "nuclear", the most essential exchanges, the most "alienated" or "fetishized" exchanges [...] But it is extraordinarily difficult to recognize the *desire of capital* such as it is instantiated here and there; as, for example, in labour, in the awful mundane sense of the *grind* for which not even the worker today has enough words of contempt and disrepute [...] But, you will say, it gives rise to power and domination, to exploitation and even extermination. . . You will tell me, however, that it was that or die. *But it is always that or die*, this is the law of libidinal economy [...] And perhaps you believe that 'that or die' is an *alternative*?! And that if they choose that, if they become the slave of the machine, the machine of the machine, fucker fucked by it, eight hours, twelve hours, a day, year after year, it is because they are forced into it, constrained, because they cling to life? Death is not an alternative to it, it is a part of it, it attests to the fact that there is *jouissance* in it, the English unemployed did not become workers to survive, they – hang on tight and spit on me – *enjoyed* the hysterical, the masochistic, whatever exhaustion it was of *hanging on* in the mines, in the foundries, in the factories, in hell, they enjoyed it, enjoyed the mad destruction of their organic body which was indeed imposed on them, they enjoyed the decomposition of their personal identity, the identity that the peasant tradition had constructed for them, enjoyed the dissolution of their families and villages, and enjoyed the new monstrous *anonymity* of the suburbs and the pubs in the morning and evening'. (Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, as above, pp. 108-10)

<sup>49</sup> See Denise Ferreira da Silva, 'No-Bodies: Law, Raciality and Violence', *Griffith Law Review*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 2009, pp. 212-36 on racialised state violence. On the post-colonial 'politics of death', see Achille Mbembe, 'Necropolitics', *Public Culture*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2003, pp. 11–40. See also Endnotes, 'Misery and Debt', *Endnotes* No. 2, April 2010, pp. 21-52 for a Marxist development of the concept of 'surplus population'. We are increasingly witnessing the relationship of capital and state to 'surplus populations' closer to home with the advent of the normalized slavery of workfare and 'cuts' depriving the disabled and unemployed of means of subsistence in a time of escalating unemployment and shrunken social care budgets.

<sup>50</sup> See Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content* (Georgia Albert, trans., Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999) for an astute examination of the conditions for the emergence of the artistic subject in the modern, or capitalist, era. The trajectory of the book emerges as an attempt to draw the consequences of Hegel's theory of the end of art, or rather its supersession by pure reflexive subjectivity, which can be understood as the decisive role of *taste* (in e.g. Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew* – but also via Kant and the indeterminacy of aesthetic judgement). I discuss this in Chapter Three.

<sup>51</sup> *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume One, as above, p. 131.

<sup>52</sup> 'Absolute contingencies' is a reference to the work of Elie Ayache, whose stochastic/non-probabilistic/speculative realist theory of financial markets centres on the concept of 'absolute contingency' which he derives from the philosophical work of Quentin Meillassoux. I discuss Ayache at length in the next chapter.

## Chapter Two

### Topologies of Speculation: Art, Labour, Finance and Time

#### Introduction

'Speculation as a mode of production' in art and capital is a proposition intended to clarify how the commodity character of art and of labour-power, examined from the formal-logical, the social and the aesthetic point of view, undergoes a shift in an era of valorisation which I have described as speculative. The relation between art and labour, as two contrary social forms, one which is predicated on uselessness and the other on a social use-value, start to lose their contours as a more immanent experience of abstract value determines the conditions for both. The speculative subject, whether of aesthetics or labour-power, is thus key to understanding how capital in its current mode – a mode that has been defined in terms of 'fictitious capital' as well as a 'double decoupling' between labour and capital<sup>1</sup> – drives a re-orientation of art and labour away from the discrete terrains set out for them by a previous mode of accumulation towards a problematic convergence of self-expanding value couched in notions such as 'creativity' or 'human capital'. This is what I aim to bring together under the rubric 'speculation'.

I have aimed to delineate the specific form of subjectivity that belongs to speculation as a mode of production. This called upon an understanding of subjectivity as a thoroughly social rather than a psychological or individual category – an 'objective' subjectivity that should be read from and against its social conditions of possibility. Here, 'subjectivity' can also be seen as an objectivity which becomes internalized, and individualized. This is

grounded in the fetishised character of the individual in capitalism. The liberal notion of the individual is by definition a being who is under-determined by, and primary to, social and historical processes. However, it can be argued that the dividing line between subjectivity and objectivity itself is an index of social and historical process.<sup>2</sup> The category of 'subjectivity' and its conditions of production is useful because this category enables us to think about the repressed politics in a dominant notion of 'creativity' which models subjectivity on self-valorising value in line with the social dominance of self-valorising value as modelled by financialised capital.<sup>3</sup> This brings us to an essentially 'economic' concept of creativity, with the entrepreneurial bearer of this subjectivity as the 'bearer' or manager of their own 'human capital'. The accounts of the 'human capital' concept that I surveyed in the previous chapter, however, do not exhaust the story of how the open-ended contingency of creativity becomes reconciled with value in the production of subjectivity. Later, I will approach this assumed reconciliation through the lens of the concept of 'real subsumption', enabling me to track how subjectivity is 'capitalised' through developments in production and property.

The account of the emergence of human capital as this kind of 'capitalization of the human' needs to be supplemented with an account of the 'humanization of capital' corollary to the precepts of creative work, creative management, and arts-led economic strategies native to the 'creative industries' discourse. My approach throughout this thesis follows critical aesthetics and value-form theory, which dictate a negative traversal and inhabitation of such 'economistic' notions for what they teach us about what social forms can be dialectically extracted from them. However, as already noted, I am also interested in

certain concepts from Marxist autonomist theory for their proximity, as well as their distance, from such a project. Thus I am interested, without committing to a fuller exploration here, in the post-Operaist debates around 'immaterial labour' and the 'general intellect'. Insofar as they fail to adequately link their accounts of capital and their accounts of production historically rather than ontologically, they can echo certain aspects of the affirmation of labour in the discussions of the 'creative industries', albeit for very different theoretical and tactical reasons. Such a tendency is a danger courted by, for example, the Spinozist and Nietzschean tenor of social production in the work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri.<sup>4</sup> It is, however, a thread that arguably runs through the work influenced by Marxist autonomist thought, since it stakes much on the liberation of labour from capital, rather than their mutual implication in the drive to abolish both.

I now intend to build upon the conjecture that the foregoing depiction of waste and uselessness e.g. in Lyotard is a decisively aesthetic project of negation, linked to the role played by labour in the Kantian and post-Kantian tradition of Romantic aesthetics. When we say 'aesthetic project', this is meant to signify the sublation of labour in 'free activity' rather than in capital, which latter the previous chapter mainly focused on. Both in 'human capital' and in 'libidinal economy', there is a cancellation of labour by capital, whether this is an antagonistic or affirmative one. With critical or post-Romantic Marxist aesthetics, there is a cancellation of labour by a notion of free activity prefigured by art. In both cases, there is a tension between overcoming or simply sidestepping the domination of abstract value in order to attain emancipation from labour.

The post-Romantic tradition of critical aesthetics charts the disjunction between labour and freedom in a dialectical vision of human autonomy, that is, the dialectic of autonomy and heteronomy.<sup>5</sup> In this corpus, human freedom cannot result from the appropriation of humanity's productive powers from capital, since labour is understood as always and by its nature unfree or compulsory, counterpoised to play or mimesis as the definitively human capacity for free and purposeless creation. Here there is a suggestive crossover between the critique of labour in critical and Marxist aesthetics, and the critique of labour in Marxist value-form theory, with exponents such as Isaac Rubin, Moishe Postone and Christopher Arthur, as well as the writers of the 'communisation current' that depart from value-form theory, such as the Endnotes group.<sup>6</sup> The crossover can be described as a common rejection of a positive concept of use-value or of labour which can be extracted from the social relations of capital; use-value is an aspect of value, and labour is always an aspect of value-determined labour, or, 'abstract labour'. The 'negation of labour' perspective, further, recurs in the thought of Italian Operaismo as 'refusal of work', most saliently in the work of Mario Tronti.<sup>7</sup> Thus I will be interested in juxtaposing the critique of labour deriving from critical aesthetics with the critique of labour in critical political economy and Marxist philosophy on their common ground of a dialectic of negation. From this perspective, 'speculation as a mode of production' can also start to describe a mode of conceptual production whose impetus is to find the 'speculative' aspect of every concept. This is not simply to deploy the dialectic as a speculative mode of thought, but to intensify the speculative potential of every category based on its materializations in the real practices which are distributed under those categories. Categories such as art, labour, value, subsumption, autonomy, heteronomy, negation – all these are speculative categories

rather than self-sufficient theoretical principles. They are thus incomplete and open to re-articulation in their concrete historical situation. While this echoes the structure of thinking set out by Theodor Adorno in *Negative Dialectics*, where objects will always exceed their concepts, it should be noted that negation would itself have to be determined as one of those concepts.

The question of autonomy and heteronomy frames the inquiry into the constitutive bind of art as being both like and unlike socially necessary labour in capitalism. Art as a realization of freedom as posed by critical aesthetics discloses its implicit contradiction – its denial of labour – but also that this contradiction cannot be eradicated by 'socializing' art or dissolving its distinction from labour since it does contain a yet-abstract freedom from capitalist work, capitalist time and capitalist value, a freedom which is only accessible through and despite its commodity status. This commodity status is posited as the condition of its critical distance.<sup>8</sup> What happens to this dialectic under the conditions of industrialized creativity? Further, what happens if the opposite pole to art in this critical tradition – labour – declines as a political and economic category? Does the specificity of both art and labour decline as well?

An important aim of this chapter is to theorize the conditions of possibility for an 'artistic worker' and to reformulate them in terms of the negativity inherent in the indeterminacy of generic creativity as a rule for labour; or, in terms recognizable to Adorno, the negativity that marks autonomy as the scar of its break with the heteronomous. I will contend that the passage through labour for art, and the passage through art for labour are both crucial; the

creative subject of labour needs to traverse the de-subjectivation, formalism and illegitimacy of artistic activity, while artistic production needs to traverse the negativity and constraint of abstract labour as its own most intimate parameter. This chapter will specify the place and morphology of 'speculation' in the analysis, and how the negativity of the value-form diverges in its two expressions as finance and as labour, prior to following how this negativity registers in the conditions for art.

An initial approach could be to see what happens if we try and re-figure art as itself a kind of 'abstract labour' under conditions of generalized 'creativity', or, as I have been putting it, 'speculation'. When it comes to figuring the proximity between art and labour, the commodity form of art and the commodity form of labour-power have to be elucidated prior to seeing in what sense it is possible to speak of both art and labour-power in their social character of abstract labour. Keeping in mind my reference in the Introduction to the difficulty of re-defining art as a form of abstract labour due to its incompatibility with hallmarks of abstract labour such as the wage-form and capitalist production process, I will first cite the classical definition of abstract labour in Marx, supplementing it with illuminating recent discussion in Moishe Postone and Christopher Arthur. I will contend that in order to bring the critique of capitalist productive relations in critical aesthetics into the present social and economic configuration, art can be viewed as a form of abstract labour – and thus part of abstract labour's negativity in capital - so that it can perform the critical function imputed to it by critical aesthetics effectively in a situation where art and labour no longer stand in opposition. Here the proximity of 'art' and 'abstract labour' demonstrates the potential of holding them both as speculative categories. Here I will also



be hedging my bets slightly. In addition to the attempted re-formulation of art as abstract labour, I will also approach the elision between art and labour from the standpoint of the value-form more broadly: I will be drawing a link between the expansion of the category of art and the expansion of the value-form in the dynamics of social production and reproduction in recent times. Such an expansion, I will argue, is an index of the crisis in the relations of production that have kept art and labour separate, a separation that can no longer hold once that crisis is considered not just a general malfunctioning of a discrete logic of valorisation called 'finance' but a crisis in the capital-labour relation more generally, a crisis that derives from the terminal logic (for capital) of finance as abstraction.

### **'Counterproductive' and Abstract Labour**

'The social form of labour during capitalism as abstract labour corresponds to the commodity as the social form of the products of labour.'<sup>9</sup>

Abstract labour is the substance held in common by commodities which enables them to enter into a relation of equivalence with one another mediated by money, the general equivalent. For Marx, abstract labour is the general social character, or expression, of the different private instances of concrete labour that constitute the capitalist mode of production, and it is abstract because it is the form of social labour established in a society dominated by the real abstraction of value. Abstract labour is then not a specific type of content of labour, a labour rendered insubstantial, generic or relational by its specific product or production process ('immaterial labour'), so much as an analytical category that describes the social form of all labour in capital per se:

as the use value which confronts money posited as capital, labour is not this or another labour, but labour pure and simple, abstract labour; absolutely indifferent to its particular specificity [*Bestimmtheit*], but capable of all specificities. [...] it becomes more and more a *purely abstract activity*, a purely mechanical activity, hence indifferent to its particular form; a merely *formal* activity, or, what is the same, a merely *material* [*stofflich*] activity, activity pure and simple, regardless of its form.<sup>10</sup>

The general value-form, in which all the products of labour are presented as mere congealed quantities of undifferentiated human labour, shows by its very structure that it is the social expression of the world of commodities. In this way it is made plain that within this world the general human character of labour forms its specific social character.<sup>11</sup>

Elsewhere, Marx emphasizes that the indifference to the particular form of the labouring activity is not simply the result of the alienated encounter between the wage-labourer and the job she has been hired to perform, nor is it the irrelevance of the content of labour detected by the critical analyst of capital who sees only abstract value; abstract labour is a social form because it structures the social relation between the worker and the capitalist, thus this indifference is shared by the capitalist and the worker – both see any particular working situation as a means to making money. 'This indifference towards the specific content of labour is not only an abstraction made by us; it is also made by capital, and it belongs to its essential character.'<sup>12</sup>

Here we see two things which will be important for the following discussion: the necessary social form of labour as the crux of its existence in the capitalist relation, which tends to undermine any account that would see this labour as a positive pole in non- or anti-capitalist productive relations and their concomitant politics; and the dialectic of the social

form as a 'mere' form, a negativity devoid of positive content or necessity, which must be 'tarrried with' and traversed in all its socially embedded destitution in order to potentially arrive at another social praxis. In other words, we can see in the capitalist social form of abstract labour and its 'purely mechanical activity' insofar as it is a means to a monetary end, regardless of degree of specialization, personal satisfaction or fulfilment of social needs in particular instances of that labour, the elements of the 'abstract activity' which is the basis of 'free activity'.<sup>13</sup> As such, it is relevant for the historical and material contingency at the heart of 'species-being' – or the autonomy proper to human emancipation in Romantic antecedents of Marx such as Friedrich Schiller, or the divergent idealisms of Kant and Hegel, all of which informed Marx's thinking at the time the concept of 'species-being' first emerged in his writing.

However, the becoming-activity of the labour-capital relation, which requires that both poles of this relation are overcome, is distinct from the negation of labour performed by the value-form in the capitalist social relation as part of its normal operations of valorisation. Earlier in the section of the *Grundrisse* from which the above quote was drawn, Marx writes that labour in its subjective moment, prior to becoming a commodity in a relation with capital, is 'not-value'; it is the source of all value, the 'general possibility' of all value, value in the abstract, but in itself is not value. Once it is objectified in capital, it loses its antagonistic, or even distinct, character as labour; inasmuch as this character is preserved, it is as dead labour, indistinguishable from capital.

It is the nebulous position of labour in its subjective moment – which can also be called

'living labour' – that frames the sense in which theorists such as Paolo Virno and Giorgio Agamben, among others, have drawn on the Aristotelian category of 'potentiality' to discuss labour-power which is purchased with a view towards a possible but not necessarily actualized generation of value, especially when that labour-power is a portion of the 'general intellect' and is resistant to measure and standardization.<sup>14</sup> In principle, labour-power is a paradoxical commodity since it is sold in a state of potentiality, although it may be more accurate to say that it is rented with payment due in the future, when it has already generated the expected quantum of surplus-value (an additional complication would be that this value may or may not be realized on the market, and is thus keeps the character of potentiality after it has already been paid for). We shall see whether this character of labour-power as a commodity bought in a state of potentiality resonates with the abstraction of labour as a social form, and with the indeterminacy at the heart of both the value relation (self-valorisation of capital indifferent to content or means of this valorisation) and the aesthetic. This would require establishing that the ideological basis of speculation as a mode of production relies principally on fusing the indeterminacy of a labour re-formulated as self-valorising creativity with the heightened contingency in the valorisation process native to financialised capitalism. Such an articulation crucially depends on a positive – hence ideological – meaning of this shared indeterminacy, that is, a conflation of the subjective self-valorisation of her own human capital by the entrepreneurial subject and the self-valorisation of capital as such. This should then be countered with an assessment of the negativity proper to the labour-capital relation which refers back to the empty or abstract form of value that controls this relation, and how this negativity is correlated to emancipation in critical aesthetics and art. This chapter will

develop this intuition through a precise attention to the role of temporality and subjectivity in financial speculation, and whether the kinds of contingency such speculation depends on are akin to the speculation of aesthetic, or, eventually, political praxis. At issue is whether the contingencies associated with processes of speculative value-creation in finance are truly negative in such a way as to put their own premises into question. To give a more comprehensive account of this negativity, we will stay with the implications of labour as 'not-value'.

Christopher Arthur associates abstract labour with the term 'not-value' in the following sense:

behind the positivity of value lies a process of *negation*. Capital accumulation realises itself only by negating that which resists the valorisation process, labour as 'not-value'. This new concept of valorisation allows a restatement of the labour theory of value as a dialectic of negativity.<sup>15</sup>

That is to say, labour only becomes productive when it is absorbed by capital and becomes 'not-labour'; in its friction within or separation from this process, it is 'not-value', and 'not-value' becomes value when its antagonistic character of living labour is negated and absorbed into capital. This echoes the preceding idea of labour in its subjective moment as 'not-value' which is not only its constitutive opposition to being subsumed by capital in the production process as sketched out above, but its potential to be something other than labour as the source of value. This resistance to being subsumed is called by Arthur 'counterproductive labour':

Albeit that the production process is really subsumed by capital, the problem for capital is that it needs the agency of labour. [...] Thus, even if Marx is right that the productive power

of labour is absorbed into that of capital to all intents, it is necessary to bear in mind that capital still depends upon it. Moreover, the repressed subjectivity of the workers remains a threat to capital's purposes in this respect. [...] Capital is limited by the extent to which it can enforce the 'pumping out' (Marx) of labour services. The consequence of this special feature of labour is that the relation of capital and labour is intrinsically antagonistic and that in this sense there is reason to speak of waged labour not so much as 'productive labour' but as *'counterproductive labour'* in that the workers are actually or potentially recalcitrant to capital's effort to compel their labour.<sup>16</sup>

Here there are unmistakable echoes of the autonomist thesis of the potentiality of labour-power, especially the 'virtuoso' labour-power that produces nothing but an experience or a service, to exceed its dominated character and become a 'public sphere', a common space where the performance of sociality can be turned to socially constitutive rather than profit-making ends.<sup>17</sup> The 'counter-productivity' of labour names the space of this potentiality insofar as it resists being absorbed into the self-positing of capital. However, rather than stay with the alternate productivity of 'potentiality', we will here look rather at the implications of the 'intrinsically antagonistic' relation of labour and capital for abstract labour. This is to stay with Arthur's use of 'counter-productive' as an immanent tendency of the labour-capital relation, one which would perhaps resist being 'put to work' by the positive entity 'counter-productivity'.

In the previous chapter, I outlined Moishe Postone's concept of abstract labour as social form, and the social form most integral to defining capitalism as a social relation, more integral even than exchange. This is a conception shared by Arthur, and they both ground it in Isaac I. Rubin's essays on value in which capitalist commodity exchange is shown to be predicated on abstract labour.<sup>18</sup> Postone takes this in a direction influenced by his

engagement with the Frankfurt School to situate abstract labour as the 'ground of social domination'.<sup>19</sup> Here I would just like to return to a specific point in Postone's exposition, which will help to elucidate the discussion that will follow on the political valences of aesthetic negativity.

Postone is concerned with a methodological point as well as a critical one, or rather the relationship between methodology and the critical character of Marx's analysis of labour. For him, Marx's mode of immanent critique is both the ground for its effectiveness as a critique of capital and its political economy, and a source of confusion for subsequent Marxist theorists. The immanence of the critique means that it is not always evident when the categories of capital are being employed critically.

social relations in capitalism appear in the form of the relations among objects and, hence seem to be trans-historical. [...] for Marx, even categories of the "essence" of the capitalist social formation such as "value" and "abstract human labor" are reified – and not only for their categorial forms of appearance such as exchange value and, on a more manifest level, price and profit. This is extremely crucial, for it would demonstrate that the categories of Marx's analysis of the essential forms underlying the various categorial forms of appearance are intended not as ontological, transhistorically valid categories, but purportedly grasp social forms that themselves are historically specific. Because of their peculiar character, however, these social forms appear to be ontological.<sup>20</sup>

Thus many writers following Marx tend to appropriate critical categories as positive ones, and end up fetishising labour and use-value as the non-capitalist core of a socialist future, once these are freed from the integuments of value (or even simply exchange-value).<sup>21</sup> They thus impute a trans-historical and often ontological currency to the categories of labour and value, missing that Marx's analysis is not a critique of the exploitation of labour,

but of labour as a capitalist social form which is perpetuated precisely via its timeless, generic appearance.

### **Autonomy and Real Abstraction**

From this discussion of the historically and socially mediated nature of the abstraction of labour in capitalism, we are now in a better position to explore the specific type of negation performed by art vis-a-vis labour in a society dominated by the abstraction of value. If in recent years, labour has been re-fashioned as 'creativity' and the creative gyrations of finance have become the primary engines of accumulation, we have also witnessed art as in no previous period assimilated into the economy not purely as ornament or market commodity but as a structure of legitimation for both those processes, a 'structure of feeling' that lends an emancipatory valence to an ever more predatory landscape of social relations. The accepted Modernist form of the negation performed by art in opposition to labour in a capitalist society – art is autonomous, an ensemble of activities done for its own sake, while labour is heteronomous, done for extrinsic ends- can no longer hold, even in the rigorously dialectical version proposed by Theodor Adorno. With speculation as a mode of production, the dialectic between autonomy and heteronomy becomes insufficient because autonomy acquires a new instrumentality in heteronomy: it becomes a style or an affect, rather than a structural opposition in capitalist value relations. However, it is the extent to which this autonomy manages to deny or repel these value relations –relating to them only obliquely, if at all - that it can be instrumentalised. Autonomy becomes a kind of immanent refusal within heteronomy, and no longer as a counter-power to which power (heteronomy) is



immanent, as it is Adorno's account. A generalized speculation sees art as the emblem of reconciliation between subjective freedom and the freedom of capital.

Adorno's version of the autonomy of art goes as follows: the separation of art and labour must have deep roots in how both of these social forms relate to the commodity. These contradictions then should be located at the heart of the social character of art itself, which emerges as an uneven topology of autonomy and heteronomy – autonomy understood as art's immanence to its own laws, and heteronomy as social determinations external to those laws. In the essay 'Art, Society, Aesthetics', Adorno makes a few statements along these lines, statements that poise art as a constitutive exclusion to e.g. the 'profane world' of productive relations and instrumental reason: 'Art can be understood only by its laws of movement, not according to any set of invariants. It is defined by its relation to what it is not. The specifically artistic in art must be derived concretely from its other'.<sup>22</sup> What this implies is that for 'the demands of a materialistic-dialectical aesthetics' proposed by Adorno to be fulfilled, there has to be an idea of a strong, yet contingent and incomplete, relationship between art objects and the social ground against which they are defined, and, precisely, against which they are defined. For him, art is a form of social labour that is intimately connected to productive labour by its severance from it, and by the conditions that perpetuate that separation as a norm: 'Yet, it is precisely as artifacts, as products of social labour, that they also communicate with the empirical experience that they reject and from which they draw their content.'<sup>23</sup> Art is symptomatic in its capacity to both disclose and disavow the canceling of human agency or creativity that obtains in a totally administered world under the rule of the commodity-form, a role which has to be

historicized, as should be the categories of 'autonomy' and 'heteronomy'. This paradoxical position of art both affirming and denying the loss of social or subjective agency in the rest of human praxis is summed up in this way: 'By virtue of its rejection of the empirical world – a rejection that inheres in art's concept and thus is no mere *escape*, but a law immanent to it – art sanctions the primacy of reality.'<sup>24</sup> Further, '[t]he idea of freedom, akin to aesthetic autonomy, was shaped by domination, which it universalized. This holds true as well for artworks.'<sup>25</sup> Succinctly, art works (or the experience of a separate realm of human activity called art) critique commodity relations by being apart and unlike those relations, yet by being apart and unlike, they also forsake the claim to any power to affect the universal reach of those relations.

But this paradoxical position is not simply the site of a conceptual tension; it is also a real contradiction, and this holds insofar as art needs to be apprehended as a particular type of commodity, one both like and unlike the commodity labour-power, for example. This particularity inheres in artworks' singularity, a singularity secured through their mode of production (artisanal, as opposed to industrial) and not subsumed to the technical division of labour native to mass production; as well as through their production being determined by artistic subjectivity rather than social objectivity, and their status, at least principally, as unreproducible and hallowed by the mark of original authorship. These are the artwork's conditions of autonomy, which should perhaps be better spelled out as the artistic mode of production's conditions of autonomy, so as to keep in clearer focus the dependence of these conditions on what they reject, i.e. the heteronomy of productive labour. Here it is vital to distinguish the role of autonomy in conditioning discrete art practices in the recent

or 'contemporary' period, from its role with regard to the field of art as a whole. While recent art (from the 'neo-avant garde' of the 1960s onwards) has been very much about critically interrogating artistic autonomy and highlighting art's interpenetration with and dependence on conditions outside the limits of the art object (heteronomy), from art institutions to the larger parameters of existence such as time, weather, land, media, narrative, the body, experience, the economy, as well as labour, the various ways of dramatizing these dependencies and entanglements have relied on the relative autonomy of art as a totality, as a distinct realm of semiotic and productive methods which is regulated by immanent laws and can in no way be conflated with any of the conditions it increasingly incorporates.<sup>26</sup> Rather, art's ability to incorporate or emulate those conditions, whereby it challenges autonomy on a 'micro'-scale, is guaranteed by the durability of that autonomy on a 'macro'- scale, which itself tends to have a reproductive role to play with regard to the conditions interrogated. For our purposes, the social efficacy of art's autonomy as a field is the result of the social division of labour, and, more precisely, the division between mental and manual labour. It may be that this division is deepened in the speculative mode of production, with its emphasis on valorisation without labour, an emphasis that refracts in proliferating forms of 'de-skilled' and 'meta-' gestuality within art. Art, as both a non-alienated form of labour and a sphere of inflated asset-values, comes to stand in for the opposite of this division, however: not only the overcoming of the divide between mental and manual labour, but the reconciliation of labour and capital as the paradigmatic form of 'human capital', providing a reflexivity within the speculative mode of production.

As such, the autonomy of art in its totality as a social practice is invariably the autonomy of the fetish, liable to play down the dependent conditions of this autonomy and displace them into a reified self-sufficiency. John Roberts, for example, writing on Adorno, summarizes the special commodity status of art as follows: '[b]ecause unreproducible artworks are not subsumable under the law of value, paradoxically, they transcend their own status as commodity fetishes by becoming, in a sense, bloated and absolute kinds of fetish, absolute commodities.'<sup>27</sup> This is despite the fact that 'the freely sensuous, unreproducible artwork secures an image of liberated labour'. The dialectic of liberated labour has a further dimension when it comes to art: the artwork always refers beyond itself, to a non-purposeful or liberated time in which the division of labour and commodity relations cease to have effect; labour-power also is always more than it is, since it produces more value than it consumes and, as living labour, always exceeds its condition as objectified, value-producing labour; counterproductive labour, in Arthur's terms. With reference to Marx's discussion of labour as 'not-value', as subjectivity which exists in a state of negativity to its valorisation – and eradication as labour – by capital, we can see art as the reification of this negativity. Its constitutive separation from capital's law of value in its mode of production puts it at once outside the conditions of labour and capital, and ensures its dependency on both. This problematic separation is summed up by Adorno in these terms:

Art exists in the real world and has a function in it, and the two are connected by a large number of mediating links. Nevertheless, as art it remains the antithesis of that which is the case.<sup>28</sup>

If we take 'that which is the case' to be capitalist social relations, it is clear that art exists as

an antithesis to e.g. subsumed or waged labour, more prone to alignment with other social forms within those relations, such as the market (also owing to the particularities of its still largely artisanal production regime). Art, through this reified separation from wage-labour, can be considered a surplus of negativity, when compared to the negativity already ascribed to labour in and against capital, since it also comes with a relation of negativity with respect to labour. Nonetheless, it is precisely this surplus of negativity which is diluted or converted into a positivity when 'creativity' becomes the condition for all wage-labour. As a result, art merges with its other, abstract labour: not just with regard to a specious creativity as a demand imposed on contemporary work, but through the routinization and industrialization imposed on art production itself through its embedding in social policy initiatives and micro-managed funding structures. We must therefore explore, as I will do in the following section, whether this negativity can be retrieved in another way – through speculative capital's relationship to contingency. If art as a mode of speculative praxis can be demonstrated to radicalize the speculation performed by capital in its financial modalities, which remains tethered to the self-expanding form of value, we will get an idea of whether it's meaningful to speak of art as 'subsumed' to either of these heteronomous conditions, and what the critical implications of this might be .

### **Speculation and Contingency**

"Modernity" means contingency. It points to a social order which has turned from the worship of ancestors and past authorities to the pursuit of a projected future – of goods, pleasures, freedoms, forms of control over nature, or infinities of information.<sup>29</sup>

Thinking about speculation as a modality of negativity to 'that which is the case'- the

continuum of a frozen reality - a schema starts to emerge wherein art's counter-position to abstract labour seems like a face-off between speculative praxis and the production of use-values according to that which is the case. But of course it is not only art which counters use-values with speculation: it is also, and perhaps pre-eminently, finance. This leads to a certain kind of 'disjunctive synthesis' between art and finance. The negativity and open-endedness heralded by the 'speculative' generates abstraction and indeterminacy, and also a formalism - the hermetic quality common to works of art and innovative financial instruments. The kind of 'fictitious capital' represented by the derivative and the fictions mobilized by art share an idiom of opacity, a smokescreen behind which games of self-referential value expansion may unfold. Such opaqueness looks like a surplus of freedom compared to the workaday reality or productive investment or the wage-labour it relies on. This freedom is, however, mediated by the need to subjugate and discount labour in order to realize the value of either art or finance in the market. This subjugation also has to, perhaps pre-eminently, happen symbolically; the invisibility of labour, labour which is deemed profane and 'unproductive' of this freedom that only money can guarantee in its frictionless self-valorisation, is a result of the emergence of speculation as the template for economic, but also personal and social valorisation. Speculation as a social form thus seems to arise in the division between mental and manual labour, in the attribution of innovative thought and praxis to a class of people who are not constrained by material need: the visionaries of art and of finance. The connection to the undetermined, to the future, to the unknown and to possibility is removed from labour and becomes the property of this creative class, whose dependence on labour is henceforth mediated as the access to universality lent by independence from material constraint, an

autonomy from interest. The genesis of such a class division and social division of labour in the concomitant emergence of Enlightenment rationality and industrial capitalism will have to be passed over here. The point here is merely to underline, albeit in passing, that the historical autonomy of art is tied to the division between mental and manual labour which presupposes the generalization of alienated labour as the hallmark of capitalist social relations.

Art as a distinct sphere of human endeavour, as indeed the sphere that generates 'distinction' and particularity, enjoys a strong correspondence with the value-form insofar as indeterminacy lies at the basis of both. The value-form is a way of organizing and extracting surplus, and art is a materialization or socialization of that surplus as open-ended speculation – in the sense of speculative thought. This speculation is suffused with the ideological freight of open-endedness, the utopian moment, that is also corollary to capital – the relationship between the 'unconditioned' that is art, and the pure abstraction that is the core of capital, the pure algebra of self-valorising value. This is not to downplay the more strictly ideological role of art as affirmation of the freedom in capitalist social relations, as cited earlier, the 'services rendered' of the durable fiction of autonomy, however provisional and fragile that autonomy is understood to be by now. It should be noted that 'speculation' has another purchase as well: it is not simply the space of a utopian or complicit indeterminacy qua Kant, making it amenable to characteristically financial mediations, such as gambling or the commodity production of subjectivity. Speculation is also a type of political thought which departs from the parameters of the actual and draws on them for its sense of possibility when envisioning or constructing

change. This implies speculation can also operate in a dystopian or prefigurative mode, both of which are more determined by the suppressed possibilities of the present and past than the vacuum of the utopian. Frederic Jameson, writing on Bertolt Brecht's notion of the scientific in aesthetic praxis as the 'experimental attitude' which secures aesthetic praxis as non-alienated labour, discusses speculation in these terms:

Brecht's particular vision of science was for him the means of annulling the separation between physical and mental activity and the fundamental division of labour (not least that between worker and intellectual) that resulted from it: it puts knowing the world back together with changing the world, and at the same time unites an ideal of praxis with a conception of production. [...] In the Brechtian aesthetic, indeed, the idea of realism is not a purely aesthetic and formal category, but rather governs the relationship of the work of art to reality itself, characterizing a particular stance towards it. The spirit of realism designates an active, curious, experimental, subversive – in a word scientific – attitude towards social institutions and the material world . . . <sup>30</sup>

This idea captures something important about the nature of art in the speculative mode of production, if this mode of production implies a new centrality for social activities defined by their intimate relationship to speculation, such as art and finance. Insofar as art charts for itself a vector of speculative praxis, it can prefigure or model social relations whose speculative power is gauged by their negation of speculation as a normative force of capital valorisation. Thus art and capital in the speculative mode of production can find themselves severed by this 'experimental' attitude which does not stop at capital as its horizon of possibility. However, we would need to determine where does it go, if it doesn't stop there, given that the example of Brecht brings with it a certain specificity of negation e.g. an organized working-class movement, which for many reasons does not apply today.



Suspending for a moment the implications of this kind of aesthetic praxis for the division of labour or for social change, we can attend to how speculation performs a more stabilizing function in the current period. The shift of speculation from being an elite or marginal activity to being a normative parameter for all labour and exchange marks the eclipse of an understanding of class interests as real, divergent and institutionally mediated. The loss of the external referent that labour posed to capital, (or use-value to exchange-value), has resulted in the situation of capitalist self-referentiality that the social logic of speculation needs in order to flourish. This self-referentiality, the harmonious self-regulation that neoclassical economics have propounded for decades, if not centuries, as the regulative ideal of social relations and market transactions alike, produces a kind of loss of measuring capacity which has at times been called the obsolescence of the law of value.<sup>31</sup> But perhaps such an erosion of measure speaks simply of the great expansion, diffusion, and refinement of that law; it has nothing to measure any longer but its own effects if we are indeed in an are of full 'real subsumption'. It now centres on the proliferation of metrics of abstraction, rather than the institution of abstract equivalence between labour-time and the wage. Thus, the proximity between art thought as abstract labour and abstract labour thought as creative (human) capital is exemplified by the loss of measure in both under the sign of finance, by the indeterminacy and expansion of art and the indeterminacy and expansion of work determined by the sociality, and subjectivity, of finance.

The social expansion of finance and art should be seen in strict analogy with the contraction of labour; both are indexes of this phase of real abstraction. The phase is one in which processes of social domination grow ever more abstract in daily life, in reproduction,

while that reproduction is located more and more closely within the sphere of finance. Why this should be the case – that art should play the legitimating role it does for the rule of finance – can perhaps be found in art's privileged relation to contingency, that is, contingency understood as novelty, unpredictability, the creation of as yet untested and potentially infinite value. Art has the capacity to socialize rather financial imperatives such as this, since art is the name for innovative praxis in a capitalist society, unconditioned by economic or other deterministic interests, a social 'research and development' site even, or especially, after decades of intensified proximity to market behaviour and government policy. Thus contingency seems to belong to both art and finance insofar as both are speculative practices. It could also be said that contingency is a kind of negativity as well, an 'antithesis to that which is the case'. Among the relationships that bind artworks to the political economy of their times, one of the primary ones is named by Theodor Adorno, who conceives of 'aesthetic forces of production' that inescapably imprint the artwork: 'the artist works as social agent, indifferent to society's own consciousness. He embodies the social forces of production without necessarily being bound by the censorship dictated by the relations of production.'<sup>32</sup> Those relations are legible in art, but encrypted in such a way as to underline their contingency. But to go a little more deeply into this link of contingency between art and finance, what exactly is the structural role of contingency in finance?

### **On to 'Absolute Contingency'**

Consultant, financial engineer and speculative realist theorist Élie Ayache contends that the risk formulas used in derivatives trading, such as the well-known Black-Scholes equation,<sup>33</sup>

are ultimately irrelevant. In order to accurately assess the probability of occurrence for the various risk factors of the assets to which probability-based algorithms are applied, the algorithms would end up trying to evaluate the volatility of each factor based on its relation to the volatility of all the other factors, which volatility itself relates back to the risk assessment that influences the trading of the assets, a helplessly recursive exercise.<sup>34</sup>

Ayache's simple counter-argument to the use of such probabilistic formulas is that if assets traded at the price which risk-assessment value algorithms allocated to them, the trade in these assets would be a priori impossible – the trade depends on the recursivity of the implied rather than assessed risk of the assets; at a basic level, it is the recursive volatility of the market itself which drives trade. Hence he proposes that probability should be dispensed with when predicting, describing or regulating what takes place in financial markets in favour of what he calls 'contingent claims'. He argues that the entire notion of an underlying (static) value in derivative trades should be dispensed with, and that a more accurate reflection of the quantum fluidity of market events is the 'contingent claim': 'that's why I say that we no longer call derivatives "derivatives" but "contingent claims" so we think of them directly, without thinking that they depend on some underlying'.<sup>35</sup> The 'absolute contingency' of asset prices in the market retroactively creates its own conditions, which then serve as the basis of the asset prices in the next cycle, and so on. Ayache links this to Henri Bergson's concept of creative evolution, Alain Badiou's theory of the event, and Gilles Deleuze's thinking around the virtual and the actual.<sup>36</sup> All these are concepts which operate outside the shadow of probability; the radical unforeseeability of the event means that its causes are only discernible in retrospect – the event is an effect that creates its own causes:

[...] the academic theoretical models try to model the market as if it was an already-written reality that implied a certain range of future possibilities; whereas recalibration means that, even as they use these models, traders rewrite the market continually in contingent ways that these models cannot capture. [...] Absolute contingency of the final world gets reflected or translated, ahead of time, by the exchange. The market, or the exchange, is how absolute contingency projects itself ahead of time. This may even act as a definition of exchange. [...] Therefore to be in the market and to trade contingent claims via a pricing tool that precisely acknowledges recalibration is to be in the middle of the contingent event. This is better than predicting it.<sup>37</sup>

Here we can see that financial speculation is formulated as the exemplary instance of absolute contingency, since transactions are powered by the contingency of value-claims: the market is constantly re-setting itself in line with those encounters between claims to value and the contingency of those claims, and this is what keeps the market going – absolute contingency is the market's metastability.

### **Futures and the Future**

It is interesting to juxtapose Ayache's account of the paradoxical aspects of probabilistic risk assessment in a milieu of absolute contingency with Marxist political economist David McNally's description of the Value at Risk formulas as a cancellation of contingency.<sup>38</sup> A contrast emerges between their two visions of the relation between finance, contingency and freedom. Ayache is concerned to ascribe an emancipatory valence to contingency in markets, and tries to articulate it using philosophical concepts usually associated with transformative and counter-hegemonic theory.<sup>39</sup> McNally, on the other hand, while agreeing with Ayache's critique of existing models of quantification of risk, frames the critique in a rather different way. For him, market speculation cannot be extracted from its

reliance on, or description by, those models, since the speculative agency of finance needs to assume the continuity of the market, e.g. of capitalism, and thus can only operate in the foreclosure of a different future. Consequently, financial speculation is ultimately anti-speculative, if 'speculation' is taken chiefly in its experimental or creative-innovative sense, since the kind of speculation that happens in markets is concerned to minimize systemic change, or at least to subsume all change into the logic of profit.

McNally stresses that 'value-forms have been extended at the same time as value-measures (and predictions) have become more volatile.'<sup>40</sup> This volatility means that capitalist measure, in the shape of money, is problematised, as the value of money itself is one of the quantities to be measured, or traded. This creates a situation of systemic risk, as the very preconditions of trade (weather, agriculture, governance structures) themselves became tradeable entities, financial commodities measured by other financial commodities. The inclusion of so many parameters into the formulas which often are operating at extremely high frequencies leads to exacerbated systemic risk. Systemic risk necessitates the design and deployment of all kinds of risk-hedging instruments, whose trade was conditional on the volatility these instruments themselves put into play, as in the trade of derivatives contracts, CDSs (credit default swaps) and CDOs (collateralized debt obligations), and other and more recondite forms of risk insurance. As the markets for risk-assessment and risk-managing devices expanded, this in its turn entrained an escalated level of volatility, a 'positive feedback' loop (or chaos), as most recently witnessed in the speculative attacks on the Euro, or the 1990s attack on the pound by George Soros – bets on debts going bad are profitable when those debts stand a greater likelihood of going

bad due to the inimical market conditions created for those debts by those bets. While generating geopolitical turmoil, such speculation tends towards enhancing the stability, power and accumulative capacities of the financial markets. Social unrest is an easily hedged risk in the global financial architecture, provided it does not impinge on the dominance of that architecture as well, that is, on the sanctity of contracts. In distinction from the apocryphal derivative trade on 'the end of capitalism' reported in the early days of the crash, the stability of this architecture is the ground of the burgeoning levels of speculation; the law of value itself cannot enter as a risk factor into the 'absolute contingency' of speculative markets. Such an absolute contingency combined with this bedrock security is the crux of financialisation, that is, the trade in fictitious capital,<sup>41</sup> or claims to future surplus-value not yet produced, variants of which have been mentioned in the foregoing account, which produces temporal closure, or rather 'securitisation' - the indefinite extension of the present, a present quantified by instruments such as the Black-Scholes equation or the Value at Risk (VaR) formula.<sup>42</sup> While McNally sees such instruments as clear instances of the 'single metric' tendency of capitalist measure which needs to establish common bases for commodity exchange (money as the general equivalent, abstract labour as the common substance of value), he links the financial crisis to the dysfunctionality of these instruments, and cites this dysfunctionality as a symptom of the inability to measure risk in an economic climate of constant currency fluctuation (instability of the general equivalent) and where calculations of risk are increasingly recursive and unmoored from any of the value they claim to measure:

And this [successful risk -assessment, normal derivatives trade] requires that derivatives be capable of computing all concrete risks –climatological, political, monetary, and more – on a

single metric. They must, in other words, be able to translate concrete risks into quantities of abstract risk. . . Using a set of models that share a common mathematical framework, VaR is supposed to measure literally any asset under any and all conditions. Crucial to the operation of VaR assessments is the assumption that all points in time are essentially the same and, therefore, that tomorrow will be just like yesterday and today.<sup>43</sup>

thus

time is reified, treated as a purely quantitative variable, and qualitative breaks or ruptures in a temporal continuum are ruled out. [...] The process of abstraction these models undertake involves treating space and time as mathematical, as nothing more than different points on a grid. This homogenisation of space and time assumes that what applied at any one spatio-temporal moment applies in principle at any other. But crises destroy any basis for such assumptions ...<sup>44</sup>

This discussion of the time of finance disrupted by crisis recalls the role of time as a social form which is a corollary of the relations of production:

Communism is thus understood not in terms of a new distribution of the same sort of wealth based in labour time, but as founded on a new form of wealth measured in disposable time. Communism is about nothing less than a new relation to time, or even a different kind of time.<sup>45</sup>

It may be added here, parenthetically, that a new relation to time, or even a different kind of time is a modality that would seem equally if not more at home in aesthetic practice or thought, or, perhaps more broadly, a speculative praxis oriented towards transformation of experience, as well as but not limited to the relations of production. While the 'absolute contingency' of the market as formulated by Ayache has explanatory power and is conceptually suggestive, it seems hard to discount McNally's analysis which finds markets operating through the repudiation of the actual contingency that remains the case outside

but also increasingly, within markets: an absorption of contingency as assets which is the source of both super-profits and an Achilles heel. This is a contingency which seems recursive but not in any sense social, or truly contingent as in an event that disrupts calculations – 'the black swan' of Ayache's wishes. It is not an obtuse point to emphasize that mitigating against 'absolute contingency' is that other metaphysics of the market, the theodicy that the market knows best, the social power it has secured in consequence and the contingencies it has either expelled as 'externalities' or ingested as 'contingent claims'. Markets are not simply 'made' by millions of discrete trades but actively fostered by the state and its legal system, whatever anomalous fluxes and eddies develop within markets, or whatever fluxes and eddies markets plug into their arbitrage. Such anomalous events, following McNally, could not be internal to markets and the types of contingency which animate them. While we can object that McNally's reliance on the VaR formula paints a different picture from the one Ayache portrays, one that remains mired in probabilistic calculations, it should be noted nonetheless that Ayache may be simply updating the abiding 'reflexivity' theory of markets which is probably older than George Soros' formulation of it and perhaps as old as Keynes' 'beauty contest' narrative of investors' decision-making.<sup>46</sup> The reflexivity of markets is a given, and perhaps may be said to go into hyperdrive in the age of 'quants' busily writing ever more involved formulas to hedge risk – and in this area, Ayache retails his own patented software on his website. However, as he says, '[a] future contingency translates into a present price. That's a direct derivation.'<sup>47</sup> The relationship of value to a suspension of future temporality cannot be encapsulated more plainly.



To recall the earlier discussion of whether finance and art are comparable forms of speculation in the speculative mode of production, the foregoing suggests that despite certain provocative analogies, they cannot be said to be comparable. Financial speculation has to exclude the suspension of the law of value, and is thus only speculative within the defined parameters of chronologically attenuated and homogeneous risk. Hence financial speculation, the speculation confined to the value-form, lacks the genuine negativity – opposition to that which is the case – which would enable it to be actually speculative in the philosophical or aesthetic sense Élie Ayache intends for it. This means that financial speculation and the indeterminacy of the aesthetic do not really share a common ground, despite earlier appearances. In comparison to the deceptive normality of labour's 'use-value' the form of value does indeed give us an insight into the level of abstraction and contingency marshalled against labour performed under capital's value relations as they obtain today. But this contingency of exchange value and value, or, negativity with regard to use, runs up against the positivity of its own drive to expand. This requires a homogeneity of time and stagnation of the social which seem to vitiate the speculative drive of the value-form as we have witnessed it in the expansion of finance over the last several decades.<sup>48</sup>

The political theorist Robert Meister has referred to the 'options-form' replacing the 'commodity-form' as the main form in which value is manufactured and traded, making temporality itself the typical commodity for an era in which risk is the main driver of social reproduction. His account starts in 1973, when derivatives or options theory developed as a way for capitalism to re-think itself once the gold standard was jettisoned – the future

orientation is a shift to a kind of reflexivity. He also sees this shift as capital's way of putting the struggle with socialism in its past – first conceptually and eventually politically. Class struggle becomes a factor of individualized risk management, juggling among economic variables, as indicated by human capital theory. And then financialisation as a hedge against uncertainty in an ever-more economically volatile and unequal society starts to become the dominant logic. Human capital investment – university education, for instance – acts like a hedge against the uncertainty that the rule of finance itself has established. If it can be priced, it can be commoditised – this is the outcome of turning social contradictions into risks that could be hedged. 'What you know long-term simply raises the price of uncertainty about what you know will happen next,' Meister states.<sup>49</sup> Contingency only has value because it is transient. All past history is accumulated in the current price in the option-form mode of capital, the speculative mode of production or, here, finance, just as all past suffering [dead labour] is accumulated in the current accumulation of wealth according to the labour theory of value. The collapse of (commodified) time in financialised accumulation has been noted also by Silvia Federici. Echoing Meister's point about capitalism putting the struggle with the organized working class behind it, she describes financialisation as the shift from capital making long-term investments into the reproduction of the working class to capital trying to extract immediate profits from this reproduction, turning reproductive institutions such as education and healthcare into asset classes. Concomitantly, the debt incurred by users of these services once this shift is complete ensures that this source of profits continues to yield far into the future.<sup>50</sup> The options-form is also interesting with relation to forms of immaterial property such as intellectual property. Here rent supplants final sale, no sale is ever complete; rent ensures

the sale can happen again and again, under different conditions. Here the shift from the commodity-form to the options-form opens up the commodity to time in a radical way, leaving behind the closed loop of self-expanding value in the usual sense. The art market remains relatively traditional in its transactional forms and property contracts by comparison, though it is a truism that the market is driven, or inflated, particularly since the last decade, by fortunes made via dealings in 'innovative' financial commodities which operate with the kind of risk temporality described above, that is, derivatives and hedges.

Art on the other hand, rather than its markets, derives its 'speculative value' from not just the parameters and value-games of art, but also from the suspension or dissolution of art itself, and the social relations that subtend its existence. As Jacques Rancière writes, the contemporary 'aesthetic regime' of art is precisely predicated on exacerbating the confusion about what art is or where it belongs, and putting into question its boundaries from other regimes of meaning and practice. Crucially, though not emphasized by Rancière, the speculations of art (or, the speculation that is art), measure and dramatize their power through art's relation to labour and value, be that a relation of affinity or negation.<sup>51</sup> In this sense, art cannot be considered in relation to politics without first being considered in relation to labour – and this is even more the case when artistic subjectivity and modes of production become a supplement to the restructuring of the labour-capital relation away from the wage and its equivalences to the precarious and 'infinite' demands of creativity. In this final section, I will return to the theme of 'counterproductive labour' to interpret the relationship between art and labour in the in light of the foregoing anatomy of speculation.

## Art as Counterproductive Labour

The autonomy of the artwork is a model of emancipated labour, not the model through which the emancipation of labour will be accomplished.<sup>52</sup>

In the previous chapter, we saw the various dimensions of a financialised subjectivity in 'human capital' as an ideological and structural category for the subject of self-expanding value who sees themselves directly in relation to or even as capital through debt and credit rather than the mediation of the wage and the antagonism it enables. In this chapter, we sought to track the intersections and divergences between art and finance as forms of speculation which both disavow labour, culminating in a discussion of the importance of temporality for speculation. This is exemplified in an art piece that takes on some of these questions performatively: labour in a financial (accounting) context rendered speculative by its extended, and indeterminate, relationship to time and production.

Pilvi Takala's 2008 video *The Trainee* depicts the Finnish artist embarking upon a placement as a trainee with the international accountancy firm Deloitte. Initially undertaking the standard array of tasks allotted her in this role, her behaviour starts to subtly shift over time, to the perplexity of her colleagues. After several months, she no longer undertakes any tasks. But instead of enacting a Bartleby-like stance of existential refusal in the workplace, Takala is actually attempting to live up to the tenets of unfettered creativity featured in the rhetoric accompanying her professional development, the tenets of spontaneous and ungovernable value creation that each company must learn how to foster in its employees if it wants to stay ahead of the game. She spends her days sitting at

her desk staring into space. Inquiries meet with responses like 'I am thinking' or 'I'm doing brain-work right now.' Occasionally she rides up and down in the lift for hours, explaining to curious interlocutors that her thought processes flow better in a dynamic environment.

Here it could be ventured that the artist is dramatizing or parodying the capitalization of attention as labour which has been written about extensively in theories of post-Fordism, along with the 'virtuosity' explored by Virno, all of which bring art as the suspension of labour and labour as the suspension of creativity, closer together to the point of indistinction, flowing into a common mode of 'process over product'. In *The Trainee*, art acts as a magnifying lens for the suspension of labour as integral to the actuality of contemporary work: the disposition, the readiness to work, is already the chief affective and subjective requirement of today's abstract labour.<sup>53</sup> Thinking might already be labour, might already be attention subsumed to the regime of valorisation, but it might also be just thinking, or nothing – clearly Takala's on-the-job performance did not serve to advance her accountancy career (this might have also pertained to her lowly status as trainee – perhaps had she attained to an executive post, her claim to be 'thinking' as work might have been given more credence). While it is not uncommon for motifs appropriated from or emulating the world of labour to infiltrate art over the past several decades, if not earlier, with the Productivists and Constructivists, Takala's piece is perhaps one of a small number which tries to represent the changes to the experience and expectations of work in recent times – which can be summed up as its unrepresentability, its loss of definition. Of course, there are other ways for art to register these changes which are not representational but also, or instead, structural – these are the more 'invisible', relational or

performative practices I have discussed elsewhere.<sup>54</sup> But Takala's action – a performance of the indistinction between art and labour that transpires both in the workplace and in her art practice – does rehearse the logic of transit between visibility and invisibility of the art object, the art 'instance' which has so characterized conceptual art and the practices that can be placed in that trajectory. It has been characterized by this equally to its mimetic tendency with regard to non-artistic labour, and it is perhaps in its concrete engagements with labour (as well as with money) that the speculative logic of (conceptual and post-conceptual) art that appears in withdrawing and disappears when it is displayed is most sharply enunciated. In Takala's case, parenthetically, she had agreed the project with the marketing manager but this information was not communicated to any of her colleagues. They, in turn, would invariably express their confusion and distress in emails to the manager behind her back; emails which are reproduced as part of the installation of the piece.<sup>55</sup> The visibility of her invisible work was disquieting to her co-workers; one must be seen to be doing something, and they couldn't tell what it was she was doing, or if she was doing anything. What is she doing there? *Arbeiten? Oder Theater?*<sup>56</sup> This is what speculative labour looks like – nothing. Or art.

Takala's speculative gesture recalls the role of the 'market-making' trader in Élie Ayache, whose subjective, physical presence is indispensable, even if it is only in manipulating and writing the equations for high-frequency automated trades. He thus discerns a logic of performance in speculative finance which parallels, without conflating, the performance of assets and the performance of traders in unleashing various quantum flows of trades.<sup>57</sup>

Takala throws into indistinction her place as an artist or as an employee in a way that

estranges the social and ontological features of both. She brings an 'absolute contingency' into a workplace that is supposedly already structured by the individualizing and self-optimizing precepts of 'human capital' but where speculation has to stay within strict, routinised bounds. Further, like Ayache's trader who is a microcosm of the market and re-creates it with every trade, Takala dramatizes the reproductive function for art of the sovereign artist: everything she does is art, a condition which *The Trainee* imagines extending to other kinds of socially necessary (and unnecessary) labour.

Here we might recall the earlier discussion on Christopher Arthur's notion of 'counter-productive labour' as the limit to capital's complete internalization of labour and metabolisation of it as value. The 'recalcitrance' of workers to capital's efforts to compel their labour is an indispensable feature of the valorisation process, both pushing capital to innovate so as to destroy the barriers posed by this recalcitrance, and fostering the political subjectivity of workers, inasmuch as they experience their activity as distinct from its appropriation and valorisation by capital, as well as from their role as workers.<sup>58</sup> The antagonism posed by this relation of labour to capital is internal to the production process, regardless of its form – labour is counter-productive insofar as it is subsumed by capital, it's not a matter of the technological aspect of the work, its greater or lesser 'abstraction'. However, this antagonism can also be embodied in another social form which lies outside the valorisation process proper: art. The whole distinctiveness of the institution of art in capital is that it is not labour, that artistic production is not principally subject to the law of value and its heteronomous exigencies. This is how it becomes a repository of values deemed extrinsic to the valorisation process, including when that process comes to

encompass more and more of the social relations and institutions which formerly were constituted through different logics of integration into capital. It thus both enacts the suspension of labour and mirrors it, insofar as labour in the era of speculation, operates precisely in the mode of suspension – deprived of class identity or productive virtue. But it does remain to be elaborated, if this is the case, why art and labour are still two different domains. If art is an allegory for the counterproductive which has gained independence from the valorisation process and become its 'own' thing – the antithesis to that which is the case – this runs a risk of turning art into a merely privative category, 'if it is not anything else, let's call it art.' This formality and ambiguity doubtlessly is what lends art, as a social role and a set of practices, its allure for the proponents of a labour transformed in its working conditions and self-concept into an analogue for infinitely mutable and self-expanding – or deferred – value. I will examine the questions arising from this conjunction of 'emptying out' and 'putting to work' in the third chapter under the category of the 'generic' as advanced by the art theorist Thierry de Duve, who locates in art 'after Duchamp' not so much a kind of activity as a form of speculative judgement - 'this is art' – opening a way to think art out of its specialization as a non-labour and directly in relation to the kind of abstract value that lends a social character to all labours.

As *The Trainee* shows, the question of the sovereignty of the artist that has been established since Duchamp as the guarantee that anything that an artist does as art is art is put to the test in the workplace, where that sovereignty only stands a chance of being acknowledged in the abstract, that is, so long as the content of the work itself does not enter into its territory. In Chapter Four, I will be discussing the uncanny effect of the artist in



the workplace with reference to the Artist Placement Group and their concept of the 'Incidental Person'. The autonomy of art and the heteronomy of labour can only meet in the space of some undefined creativity, the 'invisible labour' managerial propagandists view as common to both, and this is exactly where Takala chooses to act.

There are certainly at least two analytical trajectories that can be followed at this stage. One is to see how the intensification of a mutuality of indifference, of abstraction, is bringing art and labour closer than ever, and how that both tends to dissolve the artist's role as a privileged subjectivity which can present a different, liberated mode of production, and reinforce it as a producer of elite, specialised commodities and experiences. This would be charting how the division of labour between art and work is upheld through other means, means that should be traced both to historical changes in art's self-concept and the technical and social restructuring of work – as well as the expansion of the commodity-form and the eclipse of work as social fact that was alluded to earlier. The other would be to see how these developments are instantiated in the field of contemporary art, also with reference to historical examples of how proximity to non-art labour, either representatively or performatively, was seen as a politicising trope in conceptual or post-medium art from the 1960s and 1970s onwards.

### **Invisible Labour**

As Takala's piece suggests, labour has become more and more insubstantial and contingent. Work might be happening at any time, and it may also it may stop at any time, especially in times of crisis like now. The retreat of political forms of workers' identity

makes it neither practicable nor desirable to see that identity as an oppositional force, or even as an identity. The deterioration of work and the deterioration of the social power of work are of course part of a Mobius strip, and this is a deterioration that has become more marked as more participation and subjective investment is demanded of workers, as Harry Braverman already foresaw several decades ago. Class politics based on work have gone the same way. With such a spectrality of work increasingly actual for more and more of the population, what happens to art as the opposite of capitalist work?

In 2001, the Imaginary Party published 'The Problem of the Head' in their journal or mouthpiece *Tiqqun*. A passage that seems to pertain to our discussion can be found in this text:

The modern invention of work as abstract work, without qualifications, as indifferentiation of all the activities under this category affects itself according to a myth: that of the pure act, of the act without a how, that reabsorbs itself entirely in its result, and of which the accomplishment exhausts all signification. Still today, where the term remains employed, "work" designates all that is lived in the imperative degeneration of how. Everywhere the question of how acts, things, or words, is suspended, derealized, displaced, there is work. Now there is also a modern invention of art, simultaneous and symmetrical to that of work, which is an invention of art in so much as special activity, producing oeuvres and not simple commodities. And it is in this sector that will concentrate itself henceforth all attention previously denied to the how, that will be as a collection of all the lost signification of productive acts...To Art will be thus confided, for the price of its complicity and silence, the monopoly of the how of acts.<sup>59</sup>

Art and work have drawn closer in that both have become the exercise of 'pure acts' that exhaust all signification in their accomplishment, yet art has retained the privilege of control over the 'how', the role of the imagination, in the performance of these acts of

equivocal significance and the terms of their de-linking with necessity. Art has retained its status as a special activity that is not work, even when work has lost all distinctiveness, besides enforcing the law of value through the dominance of abstract labour. In that case, how can this 'specialness' be mobilized in order to draw attention to or transform the conditions that favour it, and can attempts to do this become de facto political, or remain simply critical? If we take 'critical' here in Modernist medium-specific sense, then this can be radicalised if the medium is understood to be the social field where art is not qualitatively distinct from labour, and the 'political' version of this would be a confrontation with the commodity relations that tell us they are. If the 'aesthetic relations of production – all that in which the productive force is embedded and in which it is active – are sedimentations or imprints of social relations of production', then contemporary art also has to reflect the social relations of non-production that prevail in the present, as a consequence of the reckoning with the 'indifference' between artistic and non-artistic labour that arguably began with the readymade.<sup>60</sup> It should be possible to refer to current and historical practices that evoke some of the political implications of reading 'indifference' as a category for contemporary art into the social form of contemporary labour – of abstraction as a conduit between art and work which figures them both as instances of abstract labour, rather than through the heteronomy of an abstract and generalized 'creativity'. To begin with, we could look for those political implications in the way the indistinction is formalized, or performed, and how that indistinction comes at the point of so-called de-materialization – when nothing is produced, except for art – or work. It is when non-art labour becomes a subject or method in art that the fragility, and importance, of the indistinction between capitalist art and capitalist work, the passage

between autonomy and heteronomy, can be exposed and troubled, by means of the negative power of human labour, as John Roberts writes.<sup>61</sup> It may be productive also to think of such transferences and inversions as a type of realism, in the sense intended by Allan Sekula: 'Any interest I had in artifice and constructed dialogue was part of a search for a certain "realism", a realism not of appearances or social facts but of everyday experience and against the grip of advanced capitalism.'<sup>62</sup>

### **Visible Finance**

So far, I have developed the link between speculation in finance and in art primarily through the latter's approach to labour through the lens of visibility and invisibility. But what happens when that speculative lens is turned directly to finance? In many ways, the conditions set by the movements of finance provide the material and conceptual parameters for art. Art operates in these conditions but also upon them to transform their terms. Art is engaged in an endless testing of its own conditions which anticipates negations of the determinations of the value form from inside, rather than beyond, its tensions.

We can examine instances of conceptualism which approached art as a 'fiduciary' object, using speculation as its material. One of these can be seen as the precursor to Robert Morris' *Money*, Abraham Lubelski's *Sculptural Daydream* (1968). The work itself was a pile of paper consisting of 250,000 one-dollar bills borrowed at interest from the Chelsea National Bank. The sculpture, exhibited for five days, ran up a bill of three hundred dollars in interest. Perhaps intending a pun on the 'disinterested' status of the artwork in Kantian

aesthetics, Lubelski here posed the same question as Morris' later and better-known piece, namely is the artwork the sculpture (the physical money) or the interest it accrues. Morris, however, in common with other examples of 'investment art' and more broadly in the current of early conceptualism, showed a lack of interest in the form of the work. With *Money* (1969), the interest (the transactions) is definitely what constitutes the work.<sup>63</sup> Morris had by then developed a vector in his oeuvre that sought to conjugate both linguistic and financial abstraction as conditions for the 'dematerialisation' of the art object. An earlier piece responded to a collector's non-payment for a work with the production of a certificate withdrawing 'aesthetic value' from the unpaid-for work; the *Statement of Esthetic Withdrawal* (1963). Naturally this certificate was also collected and displayed, next to the de-aestheticised work (although possibly not by the same collector). In response to works like these, Carl Andre wrote 'The most farcical claim of the conceptualizing inkpissers is that their works are somehow antibourgeois because they do away with objects. In fact, doing away with objects and replacing them with such reifications of abstract relations to production as stockshares, contracts and paper money itself (which is nothing but the fetishization of the idea of exchange value severed from even the dream of production) is exactly the final triumph of the bourgeois revolution.'<sup>64</sup>

To bring the discussion briefly up to date and into recent and current practice, a précis of recent art which positions itself in the allegorical mode with relation to finance can be appended here. There's Maria Eichhorn's well-known *Aktiengesellschaft* (2002), for one, which freezes capital. Or Zachary Formwalt, who works on the relation between circulation and visibility of capital: images of crisis in the media show us capital at a standstill, whereas

its movements are normally invisible and intangible (and bound to be even more so with the nanosecond-speed forms of electronic trading which recently found mention with the discovery in particle physics of new forms of temporality not covered by the law of relativity).<sup>65</sup> Here the publicisation of crisis exacerbates the crisis. Crisis makes circulation visible; when circulation freezes, it becomes visible, like Benjamin's 'dialectics at a standstill' in the dialectical image. With his 2009 film *In Place of Capital*, Formwalt scrutinises the 1847 Henry Fox Talbot photo of the Royal Exchange in London. Here, labour and sociality is effaced by technical accident. The long exposures necessary for the state of photographic technology at the time means that no people were visible in the streets around the building in this image. It is as if these missing multitudes and their labour were blotted out by the monumentality of the financial edifice, in absentia (this can be usefully compared to Rancière's idea of photographs of serially stacked shipping containers showing the missing workers or as allegories for the absence of workers).<sup>66</sup> Real abstraction is made visible, and it emerges against a background of labour which has been turned into the photographic negative of what is finally rendered visible – the monument to exchange, to the commodity. This links also to how finance embodies a crisis of representation, even as representation augurs a crisis in finance. Credit instruments, financial innovation – Formwalt wonders how to represent relations with no correlate in the object world. They cannot be represented because they are themselves terms of representation. Finally, Jan-Peter Hammer's 2011 work, *That Which is Seen and That Which is Unseen*, stages the encounter between money and labour as the eventual site of the art work itself. The piece consists of a gallery attendant and a pile of money on a plinth – value in its own shape, freed from its usual containment in the 'absolute commodity' of the artwork. The attendant

watches the money as it grows over the duration of the exhibition, and receives it as payment at the exhibition's end.

## **Conclusion**

The narrative of art in the latest capitalism has featured a certain twisting of the terms of modernist autonomy and heteronomy as its parameters. Art's tension with commodification has manifested as drives for the dissolution of art into non-art, or, conversely, the incorporation of social reality. It gravitates towards uselessness and negation when it comes to representing or emulating labour, and towards mimesis when it comes to representing or emulating the workings of finance.<sup>67</sup> Yet, as we saw with Takala, the workings of finance come to increasingly set a template for wage-labour, privileging the intangible and relational over the tangible and consumable. As we will see in the fourth chapter with the Artist Placement Group, art can also react to this situation by trying to directly valorise artistic indeterminacy and art's 'antithesis to that which is the case' as a species of 'non-specialist specialism' or consultancy to organizations which are ready to accept the uncertain but potentially ground-breaking assets which can be generated by the conjunction of speculative artistic and economic praxis. A speculative mode of production can also see art acting as a passive agent in the relation between art and speculative capital, enacting a simple mimesis of 'social capital' absent reflection on the specificity of art and finance's respective structural roles and power relations. This is something we can witness for example in the work of Tino Seghal, whose large-scale orchestrations of social relations between hired 'participants' and gallerygoers do nothing so much as replicate the coerced performance of self common to similarly paid positions in

less prestigious sectors of the service industry.<sup>68</sup> Importantly, Seghal obeys the conventions once vouchsafed as critical in 'de-materialized' conceptual art, even exceeding them with his insistence on no ephemera from and no documentation of the performances. To say that his work is concerned with the 'experience economy' is to refrain from analysis, a move repeated in the work itself. Visitors derive an 'experience' from the participants in the most alienated and codified fashion, with the interaction perfectly controlled by a managerial layer within the piece itself. This only throws into relief the affinity between his practice and 'general performance' as the rule for labour in the 'speculative mode of production', as I will discuss in the next chapter.



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<sup>1</sup>See note 2 in Chapter One for the references I am using for 'fictitious capital'. The 'double decoupling', i.e. the decoupling of the reproduction of labour-power from the valorisation of capital and the decoupling of wage from income for labour-power is found in Roland Simon, 'The Present Moment', *SIC: International Journal for Communisation*, No. 1, November 2011, pp. 95-144: 98.

<sup>2</sup>'For Marx the critique of political economy calls into question the division of subjectivity and objectivity, the givenness of what it is to be an individual, and what is, and is not, our very being. For Marx these ontological questions are essentially social.' Endnotes, 'Communisation and Value-Form Theory', *Endnotes* No. 2, April 2010, pp. 68-105: 79.

<sup>3</sup>In addition to the background definitions cited in the previous chapter, I adopt here, for reasons of clarity and accessibility at time of writing, David McNally's definition of 'financialisation': 'What the term "financialisation" should capture, in my view, is that set of transformations through which relations between capitals and between capital and wage-labour have been increasingly financialised – that is, increasingly embedded in interest-paying financial transactions. Understanding this enables us to grasp how it is that financial institutions have appropriated ever larger shares of surplus-value.' 'From Financial Crisis to World-Slump: Accumulation, Financialisation, and the Global Slowdown', in *Historical Materialism*, No. 17, 2009, pp. 35–83: 56.

<sup>4</sup>See note 7 in Chapter One. Spinoza has been a cardinal figure for Negri's thought since at least 1981, when he published *L' anomalia selvaggia. Saggi o su potere e potenza in Baruch Spinoza* (Milan: Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore). It was translated by Michael Hardt in 1991. The emphasis has continued in his work since then, including the collaborative writing with Michael Hardt. The reference to Nietzsche primarily manifests through Deleuze's influence in their individual and co-authored publications. The concluding chapter of Kathi Weeks' *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics and Postwork Imaginaries* finds inspiration in Nietzsche. In terms of 'immateriality', the account of 'materiality' that engendered 'immaterial labour' has also proved troublesome for many of the theorists who would place themselves in, as well as outside, the 'autonomist' or 'compositionist' (Bifo) camp. Maurizio Lazzarato takes every opportunity to recant his 1996 coining of the term. See 'Conversation with Maurizio Lazzarato, June 23, 2010 – Public Editing Session #3' in *Exhausting Immaterial Labour in Performance*, joint issue of *Le Journal des Laboratoires* and *TkH Journal for Performing Arts Theory*, No. 17, October 2010, pp. 12-16: 12.

<sup>5</sup>Besides the above-named authors, and prominent interlocutors such as Peter Bürger, a useful synthetic account is J.M. Bernstein, *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno*, University Park: Penn State University Press, 1992.

<sup>6</sup>It is necessary to add here that a fair amount of the writings of Rubin, Postone and Arthur are published in English or are available in English translation, but that is not quite the case for the other major contemporary protagonists of Marxian value-form theory, the German wertkritik (value-critique) or the 'New Marx Reading' group that includes theorists such as Hans-Georg Backhaus, Michael Heinrich and others, which has been dominant in the German-speaking context since the 1960s. For a good recent English-language introduction to both Marx's *Capital* and the wertkritik style of reading, see Heinrich's *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital*, Alexander Locascio, trans., New York: Monthly Review Press, 2012.

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<sup>7</sup>There are many critical differences in this perspective and its political strands. Mario Tronti, Raniero Panzieri and Sergio Bologna held on to a more strictly Marxist and, in Bologna's case, empirically sociological, derivation for this concept (class composition and class politics), while Franco Berardi 'Bifo' took a more 'Guattarian' perspective in *Autonomia* with regard to labour and negation, charting a non- or post-dialectical, micro-political trajectory. Antonio Negri partakes of both at different times in his political and philosophical journey. Increasingly, his commitments have stemmed from an ontologically 'productivist' tendency in Operaismo which he has developed more with reference to Spinoza than to Marx or 20th century Marxisms, apart from, arguably, Leninism. See Stephen Wright, *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism*, London: Pluto Press, 2002 for an authoritative account of these and other aspects of the history of the Operaist and post-Operaist currents.

<sup>8</sup>Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, Robert Hullot-Kentor, trans., London: Continuum, 2007, and elsewhere in his writing.

<sup>9</sup> Anders Ramsay, 'Marx? Which Marx?', Steven Cuzner and Michelle Koerner, trans., *Fronesis*, No. 28, 2008: English version available online only: <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2009-12-21-ramsay-en.html>

<sup>10</sup>Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, Martin Nicolaus, trans., London: Penguin Books, 1973, p.297.

<sup>11</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume One, Ben Fowkes, trans., London: Penguin Books, 1990, p. 160.

<sup>12</sup>Karl Marx, 'Economic Manuscript of 1861–63', *Collected Works of Marx and Engels*, Vol. 30, New York: International Publishers, 1988, p. 55; quoted in Christopher J. Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, Leiden and Boston: Brill Publishers, 2004, p. 42.

<sup>13</sup>André Gorz's *Reclaiming Work: Beyond the Wage-Based Society* (Chris Turner, trans., Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999) and *Critique of Economic Reason* (Gillian Handyside and Chris Turner, trans., London: Verso, 1989) elaborate on this point in ways that are germane to this discussion.

<sup>14</sup>See Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, Daniel Heller-Roazen, trans., Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999, pp. 177–84; Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito, Andrea Casson, trans., Los Angeles and New York: semiotext(e), 2004 or the interview 'The Dismasure of Art' which clearly grounds the concept of the 'general intellect' in its usage by Marx in the *Grundrisse*. Paolo Virno, 'The Dismasure of Art: An Interview with Paolo Virno', OPEN No. 17, 2009, <http://classic.skor.nl/article-4178-nl.html?lang=en> .

<sup>15</sup>Christopher J. Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, as above, p. 54.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 52–54.

<sup>17</sup> Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, as above, 'The Dismasure of Art', as above, and elsewhere in his work, e.g. 'Labour and Language', Arianna Bove, trans., Generation Online: <http://generationonline.org/t/labourlanguage.htm>

<sup>18</sup>Isaac I. Rubin, *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*, Milos Samardzija and Fredy Perlman trans., Montreal and New York: Black Rose Books, 1990.

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<sup>19</sup>Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 125.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>21</sup>This is of course not a tendency limited to theorists who would associate their work with the 'Marxist tradition'. It may yet more consequentially be the case for those positioning themselves explicitly outside, though not always without any relation to, such a tradition, such as the broad current of 'post-structuralist' thought, or Michel Foucault, whose project is in many ways informed by a reaction against a variously substantialised, economic or 'totalising' account of social relations and historical agency that he locates in Marx.

<sup>22</sup>Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, Robert Hullot-Kentor, trans., London: Continuum, 2007, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 2

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>26</sup>Marina Vishmidt, 'Situation Wanted: Something About Labour', *Afterall*, No. 19, Autumn/Winter 2008, pp. 21-34.

<sup>27</sup>John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade*, London and New York: Verso, 2007, p. 30. The influence of John Roberts' analysis here on the development of my thinking about these matters, however intuitively and scatteredly it may be expressed here, cannot be over-estimated.

<sup>28</sup>Theodor Adorno, 'Reconciliation Under Duress', *Aesthetics and Politics*, London and New York: Verso, 2007, p. 159.

<sup>29</sup>T.J. Clark, *Farewell To An Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999, p. 7.

<sup>30</sup>Fredric Jameson, 'Reflections in Conclusion', *Aesthetics and Politics*, as above, pp. 204-5.

<sup>31</sup>The Italian Autonomist 'heresy' stating that the law of value has ceased to apply in conditions of networked, affective and immaterial labour and its full real subsumption draws on the 'Fragment on Machines' in Karl Marx's *Grundrisse*. I have dealt with this point in the previous chapter. For me, a concise and helpful statement of this thesis continues to be Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's 'Value and Affect', *boundary*, Vol. 26, No. 2, Summer 1999, pp. 77-88.

<sup>32</sup>Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, as above, p. 55.

<sup>33</sup>The Black-Scholes equation is fundamental for the 'revolution in finance', opening up vast new fields of financial commodities, such as derivatives, hedges and various forms of options, manufactured according to algorithms calculating probability of risk and basing prices thereon. The Financial Times lexicon defines Black-Scholes as 'A commonly used mathematical formula for pricing options based on projections of the underlying asset price, devised by economists Myron Scholes, Robert Merton and Fischer Black in the early 1970s. Merton and Scholes received the Noble Prize for Economics in 1997, Black having passed away in the meantime.

<sup>34</sup>Elie Ayache, 'In the Middle of the Event', *The Medium of Contingency*, Robin Mackay, ed., Falmouth and London: Ridinghouse and Urbanomic, 2011, pp. 19-36. Ayache's main book-length publications is *The Blank Swan: The End of Probability*, Chichester: Wiley, 2010. *The Medium of Contingency* is an exhibition publication

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titled after Ayache's article, 'The Medium of Contingency' in the 'Contingency' issue of *Pli: The Warwick Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 22, 2011. Ayache's papers are available at <http://www.ito33.com/publications/overview>, the website for his consultancy: 'Elie's shortest cut was his first day on the floor: October 19, 1987, a day marked by a huge, unpredictable crash of the stock market that shook the global finance industry. From that first day, Elie learned that what happened then could happen any day. Yet that day was so exceptional that even if you were to replay it some other day, you would not get the same result. The same would hold for any other day. This completely ruled out the notion of "truth" in the markets as something you can think twice about, let alone try to reproduce, simulate or even represent by a model or algorithm...'

<sup>35</sup> 'The Blank Swan: Dan Tudball Talks to Elie Ayache', *Wilmott Magazine*, April 2010, pp. 40-48: 44.

[www.ito33.com/sites/default/files/articles/1005\\_coverstory.pdf](http://www.ito33.com/sites/default/files/articles/1005_coverstory.pdf) *Wilmott Magazine* is the organ of Wilmott, a trade association for quantitative finance analysts.

<sup>36</sup> More recently, Ayache assimilates Quentin Meillassoux's theses on 'absolute contingency' in Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay On the Necessity of Contingency*, Ray Brassier, trans., London and New York: Continuum, 2008.

<sup>37</sup> Elie Ayache, 'In the Middle of the Event', as above, pp. 26-28, 35.

<sup>38</sup> Both Ayache and McNally's critiques of measure in financial markets can be usefully read alongside Christian Marazzi's account of 'endogenous' risk in markets: 'In fact, there is a particular ontological weakness in the models of probability calculation used to evaluate risks due to the *endogenous* nature of the interactions between the financial operators [...] This explains the "evaluation errors" of risk not so much, or not only, as mistakes attributable to the conflict of interests scandalously typical of rating agencies, but as the expression of an (ontological) impossibility of making rules or meta-rules able to discipline markets in accordance with so-called rational principles. All the more so when, according to the methods used to establish the value of financial assets, like the ones based on the new accounting norms (International Financial Reporting Standards, IFRS, secured by Basel II), the fair value of assets is calculated on the basis of the conflict between their market value and the value at which the asset is being negotiated, that is, its historical value (the method used to establish this valuation is called 'mark to market'). The problem posed by these methods of valuation is that, since fair values act as a reference to calculate the value of a patrimonial asset—in the same way as a private citizen who calculates his *real* assets, including the *current* market value of his real estate—there is a strong urge to increase asset value by increasing debt...' Christian Marazzi, *The Violence of Financial Capitalism* (New Edition), Kristina Lebedeva and Jason Francis McGimsey, trans., New York and Los Angeles: semiotext(e), 2011, pp. 80-81.

<sup>39</sup> With the 'In the Middle of the Event' lecture, he is also trying to situate it in relation to art – his lecture was delivered in the context of an exhibition and talks programme titled 'New York to London and Back: The Medium of Contingency' at London gallery Thomas Dane (18 January – 19 February 2011).

<sup>40</sup> David McNally, 'From Financial Crisis to World-Slump: Accumulation, Financialisation, and the Global Slowdown', as above, p. 57.

<sup>41</sup> See Note 1. Sander gives the following précis of Marx's concept of fictitious capital: 'In one sense, all financial capital is fictitious since its value, its power to represent real commodities, ultimately depends on fiction, on 'faith in money-value as the immanent spirit of commodities' (Marx). But money is also 'only a different form

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of the commodity' and must therefore expand together with the value of the commodities it represents. To the extent that financial capital's expansion is disconnected from the expansion of value of the commodities it represents, it is fictitious. More specifically: fictitious capital is capital neither invested in the physical means of production, infrastructure, or the wages of workers, but rather in assets (stocks, bonds, securities) that are expected to yield profits at some future time. It constitutes claims to future production and the profits that this may generate - paper claims to wealth. While the existence of fictitious capital is inherent in the development of a capitalist banking and credit system, its actual development in present-day capitalism in the form of both public and private debt necessary to sustain economic activity constitutes a huge and unsustainable burden on future earnings that may never be repaid or which creates credit bubbles the bursting of which constitutes a formidable threat to the very stability of the capitalist system.' 'Will China Save Global Capitalism?', *Mute*, Vol. 3, No. 2, September 2011.

<sup>42</sup>The concept of Value at Risk or VaR is glossed by McNally: 'First developed in the early 1990s, VaR has become the fundamental basis upon which financial institutions and investors assess the riskiness of their investment-portfolios. Indeed, over the past decade, it has also been the basis upon which banks establish their own capital-requirements.' 'From Financial Crisis to World-Slump: Accumulation, Financialisation, and the Global Slowdown', as above, p. 70.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., pp. 70-71.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>45</sup>Endnotes, 'Communitisation and Value-Form Theory', as above, p. 79.

<sup>46</sup>George Soros, *The New Paradigm for Financial Markets*, New York: Public Affairs, 2008; John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1936.

<sup>47</sup>'The Blank Swan: Dan Tudball Talks to Elie Ayache', as above, p. 48.

[http://www.ito33.com/sites/default/files/articles/1005\\_coverstory.pdf](http://www.ito33.com/sites/default/files/articles/1005_coverstory.pdf)

<sup>48</sup> However, see Randy Martin, who approaches the enclosure of the future in the 'futures' of risk management and arbitrage in terms of a concrete action on the future in the present, thus 'market-making' in the generative sense which Ayache would propose. He writes in 'Taking an Administrative Turn: Derivative Logics for a Recharged Humanities', '...derivatives work through the agency of arbitrage, of small interventions that make significant difference, of a generative risk in the face of generalized failure but on behalf of desired ends that treat the future not simply as contingent, uncertain, or indeterminate but also as actionable in the present, as a tangible wager on what is to come.' *Representations*, Vol. 116, No. 1, Fall 2011, pp. 156-76:160.

<sup>49</sup>Robert Meister, 'Rethinking Capitalism' conference, University of California Santa Cruz, 7-9 April 2011,

<http://rethinkingcapitalism.ucsc.edu/post/category/video>

<sup>50</sup>Silvia Federici, lecture at book launch of her book *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012), 12 November 2012, Goldsmiths, University of London.

<sup>51</sup> It could be argued that there is actually more of an in-depth consideration of the politics of the art and labour divide in his 1981 book *The Nights of Labor* (first English edition 1989; re-issued as *Proletarian Nights: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France*, London and New York: Verso, 2012), than in any of his more recent writing on aesthetics and politics. See Tom Roberts and Anthony Iles, 'From the Cult of the People

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to the Cult of Rancière' for a short but incisive exploration of this strand of Rancière's work. *Mute*, Vol. 3, No. 3, September 2012.

<sup>52</sup>John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form*, as above, p. 209.

<sup>53</sup>This is also performed narratively in Melanie Gilligan's 2010 web serial *Popular Unrest*.

<http://popularunrest.org/> See also Tom Holert's interview with Gilligan, 'Subjects of Finance', *Grey Room*, Winter 2012, No. 46, pp. 84-98.

<sup>54</sup>Marina Vishmidt, 'Situation Wanted: Something About Labour', as above.

<sup>55</sup>In an interview Takala says, 'People in the workplace think they have a consensus about how things should go, what you're supposed to do. But then something like this happens and it appears that a rule for this situation doesn't exist. Some people might think it's a good way to work. Others might think it's crazy.'

'"Ungovernable" Artist Pilvi Takala Explains Her Radical Aesthetic Program: Do Nothing', 24 April 2012, *Artinfo*, <http://www.artinfo.com/news/story/799526/ungovernable-artist-pilvi-takala-explains-her-radical-artistic-program-do-nothing>

<sup>56</sup>Here I am referring to Charlotte Salomon's extraordinary inter-war graphic novel *Leben? Oder Theater?*

<sup>57</sup>The insertion of the living trader inside the very mechanism of the market is both the consequence of dynamic hedging and the guarantee that the market will always be displaced and taken somewhere else. Thus the trader holds the market at both ends. His being-there is the site of being of the market.' Élie Ayache, *The Blank Swan: The End of Probability*, as above, p. 48.

<sup>58</sup>The theme of the resistance of labour as source of innovation for capital shows up in Marx but is key to the Italian Operaist and Autonomist Marxism of Mario Tronti, Raniero Panzieri and Antonio Negri, to name the best-known of its exponents in the Anglophone context. See particularly 'Keynes and the Capitalist Theory of the State post-1929' in Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Labor of Dionysus: A Critique of the State-form*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994. The article originally appeared in Antonio Negri, *Operai e Stato*, Milan: Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore, 1972.

<sup>59</sup>Tiqqun, 'The Problem of the Head', translation of a text first published in *Tiqqun* No. 2, 2001.

<http://libcom.org/library/problem-head>

<sup>60</sup>Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, as above, p. 6.

<sup>61</sup>John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form*, as above, p. 96. More general discussion on this topic occurs in Chapter Three, 'Deskilling, Reskilling and Artistic Labour', pp. 81-100.

<sup>62</sup>Allan Sekula, *Photography Against the Grain. Essays and Photo Works 1973-1983*, Halifax: Nova Scotia University Press, 1984, p. ix.

<sup>63</sup>Mike Sperlinger has written insightfully on this and related works. See 'Diminishing Returns, or, is Robert Morris Cynical?', *Switch*, No. 2, Summer 2009.

<sup>64</sup>Mark Shell, *Art and Money*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995, p. 115.

<sup>65</sup>See 'Technology trends in the financial markets: A 2020 vision', produced by the British think-tank Foresight at <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/foresight/docs/computer-trading/11-1222-dr3-technology-trends-in-financial-markets>

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<sup>66</sup> In short, then, the containers were filled with the absence of these workers, an absence which also is that of every worker occupied with unloading containers and, more distantly, of the European workers replaced by those distant workers. The medium's 'objectivity', then, conceals a determinate aesthetic relation between opacity and transparency, between the containers as brute presence of pure coloured forms and containers as representatives of the 'mystery' of the commodity, that is, of the way in which it absorbs human labour and conceals its mutations.' Jacques Rancière, 'What Medium Can Mean', Steven Corcoran, trans., *Parrhesia*, No. 11, 2011, pp. 35-43:40.

<sup>67</sup> This specific relationship between financialisation and art is explored in detail in Melanie Gilligan, *Notes on Art, Finance and the Un-Productive Forces*, Glasgow: Transmission Gallery, 2008.

<sup>68</sup> These ideas came up in conversations conducted with former participants in *These associations*, Seghal's recent piece at Tate Modern, 24 July – 28 October 2012. An enraptured Guardian journalist concluded his review of the piece by saying, '*These associations* is one of the best Turbine Hall commissions. There are no objects: we are the subject. It is about communality and intimacy, the self as social being, the group and the individual, belonging and separation. We're in the middle of things. It is marvellous.' Adrian Searle, 'These associations- review', *The Guardian*, 23 July 2012.

## Chapter Three

### The Aesthetic Subject and the Politics of Speculative Labour

'I have a good conscience; I've written thousands of slips of paper. In the sense of this responsibility – work, conscience, fulfilment of duty – I'm no worse a worker than anyone who has built a road.'

Hanne Darboven<sup>1</sup>

'A contradiction of all autonomous art is the concealment of the labour that went into it, but in high capitalism, with the complete hegemony of exchange value and with the contradictions arising out of that hegemony, autonomous art becomes both problematic and programmatic at the same time.' Theodor Adorno<sup>2</sup>

### Introduction

The rationale of this chapter is to outline the connection between the contradictions of the social development of artistic labour in capitalism and the formation of the aesthetic subject in modernity as the displacement of labour from the category of art, bringing it into closer affiliation with the speculative forms of capital valorisation. I will start with a brief survey of how artists have approached and appropriated the politics of labour, continuing the last chapter's focus on the mimesis of labour within artistic practices in a more historiographical and analytic key. I will then discuss real subsumption as a central mechanism by which we can come to understand processes of value production that transpire elsewhere than the workplace, although they may originate there. Once we have seen how the speculative category of real subsumption can function in a discussion of artistic production, we will be in a better position to follow the emergence of the aesthetic subject as a displacement of labour and a reification of an oppositional space – not necessarily an antagonistic one – to the social relations of capital accumulation and work. This is a space of autonomy that, however, has significant affinity to the 'autonomisation'



of capital from labour. Whereas capital and art once confronted each other as heteronomy and autonomy, now they seem to share a certain utopian vision of an 'automatic subject' that can valorise itself indefinitely. This affinity of course has certain limitations – art can at best be a flattering self-image of capital, which is actuated by profit and is thus as far as can be from the aesthetic principle of 'purposiveness without a purpose'.

Crucial to the determination of how the dialectic between autonomy and heteronomy for art is displaced in the present is the status of the concept of 'real subsumption'. 'Real subsumption' plays a central role in accounts of the restructuring of the valorisation processes of capital and their relation to labour as it has developed over time. While we can start by thinking about how artistic production has been differentially 'really subsumed' by the industrializing circuits of art markets, fairs, biennials, urban branding strategies, or even education and social services, this should be situated as part of a broader trend. The annexation of art by 'culture' and 'culture' by the economy has been seen as a symptom of the 'seizure' of previously 'untouched' areas of subjectivity and social life by the valorisation process, or, conversely, the socialization of capital in cultural consumption. Processes such as these have been theorized in terms of the periodisation of phases of capital accumulation and of the relation between capital and labour within them.<sup>3</sup> The developmental tendency, then, for the relation between capital and labour is that labour not only appears more and more, but is experienced as, a moment of capital. This registers both in the objective parameters of reproduction mediated by financial rather than welfare state institutions and in the subjective parameters of 'human capital'

ideology. Some theorists have also suggested that debt represents a concrete instance of the change in the class relation wrought by financialisation. Insofar as debt has the effect of individualizing the subject's relation to capital – whereas the wage once served as a common basis for struggle – it disguises the capital relation of exploitation as 'self-investment'.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the term 'human capital' is hardly an ideological vector pure and simple; it simply describes the structural condition of the worker in the era of financialisation.

The status of class antagonism in this era of 'self-investment' also undergoes a significant change – labour can no longer be affirmed as a positive counter-pole in a vision of a non- or post-capitalist future. Theorists working in the communisation current generally contend that any affirmation of autonomy for labour within this relationship becomes an affirmation precisely of labour within this relationship, that is, a position devoid of mediations or barriers to labour's social absorption into capital (or, conversely, the socialization of capital). In this sense, any affirmation of labour is an affirmation of capital.<sup>5</sup> While this account is compelling, it does hazard the elision of the negativity of a working-class 'for-itself' (labour militancy, or its political moment) with the affirmation of a working class in itself, whereas neither moment can totalise the other, whether it is changes in the processes of capitalist accumulation or shifts in the social and political composition of the proletariat (employed and not). However, we can use it as a point of departure to construct an account of capital formation 'from the inside out', that is to say, when capital is presupposed at the affective and operative level of the individual subject

insofar as she constitutes a free individual, rather than a worker or any other socially determined role.

To do this, we will need to revisit the autonomy/heteronomy nexus as it has played out in the emergence of the artistic subject as both the emblematic and oppositional figure of modernity, internalizing the abstraction of the capital relation as the innermost truth of its existence in the world. Beyond the 'death of art' (Hegel), the artistic subject as isomorphic with the 'automatic subject' of capital is advanced as a prototype for all labour. At the same time, the artistic subject is the marker of the division of social labour which produces the artist and the worker as socially, and even ontologically, distinct. It could even be said that it is precisely through the dissolution of the artwork into the field of wider social relations (social, participatory, relational and 'invisible' forms of art) that the recuperation of this dissolution as individual artistic capital is upheld most forcefully, with the artist emerging as both a de-skilled 'service worker' and manager and curator of social creativity or the 'general intellect'.<sup>6</sup> The artist as both not-worker and utopian model of labour which mediates these shifts in productive relations serves as an analogue of capital's boundless creativity and transformative agency, even or especially in times of crisis and decline, when this figure takes on 'anti-capitalist' or oppositional contents within forms which remain very much the same. In this sense, the challenges to art's autonomy which have themselves solidified into an orthodoxy in the past three or four decades have by and large accommodated themselves to the results of these challenges, that is, a conception of artistic practices and artistic institutions that are more and more defined by the

heteronomy of the market.

Autonomy thus becomes a style, a form of 'taste' that positions art as a refined consumption of social relations whose materiality and imbrication with the institution of art's heteronomous conditions of existence must be disavowed as a key part of the adherence demanded by this style. These disavowals often take the form of sublimation of class, labour (be it artistic or supportive) and material conditions on the level of discursive criticality while being increasingly beholden to them materially. The institutional conservatism which generates these disavowals is more often defended as a pragmatic defence of art's independence and ability to nourish its socially utopian potentials, a stance which underpins many recent defences of the 'bourgeois art institution' from the depredations of the market. The artist, meanwhile, seems to retain a commitment to autonomy as a professional standard, though it is now mediated by the character masks of the manager, the researcher, or ethnographer. This quick typology of the objective parameters of how autonomy registers in the field of art today centres on the figure of the artist as a figure exempt from the relations of exploitation that obtain elsewhere in society. The artist is a figure who can be 'autonomous' because she belongs to a productive structure that allows her to appropriate and produce cultural material as the expression of her subjectivity rather than for profit or survival. She is beyond the capital relation; she has the enviably protean nature of capital itself – as close as 'human capital' can get to the idyllic abstraction capital imagines for itself as an entity unencumbered by labour, regulation or deflating asset prices. In this way, the formal autonomy of the artist aligns

with the 'automatism' of capital as engine of accumulation and self-valorisation that both includes and expels 'alien' labour. As we will see later in this chapter in the discussion of Agamben and Kant, the historical trajectory of the value-form sees it line up with taste and artistic subjectivity insofar as they are constituted by 'indifference' or the 'unconditioned', that is, by the deepening of social abstraction. The autonomy of art arises with the autonomy of capital as a central phenomenon of modern experience. It invents a category of social relation which is not one, a social relation of exemption – aesthetic judgement or 'taste'. This forms a central thread of the thesis of 'speculation as a mode of production in art and capital' because it is through aesthetic judgement that we can come to perceive more clearly the social negativity of art in its separation from labour and use-value, a negativity very different to the negativity posed by labour, which was the hostile immanence to capital, with a potential for social antagonism predicated on its affirmation of use over exchange. But it may be precisely this under-determined form of social negativity belonging to art which becomes pivotal when that antagonism is dissolved by the re-structuring of the labour:capital relation, when the very 'use-value' of labour is put into question by its main consumer, capital. Concomitantly with the loss of definition for labour, art assumes a new economic centrality as its indeterminacy is put to work in the more 'speculative' modes of accumulation. This encompasses both the market and the public institutions of display and education, although the socially reproductive role assumed by the latter is increasingly put into question as the legitimating functions of art for speculative capital are 'de-leveraged' through austerity programs.

## Is Art Working?

For an adequate understanding of the role of labour in current artistic production, the idea of the artist as a manager, an engineer of social processes which she then capitalizes, needs to be thought in conjunction with the increasingly pervasive politicization of the artist as a worker: a notion with many historical antecedents which cannot be explored fully here. The question here would be what happens when labour becomes not just a thematic or image for artistic production, but when artistic production is re-imagined as itself a form of labour, and the kinds of political forms this produces. Artists and cultural workers assuming the organizational forms and demands of the labour movement such as fair pay and equitable working conditions can be briefly encapsulated in the history of Artists Unions in the U.K. and U.S.<sup>7</sup> in the 1970s, the Art Workers' Coalition in New York in the late '60s – mid-70s, as well as current groups such as W.A.G.E. (Working Artists and the Greater Economy) and the PWB (Precarious Workers Brigade). There is also a sub-rosa tradition of artists 'withdrawing' their labour, such as the Art Strikes initiated by, respectively, the Art Workers Coalition (1970), Gustav Metzger (1977-1980) and Stewart Home (1990-93).<sup>8</sup>

There are many paradoxes thrown up by re-defining artistic production as wage-labour, however the wage is calculated. One of these might be that the division of social labour that produces the artist as a separate kind of 'non-professional' professional cannot be reconciled with a simple agreement that art be valued through the same metrics as all other kinds of work, particularly when capitalist work across the board is being rendered precarious, contingent and self-realizing for everyone on the classic reactionary model of the autonomous (starving) artist.<sup>9</sup> Yet this fragile homology between artistic labour and

labour in general does furnish the political core of initiatives by artists and cultural workers to organize on the traditional lines of labour politics. These initiatives seem to multiply at a time when the performance of artistic modalities or services increasingly do not result in object commodities. As Hito Steyerl writes, what that means is that such services are instantly commodified themselves.<sup>10</sup> But are they? While remaining art? Here we can recall Marx's comment about labour which does not produce use-values: 'If the thing is useless, so is the labour contained in it; the labour does not count as labour, and therefore creates no value.'<sup>11</sup> If it was use-value producing labour, it wouldn't be art; and, come to think of it, a great variety of waged labour these days hardly produces use-values either.

Aware of the thorny conceptual and practical issues besieging the task of quantifying artistic labour, a group like W.A.G.E. focuses on the institutional parameters of the distribution of resources. Focusing on contracts, line items in budgets, and sanctions from funders, WAGE seeks to programmatically challenge the mystification of artistic labour as 'investment' which may recompense its maker in the future. They set out to break the practical and political tie between artists and (financial) speculators by re-positioning artists as workers, itself a socially speculative gesture.<sup>12</sup> This bears directly on the relationship of art-making to speculation as a form of production. Besides artistic work – whether or not recognized as 'labour' - unpaid labour in the cultural sector (typically internships, as well as the more humdrum self-exploitation characteristic of most cultural work) is paradigmatic of speculation as a mode of production since this kind of labour is presented as a speculative investment in one's human capital, with its hallmarks of

affective excess, self-management, and submissive auto-valorisation. However, it should not be disregarded that the structural prominence of unpaid labour in the cultural sector is only pointing to the larger devalorisation of labour in the economy. More expansively, this can be discussed as the breakdown of the capital-labour class relation, here with a special focus on how art mediates this erosion of categories and guarantees economically and subjectively.<sup>13</sup>

The strategy of organizing around the structure of compensation for artists and cultural producers reveals a number of paradoxes from the side of labour politics. In addition to the ones cited, the artistic mode of production is so mystified and individualized that labour regulation could indeed only be performed by a much more omnipotent state than we are ever likely to have, and even that would hardly touch on the opaque and unregulated primary and secondary art markets. W.A.G.E. proposes a form of certification or voluntary code of best practice that arts institutions can sign up to indicating their commitment to paying cultural producers properly. What this misses is first, that an unregulated market like the sphere of art production and mediation does not voluntarily self-police and second, that art institutions operate within a capitalist social space whose iron law is that the rewards of the powerful few come at the expense of the weak many; a structural fact not amenable to moral pressure.<sup>14</sup> The professionals at the lowest rung of the ladder are unpaid so that institutions can function on inadequate budgets; artists don't receive fees so that there's more money to pay salaries to administrators to fund-raise from wealthy donors. If one of the distinguishing features of art production is that – by and large – it is



not organized through the same structures as nor accessible to the same forms of measure as other kinds of labour, then it is difficult to see how the political forms of labour organization can play more than a metaphorical role in pointing out certain social injustices of this kind within the institution of art.<sup>15</sup> Further, this kind of pointing will swiftly need to point to itself, as the expansion of the art world, however unequal the distribution of its rewards, is a symptom of extreme wealth inequality, a symptom of vast amounts of money being accumulated and invested in e.g. the art market and not e.g. in social reproduction.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, as John Roberts and Gregory Sholette have written, art increasingly functions as a sink for disguised un- and underemployment, as statistically larger and larger numbers of people try, with varying degrees of success, to monetise their free creative activity in a hostile economic landscape.<sup>17</sup>

Besides the structural paradoxes from the side of labour and the commodity, there are also paradoxes to be found on the side of art. If what is most characteristic of progressive art since Modernism is to desire the end of art, to dissolve into life, then re-defining art as wage-labour fits into that tradition, while continuing to insist on the cultural exception that determines a price for it on the terrain of state and market – and to accept that capital, which ensures the existence of divisions of labour, classes and, of course, the existence of art as a class-distinctive pursuit in distinction from labour, is eternal. As already noted, this move can mean that the real class divisions that underpin the maintenance of regimes of paid and unpaid labour, mental and manual labour, art work and 'shit work', are obscured. Also, the move of construing art as labour reduces art to one of its dimensions, namely

what it shares with all capitalist work: the commodity form. A labour politics of art boils down artistic production to the 'absolute commodity' Theodor Adorno speaks about<sup>18</sup> (in this case, irrespective of its durational or material form: the commodity of labour-power will do) or to abstract social labour in its generality, vitiating the critical inflection art still possesses as 'the antithesis of that which is the case.'<sup>19</sup>

However, raising the issue of the links between art and labour in the speculative mode of production can have other, equally if not more urgent, critical and political consequences. Art's role in social reproduction – the 'concealment' of labour Adorno mentions in the epigraph – is problematised when this role is re-defined as production. This is also the lesson of the Wages for Housework movement, and indeed any instance when a social relation accepted as natural and exceptional to the laws of market exchange is re-defined as labour, thus alienated, and alienable: an object for debate. It is not only a matter of recognition: once the disregarded is revealed as fundamental, like unwaged labour for the system of waged exploitation, the relations in that field can shift into another configuration, having repercussions for the 'norm' at issue. On the terrain of art, probably still the most elegant and symptomatically precise gesture of this kind was the feminist conceptual artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles' 'Maintenance Art' manifesto and artwork. Mierle Laderman Ukeles dramatised the nominalist protocols of Conceptual Art when she performed domestic labour as an artwork, what she called 'Maintenance Art'.<sup>20</sup> Ukeles would bustle around exhibits with a duster and cleaning fluid, wash the steps of the museum, and hound the administrative staff out of their offices on her cleaning rounds.

The point was that the work of maintenance made all other kinds of work possible – waged labour, artwork, even 'the revolution'. In proposing a world in which 'maintenance' activities were just as legitimately a part of the art as the objects or even the more ephemeral propositions or documentations that announced conceptual art, she was suspending the division of symbolic and physical labour that ensured work and art remained matter and anti-matter, autonomy without a taint of heteronomy. If the daily uncompensated labour performed by mainly women in the household could migrate to the museum and seek legitimacy as art, then it was no longer self-evident that this labour was any less 'creative' than the kind of activity otherwise enshrined as art, and no less public than socially necessary wage-labour. It could even be said that her work synthesized the political stakes of identifying with 'work' at that time (late 1960s and early 1970s) for art and for the feminist movement, since identifying with work was a way of reaching for some sort of political collective agency (and, inversely, the political stakes of upgrading housework to artwork). The debates around art's relationship to work sounded very similar to the domestic labour debates; both were seen as somehow taking place outside the social contract of waged labour.

As one of the driving forces of *Wages for Housework*, the Marxist feminist scholar and activist Silvia Federici, wrote in 1984:

Yet, the demand for wages for housework was crucial from many viewpoints. First it recognized that housework is work—the work of producing and reproducing the workforce—and in this way it exposed the enormous amount of unpaid labor that goes on unchallenged and unseen in this society.<sup>21</sup>

As soon as an activity, and the identity of those who perform it, is alienated in this way, its

stability as a social relation is suspended. In the field of cultural production, it allows the question to be posed of what it is about the organization of society that impels some to work for no money whatsoever because the alternatives seem even worse. Considered in a purely formal manner, it is here that the question of 'self-abolition' – of the proletariat, of social existence under the category 'woman' or 'homosexual' or 'black' – also becomes a question for artistic labour. This returns us to the decomposition of the class relation discussed in the first part of this chapter. The relations between the negativity of labour for capital and the political affirmation of labour within capital can be seen as an analogue to art's heteronomy and autonomy. Art cannot affirm itself as art within the relations of capital – its autonomy - without using that autonomy to disclose the horizon of its own erasure, whether that means merging with life (heteronomy) or wider social transformation (overcoming the autonomy/heteronomy contradiction). It is clear that the analogy between the self-abolition of art and the self-abolition of the proletariat, or other forms of social self-abolition, is questionable at a greater level of concretion, which would bring into focus the class relations of art and its 'exceptionality'. However, there is the formal correspondence in the relation of art to capital and unpaid domestic work to capital that looks like a relation of the 'supplement', that which is necessary but must be depicted as incidental.<sup>22</sup> The constitutive exception, whether it is reproductive labour in the home or the unquantifiable reproductive labour of the cultural worker or the serviceable artist: the 'under labourer' who is the condition of possibility of the system's ability to reproduce itself as a whole, the 'work' that must disappear in order for 'the work' to appear, whether that work is the waged worker or the art installation. A further question here would be how

the participatory, post-conceptual and relational art practices of the past four decades have sought to internalize and exhibit this 'work' as part of 'the work' that emerges thereby.

How does the social relation of capital mobilize and valorise the 'counter-production' discussed in the last chapter (the resistance of labour to be made capital within the labour process), the desire to be 'not-labour' that is the founding moment of art and the division of labour within which it exists? It will be the task of this chapter to explore this question by grounding the alignment between the autonomy of art and the heteronomy of capital as it indexes changes in the organization and work (the capital relation) in the figure of the artist as type of modern subjectivity which allegorises the real abstraction of capital, equating ceaseless flux, change and competition with personal and social freedom. At the same time, this alignment generates a negativity which seeks its content in opposition to capital's rule, if not always its logic, as the above indicates. This then, does not greatly depart from the contradictions of art as meeting place between autonomy and heteronomy as Adorno sketched it half a century ago: art de-functionalises subjectivities but only as an exception which proves (even if it on occasion contaminates) the rule. Such a suspension of use value is performed within limits which are in their turn guaranteed by the total mobilization of subjectivity, by the fixed division of social labour, enforced by the accumulation needs of capital, within and without the workplace. It can be contended that it is precisely art's micro-alienation from productive labour and commodity relations that in the age of creative work, creative industries and creative cities, acts to socialize capital

on the macro-level, fulfilling art's oft-cited role of being 'the commodity that sells all others'. Thus, the affect of emancipation and critique that comprises the 'surplus value' of art in this schema is not simply or merely ideological, but wholly structural, flourishing as it does in an era of seemingly indefinite capitalist crisis.

Concomitantly, we might look at how art practices and art parameters have globally become aligned with the restructuring of labour into ever more arbitrary, placeless, transient and performative modes of generating value, including even the value of its non-reproduction. By 'non-reproduction' here, I refer to brakes put on expanded social reproduction by debt in the case of labour (and capital), or, in the case of art, its self-referential continuation beyond and by means of, its own exhaustion and indistinction. So here we can approach real subsumption as the restructuring by direct integration into capital of arenas of social life that had been principally, though contestably, separate instances from value accumulation – social reproduction as the consumption of use-values, art as the production of useless 'higher' values. This heralds a loss of mediation on the one hand and its proliferation on the other, when capital's mediations – financial and managerial mechanisms – expand into and reshape in their own image instances of relative autonomy where this autonomy has recently become a barrier for further accumulation, a barrier that comes to seem ever more intolerable in periods of crisis. Thus, the separation of art and labour, premised on the self-consistent identity of each, is transformed by real subsumption, with the decomposition of the sites and senses of work on the one hand, and the untenability of proper places and pursuits for art on the other.

Hence, the politics stemming from each also – use versus exchange in the traditional iterations of labour politics, and the criticality of useless art against reigning use-values in social reality – themselves are hollowed out by the rationalizations that come with real subsumption. This was already the case in the last global economic and social crisis, which heralded the onset of the 'neoliberal' era. In the speculative mode of production that has prevailed since then, art's attempts to model or embody practices of greater social utility itself relied on a vast expansion of debt-financed social spending and culture-led urban leveraging. A vast array of types of 'social speculation' pursued by means of contemporary art thus claimed critical or even political purchase in the midst of this abundance, inequitable as it was. The current crisis punctuates, though it cannot be said to introduce a sharp break into, the self-understanding of such practices. The 'supportive infrastructures' that art has dedicated itself to prototyping in recent years seem objectively more urgent than ever, now joined to an invigorated activist and collectivist impulse in the wake of Occupy. But if the respective erosions of art and labour come as symptoms of a crisis, can there be a negative as well as a palliative reflection on the current situation, and can this negativity also potentially disclose a re-composition, precisely around the crisis of 'value' that the social forms of art and labour manifest in their own ways?

Here, we must be careful to distinguish art's relationship to real subsumption from the claim that art itself is really subsumed; or, stated otherwise, art's conceptual or 'imaginary' subsumption and the real subsumption determining labour must be held apart if we are to track how art and labour converge and diverge in the recent period of capital

accumulation, and the shift in the mechanisms of subsumption this has brought with it. If we look below at the exegesis given by Marx of the category of subsumption (in its formal and real variants), it will be clear that the production process of art, as discussed in the previous chapter, is not subsumed at all, neither really nor formally.<sup>23</sup> I have previously discussed this in terms of art having a relationship to the value-form while itself not being determined by the law of value; it is this condition of difference which allows it to have a relationship to the social instance that does, namely abstract labour and its concrete articulations. This allows us to truly, that is to say, structurally, situate art within the speculative mode of production as 'speculative labour'. As John Roberts writes in a recent essay:

Artistic praxis certainly plays a part in the accumulation of capital, through opening itself up to interdisciplinary and environmental forms of situatedness - as I have said. But as speculative labour art lies outside of the value process: most artists, most of the time, don't have to work harder and faster in order to produce a range of prototypes to a given template and to a deadline.<sup>24</sup>

This will be important to consider also in the conclusion, where I will deploy the concept of 'imaginary subsumption' to open a consideration of whether art can make the leap from non-subsumption directly to 'real subsumption' as a consequence of the shifts in its economic role and social agency in the 'speculative mode of production'. My hypothesis is that art's non-compatibility with the category of 'real subsumption' is clear when the category applied to the characteristic production processes of art, and that this is important for reading the specific political potential of art in the speculative mode of production and in capital in general, with regard especially to its relationship to



revolutionary 'social technique', as Roberts also writes. However, once the broader application of 'real subsumption' that has been outlined so far in this chapter is allowed to register, it is equally clear that we can discuss art as pivotal – again, due to its specificity as a 'non-labour' - to real subsumption seen as a tendential process of capital investing the whole of social reproduction with its value imperatives.

### **Real Subsumption**

In the Appendix to the first volume of *Capital*, 'Results of the Immediate Process of Production', Marx develops the category of 'real subsumption'. Real subsumption refers to the socialization of labour through and by the capitalist production process as it becomes properly capitalist, that is, capital shapes the working day and working processes to its ends, not merely marketising the exchange relations within which traditional working practices continue. This would be considered formal subsumption and is logically (not chronologically) prior to real subsumption. In real subsumption, the majority of the population are proletarianized: they have no means, no reserves, for reproducing themselves besides the sale of their labour-power for a wage:

the working population must have ceased either to be part of the *objective* conditions of labour, or to enter the market-places as producers of commodities; instead of selling the products of its labour it must sell that labour itself, or, more accurately, its labour-power. Only then can it be said that production has become the *production of commodities* through its entire length and breadth.<sup>25</sup>

Later in the chapter, Marx emphasises that it is under real subsumption that the powers of labour appear as what they 'are', the powers of capital:

Since – within the process of production – living labour has already been absorbed into

capital, all the *social productive forces of labour* appear as the *productive forces* of capital, as intrinsic attributes of capital, just as in the case of money, the creative power of labour had seemed to possess the qualities of a thing.<sup>26</sup>

and finally:

Capital *employs* labour. This in itself exhibits the relationship in its simple form and entails the personification of things and the reification [*Versachlichung*] of persons.

The relationship becomes more complicated, however, and apparently more mysterious, with the emergence of the specifically capitalist mode of production. Here we find that it is not only such things – the products of labour, both use-values and exchange-values – that rise up on their hind legs and face the worker and confront him as '*Capital*'. But even the social forms of labour appear as a *form of development of capital*, and hence the productive forces of social labour so developed appear as the *productive forces of capitalism* [...] The same transformation may be observed in the forces of nature and science, the products of the general development of history in its abstract quintessence. They too confront the workers as the *powers* of capital. They become separated effectively from the skill and the knowledge of the individual worker; and even though they are themselves the products of labour, they appear as an *integral* part of capital wherever they intervene in the labour process.<sup>27</sup>

Marx here stages the later discussion of real subsumption with a depiction of how it is that concrete social labour is incorporated into the expansion of abstract value. Importantly, the analytic transition between formal and real subsumption is linked to the distinction between absolute and relative surplus value. While absolute surplus value extraction relies on the simple extension of the working day or intensification of labour, relative surplus value extraction is pursued by means such as automation or strict divisions of labour which are only possible once capital has seized control of the production process as well as the products for the purposes of its valorisation, that is, with real subsumption. Once this valorisation starts to extend to sectors having to do with the reproduction of labour-

power, such as health or education, then it becomes possible to discuss a 'real subsumption' of sectors outside the workplace, up to and including culture. However, real subsumption is a speculative rather than a descriptive category. It is capable of indicating the contours of valorisation on an abstract scale, but it becomes problematic when used to make historical arguments, such as ones about the periodisation of the capital relation. It is even more speculative when applied to labour processes themselves. This is exemplified by artistic production and artistic labour, which in no way can be demonstrated to be really subsumed as a labour process typically, but as a sector of valorisation of capital does lend itself to this critical category of political economy. The notion of 'speculation as a mode of production' in art does in fact have everything to do with how we can position artistic production with regard to processes of real subsumption. Although 'capitalisation' seems initially more apt when talking about how value is generated within art, it is only with reference to 'real subsumption' that the contradictions of artistic labour, rather than e.g. the art market, can come into view.

The discussion of real subsumption here is intended to underline and extend the discussion in the last chapter, which followed Christopher Arthur's<sup>28</sup> account by determining labour within the production process as a moment of capital's self-valorisation, yet a moment which can run 'counter' to this structural role insofar as it is also living labour, resistant to its break-down and absorption in this process. This is important for two reasons. One is that it allows us to distinguish between a 'negative' and an 'affirmative' status of labour in capital. Insofar as it is an alien and resistant element that

can resist or erode its role in valorising capital, and this refusal is potentially collective insofar as capital orchestrates labour as a collective force of production, then this negativity vis-a-vis capital can have emancipatory political effects. However, labour as such is something that cannot be affirmed politically as an independent source of value, only negatively (as not-capital and inimical to its interests). Labour 'as such' does not exist outside the historically specific capital relation - and its class relations - and any movement looking to definitively overcome this relation must seek to overcome labour and use-value just as much as it opposes capital and exchange-value, as both are instances of the social form of value. It is in this way that any communist politics should be an 'antiwork politics'<sup>29</sup> and must take account of this double status of labour in capital: insofar as labour valorises capital, it is a threat to its self-expansion and its rule (negativity of labour); insofar as labour valorises capital, it must be undermined, principally by the subjects of that labour (whether employed or not, productive or unproductive) lest it establish itself as an independent source of value abstractly without breaking its dependence on capital. The latter can extend to any workerism, and, more complicatedly, to the 'refusal of work' which employed the unfortunate term of 'self-valorisation' for activities which were intended as directly hostile to capitalist value production and extraction. Insofar as labour presents an antagonistic, albeit internal, relation to capital, its negativity can shed light on a politics of art and work which can depart from the antagonism in order to help us re-imagine the relation, with a view to overcoming it in its totality.

The problematisation of labour as a positive pole in the capital-labour relation can, I would

propose, be performed by looking at the re-structuring and de-composing influences of finance and art on labour as respectively, but also aporetically, the 'objective' and 'subjective' moments of capital's drive to subsume labour. Financialisation strengthens the rule of capital over production and reproduction, while artistic subjectivity mirrors capital's self-expansion on the subjective scale as a liberating exception to wage-labour. On the other hand this re-structuring and de-composition also starts to exert a corrosive effect on the capital side of the relation. One example would be the devalorisation of capital, as well as of labour, engendered by the financial crisis, along with the more long-term effects of financialisation, growing organic composition and expulsion of workers on capital's valorisation prospects. These prospects become more volatile and short-term as valorisation becomes 'fictitious', or internal to a speculative economy of risks and expectations rather than capital-expanding investment. The flourishing art market would be a prominent instance of the tendency towards this kind of 'unproductive' investment which continues since the era of the bubble with hardly a dent.

However, matters become yet more complex when the category of 'real subsumption' is taken up and used to denote phenomena such as 'commodification' and 'reification' extending over, or inserted into, more and more areas of social reproduction as well as production, and this is then formulated as a phenomenon of 'periodisation', that is, a historical account of specific stages of capitalist development rather than e.g. categories which may obtain concurrently and 'unevenly' in different geographical and political circumstances.<sup>30</sup> The boundaries between production and reproduction themselves are

less and less tenable, socially or politically, and the politics which were founded on that division become problematic, as Kathi Weeks notes in her discussion of the limitations of a politics of reproduction to be drawn from the history of Marxist feminism<sup>31</sup> when she writes 'under the conditions of post-industrial, post-Fordist, and post-Taylorist production, the always vexing exercise of distinguishing between production and reproduction whether by sphere, task, or relationship to the wage becomes even more difficult.'<sup>32</sup> Here, it remains to be noted that it was Italian Autonomist Marxist feminists who initially demonstrated the extent to which social reproduction was always already incorporated into the capital relation through the unwaged production of the commodity of 'labour-power' in the gendered and racialised domestic sphere – the care that was a precondition for entering and staying in the labour-market or indeed anywhere in the 'social factory'. However, this is somewhat oblique to the theorization of 'real subsumption' since the question of value-production or labour discipline when it came to domestic labour was always very thorny in this debate, prone to metaphor and generality. Redefining domestic labour as productive work was always more of a strategic move in the relations between Marxist feminism and the workers' movement, enabling it to redefine an activity deemed invisible and insignificant, the 'realm of nature', as a contested sphere of work and antagonism, hence of proletarian politics. The analytic coherence of the move is equivocal and perhaps distracts from the historical and political possibilities opened up by this move.<sup>33</sup>

These kinds of 'anti-work politics' become complicated at a point when the socialization of

capital means that social agents undergo collective and individual 'total mobilization' as risk-taking and growth-maximising agents of their own capital,<sup>34</sup> in the wake of class de-composition and the erosion of social guarantees. Everyone must become a speculator in order to participate in a society where speculation has become not just structurally enforced, but normatively affirmed. This leads to an inversion, and eventually, implosion of any production of subjectivity which would be grounded in a negativity towards the conditions that currently obtain, since struggle has no place in individual maximisation of value – and it is through the inescapability of a purely individual maximisation of value that capital socializes itself. Bernard Stiegler depicts the speculative tendency of a capital which socializes itself financially – aptly in the context of the previous chapter's account of the recursive character of speculative finance – when he writes:

capital, however, tends to become purely speculative when it no longer measures a capital of confidence in the future of the assets of the production apparatus – in relation to which it constitutes, as a system of anticipations, capacities for investment – but instead relies on operations which are either purely self-referential (such that anticipations created by the financial sub-system anticipate nothing but itself and come at the expense of the production system), or else are oriented toward the production apparatus, but are structurally short-term (that is, based on disinvestment, that is, on the pillage of the production apparatus).<sup>35</sup>

This resonates with the previous chapter's discussion of the relationship between finance, temporality and the social, where finance is seen as both oriented towards the present – extraction of value in the present rather than long-term investment – and the future, with credit instruments such as the options form or the derivative premised on pay-offs contingent on future events occurring or future value being produced, as well as future

bets being placed. Stiegler captures both of these in his emphasis on the recursive 'anticipations' of speculative capital and their 'short-term' outlook. Finance is thus intimately linked with real subsumption as it is the index of the extension of accumulation to consumption and reproduction once these are sustained by debt, that is the future-in-the-present.

We can thus see real subsumption as a socialization of capital – extensive and intensive – which doesn't just re-order the production process according to capitalist lines but seeks to efface the division between spheres of social life it itself put in place in an earlier stage of extending its domination, such as the one between production and reproduction, in order to maximise its speculative accumulation. Speculation as a mode of production then augurs precisely the loss of the division between production and reproduction, akin to the earlier reference to the porosity between art and work. Real subsumption to the capital relation tends towards establishing a homogeneity between art and work insofar as the production of subjectivity in both, once divided along the duality of use and exchange, or even actuality and utopia, becomes the same speculative one. Real subsumption displaces the autonomy/ heteronomy nexus which is predicated on art's difference from, and opposition to, productive labour. If all labour is less and less productive and more and more speculative, art's *raison d'être* becomes dubitable. Likewise, real subsumption emphasizes art's role as a marker of the division between intellectual and manual labour (Sohn-Rethel) when art is massified into a professional category whose tools and products are immaterial (as in irrelevant) since its status relies entirely on the maintenance of the division as the condition for this set of nominalist gestures to be valorised as art.<sup>36</sup>



## Negative Composition

If the issue is whether 'real subsumption' can help to describe a newly flattened field of the 'social' which is both immanently productive and open to 'pillage' in Stiegler's sense, then the historical precedents for such a debate are not far away. Here we can recall the analyses familiar from the Italian autonomist tradition of 'all life put to work' and 'the social factory' which sees all of social life as enmeshed in the antagonism formerly imputed only to the production process, since all moments of this life are potentially productive and thus potentially moments of struggle. As I noted in Chapter One, I would like to mark a departure in my analysis from this set of positions insofar as they place what I would claim is an untenable emphasis on production, and labour as a potentially positive pole in the capital relation ('workerism') even if labour is subsumed to the 'autonomy' of 'forms of life'. Insofar as cooperative multitudes can be said self-valorise, it is along a value-chain which hosts capital at both ends, whether it be 'human capital' or the corporate kind. What I would like to retain, however, from the Autonomist and post-Autonomist spectrum is its attention to composition (class composition) as an outcome and a horizon rather than a fixed vector of class politics; its focus on the production of subjectivity; and its emphasis on antagonism. Here I would also like to keep in mind the earlier discussion on the political implications of re-defining artistic labour as waged labour, a move that, however full of tensions and illusions, does have the virtue of highlighting the antagonism which artistic labour shares with waged labour, especially when it comes to artistic practices differentially embraced by art institutions but which remain marginal to the process of creating speculative products for the art market.

In the consideration of these practices, we can see a commonality with 'creative labour' as the commodification of quirks, habits, social networks, in short, of 'singularities' rather than 'masses'. Singularity goes from being the spur to alienation in a de-humanizing and homogeneous production process to becoming itself the source of value in production. It could also perhaps be argued that alienation does not disappear, but becomes more intimate and transversal, saturating subjective and social affect. Capital as the 'automatic subject'<sup>37</sup> is reiterated at the level of individual subjects, whose social activity is determined by capital as a means of its own self-expansion, where each singularity becomes a way of valorising contingency in the future-oriented trajectory of this self-expansion – contingency and future because the value that is produced may or may not be realized in circulation later on.<sup>38</sup> However, as discussed in the previous chapter, the future-orientation of capital is fundamentally reliant on value relations continuing to persist, whereas this 'stability' for capital returns on the systemic level is translated for the individual subject of 'human capital' as infinite risk and constant flux. This then has consequences for the 'resistance' of labour to being valorised as capital, as the predominance of socialized (financialised) capital conflates the preconditions for social existence of 'always-already' labour into capital's own conditions of existence and expansion. We can then say that this removes the margin for alienation where the resistance of labour to being valorised or where the programmes for social and political autonomy used to find their source, or, conversely, it generalizes this alienation at such intimate and granular levels of subjectivity that it is at once everywhere and nowhere. 'Human capital' then becomes one of the types of 'fictitious capital' that is the main engine

for valorisation in a period of capital's expansion where more and more of its expansion occurs by means of financial commodities and enclosure rather than productive investment. 'Fictitious capital' derives its value from not-as-yet or never-to-be performed surplus-value extraction from labour at the end of the value-chain, and thus takes a speculative gamble in a volatile climate of temporary high rewards which can trigger systemic backlash and even collapse when that value fails to materialize. It is also the extension of measure and the 'exchange abstraction' (Sohn-Rethel)<sup>39</sup> to phenomena which are hard to measure, such as education, social skills, health and so forth, which contributes to the instability of this regime of accumulation. We can then say that human capital is the emblematic instance of capital attempting to realize itself in terrain where this realization is far from assured, to valorise itself from labour which may or may not be performed and skills which may or may not be marketable or quantifiable. As mentioned earlier, the notion of human capital also instils management at the level of subjective agency as the internalized directive to 'add value' to one's capital as a behavioural norm. We can say, in fact, that management is what acts to conceal problems in valorisation in many fields.<sup>40</sup>

This has to be distinguished of course from the classic schema of how capital valorises all labour-power in the uncertainty of its realization: capital buys the potential to labour (labour-time) with no assurance in each case that the value added to the commodity by the labour performed will be realized in the sale of the commodity.<sup>41</sup> When we speak of 'human capital' it is simply to indicate that this labour-time or potential to labour

(labour-power) becomes extensive over the whole of the individual's life so that the capitalist and the worker are merged in one empirical individual. In this way we can speak of 'human capital' as the 'becoming-management' of labour, and this construction, with its implications for the figure of the artist as a figure counterpoised to the worker, will be developed more fully below.

### **The Specialist of Non-Specialism**

Let us stay with the category of 'real subsumption' as a shorthand for describing the socialization of capital through mediations outside of the direct site of the wage-relation – the sphere to which Marx originally applied the term – in accord with contemporary theorists in the Italian post-Autonomia current, but also other contemporary Marxist currents such as the communisation theorists. 'Real subsumption' in this part of my discussion can be broadly conflated with 'speculation as a mode of production' according to the preceding definitions I have given this term, insofar as 'real subsumption' in these two currents is often used to designate the absorption of social affects and subjectivity into the capital relation; or, to be more exact, the remoulding by capital of the production processes of this subjectivity in the sphere of reproduction. In order to trace how the subject of contemporary work is modified by this kind of 'real subsumption' into the subject of 'human capital' and how that connects to the subject of artistic labour, we need to specify what kind of subjectivity was created in the division of social labour under capital between those who go to work and those who make art. Following on from the general lens that has been established through the concept of real subsumption, I would now like to focus more closely on the production of artistic subjectivity within it, as its constitutive

exception. In artistic subjectivity, (which is more properly called 'aesthetic subjectivity' to encompass the viewer/consumer as well as the producer of art, also since the classic philosophies of the aesthetic such as those of Kant or Hegel are more concerned with the viewer), the subject of labour is transformed into the subject of judgement.

What follows from this? At first it seems as if we are presented with the artist as a conservative figure, where the direct relation to the world or with social reality entered into by the worker is replaced by a mediated one which is purely reactive; the artist as empty, abstract subject who takes no position and who evaluates the world rather than changes it. Alternatively, we can see the artist as a radical figure, whose formal relationship to the world is free from the mediations and power hierarchies imposed on the worker, as well as the entrenched understanding of reality imposed by repetitive alienated labour. This latter is the artist as the abstract subject of unconditioned freedom who gains a critical purchase on the world due to her (productive) autonomy from its utilitarian reason. As we track the generalization of the abstraction of value as pure creative subjectivity in the current moment which I have designated as the 'speculative mode of production', we need to return to the earliest moments of their contact to understand what has changed. To what extent was the splitting of the subject of aesthetics from the subject of productive labour, inseparable from the development of culture in modernity, already a reaction to the grip of abstract value on social relations? In other words, what are the subjective grounds for the split between autonomy and heteronomy which makes art possible in capitalist modernity? A historical and philological journey seems to be called for here.

Giorgio Agamben has recently narrated the production of subjectivity as pure abstraction in the figure of the artist – recoded into the 'man of taste', thus, as indicated above, crossing between the making and the appreciation of art. He offers an exploratory genealogy of the subject of aesthetics primarily with reference to Hegel's philosophy of art. To risk an as yet-unfounded leap, what he discovers at the root of this genealogy is the demand for self-annulment, a Hegelian imperative of sublation. Can this be placed alongside the communist revolutionary principle of the 'negation of all that exists' and the self-abolition of the proletariat, as noted earlier? That which is nothing but its relation to capital can only overcome this condition by annihilating the relation itself. For this, the true contingency of the relation, and of its position in this relation must be recognized. There must be a moment of alienation, where what is most concrete is transformed into the most incidental and contingent:

The artist then experiences a radical tearing or split, by which the inert world of contents in their indifferent, prosaic objectivity goes to one side, and to the other the free subjectivity of the artistic principle, which soars above the contents as over an immense repository of materials that it can evoke or reject at will. Art is now the absolute freedom that seeks its end and its foundation in itself, and does not need, substantially, any content, because it can only measure itself against the vertigo caused by its own abyss. No longer is any other content – except art itself – immediately for the artist the substantiality of his consciousness, nor does it inspire him with the necessity of representing it.<sup>42</sup>

This passage appears to provide some material for the further unpacking of the concept of 'self-abolition' with regard to art. For Hegel, the more reflexivity art develops, that is, the closer art gets to philosophy, the more it renders itself redundant, its proper sphere of activity becoming merely to illustrate, using its own means, the philosophical endpoints

which overdetermine the very possibility of its continuation as art.<sup>43</sup> Art can only realize itself by disappearing. For Agamben here, following Hegel, art as a specific kind of production of a specific kind of object is also liable to vanish on attaining to the condition of absolute freedom. It becomes simply discernment or taste, a capacity for selection. The subjectivity of the artist only registers as the measure of its own emptiness; or, as the power to choose from 'indifferent prosaic objectivity' and render the selection a proof or example of this subjectivity at work, a purely gratuitous act. However, when we look at the thematic of such a 'self-abolition' for art in Adorno, we encounter a more relational concept, one whose horizon is materialist rather than metaphysical:<sup>44</sup>

Art and artworks are perishable, not simply because by their heteronomy they are dependent, but because right into the smallest detail of their autonomy, which sanctions the socially determined splitting off of spirit by the division of labor, they are not only art but something foreign and opposed to it. Admixed with art's own concept is the ferment of its own abolition.<sup>45</sup>

With reference to the proposition that what is most characteristic of art in our period is to desire the end of art, be that in the axiomatic manner of Hegel, or in the performative blurrings between art and labour in present-day work, art and social action alike,<sup>46</sup> it seems that this can also become a transcendental parameter, a criterion, a normative command. The wish for the end of art can become, or rather has long since become, the primary principle of its continuation. As Agamben notes, this end is in fact the beginning of autonomous art. This is testified by the role of criticality as mark of seriousness and ambition in art as it is currently produced and taught, even if the ubiquity of such criticality opens itself to charges that it 'adds value' to an otherwise consistently conservative sphere

of discourse and practice. For Adorno, the 'foreignness' of art to the reality principle, the very fact that a society based on exchange-value could find no use for it but to sell and collect it, was already a sign that its autonomy was potentially realizable: art could help bring about a world in which it no longer existed as the legitimating exception to the rule of value over the social and natural world. However, it may be that Agamben's point is more relevant in an era when it is artistic subjectivity that has been discovered to have a use-value all across the social field, a use-value historically derived from art's refusal to be art in the era that coincided with Adorno's later years and has lasted into the present.

In *The Man Without Content*,<sup>47</sup> Agamben describes in great detail, calling on a panoply of literary and philosophical sources, how the condition of the modern subject is first and foremost an aesthetic condition. He develops this through the figure of the subject who appropriates 'prosaic objectivity' through the faculty of taste. Taste is the distinguishing faculty of the modern subject who neither owns nor works, but cultivates his sensibility, and the rise of the modern philosophical discipline of 'aesthetics' coincides with the historical emergence of the middle-class consumption for which this figure is an emblem. The consummate man of taste is the artist, who in principle owns nothing but his discrimination, his sensibility which allows him to select his artistic material from an indifferent world. The non-necessity of the aesthetic subject's position also allows him to function as the absolute consumer, which is where the sensibility of genius crosses over with the dandy and the distinction sought and enacted by the discerning consumers of modern 'heteronomy' sketched by Baudelaire and Benjamin.<sup>48</sup> It is an expertise and



training in seeing; the man of taste is dispossessed of everything save for his world-creating sensibility. The radical contingency experienced by the man of taste is then an index of his radical self-sufficiency, which in some ways brings us back to the subject of human capital which appreciates, with the double meaning of 'appreciate' key here.<sup>49</sup> Agamben shows how the abyssal loss of ground which creates the 'man of taste', as depicted in the writings of e.g. Diderot, exerted an influence on Hegel's own developing phenomenology of the subject in the 'dark night of the world'. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel diagnoses the subject of culture as pure self-alienation, an entropic sign of the downfall of civilization. Spirit, having alienated itself in culture, can only return to itself in the consciousness of this utter alienation, and the absolute contingency of all attachments, principles, truths and laws. 'Pure culture' is the name of the 'I' that 'beholds itself outside of itself and split . . . everything that has continuity and universality, everything that is called law, good, and right, is at the same time rent asunder and destroyed.'<sup>50</sup> In other words, a hypertrophy of judgement ('taste') and a corresponding inability or impossibility of action or understanding. Unlike for Kant, whose *Critique of Judgement* identifies the ability to appreciate beauty in nature or in art as the mark of a shared human sensibility and sociability, the 'sensus communis', in this account, the ability to appreciate constitutes an aesthetic subject liable at any moment to succumb to a keen sense of her own futility, and the futility of everything which binds her to other subjects and a world external to her own subjectivity.

It should be noted that Agamben's intention in sketching this account of the emergence of

the aesthetic subject in Enlightenment and Romantic-era European literary and philosophical culture is to articulate a Heideggerian/Nietzschean argument in which the aesthetic subject is the exemplary subject of modernity insofar as it is primarily a nihilistic subject. For better or worse, my interest in the argument can be couched in more materialist terms. Agamben's inquiry seems to me to have some bearing on Adorno's account of the conflictual nature of the autonomy of art as both a confirmation and cancellation of social unfreedom. This then points back to his account of autonomy, in which autonomy is invoked as an 'autonomy-effect'. Adorno writes 'The strongest buttress of subjective aesthetics, the concept of aesthetic feeling, derives from objectivity, not the reverse. Aesthetic feeling says that something is thus, that something is beautiful; Kant would have attributed such aesthetic feeling, as "taste," exclusively to one who was capable of discriminating in the object.'<sup>51</sup> Taste is disclosed as a social relation marking inequality, one predicated on other social relations, much as autonomy is based on exploitation: yet, without the autonomy of critical judgement, exploitation remains the order of nature.

The content of artistic subjectivity is then its form, the form which emerges from the split with wage-labour which creates the possibility of 'art itself'. The contingent, or 'inessential', is the primary characteristic of the artist's subjectivity since it is via this that she develops the singularity of apprehension, or 'taste', which makes of her consciousness a productive form for any content it might encounter, and enables her to transform this content by means of the singularity she has cultivated. Production is a moment of consumption, and vice versa. As the truth of artistic subjectivity is found in this detachment, contingency

colours its relationship to the world in (at least) two ways: the artist's autonomy and the autonomy of her production is founded in this detachment. It is at once utterly dependent on this detachment for its (non-)identity, and at the same time retains an agnostic attitude towards it, disavowing dependence and reifying detachment as the non-specialized specialism that distinguishes art in the social division of labour. Its scepticism towards content – here for 'content' one might speak of constituted social reality, or heteronomy – allows it to approach it as form, thus acceding to its demands without taking them seriously, as long as there is a possibility of continuing to reproduce oneself as an artistic subject within this heteronomy; on the other hand, it occludes the form-determination of this reality, that is, by the historically specific form of value which has engendered precisely these objective contents, and delivered them to the faculty of judgement at the core of artistic subjectivity and artistic labour.

### **Negate Here**

However, the awareness of the untenability of this split and its call for self-negation, which has been expressed in the perennial theme of the artistic avant-garde as the overcoming of art or its dissolution into life, itself remains enclosed by the necessity of maintaining the split within which this agonized consciousness is sustained. The self-abolition of art as a programmatic vehicle for its reinvention has only very rarely continued into the call for the abolition of that which maintains it as art, that is, the form of value and the division between mental and manual labour established by capital. Thus, the expansion of art into life has historically tended to support the multiplication of sites for the operation of first artistic, then economic, value, a development which, it has been argued, eventually

forecloses the possibility of an artistic avant-garde as such, in common with its political variant.<sup>52</sup>

The artist is the exemplary subject of modernity in this sense, in that she (historically the pronoun choice here is tendentious) grounds her identity in the awareness of its contingency, its constant flux and speculative ends. The historic avant-garde of modernity has certainly been eclipsed by the end of that modernity and its utopian horizons, wherein art had to be constantly revolutionized not just to advance as art, but for the sake of a wider idea of human progress or, on the other side of the same coin, the subversion of established ideals. Now this speculative subjectivity is a purely personal and socially homeostatic one, and the figure of the artist is simply that of a specialist of this process, one of a privatized radical openness, or, as discussed earlier, a manager of affect and freely given participatory labour. This figure is indeed related to the Romantic figure of aesthetic judgement we have seen, but a truncated one, lacking the deeper contingency of Romantic irony and its roots in the social dimension of the artist's alienation. The social dimension within which art functions, whether or not it confronts it with an attitude of 'engagement' or aloofness, is not an alienated one, in which people, including the artist, are separated from their capacities – the standard meaning of alienation in capitalism. It is one in which people are 'excluded' or 'marginalized' from a monolithic and unchangeable constitution of society whose rewards are inequitably distributed, in which critique helplessly imbibes the ethics and formulae of its targets. The 'vertigo caused by its own abyss' experienced by an artistic subjectivity split from social labour on the one side, and

internally split by contingency on the other, is now diffusely replicated in abstract socially (un)necessary labour restructured by a socialized capital in its own image. The form represented by art and the content represented by labour come to merge in the contingency of value systemically generalized by the restructuring of labour, with human capital as the homology between the value-form and an increasingly formal and empty subjectivity. But can we also think of this as a de-subjectivation that, paradoxically, is made possible through the suturing of the split of alienation by the homogenizing effects of the value-form on the production of subjectivity in art as it is in labour? The speculative subjectivity which is structurally reproduced comes to see its contingency everywhere, its subjective necessity – labour, production, family, citizenship – nowhere. Like the artist, it sees its primary responsibility as the refinement and further 'singularization' of this subjectivity as the source of its value. Like capital, it enacts a thoroughgoing negativity in the drive to valorise itself. However, this 'self-valorisation' might proceed as far as the destruction of valorisation itself, which differentiates it from capital's own often self-destructive drive to valorise, since individuals enter into transformative historical moments with other individuals where individualizing logics no longer have the same, or any, relevance. In this sense, we can say that it is social relations that harbour the element of speculation which renders it social, that is, politics. Agamben, again, has an interesting reflection on this point, which loops back to my hasty correlation between the self-abolition of the proletariat and self-negation of the artist as the respective grounds of their political agency: 'I tend to think that every act emanating from the singular need of an individual, the proletarian, who has no identity, no substance, will also be, all the same, a

political act.<sup>53</sup>

As Agamben realizes, it is certainly insufficient to cancel the subject abstractly to arrive at an (effective) 'post-identity' politics; the shifts between de-subjectivation and subjectivation are at the core of political composition in time and space. In a similar fashion, art cannot dissolve itself in life as anything but a gesture of its own will to power so long as both 'art' and 'life' are organized through the form of the commodity. If 'the artist is the man without content, who has no other identity than a perpetual emerging out of the nothingness of expression and no other ground than this incomprehensible station on this side of himself',<sup>54</sup> then the autonomy of this kind of subject can only seek its ground on 'this side of himself' which is contradictory social reality. The ultimate result of such a nothingness entails an estrangement of the conditions of this emptiness, that is, the social relation of capital, rather than a withdrawal from them to a no-longer accessible aesthetic plenitude of the self or the dubious legitimacy of 'productive work'. Is the 'legislating subject' however so easy to win over to the side of a socially speculative praxis rather than an individual one? Adorno writes in *Negative Dialectics* that his project has consistently been to use the subject to destroy the fiction of constitutive subjectivity.<sup>55</sup> Such a task seems to encapsulate the project of immanent critique, as well as to touch on the materialist gesture in Modernist and contemporary art of de-mystifying a medium (the constitutive subject being primary among the mystifications) by highlighting the technical and social conditions of that medium. The aesthetic subject may be an abyssal one, nothing but the collection of her preferences and references and thus not a 'subject' in the

strict, outmoded sense which implies a coherence and projectuality. But the coherence here may be substituted by the introjection of the 'automatic subject' of capital. The aesthetic subject is thus one whose hypertrophied sense of contingency remains circumscribed by the value-form and the parameters of abstract socially necessary labour as never before. These are the consequences of real subsumption for the figure that modernity has placed outside or at the margins of accumulation, and for whom it dictated an autonomy that finally proved redundant, as we will see with the Artist Placement Group in the next chapter.

Of course, the appeal of cultural production is that it holds out the negation of all these parameters, i.e. through fulfilling and autonomous work on the one hand, and on the other the prospect of accumulation to a point where the coercion exercised by these parameters can be gracefully overlooked. A good illustration of this logic is the notorious 2011 gala benefit dinner organized by the star performance artist Marina Abramovic at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, where young and attractive women performers were selected to be 'human table settings' for the entertainment of dinner guests. The two sides of this equation are represented by Marina Abramovic and the affluent collectors respectively, with the human table fixtures playing the mediating role of disposable living labour.<sup>56</sup>

Here it might be interesting to turn to the category of 'judgement' as the defining gesture of conceptual, that is, post-Duchampian, art practice to see how it prototypes both the

polite rejection of all use-values, including the aesthetic, and then how a new proximity to use-value is achieved by the valorisation of the non-specialised specialist. For this, the eminent site of investigation has to be Immanuel Kant's third Critique, the *Critique of Judgement*, which is the first to make a case for indeterminacy as the core category of aesthetic judgement, a type of judgement that can only infer but never establish a 'purpose' for natural or artistic phenomena. Aesthetic judgement becomes the representative category of human freedom, the manumission from the 'kingdom of ends' represented by both pure and practical reason. It is thus Kant who is the first to make a link, however vague and speculative, between aesthetics and social progress, which is the tenet that is developed by the German Romantic thinkers and philosophers who are informed but not satisfied by Kant's transcendental idealism.

### **The Critique of the Power of Judgement and the Critique of the Powers of Art: Kantian Interlude**

Much of the analysis thus far can be elaborated on by reference to Kant. In the *Critique of Judgment*,<sup>57</sup> Immanuel Kant sets out to find a mediation between the first critique (of pure reason) and the second (of practical reason) with an account of a subjective basis for the universality of judgement, one that departs from an aesthetic relationship to objects where this relationship is determined subjectively, which is to say, through taste. Without objective a priori necessity or an interest in the good or the pleasant, this is a situation of purposiveness without purpose, where a feeling of beauty or harmony derives from an intuition of an accord between means and ends in e.g. the beauty of a botanical or painted specimen of a flower, not from any knowledge based on concepts whose truth can be



demonstrated either scientifically or morally:

What is strange and different about a judgment of taste is only this: that what is to be connected with the presentation of the object is not an empirical concept but a feeling of pleasure (hence no concept at all), though, just as if it were a predicate connected with cognition of the object, this feeling is nevertheless to be required of everyone.

It follows that, since a judgment of taste involves the consciousness that all interest is kept out of it, it must also involve a claim to being valid for everyone, but without having a universality based on concepts. In other words, a judgment of taste must involve a claim to subjective universality.<sup>58</sup>

What is central to this kind of judgement is that it solicits, without any security in attaining, a general agreement on its conclusions in the very act of making it; it presupposes a *sensus communis* – not a rational 'common sense' but a common faculty of sensibility – which in principle encompasses all spectators capable of making the same sort of judgement on an object approached from the disinterested perspective of aesthetic pleasure. In other words, it presupposes a sociality, a multiplicity of perceivers, in order for the strictly subjective basis of an aesthetic judgement to hold. Crucially, it is not agreement in judgement which is posited here, but the possibility of making the judgement in the first place. Aesthetic judgement is offered as the best example of human freedom of the will because it is a judgement unconstrained by interest or the categories of the understanding, which is to say, it is the capacity of a harmony (or, in the case of the 'sublime', an edifying discord) between the faculties of reason, imagination and sensibility that is most definitive of individual freedom as the basis for human community. It is an unconditioned judgement, and the capacity to make such judgements attests to at least the capacity if not the actuality of human freedom. As Pluhar writes:

But judgment's concept of nature's subjective purposiveness is especially "suitable" for mediating between these two realms [i.e., nature and freedom] only if no *objective* purposiveness (purposiveness with a purpose) has been based on it, i.e., only if the subjective purposiveness is merely subjective, a purposiveness *without* a purpose, and hence a purposiveness as judged aesthetically. [...] the "play" in which our cognitive powers are when we judge subjective purposiveness aesthetically is "spontaneous"; i.e., this play is "active" inasmuch as it sustains itself (Ak. 313, 222, and cf. 220), and in this respect it is again similar to our will's freedom . . .<sup>59</sup>

Here we see that the focus on the indeterminacy of the will engaged in making aesthetic judgements and the emphasis on the cancellation or suspension of an interest in the object as the hallmark of aesthetic judgement has several consequences. First, it locates the freedom of the subject in relation to the object in abstraction: only by abstracting from corporeal desires and needs, as much as from intellectual needs for certainty or systematicity, can the subject be in a position to make a judgement such as 'this is beautiful' or 'this is hideous', thus asserting her freedom vis-a-vis the object. Whereas a statement of liking or disliking is a statement of interest – of how the object affects her – beauty or ugliness is projected onto the object itself as a property of its own existence, hence the tenuous universality of aesthetic judgement: a subjective assessment which imputes a quality to the object as the basis of its elaboration and claims no other relationship to the object than the possibility of this judgement. 'Taste', then, is the capacity to make discerning judgements of this type, a capacity which operates in the abyss of contingency and neutrality created by withdrawal of interest, as Agamben discusses, and is thus, paradoxically, also the ground of a sociality enabled by the universality presumed in judgements not based in anyone's particular circumstances or

interests. Rather, this capacity is based on the commonality of the ability to bracket or suspend such interests and circumstances, to act 'as if' we were free. Without here wishing to engage substantively with Alfred Sohn-Rethel's crucial discussion of Kantian philosophy as the apotheosis of the 'exchange abstraction' in thought,<sup>60</sup> it can be ventured that the account of subjectivity provided here by Kant is part of a project to authorize a 'shared sense' of an emerging class subjectivity, one that finds its realm of freedom in a relation to beautiful objects it neither seeks to possess, like the aristocracy, nor is constrained to produce or maintain, like the generality of artisans, labourers and servants which in Kant's time prefigured a working class. Freedom is dissociation from need, and community is only possible in the indeterminate space not dominated by need.<sup>61</sup>

While the drawbacks of the stance of the 'disinterest' for a materialist aesthetics are not far from the surface, it is important to underline that the surface is not the exhaustion of contrary potentials. For Marx, historical materialism was indebted to German idealism – to Hegel in particular, but on this point also Kant – for freeing matter from the instrumentality it had possessed in the dualistic 'mechanical materialisms' that preceded it, thus setting the stage for the dialectical imbrication of matter and freedom. The role of 'disinterest' in aesthetic judgement is a crucial site of such freedom, wherein something's 'purpose' is located precisely in the indeterminacy or lack of direct relevance to the instrumental ends of the perceiving subject. If preconditions for aesthetic judgement such as indeterminacy, lack of purpose, and detachment from necessity are re-calibrated from a standpoint which queries the social organization at the affirmation of which critique has

too often been happy to stop, then the *sensus communis* can furnish a powerful counter-argument to the economic determinism, sociological aridity and critical complacency which leave their traces in a great part of the tradition of materialist aesthetics or 'social history of art' into the present.

Kant's account of aesthetic judgement, with all its disavowals, is subversive of these tendencies through its central contention that art is not intended to be useful: that it is not based on determinate concepts and thus cannot be used to prove anything. It is 'simply' the possibility of a world which is organized differently and, conceivably, in opposition to the one that currently obtains, a moment of suspension in which that world's uses and priorities cease to apply. Moreover, it is capable of making such a world real to its producers and spectators, and placing subjectivity itself under the sign of suspension or erasure. This casts a light on the role of the aesthetic subject of the speculative mode of production who advances by ceaselessly accumulating, largely untransformed, the 'contents' of heteronomy. Here 'constitutive subjectivity' shakes off its humanist trappings to fully identify with the metaphysics of displacement enacted by the automatic subject of value, capital, which is only ever itself. The space for judgement, for disinterest, has collapsed; it is now simply the space of selection.

Those aspects of Kantian aesthetics that emphasized the indeterminacy and detachment from use peculiar to aesthetic judgement then went on to inform the Romantics who were expressly concerned with the social implications of the aesthetic, such as Schiller. It is also

the ground for Adorno's development of a dialectical notion of the autonomy of the aesthetic: aesthetic judgement's capacity to displace the viewer's 'constitutive subjectivity'. In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno returns again and again to a dialectical reading of Kant's third critique against the ostensibly more critical Hegelian philosophy of art to see if the structure of aesthetic judgement might have something to offer which that philosophy does not due to its cognitive and historicist bias:

Paradoxically, Hegel's metaphysics of spirit results in a certain reification of spirit in the artwork through the fixation of its idea. In Kant, however, the ambiguity between the feeling of necessity and the fact that this necessity is not a given but something unresolved is truer to aesthetic experience than is Hegel's much more modern ambition of knowing art from within rather than in terms of its subjective constitution from without.<sup>62</sup>

This 'subjective constitution from without' is, as we have seen, the scene of the aesthetic subject. It is the contingency that unites both the artist and the viewer in the character of the 'man of taste' whose key claim to the aesthetic is the ability to make undetermined choices as a marker of their freedom. To update this depiction, we could refer to consumption as the emblem of much contemporary art, whether it is conducted through a reference to popular culture or esoteric research, and whether its thematizations are keyed as ironic or redemptive.

As we saw earlier, Marx calls capital a 'subject' because it is self-positing, and absorbs the social and material conditions in which it arises as its own presuppositions. The world exists for capital, much as in Kant, the world exists for the subject (insofar as the subject emerges in the transcendental synthesis which is its relation to world). It is likewise 'automatic'

because it increases itself, realizes itself, as a condition of its continued existence, without the intervention of any other agency extraneous to it: once a capitalist mode of production is established, capital survives by constantly positing the conditions it needs to reproduce and survive as the conditions for that society to reproduce and survive: wage-labour, property, the commodity. When we come to examine the precepts of 'human capital', as we did in Chapter One, we find a subject which is modelled on the 'automatic subject' insofar as the 'owner' of human capital is urged to constantly augment and diversify it at the risk of redundancy and exclusion that a failure to compete would augur, as it would for its model, capital as a social expression of the rule of abstract labour and abstract value. Importantly, this is portrayed not as a scene of compulsion, but of liberation: flexibility, self-realization, choice, the development of individual skills and inclinations. Like all dreams of capital, its wish-fulfilment is sketched in the hues of a liberation from the very labour that provides it with the value it needs to survive. Here, the hatred for dependent, coerced labour is implanted as a decisive split in the very object of that coercion, namely the agent or bearer of human capital. Like the 'aesthetic subject,' the automatic subject of 'human capital' is situated in an abyssal terrain where she is totally individualized and confronts an indifferent objectivity from which she may select and exploit at will for the goal of acquiring distinction as a self-determined commodity in the labour market.

To the degree that all labour is increasingly mediated via the image of an independent and virtually cost-free labour pool which capital may on occasion profitably exploit, the aesthetic subject and the automatic subject meet on the terrain of 'human capital' whose

isolation and detachment is the very 'missing ground' of her productive capacity. The unconditioned judgement familiar from the figure of the modern artist since Duchamp – 'it is art because I say so' – comes from a rarefied abstraction which is self-sustaining and self-valorising. Not when it is a specific and discrete act of avant-garde artistic negativity, as e.g. Duchamp's was, in a world otherwise dedicated to mass industry and mass organisations, but when it becomes typical of a phase of capital which posits its presuppositions at the level of the subject. While with reference to the earlier discussion of artists as workers, it can be said that this exemplifies a world of work in which artists try but fail to identify with the regularity and recognition that no longer applies to this world,<sup>63</sup> it should be noted at the same time that the 'proletarianisation' of artists/cultural producers and the aesthetic subjectivity structurally demanded of workers is equally a condition of changes to the regime of exploitation triggered by the financialisation of capital in recent decades. This is what I discussed at the start of the chapter as the thesis of real subsumption, and will explore further in the next category as the assumption of new economic forms by aesthetic judgment.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have proposed a constellation – with pretensions to a narrative – between the concept of 'real subsumption' in Marxian theory, and the place of art in social reproduction. I have further tried to develop what is distinctive about aesthetic subjectivity as it comes to represent the central character in speculation as a mode of production, once this latter concept has been articulated with 'real subsumption' as the re-shaping by capital of the processes of social reproduction as well as production and

consequently the role art is called upon to play. Art as a form of 'speculative labour' comes both to serve as the model for all kinds of work while providing a distinctive and desirable prototype of liberated – non-capitalist – labour which can either be antagonistic or conciliatory, two kinds of social outcomes whose premises are not determined by the concept of art itself but precisely by what 'role it is called upon to play'. The 'politics' of speculative labour, then, inhere both in this and in the detachment of art from use-value and useful labour, which can only be attained in their capitalist modalities to the same degree that art and labour can only be irreconcilable in capital, however 'speculative' this capital may become in its operations.

We now need to examine Thierry de Duve's concept of the 'whatever' as the key performative condition for the statement 'this is art' after the readymade, as it displaces the category of aesthetic judgment irremediably from the relationship between object and viewer to the subject of the artist and her capacity to select and name. This can be perceived as a 'managerial' turn in artistic production, as the engineering of social activity and the combination of objects for the enhancement of their capacity to produce (aesthetic) value becomes the key characteristic of the type of social labour that is still distinguishable and commodifiable as art. I then follow this trajectory of 'management' and 'performance' as the concrete modes whereby the speculative mode of production transforms the conditions for contemporary art and labour by looking at several art practices – especially the Artist Placement Group – and situating them in this trajectory. APG embodies the contradictions of Romantic subjectivity as both empty and intensively



specialised ('taste') as discussed by Agamben. This is then the nexus of artistic-labour-as-subjectivity initiated by Duchamp, and standardized in the figure of the artist as the emblem for a type of labour which is no longer distinguishable from the valorisation of capital, that is, speculative labour, or, human capital. Further, a discussion of this emblematic historical (late 1960s to early 1980s) practice, which historically indexes the perturbations of 'post-Fordism' for art and labour in the West opens out into the aporias of post-Kantian and Romantic aesthetics briefly signalled in this chapter. A more extensive engagement with those aporias requires an excursion on the utopian role of aesthetics in social transformation proposed by Friedrich Schiller, taken in a more technocratic key by Saint-Simon, and recently complicated by Stewart Martin in his 2009 text 'Artistic Communism'.

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<sup>1</sup> Dan Adler, *Hanne Darboven: Cultural History 1880-1983*, London: Afterall Books, 2009, p. 106.

<sup>2</sup> Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, Rodney Livingstone, trans., London and New York: Verso, 2005, p. 72.

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<sup>3</sup> 'Real subsumption, as the modification of the labour-process along specifically capitalist lines, is exemplified in the historical development of the productive powers of social labour as the productive powers of capital.' 'The History of Real Subsumption', *Endnotes*, No. 2, April 2010, p. 140. Apart from Endnotes, Théorie Communiste and other exponents of the 'communisation current', 'real subsumption' is a crucial concept in autonomist and post-operaist Marxist writing, especially in the work of Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt, Christian Marazzi and Paolo Virno. The concept of the 'social factory' widely shared by this tradition pivots on the argument that more and more realms of social activity are invested in or valorised by capital – a contention which would take in the institutions of the welfare state, care work and social relationships as well as affect and language as generic human capacities.

<sup>4</sup> Silvia Federici, lecture at launch of her book *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012), 12 November 2012, Goldsmiths, University of London.

<sup>5</sup> Jasper Bernes writes that 'TC [Théorie Communiste] tend to approach the restructuring in formal terms, speaking of an integration of the proletariat within capital – a mutual presupposition of capital and labour – such that any affirmation of a working-class identity is simply an affirmation of capital.' ('The Double Barricade and the Glass Floor', *Communization and its Discontents: Contestation, Critique, and Contemporary Struggles*, Benjamin Noys, ed., New York: Autonomedia, 2011, p. 161). There is no space here to go into the – at the very least – problematic character of a formal analysis of the type attributed to TC here, which may be an over-simplification by this writer. Even in places where there was an institutional communist left and powerful unions, the character of workers' struggles, particularly starting from the 1960s onwards, were hardly ever simply, or even mostly, affirmative of their position within the current capital relation. To say the contrary would be to support the Leninist distinction between economic and political struggles, something of which tendencies rooted in the ultra-left such as Théorie Communiste have traditionally been sceptical. They do open themselves up to this critique in large part owing to their emphasis that such an affirmation is no longer possible due to an arguably economic postulate of the 're-structuring' of capital – the decay of working-class struggle is predicated on this re-structuring. These considerations have been freshly brought to mind in my reading of Silvia Federici's recent essay collection *Revolution at Point Zero* and the description of the relationship between struggles in the field of labour and of culture around May '68 in France in Trevor Stark, ' "Cinema in the Hands of the People" ': Chris Marker, the Medvedkin Group, and the Potential of Militant Film', *October*, Vol. 139, Winter 2012, pp. 117-50.

<sup>6</sup> For the artist as service worker, one of the more cogent analyses remains Andrea Fraser, 'What's Intangible, Transitory, Mediating, Participatory, and Rendered in the Public Sphere?' *October*, Vol.80, Spring 1997, pp. 111-16. For the artist as manager, canonically there is Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, 'Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions', *October*, Vol. 55, Winter 1990, pp. 105-43. More recently, artist, writer and musician Mattin has explored this topic in 'Managerial Authorship: Appropriating Living Labour', *Casco Issues XII: Generous Structures*, Binna Choi and Axel Wieder, eds., Utrecht and Berlin: Casco and Sternberg Press, 2011, pp. 284-307.

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<sup>7</sup> I confine my analysis to North America and Western Europe, as the institutional and social relationship between artistic labour and abstract socially necessary labour – in all its concrete variants – was very different in the socialist, non-aligned and colonial/post-colonial spaces of modernity. A distinction here would also need to be drawn between the groups mentioned and artists unions operating in strong welfare-state contexts such as Canada or Denmark which, whatever the informality or radicalism of their origins, have become more or less functional organs of the distribution of cultural funding in their respective nations. Some examples would be CARFAC (Canadian Artists' Representation/Le Front des artistes canadiens), founded in 1968, which is now billed as a 'non-profit corporation that serves as the national voice of Canada's professional visual artists' and sees itself as a lobbying organization. The Danish BKF [Billedkunstneres Forbund/The Danish Association of Visual Artists] was challenged for its conservatism and insularity in 2002 by the group that formed the new union UKK (Unge kunstnere og kunstformidlere/Young Artists and Art Facilitators).

<sup>8</sup> Gustav Metzger is additionally of interest here since he was very active in the UK Artists Union in the 1970s. For more information on art strikes, see the *Art Strike Handbook*, Stewart Home, ed., London: Sabotage Editions, 1989 and 'The Art Strike Papers' for material that has emerged subsequently, <http://www.spunk.org/library/writers/shome/sp000457.htm> . See also Julie Ault, 'A Chronology of Selected Alternative Structures, Spaces, Artists' Groups, and Organizations in New York City, 1965-1985', *Alternative Art New York, 1965-1985*, Julie Ault, ed., New York, Minneapolis and London: The Drawing Center and University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

<sup>9</sup> In a 2009 interview with art and public space journal OPEN, Paolo Virno encapsulates the problem thus: 'Nowadays artistic labour is turning into wage labour while the problem is, of course, how to liberate human activity in general from the form of wage labour.' Sonja Lavaert and Pascal Gielen, 'The Dismasure of Art: An Interview with Paolo Virno', *OPEN*, No. 17, April 2009; <http://classic.skor.nl/article-4178-en.html>

<sup>10</sup> See Hito Steyerl, 'Art as Occupation: Claims for an Autonomy of Life', footnote 4: 'One could even say: the work of art is tied to the idea of a product (bound up in a complex system of valorisation). Art-as-occupation bypasses the end result of production by immediately turning the making-of into commodity.' *e-flux journal* 30 <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/art-as-occupation-claims-for-an-autonomy-of-life-12/>

<sup>11</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume One, Ben Fowkes, trans., London: Penguin Books, 1990, p. 131.

<sup>12</sup> I touch on the idea of a speculative praxis of the social as the specific modality of the relation between aesthetics and politics in the previous chapter. The idea is attributed to Bertolt Brecht by Fredric Jameson and then taken up by T.J. Clark as part of his genealogy of modernism in *Farewell to an Idea : Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999).

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<sup>13</sup> I am here relying on the account given by Endnotes in their 'Crisis in the Class Relation', *Endnotes*, No. 2, April 2010, pp. 2-19.

<sup>14</sup> W.A.G.E. have recently been addressing this consideration by working with funding bodies on the inclusion of fees as a condition of funding, and on developing enforcement mechanisms for this. Personal correspondence. See also 'About Certification', <http://www.wageforwork.com/certification/1/about-certification>

<sup>15</sup> This 'by and large' should, however, be qualified, as it is increasingly the case that fabrication studios and extensive workforces are employed to realize monumental, technically challenging, or just copious pieces for celebrity artists who work on a large scale and have considerable markets to satisfy. This puts into relief the claim that artistic production is still primarily artisanal in character and thus not really subsumed. For a good preliminary discussion, see Karen van den Berg and Ursula Passero, 'Large-Scale Art Fabrication and the Currency of Attention' in *Contemporary Art and its Commercial Markets: a Report on Current Conditions and Future Scenarios*, Maria Lind and Olav Velthuis, eds., Berlin and Stockholm: Sternberg Press and Tensta Konsthall, 2011. They write, for instance: 'It is worth considering the fact that the division of labor in art production as it has evolved leads to the application of the same management principles as in regular business organizations. For artists, the field of operation shifts in this context, too. They become project leaders, who do not have to be involved in manufacture themselves (and would not be able to anyway). [...] This adds a certain organizational rationality that is entirely at odds with the romantic notion of the artist as a privileged subject who draws, sketches and finalizes his work of art with artistic stubbornness and integrity, yes remains "lonely and free." ' (pp. 174-175) This casts into another and more literal light the preceding discussion about the artist involved in e.g. participatory forms of art production acting as a 'manager' of the audience's affective labour. All this considered however, it remains the case that so long as the production process of artworks is not determined by the production of a surplus, neither formal nor real subsumption can be said to be operating. The extent to which the production of artworks does take on a more commercial character structurally is the extent to which the artworks lose autonomy. This poses a threat to the social and market value autonomous artworks possess by virtue of not having this character. I will get further into this point in the next chapter. Parenthetically, it would need to be investigated to what extent large artist studios with a workforce differ principally from artist or craftsman guilds, apart from the nature of the wage and management systems that would apply to either case.

<sup>16</sup> For a limited but still astute view on this, see Andrea Fraser's timely 'Le 1%, c'est moi' in *Texte zur Kunst*, No. 83, September 2011, pp. 114-27.

<sup>17</sup> See Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture*, London: Pluto Press, 2010. John Roberts has spoken of the ever-growing numbers of people who state their occupation as 'artist' in the U.S. Census in presentations, including one he gave at the 'Art: What's the Use?' symposium at the Whitechapel Gallery, London 14 January 2011.

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<sup>18</sup> 'The absolute artwork converges with the absolute commodity.' Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, Robert Hullot-Kentor, trans., London: Continuum, 2007, p. 28. For an exceptionally illuminating elaboration on this issue, see Stewart Martin, 'The absolute artwork meets the absolute commodity', *Radical Philosophy*, No. 146, November-December 2007, pp. 15-25. He writes, 'The implication of Adorno's account is that the absolute artwork meets itself with the absolute commodity. [...] However, this recognition does not reveal a harmonious resolution, but a contradiction of capitalist culture that is irresolvable in its own terms.' p. 18.

<sup>19</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, as above, p. 159.

<sup>20</sup> Mierle Laderman Ukeles, 'Maintenance Art Manifesto' (1969) in Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*, New York: New York University Press, 1979, pp. 220-21.

<sup>21</sup> Silvia Federici, 'Putting Feminism Back On Its Feet', *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction and the Feminist Struggle*, Oakland: PM Press, 2012, p. 56.

<sup>22</sup> The classic formulation of the 'logic of the supplement' is by Jacques Derrida in *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, trans., Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976, pp. 144, 153, 200, 281, 315, and elsewhere.

<sup>23</sup> Theorists such as Peter Osborne and John Roberts sustain this claim in different publications. See John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade*, London and New York: Verso, 2007, passim.

<sup>24</sup> John Roberts, 'Art and Praxis: Metastability, Legibility, Situatedness', unpublished paper. Delivered at Moscow Curatorial Summer School, Russian State University of the Humanities, 16 July 2012.

<sup>25</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume One, Ben Fowkes, trans., London: Penguin Books, 1990, p. 950.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1052.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1054-5. Notable also in this context is the critique Marx advances of the real domination of capital as the ideological standpoint corresponding to real subsumption. If the powers of labour are objectified and valorised as the powers of capital, then it stands to reason that labour becomes the secondary variable, dependent on capital's valorisation needs and objectively beholden to the capitalist, who is the fount of all social wealth. This is of course an inversion of the facts of the case – capital could not expand, that is, exist, without being valorised by labour. In footnote 17 on p. 1008, Marx writes 'Likewise, in modern German the capitalist, the personification of *things* which take labour, is called an '*Arbeitgeber*' [employer, literally a giver of work], while the actual worker who gives his labour is called an '*Arbeitnehmer*' [employee, literally a taker of work]. In bourgeois society capital is independent and has individuality, while the living person is dependent and has no individuality.' ( 'Manifesto of the Communist Party' , op.cit.). The spontaneous ideology of German etymology as it applies to economic actors can likewise be found in the U.S. idiom of 'wealth creators'

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as the only deserving economic subject during the recession, while the self-evidence of the independence of capital and the social preference for the entrepreneur is an index of the consolidation of far-right orthodoxy there in the last few decades.

<sup>28</sup> See Chapter Two of the present work, also Christopher Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, Leiden and Boston: Brill Publishers, 2004.

<sup>29</sup> This is the perspective that informs Kathi Weeks' important book *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics and Postwork Imaginaries*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011.

<sup>30</sup> Screamin' Alice, 'On the periodisation of the capitalist class relation', *SIC: International Journal for Communisation*, No. 1, November 2011, pp. 171-96.

<sup>31</sup> Weeks understandably focuses on the limitations of the 'dual-system' debate. This refers to a controversy which transpired mainly in Marxist and Socialist Anglo-American feminist theory in the 1970s and early 1980s. It sought to establish whether a discrete domestic mode of reproduction could be said to co-exist along the system of waged production in capitalism. The question occasionally crossed over, and no doubt was significantly complicated by, the debate on whether patriarchy and capitalism could be identified as two intersecting and parallel systems, and if so, which target was the priority for women's liberation. See the section on the 'domestic labor debate' in Chapter Three of *The Problem with Work*, pp. 118-20. It should be noted as well that in the French feminist theoretical context, Christine Delphy was a proponent of 'dual-system'. See Delphy, *Close to Home: A Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>33</sup> Again, see the invaluable anthology of Silvia Federici's essays, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction and the Feminist Struggle*, Oakland: PM Press, 2012. Mariarosa Dalla Costa was the other significant early theorist of housework as commodity-producing labour. See *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1975 – an English-language translation of work that had been published in Italy in 1972. This edition also included an article by Selma James, 'A Woman's Place', which had a similar viewpoint if not identical terms.

<sup>34</sup> See Chapter One for an extended discussion of this point.

<sup>35</sup> Bernard Stiegler, *For a New Critique of Political Economy*, Daniel Ross, trans., Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2010, p. 81.

<sup>36</sup> This discussion will be taken up more comprehensively in what follows. In the disavowal and absorption of labour, art bears the 'managerial' character I allude to at the start of this chapter and which will be delineated more fully in the section on Agamben's 'man of taste' in this chapter and in the section on the Artist Placement Group in Chapter 4.

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<sup>37</sup> In the first volume of *Capital*, Marx refers to capital as the 'automatic subject' in 'The General Formula for Capital': 'It is constantly changing from one form into the other, without becoming lost in this movement; it thus becomes transformed into an automatic subject. If we pin down the specific forms of appearance assumed in turn by self-valorizing value in the course of its life, we reach the following elucidation: capital is money, capital is commodities. [...] For the movement in the course of which it adds surplus-value is its own movement, its valorization is therefore self-valorization [*Selbstverwertung*]. By virtue of being value, it has acquired the occult ability to add value to itself. It brings forth living offspring, or at least it lays golden eggs.' These golden eggs can be alternately interpreted as artworks. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume One, as before, p. 255.

<sup>38</sup> As Melanie Gilligan writes in a recent text, 'When Marx says "subject" here, he is playing on Hegel's use of that term, meaning that value moves according to its own internal (quasi -dialectical) logic of progression. However, he is also describing the uncanny condition experienced by all wage earners, whereby capital, brought into being by people as a means to exchange their labour and goods, becomes itself the main determinant of their activity, and capital's expansion becomes the aim for which they are compelled to strive. [...] Capital's expansion acquires a general focus on the future, which, as we will see, takes on further dimensions of agency today.' Melanie Gilligan, 'Affect and Exchange', *Intangible Economies*, Antonia Hirsch, ed., Vancouver: Filip Editions, 2012.

<sup>39</sup> Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology*, Martin Sohn-Rethel, trans., London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1978.

<sup>40</sup> Mattin writes "As human creativity is more variable and heterogeneous than a machine, the framing of it, and the production of value within it, is more complex. The manager appropriates life processes that he or she might not be able to evaluate immediately, but when the potential of our living labour is realised he or she knows how to define, measure and market it.' 'Managerial Authorship: Appropriating Living Labour', as above, p. 292. In my conclusion, I will try to think of such uncertain and even mimetic approaches to value-capture as 'imaginary subsumption', an evocative term first brought to my attention in a text by William Clare Roberts analysing the re-structuring of higher education.

<sup>41</sup> Harry Braverman writes of labour's 'indeterminacy' in this sense. See *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998, p. 39.

<sup>42</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, Georgia Albert, trans., Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999, p. 35.

<sup>43</sup> Or, to take an artist profoundly influenced by Hegel's theories of what happens to art 'after philosophy' – analytic Conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth. See his 'Art After Philosophy' (1969) in *Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966-1990*, Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1991, pp. 13-32.

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<sup>44</sup> A discussion of the metaphysics of Adorno's project to craft a materialist aesthetic theory is a subject of powerful interest, but will have to be postponed for a future project. The mention of 'spirit' in the quotation that follows reveals the Hegelian contours of Adorno's engagement with metaphysics.

<sup>45</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, as above, p. 5.

<sup>46</sup> Jacques Rancière has theorized this blurring between types of social activity as constitutive to art in the 'aesthetic regime', i.e. contemporary art. A concise definition of this term is provided in Jacques Rancière, 'The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes: Emplotments of Autonomy and Heteronomy', *New Left Review*, No. 12, March-April 2002, pp. 133-51. See also *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, trans. Steven Corcoran, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009 and *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill, London/New York: Continuum, 2004, by the same author.

<sup>47</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, as above.

<sup>48</sup> For Walter Benjamin on Baudelaire, and on the 'flâneur' as the quintessential character type of urban capitalist modernity – browsing but not buying, aloof, disinterested – see *The Arcades Project*, Rolf Tiedemann, ed., Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, trans., New York: Belknap Press, 2002.

<sup>49</sup> Appreciation here appears as the potential to grow which is common to a sensibility which is cultivated and a financial resource. The fundamental role of discrimination in the constitution of the 'empty' aesthetic subject is revealed in a piece of dialogue Agamben quotes from Schlegel: 'He who does not scorn . . . cannot appreciate either . . . . So is not a certain aesthetic cruelty [*ästhetische Bösheit*] an essential part of harmonious education?' *The Man Without Content*, p. 22; quote taken from Lucinde in *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe*, Hans Eichner, ed., Vol. 5, Munich: Schöningh, 1962, p. 28.

<sup>50</sup> Agamben quotes Hegel on p. 24. The reference is found in paragraph 517, G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, A.V. Miller, trans., New York: Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 314.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in footnote 41 in Thierry de Duve, 'Resisting Adorno, Revamping Kant' in J.M. Bernstein, ed., *Art and Aesthetics After Adorno*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.

<sup>52</sup> The classic statement of this position is Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Michael Shaw, trans., Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984. Another important interlocutor in this debate has been Benjamin H.D. Buchloh. See his *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2000) for a collection of key writings around this topic structured as analyses of particular art practices.

<sup>53</sup> Vacarme, "' I am sure that you are more pessimistic than I am . . ." : An Interview with Giorgio Agamben', Jason Smith, trans., *Rethinking Marxism*, Vol. 16, No. 2, April 2004, p. 121. He also says earlier in that interview 'One way the question could be posed is: what would a practice of self be that would not be a process of



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subjectivation but, to the contrary, would end up only at a letting go, a practice of self that finds its identity only in a letting go of self? It is necessary to maintain or "stay," as it were, in this double movement of desubjectivation and subjectivation.' p. 117.

<sup>54</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, as above, pp. 34-35.

<sup>55</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, E.B. Ashton, trans., London and New York: Routledge, 1973, p. xx. An alternative translation is Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, Dennis Redmond, trans., <http://www.efn.org/~dredmond/ndtrans.html> or online pdf only, 2001, p. 4.

<sup>56</sup> For an analysis of the social and economic implications of this kind of 'performance' labour in the context of the post-2008 crisis and the link between 'endurance' performance and the 'endurance' of exploitation, see Ellen Feiss' astute 'Endurance Performance: Post-2008' in *Afterall Online*, 23 May 2012, <http://www.afterall.org/online/endurance-performance-post-2008>

<sup>57</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Werner S. Pluhar, trans., Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31, 54.

<sup>59</sup> Werner S. Pluhar, 'Introduction', *Critique of Judgment*, as above, p. ciii.

<sup>60</sup> The 'exchange abstraction', in Sohn-Rethel's Kantian-Marxian account, is the 'transcendental condition' of quantification and abstract mediation of social life through the medium of money and its related instruments. For him, it is the gradual historical dominance of the exchange abstraction from Ancient Greece onwards that is responsible for the development of social forms such as idealist philosophy, modern 'pure' science and administrative rationality, not to mention capitalism. He sees an isomorphism between the abstraction from content, materiality and particularity that underlie all these instances of modern instrumental reason and the original principle of a general equivalent. See *Intellectual and Manual Labour*, as above.

<sup>61</sup> For the salience of different versions of this thesis to Western political theory, both in its elitist and its critical orientations, Jacques Rancière's *The Philosopher and His Poor* (John Drury, Corinne Oster and Andrew Parker, trans., Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003) is a fascinating study.

<sup>62</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, as above, p. 120.

<sup>63</sup> A revealing formulation of this dilemma can be found in Claire Fontaine's 'Ready-Made Artist and Human Strike: A Few Clarifications': 'But we are not going to trace a genealogy of transformation in the domain of the production of art objects; what interests us here is what happened in the domain of the production of artists. [...] In an era that has been qualified as post-Fordist, one in which on-demand has replaced stock, the only goods still produced on an assembly line – that of the education system – without knowing for whom, nor why, are workers, including artists.' Available at [http://www.clairefontaine.ws/pdf/readymade\\_eng.pdf](http://www.clairefontaine.ws/pdf/readymade_eng.pdf)

## Chapter Four

### Autonomy, Judgement, and Putting the Speculative to Work

#### Introduction

This thesis has been developing a theory of how speculation as a mode of production revises the relations between art and labour. I have used a historical and analytical approach to the production of subjectivity in art and labour on the one hand, and to discuss the modifications to the logic of capitalist valorisation itself as it skews towards the speculative, contingent and reproductive. These two strands of the inquiry connect in a look at the consequences these developments have for the specific mediations which articulate the differences and, increasingly, the parallels between the social forms of artistic (non-) labour and abstract labour.

The last chapter demonstrated how art emulates speculative labour, and the paradoxes and potentials of its autonomy from capitalist subsumption as the logics of labour and management infiltrate its productive processes and conceptual idioms. To say that it 'emulates' labour is to say that on the one hand art casts labour *out*, as its most intimate outside, in order to emulate it as a sign of its attentiveness to its own material conditions or the limits to its propositional character. This can happen either through the representation of and reference to labour in artworks, or through the deliberate blurring of what constitutes artistic labour and what abstract labour in performative, 'social' or 'invisible' practices. On the other, art production itself both prototypes and reflects the defining aspects of contemporary labour as a speculative *form*: mystified or attenuated wage relations, a disavowal of work in favour of management (curation, selection), the notion of reproduction (and production) as (self-)investment, and ecological rather than antagonistic (class-based) understandings of social relations. Again, what I am interested in is not so much a critique of the ideological parameters that generate the artist and the entrepreneur as the model social subjects

benignly mediating an entirely individuated, risk-based and crisis-ridden capital relation. The basis, as well as terminus, of such a critique must surely amount to no more than a diagnosis of the corrosive effect of intensified abstraction as ever more native to the 'free labour' of the artist as it is to the alienated factory or service worker. We should be cautious about the conceptual efficacy of 'alienation' for deriving a politics from social abstraction. My focus is instead on how speculation as a mode of production reveals the collapsed mediation between capital and labour in its fullest negativity in the figure of the artist. This figure's alienation from labour becomes the apotheosis of labour once abstract labour becomes as contingent, haphazard and socially 'unnecessary' as artistic labour. This is even more dramatically the case once both are subsumed into the valorisation model of human capital. Human capital then comes merely to denote the humanization of the 'automatic subject' of value.

Building on these arguments, this chapter will further develop a genealogy of indeterminacy or, in Thierry de Duve's terms, the 'whatever' as the link between current expressions of artistic labour and the social form of abstract labour as it appears today. We have now ascertained this via two main axes: by reviewing Giorgio Agamben's discussion of Hegelian aesthetics to bring to light his concept of the 'groundless ground' of the modern aesthetic subject, and then with an exegesis on Kant's concept of aesthetic judgement. We now need to explore how the autonomy of the aesthetic comes to be determined by reference to the artist as a professional of 'indeterminacy', rather than the alienated aesthetic subject 'without content' of Agamben or Kant's positioning of aesthetics at the base of a *sensus communis*. To set up this inquiry, I would like to explore to Thierry de Duve's analysis of indeterminacy and judgement with respect to Marcel Duchamp's founding gesture for contemporary art, the readymade. My reason for taking this particular route is to use the indeterminacy of aesthetic

judgement to flesh out the dialectics of autonomy and heteronomy *within* speculation – to show how the 'automatic subject' of capital is determined not just by the negativity of labour which it constantly seeks to absorb and deny, but by its own intrinsic void which can be inflected in emancipatory ways: not-capital, not-labour, not-art. Speculative praxis, in other words, but a speculative praxis which can only be elaborated, and lived, by means of the determinate negation of what it already is: value-in-process, speculation as a mode of production. This antagonistic potential, however, is constantly enmeshed in the temptation to *professionalize* the special dispensation this affords the artist in capitalist society. This chapter's close case study of the Artist Placement Group is intended to act as an illustration of this very predicament in a historical moment just prior to the advance of 'human capital' as the new rubric for labour, and just after the demise of the 'autonomous artist' as a viable oppositional figure in cultural politics. The previous chapter's analysis of 'taste' in Kant and in Agamben's text has prepared the way for how aesthetic subjectivity can be mobilized as a force for triggering innovation for capital as part of a universalist avant-garde project in which the visionary artist acts as the 'conceptual engineer'. 'Taste' becomes the shorthand for how the indeterminacy of aesthetic subjectivity functions to guarantee its sovereignty in relationship to the 'prosaic objectivity' of the socio-economic merely given.

In what follows, I will trace the implications of this notion of 'taste' for modern and contemporary art inasmuch as it presents a key for the production of subjectivity in the speculative mode. This will be done by means of a reading of Thierry de Duve's Kantian and nominalist account of art in *Kant After Duchamp*, and chiefly through his contention that aesthetic judgement is the bedrock of not just judgements of taste in nature or art, but is the ground for how something is to be defined as art – and someone to be defined as an artist – in the first place. First, it might be useful to make a short preliminary analysis of the historical

conditions for art and labour to converge on the semiotic, social and institutional field of the 'whatever'.

### **The Name of Art**

The thesis of 'de-materialization' often accompanies historical accounts of contemporary art that strive to link 'post-Fordist' labour to the rise of art that finds its 'purposeless purpose' in concept and context rather than matter (however this matter might be liberated from instrumentality, as it is in Kantian aesthetics).<sup>1</sup> This is decisive for understanding how the 'groundless ground' of aesthetic subjectivity is 'put to work' in affirming speculative modes of accumulation as socially normative and desirable.

If we follow a number of contemporary commentaries which attempt to place transformations in the conceptual and productive infrastructures of art along a trajectory of economic and social change, then the axis where this change has been often situated is that of language. Just as the methods of value extraction became more oriented towards the semiotic and analytical, with labour process and rewards increasingly skewed toward the managerial and rent-seeking as a result, so did art become increasingly self-referential and linguistic, the proposal of a framework in which anything may appear as art rather than the creation of discrete, expressive objects. Conceptual art is the first to disclose the object character of language and, conversely, the linguistic character of objects in space with its use of seriality, documentation and collection to structure an experience of art, rather than an experience of a specific art object.

We can say here, provisionally, that inasmuch as for Kant, the exercise of taste establishes a possibility of universality in the *sensus communis* of undetermined reflective judgement, this universal horizon is in turn made possible by the shared medium of language. This possibility

is what Agamben calls 'communicability as such', a communication undetermined by concepts or ends.<sup>2</sup> Thus the more art comes to rely on the structure and practice of the linguistic, the more it becomes meta-linguistic, about the possibility of communication as a *utopian* rather than *universal* horizon in a world determined by technocratic, specialized and often incommensurable 'applied languages'. When communication itself becomes a capital good, with art works and practices included in that, then the question of *communicability* takes centre stage. While we can say that this is when the linguistic becomes pervaded with the affective and the somatic, this is equally the case for labour and production, tempering the emancipatory valence this broadening would seem to invoke. It may be a commonplace that 'affective labour' is now required from the most menial to the most elite positions in the labour market; however, as we saw in Chapter Two with the discussion of Pilvi Takala's work, this opens the door to the performance of labour as the readiness to work rather than any act of 'concrete labour'. Such an equivocal space – of embedded exploitation and its invisible refusals – can be seen as the negativity that traverses labour and art alike as realms where performance has eclipsed production, or, rather, the production of performances is strictly coeval with the production of abstract value.

Such an expanded notion of the linguistic, which must include the 'attunements' and 'moods' of variable capital, but also, as we saw elsewhere in the second chapter, the recursive movements of algorithmic financial trades, becomes key to understanding this kind of production. A local instance, pertinent for the discussion of performance but also of judgement, as we will see later, is the priority of self-reflexivity, discourse or the linguistic in general as the key apparatus for art production, as cultural critic Lianne Ngai underlines as 'the increasing convergence between art and discourse overall':

Art's identification with critical or theoretical discourse about art, in particular, seems to have become one of the most important problems informing the making, dissemination, and

reception of art in our time—as important, perhaps, as the loss of the antithesis between the work of art and the commodity.<sup>3</sup>

This 'identification' with criticism – and critique – for art as an important parameter of its production does not only signal a rapprochement between art and the commodity, of course. If anything, the motivation for art's identification with discourse about art and the drive for self-reflexivity this signified was a refusal of the commodity, on par with the social and political radicalisms of the Conceptual art era. It was seen both as a re-assertion of autonomy of the aesthetic vis-a-vis the decorative and the hermetic qualities of object-based art whose natural home was the art market, and a refusal of the kind of autonomy such objects were purported to exemplify. 'Heteronomy' was welcomed, as long as it remained on the autonomous terms of art. Art became the transitive discipline able to emulate and incorporate all others, and its specific critique was articulated in the rupture of genres and properties where the aesthetic was to be cited, as Rancière writes.<sup>4</sup> Correspondingly, it can be said that 'human capital' labour and the (financial) commodity have become self-critical in the same way, when their character is to overflow their boundaries by self-actualizing in ever more transient, blurred and unpredictable ways.

Of course, 'de-materialization' did not for long remain a bulwark against art's ontological or economic valuation. Art and economic production now do converge on the value of the linguistic and affective – in its circulation, its means and its formal preoccupations. However, art still attempts to throw up a fragile critical barrier on the grounds of its own possibility, that is, what makes it art and not other kinds of labour and production – the indeterminacy of concept, communicability as such. Even Conceptual artists, while prioritizing the linguistic and the reflexive, wanted to retain the mystical, intuitive and arational as categories for their work.<sup>5</sup>

While this can engender trivial, idealist or simply insular consequences for art practice – and the retention of art or the aesthetic as placeholder category for non-antagonistic social change will be examined more fully in the next section – here I would just like to stay with the *abstraction* of this position (that art's purpose is to be without any) to see if we can use it to ground a negativity towards the existent rather than the benign transvaluation of it guaranteed to all equally in their capacity to make non-conceptual judgements of taste. Such an attempt should not fail to take cognizance of the tendency of a negation rooted in the aesthetic to content itself with valorising alienation, and lending a positive moral weight to marginality. This Romantic-era tendency is not only pervasive in cultural but also in political radicalism.<sup>6</sup> However, the relationship of negation and abstraction to judgement needs to be spelled out more fully here.

### **To Be Done With the Judgement of Art**

In *Kant After Duchamp*, Thierry de Duve is concerned to show how the judgement 'this is art', as first instantiated by Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades, creates a sort of negative universality for the act of being an artist. Far from the Utopian concept of universal creativity championed by the Romantics and their latter-day epigones such as Joseph Beuys, this is a universal *anti-creativity*. It is enough to call something art for it to be so, a purely procedural act of naming. Given that the relevant institutional and economic apparatus is in place for this act of valuation to be performed successfully<sup>7</sup> – i.e. that there is such a referent as 'art' to begin with, which we will take as given for the purposes of the argument, what is the status of such a judgement in the age of art's tendential real subsumption? This is to say, do the conditions for this judgement change when it is far from self-evident what the judgement 'this is art' refers to – not because art is produced in industrial quantities for the market, or at least not primarily, but because the 'absolute commodity' of art has been discovered to have very



definite use-values? It is a linguistic act which is not just social in the formality of its (relative) autonomy, inasmuch as its critical potential is premised on this autonomy. In recent decades, art has also been demonstrated to have many social implications and applications, for governance, social services and urban redevelopment, to name a few realms where art – socially engaged and not – has been applied, sometimes as part of a broader program to change the economic and class composition of an urban area to a more 'creative' one. Concomitantly, the 'aesthetic character' has become the functional prototype for labour in general, even if we take that only as the flimsiest of veneers for unregulated exploitation or the imposition of self-regulated work – it is the subjective autonomy indissociable from the concept of the artist which is important. Kant's universality of aesthetic judgement finds its modern correlate in the universal capacity of creativity which aligns the labouring subject with the automatic subject of capital.

For de Duve, however, the emptiness and formality of the judgement 'this is art' is what lends it an emancipatory dimension exclusive of context or content. Perhaps like Marx, who saw a progressive historical side to capital's power of accelerating social abstraction, it is the formality or *regulative* rather than substantial nature of Kant's idea of aesthetic judgement and Duchamp's gesture of selection which definitively frees art from the mystifications of cultic or individual transcendence and allows it to become an anonymous, commonplace, *popular* faculty: to make art by naming it.<sup>8</sup> For him, it is nothing but this which furnishes the justification for all historical artistic avant-gardes, the anti-hierarchical impulse to locate the possibility of social change in the common access to taste or 'genius'. There is here then an attempt to flesh out a concept of social plasticity that infuses all these aesthetics-led iterations of revolution. The argument seems a bit inadequate, if its extent is merely to demonstrate that if anything can be art, then anyone can be an artist. But we shouldn't

assume that de Duve's intention is to give a firm basis to the imbrication of art with social praxis. This is more in the character of a byproduct, which is perhaps why it isn't that convincing. He is ultimately interested in what conditions obtain for something to be identified as art when the concept of art has no determinacy *whatever*; thus no extrapolation from art to e.g. politics can ever have determinate content either:

So, creativity is no longer a Utopian program in the form of a maxim, or a mythic belief in the form of a presupposition [...] It not only boxes the thing into the over-determined double bind of having to be at once something and anything whatever [...] it also abandons the thing to its absolute impossibility of being determined as undetermined, that is, to its impossibility of conforming to the law or the necessity of a universal whatever. And it's precisely thanks to this abandonment that *the readymade*—and not the ready-mades—conforms to the universal of this impossibility. In other terms, that the phrase "this is art," as it can be applied to anything, ought to be applied to a "this" that is absolutely, or better, categorically, anything whatever.<sup>9</sup>

Here, de Duve signals the ontological quandary of art since the ready-made: it assumes a double character with respect to the commodity – it is both itself – an art object that is a special kind of commodity - and it is any commodity, a universality of values. The reason it can have this double character is that the imprimatur of art has migrated from the object to the subject. The artist produces objects or services like any other worker – but her labour-power is not the commodity since the works and services she produces are 'useless' in the sense I've alluded to previously.<sup>10</sup> It is the artist herself who is the commodity through her authorship, through the particular kind of subjectivity she claims as an artist that endows her with the power to control the conditions of her labour and the choice of what she produces. Or, better, it is the indeterminacy and freedom of her working conditions that identify her as an artist and thus lend commodity value to what she produces, though these 'absolute commodities' may not have an iota of use-value.

Apart from setting out these conditions of indeterminacy, the abstraction that de Duve calls

the 'whatever' in actuality need not follow the Kantian regulative idea of the emancipatory anonymity of the shared judgement of art. It can just as easily be folded back into the heteronomous law of the market: 'What this law tells artists to do can only go in the direction of its own enforcement. It enriches some, it crushes many, it frees no one.[...] Painting, which sells best these days if it is figurative, has never been so abstract; it has the abstract quality of money.'<sup>11</sup> Additionally, the double bind of the artwork that is at once forced to be something and must be whatever can be placed in conjunction with the double character of labour in capital as concrete and abstract, or of value, which contains use-value and exchange value. In all three cases, there is an asymmetrical reciprocity, or, better, a dependence of the former term on the latter, even as the latter is largely mediated by the former. An artwork or practice can only be 'something' on the precondition that it is institutionally and critically articulated within the absolute 'whatever', that is, the qualified, but then limitless, conditionality of appearing in the field of art, regardless of its 'origin' (this is the crux of the readymade as an irreducible gesture shaping all that comes after). Similarly, concrete labour is mediated through the social institution of abstract labour – the exchange of 'whatever' kind of labour-power for a wage, and the access to use-values is rigorously dictated by access to means of exchange in the market. However, we can see that the latter term is *socialized* through the former in each case: the 'whatever' of art takes specific (indeed context- and site-specific) forms, abstract labour must be embodied in concrete acts of labour which are performed with specific skills and in specific forms of exploitation, the dominance of exchange-value is legitimated through its (incidental) mediation through use-values.

### **Counter-Artistic Production**

Here I am guided by Marx's understanding of advancing 'real abstraction' as breeding contradictions which undermine the rule of capital, which is to say the importance of social

abstraction and mediation in estranging nature and tradition: a salutary negativity which evacuates and sublates established social forms. We can recall the discussion in Chapter One of Moishe Postone's examination of abstract labour as a social form and Chapter Two's discussion of labour as 'not-value' through the optic of Christopher Arthur's *The New Dialectic*. What I would like to keep in mind from those discussions in order to more clearly situate what follows is that the first prevents us from thinking of labour as a positive quantity to be liberated from the capital relation and allows us to see it as one pole of this relation: *use-value for capital*; the second guards us from overlooking that this dialectic is internal to the existence, and experience, of labour itself as the negative other to value (which is why 'human capital' must erase labour). Art can then be put into several, and seemingly paradoxical, lights as a mediator of or even just an 'other' to labour and value. On the one hand, it expels and absorbs labour just as capital does, subsisting on an image of free unconditioned creativity.<sup>12</sup> On the other, the dialectics of autonomy and heteronomy are inherent to the social character of art itself, and it is thoroughly structured by the negativity of the labour it would put at a distance, even as changes in the capital relation cast them in the same speculative mould. The labour politics of art are then in a crucial sense *impossible*: as John Roberts writes, art may align itself with 'social technique' as a condition of its own critical reflexivity, yet its ability to make this gesture remains bound to the differentiation from it. Concomitantly, we need to perceive Arthur's point about labour being 'not-value' in a further, and a resonant sense. Arthur thinks that labour is (at least in one sense) 'not-value', while human capital argues that labour is *not* labour. On the surface these two arguments are essentially and even diagrammatically opposed to one another, but they do both also imply that it is essential to *capital* that labour exist as *more than what it is*, albeit in radically different modes. The status and the tenor of that *more than* is emphatically an aesthetic problem and is interesting for that reason. And, finally, Postone's positing of abstract labour

as social form (with the typical Frankfurt School articulation of social form as domination) enables us to develop a concept of how art as abstract labour can act as a suggestive analogy that discloses the role the social form of art plays in processes of real subsumption without supporting the claim that art production itself is really (or even formally) subsumed. This is important to keep in mind if we want to hold on to a dialectic of autonomy and heteronomy which engenders the negativity of art in relation not just to use-values and to labour, but to the social existence of art itself as a separate instance, that is, to the conditions of its problematic autonomy.<sup>13</sup>

The notion of the 'readymade artist' proposed by Claire Fontaine registers a situation where art and labour come together on the terrain of neither any longer having an 'object'. The contradictions of the form of value that both dominate them and keep them apart in the era of de Duve's 'whatever' thus gain a new, if not politically unambiguous, salience. The 'readymade artist' can then acquire a hopeful coding, since it portrays the figure of an artist who can no longer believe in her status as an exceptional or privileged kind of non-worker, but one who can recognize her exploitation by capital as a precondition of her existence regardless of what she does. Her 'refusal of work' can then very easily become generalized to the 'human strike' that refuses on a transindividual and affective level, and whose terrain is the whole of social reproduction not any particular labour relation. Fontaine has said in a recent interview:

Refusal to work is a part of human strike, but the more important aspect of the strike is the wider refusal of certain human relationships and social dynamics. Human strike is open to subjects that actually do not work, whose work is not recognized as a professional activity, who are unemployed or precarious and therefore cannot organize themselves against some specific conditions of exploitation, but instead have to endure submission to the economy and its merciless laws.<sup>14</sup>

With relevance to the earlier discussion of the relationship between art and reproduction,

Fontaine historically locates the 'human strike' in the rupture introduced by feminism in the Italian workers' and autonomist movement of the 1970s. It seems like a combative way of re-thinking the trope of the 'personal is political', of visibility and invisibility as the parameters of social contestation, a minoritarian politics which ungrounded the originary silences of the movement. It seems then as if the notion of 'human capital' was invented precisely to neutralize the possibility of 'human strike', thus not merely effacing the antagonism between labour and capital by ideologically folding labour back into capital but also to silence all the figures of agitation and refusal unfolding precisely away from the workplace, struggles which sought to dissociate the existence of the 'human' from the survival of 'capital'.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, the 'readymade artist' may be viewed less hopefully as the sovereign individual of the whatever, consolidating her social power as an artist as a manager and exploiter of 'indifferent contents', acquiring power as a competitive subject among objects. On this point, Andrea Fraser has written that '[t]he institutionalization of Duchamp's negation of artistic competence with the readymade transformed that negation into a supreme affirmation of the omnipotence of the artistic gaze and its limitless incorporative power. It opened the way for the artistic conceptualization – and commodification – of *everything*.'<sup>16</sup>

### **Whatever Indicator**

As hinted in previous chapters, a figure which may be able to help us think further through this field of 'whatever' is 'performance'. Contemporary post-workerist theorists, art historians, labour-process analysts, critical management scholars and sociologists have contributed to the discourse of contemporary labour as essentially 'performative', which is to say, formal and empty of determinate content, more a series of dispositions, adaptations, and generic skills. As noted in this and in previous chapters, this can be understood as a potentiality or a readiness to labour, a production of subjectivity, which must be solicited and managed, in all its idiosyncrasy and contingency, if the value it *may* produce is to be captured. This gives us a

view of artistic practices and contemporary regimes of labour as united by their common attunement to contingency or the 'whatever' that the generic capacity to *work* or *make art* has established. In the terms I've been deriving from de Duve and from Kant, the performativity of art as art if the conditions of the generic judgement 'this is art' are fulfilled and the performativity of labour as labour under the generic conditions of 'human capital' (in other words, whether speculatively or immediately paid) both seem to rest on the abstraction of a measure that nevertheless remains ruthlessly operative. In the previous chapter, we encountered the accumulation of contingency in derivatives markets as exemplary for the behaviour of capital as it becomes more concretely ubiquitous while technically more 'abstract' by seeking to directly valorise time and its own recursive motions in that time. Randy Martin speaks of this direct valorisation of time as the efficient cause for the proliferation of measures of performance; since in the derivative trade, prices have to be set for heterogeneous processes in the present for what they will be worth in the future, the future becomes 'actionable' in the present. Performance of assets has to be established into the future in order to determine their present values, and this requires a proliferation of ever more finely calibrated and standardized instruments of measure.<sup>17</sup> So while this can be seen as a 'foreclosure' of the future, it can also be seen in reverse, a convergence of the present and the future through the speculative encounters of risk and value whose performances escalate in entropy at the same rate as metrics are put forward to measure them.

The prevalence of 'general performance'<sup>18</sup> is then a generic form of judgement *as management*, shaping and demarcating art and labour, a way to control and shape contingency so as to capture its value. The entrance of '(do) whatever' with the readymade as the categorial arbiter of art production registers in the field of labour as the imprint of management acting to hollow out, de-skill and 'formalize' all kinds of concrete labour as

varieties of 'performance' judged by metrics arbitrarily and recursively set within the field, as is the case for art. Both can then be determined as modes of managing time and attention in a production regime which has developed to a stage where the 'production for production's sake' characteristic of capital accumulation takes on the mercurial and micrological forms of value extraction and social control elsewhere termed 'biopolitical' and which I will here term 'performance', after its central evaluative category. 'Performance' is then, I suggest, the core subjective experience – and objective measure - of real subsumption in the field of art and in the arena of labour. It embodies its emptiness and formality as a code of management, a code of conduct of conducts, providing a common ground for how they converge, diverge and politically inflect one another in times of dwindling security and increased material and affective conflict for their respective conditions of reproduction.

Building on the discussion in Chapter Two, and the connection between abstract labour and performance sketched out there, Kant and de Duve's anatomization of aesthetic 'judgement' might help us clarify some of those issues. This would be chiefly with regard to how the 'generic' can be seen as not just an evacuation of content from both art and labour, but its positive condition for coming into visibility; for being performed and recognized in a shared social space. For Kant and de Duve, the rubric of judgement explains not only the actualizing condition for art (and, for de Duve, specifically the condition for art after Duchamp made the irrevocable gesture of naming and selecting as the ground zero for art to appear as art), but the social conditions of its reception, and, in fact, its *potential*/sociality; the undetermined as the ground for both a distinct realm of the aesthetic and the possibility of human freedom. However, if this account is taken as part of the infrastructure of the division of social labour, then we see the production of a specific class subjectivity for aesthetic judgement and a need for the existence of commodified abstract labour for the self-realization of the automatic



subject of capital which art and labour both in their ways are bound to emulate. The generic here is both the ground for the possibility of community and freedom that art is supposed to model, and the formal logic of performance for the automatic subject. The question would then be whether this generic-ness can harbour a potential for negativity that emerges precisely when art tries to practically appropriate the negativity of labour as part of its own conditions of production, as part of the under-determination that distinguishes its own artistic negativity vis-a-vis capital from the kind that is harboured by labour. The key mode for this to happen, as we shall see in the section on APG, is through the kind of labour whose degree of abstraction and 'whatever' has the most proximity to art's own self-concept: management.

In the thesis so far, we have seen how art, as a mediated social form and itself a social mediation, can be compared to abstract labour as well as money in its capacity to socialize and subjectify the valorisation processes of capital as innovation or creativity. When we speak about art as abstract labour, and how the blurring between art and abstract labour that is already occurring can re-define or renew the critical potential of art as a social practice, we are not affirming that art is 'like' abstract labour because it produces value, that it is one social practice on a continuum of immanently productive and self-valorizing living labour trapped in the extraneous domination of capital and the state. Nor are we saying that art is a subsumed labour process, differentiated from other labours only by its precarious and mystified remuneration structure – in which case it would hardly be different from an increasing proportion of waged labour nor the entrepreneurship which is propagated as that waged-labour's ideal and ethical form.

Importantly, we are not especially interested in analysing the concrete presence of abstract

labour *within* artworks or in their realization, whether this is empirically, as we saw in the last chapter with the brief discussion of large-scale fabrication and employment of specialized personnel answering to management, or structurally, insofar as artworks are commodities. Abstract labour inheres in all commodities by virtue of them being values and having the form of value; increasingly artworks and art gestures are compounds of many different material and social processes, so it's clear that art commodities contain definite quantities of abstract labour, even if we're only looking at commercially manufactured components such as paint or cameras. Yet, art itself is not considered abstract labour, and to the extent that this remains predominantly the case – the extent to which art is practised and assessed as a kind of exceptional 'free activity' in all the equivocal senses of both terms – the commodity status of its products and its subjects is guaranteed by that exceptional status. It is in this sense that we discuss art in terms of abstract labour, that it indexes and develops models of real social abstraction as aspects of free self-creation, advancing a representative mode of how labour is mediated and imposed in the speculative mode of production. It is a template for speculative labour if speculative labour can be considered the hegemonic form of abstract labour in the present, an ever-ramifying tendency.

This can of course, and should be, connected to the debt-financed character of capital's reproduction today, which authorizes the decimation of a similarly debt-financed social reproduction as an investment strategy and the necessary de-valuation of labour-power. So when we speak about abstract labour in the speculative mode of production (or, more precisely, the speculative phase of the capitalist mode of production), we are speaking of an increasingly reflexive and unmediated regime of production for value, where value rises and falls are experienced immediately, personally, and ruinously, where value is *experienced* not just in the determination of the labour market but in all life. It is important to emphasize – if

not delve into – the dimension of 'experience' since (exchange) value has always determined production and the reproduction of life, inasmuch as it is actually or potentially labour-power, in capitalist economies. Yet it is in the speculative phase that 'the economy' saturates the sphere of reproduction and exposes it to oscillations in market value in a qualitatively different way. Here we could perhaps think of theorist Michael Denning's concept of 'wageless life' as the ancient and now re-surfaced proletarian condition *par excellence*. The proletarian is one who is separated from her means of reproduction, exposing the priority of the condition of *unemployment* to that of waged work as the true universality of non-owners of capital in a capitalist society.<sup>19</sup>

Bringing this discussion back to art, however, we need to see how this separation from the means of reproduction, and the speculative subjectivity this condition implants, is prototyped and popularized as an emancipatory one - as well as a negative and oppositional one – by the subject of artistic labour from the Romantic era onwards, as I started to outline in the previous chapter. The subject of artistic labour was, and predominantly remains, a subject defined as against, or apart from, the relations of domination and instrumentality integral to capitalist work. In a speculative mode of production, the artist is concurrently a self-determined subject and an automatic subject, speculating on the saleability of her assets as creative products with no immediate use-value (unlike, for example, other creative products such as design). Like the automatic subject of capital, she is an empty subject of whom principally any act can be predicated as art, given the social and economic grammar that establishes art. Recalling Marx's discussion of the automatic subject in Volume One from the last chapter, we can append to this the passage in Volume Two where he writes about the 'different forms that the same capital value, once advanced, successively assumes and discards throughout its *curriculum vitae*.'<sup>20</sup> Capital as a subject with predicates, a subject that remains consistent

through all the accidents of its biography. It remains the same through all its metamorphoses; predicates only accrue to it on the basis of this consistency. Yet this is also a suggestive analogy with the mutable but self-valorising subject of human capital, who, as we saw in the first chapter with Michel Feher, can be understood as a subject who is both speculator and asset in one entity.

### **Reproductive Potentiality**

To further this argument we must return to the question of art as reproduction. The reproduction of the automatic subject of art and the automatic subject of human capital are both ways of socializing the automatic subject of capital. Each produces nothing but the reproduction of the subject, and in this, the reproduction of the entire system of valorisation. The art critic Kerstin Stakemeier has written cogently on this topic, proposing that once the question of medium is no longer central for art and the artist doesn't produce objects or works, what she does produce is simply herself as an artist, thereby reproducing the whole art system or institution of art. This is 'the further step in the argument of art as automatic subject, that it must expand to survive and constantly reproduce its presuppositions.'<sup>21</sup> This then is reflected in the reproduction of the worker of herself as capital in the speculative mode of production, reproducing the entirety of capital as the presupposition of her own existence. Capital as automatic subject reproduces its presuppositions now also subjectively, in living labour power itself, cancelling both alienation and antagonism, as Jason Smith notes.<sup>22</sup> The subjectivation of the artist acquires a logical consistency within the speculative mode of production, reproducing its presuppositions while retaining the affect of exemption from them. This allows us to understand this relationship as not a derivative one – art follows the mandates of speculation – but more symbiotic, as the speculative as a mode emerges in and through art's antagonistic role to the rest of social production. Even as it has expanded

beyond art, it continues to carry a different potential *in* art, which is how the affect of autonomy can still be maintained. The subject and object of labour in artistic production are hard to separate, which is both the ground of the homology between the artistic subject and the automatic subject, and the root of their variance.

It has likewise been argued that the form labour takes nowadays, in the increasingly dominant service sector, but normatively in every workplace, is premised on the erosion of the division between self and product, subject and object, as Diedrich Diederichsen has written recently:

the worker has been transformed into the product itself. The latter is now human, alive, biological, sexual, and emotional. The worker is the object of her own subjective labour, which is nothing but her self, which is nothing but a product.<sup>23</sup>

Recalling the discussion of Tino Seghal at the end of Chapter Two, we can add here that the performance of the participants in *These associations* (2012) rests on the elision between the conditions of labour and the authentic personhood of the performer as it is relayed in the conversations with visitors to the piece. This problematic elision is structured in such a way that one can only be foregrounded at the expense of the other – drawing attention to the conditions of labour transpires in the dialogic situation as a disregard of the authentic self-narration of the performer, while a focus on the latter dismisses the situation of the encounter and everything that subtends it. It thus replicates precisely the imperative to perform subjectivity in many types of service work, where questioning the conditions of labour becomes a painful reflection on the very conditions of production of the self.

Here we would have to remember, as we saw in Chapter One's consideration of Michel Feher's *empowering* account of human capital, that the obstacle in the way of human capital's self-determination is the same inseparability between bearer and commodity that obtains for the subject understood in terms of labour-power. The proletariat has nothing to bring to the

market but her capacity to labour, but this labour-power cannot be abstracted from her and used separately from her own survival as its bearer – this is why the reproduction of capital has to, at some level, assume the reproduction of labour, whether or not capital pays for it. Just so, capital cannot be separated from and productively invested by its owner if she, essentially, still has nothing but her labour-power to sell. Her existence may be speculative, just as the purchase of her labour-power by capital is speculative (the capacity may be bought, but may not be realized), but she cannot alienate her capital to watch it appreciate in her absence as all owners of capital in its usual sense can. Capital is dead labour, so human capital is an oxymoron.

The commodity of labour-power can then be seen to be peculiar, as Marx calls it, in two senses: it produces more value than it consumes, and though it is sold by its owner, the owner retains her rights over its disposal after it is sold. The reason that it can be sold yet still remain with the seller is that this commodity is a *capacity*.<sup>24</sup> For Paolo Virno, the fact that all sale of labour-power is in this sense *speculative* opens a space of politics or antagonism in the dual structure of ownership of labour-power. For him, the fact that the capacity is the commodity, rather than specific goods and services, particularly in the forms of 'communicative' labour most strongly evincing the product/subject blur alluded to above, means that there is a subjective moment for labour before or within its incorporation into capital in the labour process where this capacity is realized. This echoes Christopher Arthur's 'counterproduction', although he would place this in a Hegelian register of negativity apropos the self-valorising automatic subject of capital, whereas Virno views this subjective moment of labour-power as the difference between life and value which biopolitics strives to collapse and harness, and the bearers of this capacity strive to expand. This accords with the *operaist* and *post-operaist* tenet that the production process is the stage where the primacy of labour as a subject of

refusal is internalized by capital as the negativity that drives its own development (technical composition) and it is the workers' ability to organize politically (political composition) which can realize that autonomy and negativity. However, the point to be emphasised here is that the capital-labour relation is pervaded by abstraction in (at least) two ways: one, through the general form of abstract socially necessary labour, but also the very conditions of purchase and sale are built around a commodity that is only potential. Virno observes that '[t]he potential for working, bought and sold like just another commodity, is labour not yet objectified, "labour as subjectivity."' <sup>25</sup> The reason capital buys labour-power, or capacity to labour – the surplus-value it produces when it works longer than the time which is paid for by the wage – is framed by Virno as part of this potential, the potential which is 'at the core of the exchange between capitalist and worker.' <sup>26</sup> This can be compared to Marx writing 'The use of labour-power is labour itself. The purchaser of labour-power consumes it by setting the seller of it to work. By working, the latter becomes in actuality what previously he only was potentially, namely labour-power in action, a worker.' <sup>27</sup>

If it is possibility that is the subject of exchange, then this possibility is inseparable from living labour, and, specifically, from life as the site of all production and exchange – the axis where Virno locates the relationship between the labour theory of value and Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics. The same potentiality that is bought and sold as labour-power, the potentiality to produce, is also the potentiality for other social and productive forms, other metabolisms with nature. This seems like an articulation between potentiality as capacity to labour or produce and potentiality as species-being, the human capacity to transform its world and itself with it. The relationship here could also evoke the necessary reliance of autonomy on heteronomy as its condition of possibility, insofar as the autonomy of species-being is predicated on its engagement with the heteronomously – externally determined or

pre-determined – social or natural world. Parenthetically, but not peripherally, we can add that the dependence of art's autonomy on heteronomy presents itself as the condition both for its critical independence and the agreement that this critique will have no purchase on the heteronomy that has licensed this space for free activity. We could even go further here and say that heteronomy does not so much license this space as it directly produces it, externalizing and alienating its own free potentiality as a separate zone of artistic license.

### **Subhuman Capital**

We can here remark that potentiality as the state of the commodity labour-power in which it is sold holds implications for a politics of the 'speculative' which would be immanent to the labour-capital relation as such. However, we are interested in the tendency of the 'speculative' as self-valorising value to efface labour completely and turn that into a moment of liberation, a moment when capital and the subject are identified. The dual ownership relation critical for the bearer of the commodity labour-power cannot apply when the owner and the capital are one and the same entity. If we think of all the transactions the commodity labour-power engages in as speculative insofar as labour-power is a commodity in a market and can have a price put on it, and no less because it is bought for its potential, not its actual, value, then it becomes evident that the re-description of labour as capital can have no analytic credibility or emancipatory valence. Of course, labour has always had a dimension of capital in Marxist theory – this is 'variable capital', the wage, to be distinguished from fixed capital (machines, production equipment). Operaist and autonomist strands of Marxist critique have thus been interested in how the most recent phase of accumulation ('immaterial production' or 'real subsumption') renders variable capital into *fixed capital*: the subject becomes her own production resource, and is also seen as such by employers. However, the inquiry here has been into 'human capital' precisely because it overlooks such distinctions, which would still



bear a trace of contradiction and antagonism in the use of Marxist categories (even if these are ultimately erased in the post-Operaist precept of 'all life is put to work'). 'Human capital' is the vision and experience of identifying completely with capital as a mode of production, but also a way of life and a way of flourishing undetermined by structural constraints. It is the relation to self as which might seem at first glance purely auto-referential (self-maximising value), but which presupposes and activates social relations reinforcing the idea that there is no divergence of interests between capital and human life, between dead and living labour.<sup>28</sup>

The notion of 'human capital' allows us to describe conditions of work in which the line between worker and product is effaced in the performance of the job and in the experience of precarity in and out of the workplace that besets the worker in a speculative mode of capitalist production. Central to my thesis is that artistic labour is the pre-eminent case where the speculative parameters of this kind of labour are turned into the ideological basis for autonomy and an exemption from the heteronomy of abstract labour. This denegation of heteronomy extends, for the automatic subject of art as it does for the automatic subject of capital, symptomatically, to reproduction. The potential value of human capital or the speculative commodity she produces, cannot have the material costs of her reproduction as *bearer* of labour-power recognized – here the cost of her investment in her capital – only the value of the product as assessed by the market. Perhaps here we should finally be content with noting the descriptive or analytical inadequacies of the human capital concept, and consign it to the status of ideological metaphor which seems to be its most common use.

However, the material consequences of this metaphor should still have critical interest for us. Labour in the speculative mode of production is not only represented, but comes to experience itself, as human capital, since collective structures of class antagonism or simply class identity have fallen by the wayside. As we have seen in previous chapters, debt is an

ideal vehicle for crafting workers (and artists) into 'human capital', enforcing 'self-investment' on all those who lack other means. There is no principal conflict, in this case, between the valorisation of the subject as capital, and the valorisation of capital by the labour of that subject – like all ideologies, it is a fiction based on how things really work. But as a fiction also, it links the subject of human capital with the aesthetic. As developed in the last chapter, aesthetic subjectivity and human capital have certain structural correspondences which cluster around a 'groundless ground' (Agamben), an autonomy which is determined by a logic which is speculative in both senses – speculative social praxis, and the speculative form of value. The speculative character of art, with a circumscribed or absent social use can then come to seem like a dramatization of value-in-process, untethered from the fiction of useful labour and comparable to the financial markets whose profits subsidize it. But even as we elaborate this line of inquiry, the constitutive 'excess', or, better, negativity of the aesthetic should be kept in view consistently, as the whole impetus and dialectical content of this inquiry is staked on it. Framing the inquiry in terms of the production of subjectivity from and as speculation since Kant allows us to approach concepts such as 'abstraction', 'reproduction' and the 'automatic subject' (or even 'counterproduction', as in Chapter Two) from the perspective of their uselessness as an *active* negativity. These concepts should be mined for the ways they allows us to understand how it can be that what does not produce value – art and (reproductive, service) labour alike – can be made actively hostile to valorisation. The optic of 'speculation' allows us to depart from the autonomy/heteronomy dialectic of art to root it in the conditions of labour and life as we encounter them today.

### **Artist Placement Group – Incidental Person or Negation of the Artist**

I will draw on a concrete episode in the recent history of art which links the two ways art has tried to come to terms with its relationship to abstract labour in capital that have predominated in the discussion so far: artistic labour that highlights its use-value or what it

has in common with other forms of labour, arriving at a 'labour politics of art' that focuses on art's heteronomy, as opposed to the autonomy staked out by art that orients its critique on its distance from rather than convergence with, other forms of social labour. The example I will foreground, that of the Artist Placement Group, has been a clarifying one for me as it shows an attempt to broker artistic uselessness *directly* to corporations and government agencies as a speculative good. The APG argument went that it was precisely because artists are not like other workers that they should be integrated into the workplace, since their lack of investment in the product or the remit of the organization was precisely what would produce visionary results that organization could potentially use. In the second chapter, we saw a latter-day performance of this notion in the piece by Pilvi Takala, albeit in the mode of a *reductio ad absurdum* of the APG concept which also jettisons its programmatic link to art.

APG identified the traits that the post-object artist had in common not with other workers but with other professionals – a certain form of socialization such as a managerial worldview or cultural confidence, a certain adaptability and ability to mobilize situations. The conditions of the reproduction of an artist as a social being is already her role in production, without the mediation of artistic autonomy or politics. A 1975 document setting out the characteristics of the Incidental Person – APG's proposed re-definition of the artist – states, 'The innovatory artist has always developed skills and conceptual material that he needs different from those that are already familiar. The I.P. is someone who does this within any frame of reference. Thus we should regard him as a formulator, with experience of social customs and behaviour. He works to no party political requirements and as far as possible independently of the declared objectives of the Organisation with which he is associated.'<sup>29</sup>

The Artist Placement Group (APG), operating in the UK and Europe from 1966-1989, initiated

'placements' of artists in firms and organisations, creating a forerunner to artist residencies. The main difference from the artist residency as it exists now was that the artist was re-defined as an Incidental Person (IP),<sup>30</sup> a kind of de-skilled and disinterested agent whose insertion into 'alien' organisational sites promised no specific outcome. When examined alongside contemporaneous tendencies by artists to repudiate art as they found it either by negation, i.e. withdrawal from art, or the expansion of its boundaries, APG took a further turn. The notion of the 'IP' bracketed both 'art' and 'work' in the emergent concept of the 'professional' as a neutral and unmarked social being who can have visionary impacts in all social contexts but need belong to none of them. John Latham, the artist who co-founded and did much to establish the theoretical slant of the project, described the 'professional autonomous artist' as a figure who was 'ahead' of society, and was thus positioned to advance society and economy. This 'professional autonomous artist' was someone who could 'sow the seeds of intellectual controversy from which so much economic progress develops'. The focus on the artist as a visionary socio-economic agent was key to the formulation of the 'placement' programme and to the corporate structure of APG itself – by 1970, APG had formed into a limited company nonprofit under the title of APG Research Limited and Trust.<sup>31</sup> As this was at a time when the 'artistic entrepreneur' had not yet emerged as the emblem of cultural policy agendas, and arts funding was not then geared to reward artistic practices designed to emulate business ones, it is safe to say that this was a theoretical and pragmatic move set to place APG on an equal footing with the corporations who at that time were the principal targets of their 'placement' activity. It can also be hypothesised that the entire project was a sophisticated exercise in procuring the maximum funds, materials and latitude for displacing artistic practices from the studio to a social context where both artistic practice and context would throw one another into question.

Where does the idea of the artist as an elite professional in a complex modern society with ever-ramifying needs and productive forces find its origins? We could briefly situate the development of the IP concept by examining its connections to the doctrines held by a forerunner of Marx, the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Utopian socialist technocrat the Comte de Saint-Simon. For Saint-Simon, politics was a 'science of production' and the role of artists was itself a political role bound up with the multivalent aspects of art, use and poiesis. Here we can see a prefiguration of the deployment of artists in industry as promoted and practised by APG. The significance of Saint-Simon in this lineage is not only that from a certain perspective APG appropriated the role of the artist as part of a problematic managerial vanguard of a new system. It also rests in the fact that Saint-Simon's 'prosperity' is not productive in the capitalist sense but emancipates workers from work to pursue 'enjoyments'.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, the IP's presence in an organization is not productive; if anything, it can only be her 'abstraction' from the organization's productive goals which can ever deliver 'value' for the company. Her labour is unpredictable and indescribable, but real. The point that it is a kind of labour is important: her presence is conceived in terms of labour, with repercussions for the labour of the other employees of the organization. If this were not the case, then the company could more straightforwardly achieve the enhancement of its brand management goals with a numinous 'creativity' via art sponsorship or collecting.

Several statements from the documents assembled in the APG archives held by the Tate concisely testify to the salience of these ideas for their project. In a 1971 Group Report to the Arts Council of Great Britain, who funded their activity for the two years previous, they write, 'The proposal to industry that "useless" activity may be to its own future advantage, unless, that is, in terms of any preconceived notion of what is useful that has become rigid or too protective of the position to accommodate fresh approaches. The useless can provide a

catalyst where decision making has become lacking in "snap."<sup>33</sup> From the beginning of the project, it was emphasized that the important thing was not what the Incidental Person did in a placement, but how she affected her context, that is, what the others around her did in response to this 'x' variable. Finally, there was an interesting, though less emphatic, attention to placements as a solution to the post-object, non-market artist's confusion about her social role in the turbulent era of the late 1960s and 1970s. The earlier-quoted Report from 1975 observes:

There is a growing population of individuals without a social function which includes independent artists, film and sound producing people. The I.P. concept would integrate these, to function on behalf of the long time-based Event to which most of them are committed. The potential I.P. without a proper facility or outlet is often drawn into social and political ` extremism.<sup>34</sup>

As we saw in the first chapter, the status of 'creativity' as an unquantifiable engine of value creation has been central in the economic re-structuring of recent decades, a truism that need only point to the hegemony of the creative industries, the 'creative city' or the 'creative class', however evidently discredited post-crisis they may seem. With APG, we see a sort of 'bottom-up' and deeply idiosyncratic approach to this problem of valorising the unquantifiable. John Latham indeed proposed a 'delta unit' which would be a metric capable of measuring long-term and complex impacts like the influence of an IP in an organization or his theory of 'flat time' for the economy or government policy.<sup>35</sup> In this light, we can think of the proposition of another theorist of human capital, Robert E. Lucas, Jr., that in the end we have to use an unquantifiable 'factor X' to account for the way human capital is mobilized in different geographic and historical contexts. It may be observed here that both the delta unit and factor X would strictly exclude the determinations of class, and thus productive relations in capitalist society per se, from their scope of analysis.<sup>36</sup> This principled 'neutrality' of analysis hence gives us a crucial insight into exactly how the nature of the IP's involvement in non-

artistic employment contexts was conceptualized. APG had been operating for nine years before the term 'Incidental Person' was coined, presumably to deflect criticism and misunderstanding, although the conception of the artist in non-artistic contexts had remained consistent throughout, as can be seen from the 1969 text quoted earlier.

Traditionally, capitalist modernity has excluded art from instrumentality because it was seen as an exception, a free creative practice which was pursued for different ends than other business or professional activity, and a sphere untainted by politics. But this can also of course be re-framed as placing art in service of a 'higher' instrumentality, the one of displacing and reconciling bourgeois contradictions. The concept of the Incidental Person can thus be read as a subversive affirmation of this: putting purposeless purpose to work.

APG's 'non-technical non-solution' exposed them to accusations of having social-democratic illusions, fetishising management, and capitalizing on the naiveté of an explicitly non-antagonistic research-based approach.<sup>37</sup> Politicized artists such as Gustav Metzger inveighed with the principle that 'the middle way always leads to the right', while formerly APG-affiliated artist Stuart Brisley wrote in a review of their seminal *Art and Economics* exhibition at the Hayward Gallery 1971 that the 'APG idea gravitates towards the source of power and must tend to reinforce it' and that they worked in 'connivance with management' to realise their goals'.<sup>38</sup> Several years later, an internally-commissioned report intended to mark the 'termination of the experimental phase' of the group cites the Arts Council of Great Britain's fears that APG was 'highly compromised by dubious relationships with industry, capital and other ancillary agents'.<sup>39</sup> This is certainly intriguing in light of the current position that Arts Council England takes, which encourages entrepreneurial behaviour on the part of its funded artists and organisations while it itself 'reach[es] out to a broad coalition of public, private and

community organisations that we feel can help us achieve our goals as we work to create the conditions for talent, ambition and innovation to prosper.<sup>40</sup>

Whereas APG's placements were guided by a characteristically obtuse notion of 'use', artists are inserted into social contexts in the UK and US now precisely because they are approved as mediators of specific state or corporate goals, which is to say helping to deliver pre-existing agendas such as inclusion or regeneration – no longer so much of a sovereign IP deranging the managerial class, and more of a support worker. Such an outcome was, however, already evident in the history of the contortions APG went through in trying to 'sell situations' to UK culture bureaucracies in the 1970s, as they alternately embraced and backed off from the entrepreneurial and employment potential of the 'placements'. They asserted that they aimed to 'provide a service to Art, not a service to artists', while the notion of the Incidental Person was itself predicated on a loss of self-evidence of what Art is or even its right to exist, as Adorno put it.<sup>41</sup> The IP was a 'de-materialised' artist, operating undercover just as a notebook or a chair may turn out to be a piece of art.<sup>42</sup>

The very absence of instrumental benefit in the long 'time-base' impact of the presence of the IP in organisations was framed by APG as economically productive in the visionary sense today's business climate needs. By the early 1980s, the concept of 'human capital' had begun to circulate in policy circles, and APG's proposals started to make more sense; importantly, 'human capital' was taken in the most diffuse of senses as well, contrary to the accounting fictions that characterised the later 'creative economy' paradigms pervading arts funding at the behest of New Labour.

A few implications arise here. One is the IP's repudiation of the Productivist legacy of sending artists into the factories so they could re-engineer and improve the labour process: the IP



brief was totally undetermined – APG took artistic alienation from productive life seriously, even if they entered the factory under the same managerial auspices as the Productivists.<sup>43</sup> Yet this challenge to use-value and useful labour was beholden to a vision of artistic neutrality which can be seen as readily morphing into the non-specialised but omni-adaptable 'creative' of today. The negativity of non-specialism has to harbour a moment of refusal or it leaves itself open up to be colonised by the abstract value, abstract labour and concrete hierarchies against which its own 'abstraction' of indeterminacy has no power. For example, much has been written, by Benjamin Buchloh and others, about the 'aesthetic of administration' heralded by Conceptual Art.<sup>44</sup> This refers to the artist adopting the position of the manager or bureaucrat rather than the worker in the productive relations as well as the sensible forms of the art, thus reinforcing the division between mental and manual labour that Conceptual Art saw itself as challenging with its radical de-sanctification of art objects and processes. Nowadays, we can observe that this condition has been, if anything, exacerbated, with the massification and globalisation of post-Conceptual practices no longer operating as a challenge to the ossified hierarchies of Modernism but functioning frictionlessly in the smooth spaces of art markets and cultural economies. The suspension between mental and manual labour is enacted indefinitely in the field of post-Conceptual practices, insofar as artistic practice is determined by its greater claim to the ontological 'whatever' than others, as we saw earlier. 'Administration' too is no longer a counter-pole to art which it needs to reckon with to get traction on transforming social and productive relations, but the medium through which everything must pass. As we see with the Artist Placement Group, the encounter between the artist and the organisation was at the time of Conceptual art understood as one of fundamental incongruity and ironic allegory – the Incidental Person emerged against this background of the growing professionalisation of the 'autonomous individual' represented by the artist. Such a perspective would be difficult to uphold in the present, when the

relationship between art and administration, art and the corporation has been overhauled and rationalized – partly, as always, due to the disruptive efforts of the protagonists of three and four decades ago.

### **Excursus on Use-Value**

A critical trope that has enjoyed favour among many art theorists and art historians of a Left persuasion over the years is that art behaving like a commodity is de facto 'bad', rather than the fact that art exists in and as an artefact of a social relation which must commodify as much of the world as possible in order to ensure its survival. Moreover, insofar as artistic production has been approached, often not explicitly, as a commodity sphere, one side of the commodity – its exchange-value – has been condemned, while the other side – its use-value – has been exalted. Such an analysis serves to mystify several aspects of the social existence of art, like its specificity as an 'exceptional' kind of commodity and kind of labour in capital. It also tends to moralize the 'relationship of art to society' as a channel between two undifferentiated masses – one effete and detached, one concrete and urgent. What is more urgent, in my view, is to return to Adorno's dialectical understanding of the artistic commodity to help us understand art's existence as a social relation, specifically with regard to the (fetish) character of artistic labour. The exposition on use-value that follows will be somewhat elementary and far from novel. Its intention, however, is to offer a corrective to the largely ambiguous or positive (not to say positivist) accounts of the nexus between art and social use which obtain in many otherwise careful surveys of critical, politicized or 'engaged' practices. The structure of an identified art fulfilling an identified use can be melancholically queried or celebrated, but neither of its terms are generally questioned at the same time, and this tends towards the production of conservative accounts. This ends up being the case because the gesture of holding up social use against exchange value is not one that merely disregards what 'socially useful' or 'socially necessary' means in a capitalist society, that is, necessary for

the reproduction of capital. It more saliently expresses the hope for a humanized capitalism in which art plays the very same role as now – mediating the coercion of capitalist contradictions as individuation and singularity – but even more crudely, because any allusion to capital's abstraction would be condemned, if art can only be justified by a display of use-value for the social relations of this abstraction (which still is a use value *for* capital).

Because all capitalist commodities are products of abstract labour, the dimension of use-value supposedly unrelated to their social form is integral to their existences as values. The homogeneity and abstraction of value extends to use-value insofar as use-value is part of the commodity. Use-value bears the same relation to exchange-value as concrete labour does to abstract labour; it is its opposite (particular, individual), but subsumed into the general form of value which hollows out particularity. Moishe Postone identifies 'labour' as a capitalist category and thus a reified one.<sup>45</sup> The same applies to the de-socialised or idealised notion of use-value. Use-value's imbrication with exchange-value has implications even for the complex commodity of art. It testifies that the seeming opposition of art into life versus critical autonomy for art cannot be resolved within the current form of society so long as the social form of their production is determined by value. The form of social labour in capitalism is nowhere the same thing as concrete labour, or even the ahistorical 'metabolic interaction with nature':

“Labour” by its very nature is unfree, unhuman, unsocial activity, determined by private property and creating private property. Hence the abolition of private property will become a reality only when it is conceived as the abolition of “labour” (an abolition which, of course, has become possible only as a result of labour itself, that is to say, has become possible as a result of the material activity of society and which should on no account be conceived as the replacement of one category by another).<sup>46</sup>

Most mainstream and even libertarian communist and socialist theory continues to pose the problem of production as one of separating use-value from exchange-value. Yet a basic value-

form analysis suggests that destruction of the capital-labour relationship must also bracket off and destroy use-value as a constitutive category presupposed by value, thus questioning the category of 'production' itself. The principle that labour cannot serve as a ground for emancipation is a perspective common to the left communist theory of the Frankfurt School, German 'wertkritik' (value-critique) and the ideas around 'communisation' circulating today, as discussed briefly at the beginning of the previous chapter. We can say that art cannot perform this function either, despite all its salutary effects in short-circuiting use and complicating exchange in its object production and modes of subjectivation, which would go under the earlier-cited category of 'modelling' free activity, a speculative liberated labour. A form of modelling which relies, inevitably, on the heteronomous channels of social media or education institutions to disseminate beyond its coteries but which does not yet have the social means to function adequately even as a model. A pedagogical potential that would be secured by a political and affective circuit between the artistic and labouring subjects of human capital remains a 'suspended step'.<sup>47</sup>

### **Artistic Communism – A Speculative Gesture**

In APG, we can see an important bridging practice: between the artist as worker and the artist as manager, between the artist as autonomous creator and the artist as decorative support worker; from the artist enhancing social technique by raising outputs in the factory and the artist as an agent of indeterminacy in the post-industrial organization. It can be said that, like the Utopian Socialists Saint-Simon or Fourier, APG – and John Latham in particular - came up with new metrics for harnessing indeterminacy to the aims of social development (the 'delta unit', the 'long time-base'), while on the other hand, APG sought to turn indeterminacy, or, more classically, artistic 'uselessness', into a quasi-commodity to be sold to corporations and the state. The artist's new lack of a social role could be normalized through the support of these actors, who would acknowledge artistic indeterminacy as useful both in and of itself

and for their own organizational ends. The artist could be socially validated and materially supported by these powerful entities in society for the value of her 'non-specialism' rather than an accomplishment in craft or her work's market value (the artist would no longer be dependent on state funding or market movements to recognize her production). In a sense, this could be read as an attempt to short-circuit the contradiction between artistic labour and abstract labour, turning the former into the latter by directly capitalizing the qualities proper to the former, rather than through the mediations which translated artistic labour into money thus far.

It is in this sense also that APG could in fact be viewed as latter-day Productivists, breaking out of the boundaries of art in order to harness the new-found indeterminacy of the post-object artist's social role - whose activities had no evident market value at the time - to existing social ends. However, the distinction between these projects is inarguable – the APG placements were 'sold' to organizations *on the basis that* there was no set outcome for their presence. This is the importance of the notion that the marketing of artistic indeterminacy was *direct*. We can thus see that APG placements were nonetheless producing an antagonism from their embedded position, precisely because the artistic labour they performed in the workplace demonstrated the potential of all other work performed there to also become 'de-functionalized', to encounter its own contingency.

It is important to emphasize here that it was the indeterminacy of the artist's activity that was the aspirational good promoted to companies. This had a double nature, inasmuch as the vague concept was both advanced on its own and was subtended by a different concept of use or social benefit – 'in the long time-base' – which could not be communicated as clearly to the marketing departments of possible placement contexts as could the somewhat trite

allusions to a kind of 'blue-sky thinking' that pervade APG's discourse. The proposal of new metrics and the ostensibly non-antagonistic version of systemic harmony flowing from their adoption links APG to the tradition of the Utopian Socialists, where Romantic conceptions of the artist's genius – the aesthetic subjectivity discussed in the previous chapter – do not serve as sources for alienation from or negation of capitalist modernity, but instead as the source of its reconstruction on a rational basis, as in, again, the vision of Saint-Simon's artist-engineers. A notion of social use or socially useful labour is advanced which is in many respects quite other than the one which obtains in the capitalist mode of production: a distinctly speculative notion. It is a notion which, like the Adornian understanding of a heteronomously-determined critical autonomy for art, rejects an actual social role for art in the present order, but, unlike Adorno, does not see this critical alienation from use as what links art to the revolutionary negation of the capitalist order. In APG in particular, as we have seen, the avoidance of political content in their proposals about revising the relationship between art and socially useful labour is, while of course strategic, characteristic of the idealism that says there is a functional, rather than socially determinate, separation between artistic labour and abstract labour that rational action by powerful actors and motivated artists can remedy. I would argue further that this is a misrecognition of the instrumentality that such 'uselessness' *already* does have in that order.

In order to demonstrate this, it might be helpful to turn to Stewart Martin's theorization of 'artistic communism', since this represents an important recent attempt to reveal a trajectory for art's progressive trajectory in the writings of the German Romantics and in Marx, but also in the current shape of art's social and economic relations.<sup>48</sup> His hypothesis is that communism is the realization of art in the concrete form of social organization. Unlike the Situationists, art is realized *without* being 'superseded' – communism simply is art, with its

rejection of divisions between work and leisure, labour and life. Crucially, it emerges from the possibilities created for it by 'artistic capitalism', that is, aspects of real subsumption advanced by means of art. He sidesteps the negative dialectic between art as a form of separation resulting from and shaped by the dominance of socially necessary abstract labour and art as a prefiguration or crystallization of the antithesis of the separation. This makes his position an interesting hybrid of APG's pragmatic idealism and the Marxian critique of political economy – in its more 'Left' variants, which denounce labour and use-value as capitalist social forms to be eliminated in a communist future or in the process of 'communisation'. Here, it would be productive to revisit the Romantic aesthetics which set the background for Martin's thesis not only from the perspective which he does employ, which is the confluence of those ideas of free creativity and liberated humanity with Marxian vision of a humanity freely inventing itself in metabolism with nature once it has left behind the bonds of profit-oriented production and its 'asocial sociality'. What I have in mind is a tentative loop- back to the discussion of Kant's aesthetic judgement, with its positing of disinterest as emblematic of this type of judgement, and the initially Romantic, and then avant-garde critical vision of art as alienated from usefulness or useful labour.<sup>49</sup> A caveat should be observed here, however. There is an argument to be made that Kantian 'disinterest' cannot principally think art, or can think art only as a fall from grace from natural beauty, which is untouched by earthly interest. The detachment from interest, or from 'ends', that is proper to aesthetic judgement thus must remain unworldly, an idealist aesthetics in its Kantian variant. The early German Romantics' approach to aesthetic judgement, by contrast, expands this rejection of 'ends' onto the contingencies of the mutual relation of humanity and nature. Humanity and nature are constantly reflected in one another, and this reflection measures the distance between art's propositions and the material relations in which art subsists. Thus, with regard to the aesthetic roots of 'speculation' as a form of subjectivation, the detachment of aesthetics from

instrumental reason is sustained by a specular relation which avoids Kant's tendency to lose all reference to social reality but instead grounds it in the materiality of distance between what is and what can be, an indeterminacy shared between humans and the world. This then brings us back to Marx's affinity to German idealism. As cited earlier, he saw it as introducing an active principle into the relation between matter or nature and humanity or social life, and that, also as cited earlier, it is precisely Kant who proposes a way to think change through matter by furnishing the philosophical tools to separate matter from brute instrumentality.<sup>50</sup>

If we can think about the opposition of disinterest to consumption or exploitation of the object by the subject as an opposition of art to instrumentality, then the argument around use-value as neither innocent nor natural but fully determined by the value relation of a society organized around abstract exchange comes into focus as a negative aesthetic politics – aesthetic in the sense of an affect which sees the distance to be traversed between art's propositions and the social relations that currently obtain as the structural place of art in any project of social transformation. The critical premise of art as autonomous from practical human ends comes to stand in for, if not ideally displace, a humanity independent of the heteronomy of the capital relation; a humanity which can finally undertake a conscious, *aesthetic* project of creative and autonomous self-determination. Certainly we need to be aware of the ambivalence or indeterminacy of disinterest when framing it this way – disinterest as rejection of the use-value of an object or activity (whether this is enjoyment or utility) need not be an antagonistic relation; it can be simply a contemplative one, reinforcing the class relations that obtain on interest and disinterest. Distance from use or consumption does not countervail use or consumption as principles to be upheld outside the aesthetic encounter. A 'contemplative attitude' can be said perhaps to be key to much contemporary art production which is held to be 'asking questions', for example.



With regard to locating where art is now in the project of 'aesthetic communism', Martin does not discuss whether or not art can be considered as really subsumed: what is more salient to his argument is that art acts to facilitate capitalist subsumption more generally through inculcating a culturalised capitalism and a capitalist production of subjectivity. He writes, 'Art needs to be understood within the context of this expanded capitalist subsumption. It is emblematic of a realm beyond traditional wage labour that has become capitalised. [...] The dissolution of art into life not only presents new content for commodification, but a new form of it in so far as art or culture has become a key medium through which commodification has been extended to what previously seemed beyond the economy.'<sup>51</sup> Art is the principal way that autonomy and creativity are commodified by the capitalist mode of production, and a main source of the legitimation of these processes at the same time. However, if we look to the positions articulated in documents such as the 'Oldest Systematic Programme of German Idealism', we can find a post-French Revolutionary-era fervour for the emancipatory potential that lies with art – rather than with labour, or with politics, as it would later do for one of its best-know co-authors, G.F.W. Hegel, and the Hegelian Marx. As Martin notes, 'Art is proposed as the realisation of freedom. Autonomy or self-determination seeks the unconditioned or absolute, and the absolute is revealed in art.'<sup>52</sup> They departed from Kant's concept of aesthetic judgement as a bridge between pure reason and practical action, 'the bridge between freedom and nature', but sought to radicalise the concept into a blueprint for moral and political education as it fed into a re-invention of society. Friedrich Schiller's discussion of beauty and play as the basis for human community in *Letters on Aesthetic Education* is guided by a similar intuition. For him, the unconditioned activity that these moments embody is prefigurative of human freedom, just as aesthetic judgement in Kant helps to actualize freedom, since it operates without a concept on activities and objects which have no end outside themselves. Such a role cannot be played by labour, since it does have a practical-

hence constrained – purpose, and thus presupposes a hierarchy between use and uselessness. For F.W.J. Schelling, even more fundamental is that aesthetic activity transcends conscious or rational activity, because there freedom would be cancelled out by the hierarchy between consciousness and non-consciousness, self and non-self. Only the aesthetic subjectivity of the genius is able to suspend these determinations in his free activity – but aesthetic subjectivity can in principle be enacted by anyone, which it would have to be if it were to supply the basis for an emancipated community.<sup>53</sup> If for Kant, aesthetic judgement was the mediation between human freedom and natural constraint, for the German idealists who followed him, art was hypostasized into the practical unity of these poles.

It is in these formulations about free and unconditioned activity that Martin finds the main affinity between German idealism and Marxism, which envisioned communism in terms of free activity, as well as some divergences – materialism would not recognize art as an 'Absolute' realization of human freedom, since that could only be achieved through the collective self-determination of political action. He concludes that this apparent discrepancy may be reconciled, albeit speculatively, by virtue of positing that both art and communism are centrally concerned with the liberation of life from capital, which is why it is art that capital deploys to effectively subsume life under its regime of valorisation. If this was once achieved via the recourse to the standardizations of the 'culture industry' anatomized by Adorno and Horkheimer, it is now achieved through attention to singularity, contingency and the fractalisation of elite consumption. But this 'artistic capitalism' is always confronted by art's logical and historical affinity to communism.

### **Art – Departure or Destination?**

Martin's speculative conclusion thus transpires at a level of abstraction which takes note of, but doesn't reckon with, some of the consequences of 'artistic capitalism' for the prospects of

'artistic communism'. As I've been discussing, these would include the merging of artistic labour and abstract labour, or the merging of production and reproduction in art as it is in the subject of labour translated into human capital. He is not interested, at least in the text under discussion, in art's conditions of production, but in their mediation and consumption, and his theory of 'artistic capitalism' bears admitted similarity to Guy Debord's concept of the spectacle – a production of passivity, except now this is attained via full mobilization of producers-consumers. Yet, this 'mobilization' is not scrutinized as a semblance of self-activity which is determined by the form of value as it operates differentially within and across art and abstract labour in a mode of production that is speculative insofar as it implants the automatic subject of capital into the logic of every social activity. Perhaps in this manner we can extend the significance of 'artistic capitalism' utilized by Martin to locate a structural correspondence between the logic of art and the logic of capital. It may at least help us avoid the doubtfulness of the categories of 'capitalist' and 'non-capitalist life' which Martin finally comes to when defining a new era of real subsumption where capital has gone beyond subsuming labour to subsuming life directly, and where 'artistic communism' has to confront 'artistic capitalism' as the absolute, and absolutely opposed, vision of human life. Here, we would have to remember the relevant lesson of Foucault's 'biopower' and biopolitics, that is, capital is interested in life insofar as it can be made productive, insofar as it can be made into *labour*.

Despite these reservations, Martin's account is relevant because it tries to think the separation between art and labour, the 'uselessness' of art, in terms of a positive political project, with determinate philosophical and historical roots, and one based on the transformation of labour into free social activity. This differs strongly from many critical Marxist aesthetic accounts of the relationship between art and abstract labour in capital, which eschew the

idealist tendencies of something like 'artistic communism' only to end up with a negative theology of the 'useless' commodity and a political quiescence. APG's project of valorising artistic uselessness – art can renew and refresh value production and its labour routines - makes for an intriguing asymptote with Martin's conception, which pivots on making art truly useless for capital, but useful for communism. This then appears to be a use of art to *ideally* overcome capitalism and realize a communism which looks very much like a generalization of one pole of the art/labour divide, rather than an abolition of the divide itself (though it presupposes the abolition of the divide in a free social activity in order for such a generalization of art to take effect). In this ideal overcoming by means of art, APG and Martin seem to occupy the same ground, in spite of their political disparity. This owes to their common conception of art as the realization of human freedom and the Romantic image of the artist as the subject of this realization. Neither have a concept of the negativity that must be appended to both art – as existing in a state where this realization is indefinitely postponed – and to the realization itself, a realization which, insofar as it opposes the present state of things, may include in this the abolition of an art whose main expression of negativity – uselessness – has already been put to work. In sum, what is illuminating about the practice and proposals of the Artist Placement Group and Stewart Martin's argument alike is that they try to think through the consequences of artistic 'uselessness' for capital, the major strand of negativity in a Romantic aesthetics which otherwise tends to positively absolutise the figure of the artist. They are not content with the immediate practical negation of uselessness by the artist – a labour politics of art; or with dismissing uselessness – autonomy - as a pure ideological fantasy. Both visions, however, defend a non-antagonistic notion of this uselessness, though in Martin's case, an abstract antagonism is found in the stand-off between 'artistic capitalism' and 'artistic communism'. It seems that both try to overcome the dialectical double-bind of art as the dramatization of the conflict between autonomy and

heteronomy, but in leaving this dialectics behind, they seem to end up reinforcing the most uncritical axioms about art's transformatory powers in capitalist society. We could call this perhaps, after Hegel's 'bad infinity', 'bad autonomy'.

## Conclusion

Taking this into account, along with the previous chapter's exploration of aesthetic subjectivity as the 'groundless ground' of both capital's mobilization of creativity – the 'whatever' – and the socially shared indeterminacy that portends a free community, I would like to return in more detail to the 'communicability as such' that both Agamben and Kant locate at the centre of art's emancipatory potential. Here it may help to develop a contrast between 'communicability as such' being the focus on a pure means without outcome as a way of describing both the social and immanent excess (negativity) of the aesthetic with respect to capitalist accumulation and the extent to which this 'communicability as such' is a condition for contemporary labour, especially labour which does not identify itself as labour and is enjoined to identify with capital. The speculative mode of production would then be understood as a *wager* that this labour can be valorised, can be turned into a productive asset, and this done ideally by mediating it as the antithesis to labour, i.e. art. However, this wager, and the speculative structure around it, is highly contradictory and fragile. We could even say that the extent to which it is emblematic is the extent to which it is a lens for capital's systemic problems of valorisation. So long as art is not really subsumed, a labour politics of art can never catch up with those problems, nor succeed in valorising artistic labour on the terms of the worker who is not one. Its survival is only imaginatively, (or, even, *ideologically*) pegged to the survival of the system it helps to reproduce, as in the figure of human capital.

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- 1 The founding document for this argument is Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*, New York: New York University Press, 1979.
  - 2 Fittingly, the notion of communicability emerges in *Means Without End*, although it is developed by him in other writings. See 'Notes on Gesture': 'It is only in this way that the obscure Kantian expression "purposiveness without purpose" acquires a concrete meaning. [...] if we understand the "word" as the means of communication, then to show a word does not mean to have at one's disposal a higher level (a metalanguage, itself incommunicable within the first level), starting from which we could make that word an object of communication; it means, rather, to expose the word in its own mediality, in its own being a means, without any transcendence. The gesture is, in this sense, communication of a communicability. It has precisely nothing to say because what it shows is the being-in-language of human beings as pure mediality.' *Means Without End: Notes on Politics*, Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Cesarino, trans., Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, pp. 58-9. See also Lianne Ngai, 'Indeed, for Kant, what one judges in the pure judgment of taste is less the object or even the feeling of pleasure that follows its judging, but rather the communicability of that feeling.' Adam Jasper, 'Our Aesthetic Categories: An Interview with Sianne Ngai' [http://cabinetmagazine.org/issues/43/jasper\\_ngai.php](http://cabinetmagazine.org/issues/43/jasper_ngai.php) or print edition, No. 43, Fall 2011, pp. 50-1.
  - 3 Ibid., p. 51.
  - 4 These ideas also fall under Rancière's development of the category of the 'aesthetic regime' of art. See note 46 in Chapter Three of the present work.
  - 5 See Sol LeWitt's 'Sentences on Conceptual Art': '1. Conceptual Artists are mystics rather than rationalists. They leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach.' *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*, Kristin Stiles and Peter Selz, eds., Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1996, p. 826. Bruce Nauman's neon piece *The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths* ironises this further, although the 'silly yet serious' (Nauman) statement extends to the pursuit of art as such, not Conceptual art in particular. The Moscow Conceptualism practices of late Soviet times are also interesting in this regard. See Claire Bishop, 'Zones of Indistinguishability: Collective Actions Group and Participatory Art', *e-flux Journal*, No. 29, November 2011, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/zones-of-indistinguishability-collective-actions-group-and-participatory-art/>
  - 6 Thierry de Duve writes: 'As the century went on and the various artistic/political Utopias already implied, for example, in Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, merged with the climate of bohemianism of later romanticism, both madness and genius began to be conceived as forms of alienation that could be brandished as signs of the artist's exclusion from bourgeois society. Herein lies one of the romantic roots of anti-art: this alienation stood and accounted for a paradoxical *sensus communis*, which ran against the bourgeois common sense and was rather a taste for the marginal, the bohemian, the Lumpen, the socially deviant.' *Kant After Duchamp*, Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, pp. 318-19. The social and historical negativity of this 'taste' could be usefully explored further.
  - 7 This is equally the case for successful acts of 'absolute contingency' in derivative trades as we saw with Ayache in the previous chapter. Isabelle Graw notes that when it comes to art, the evaluative and the economic are the two inseparable sides of the act of judgement. This does not of course just hold for judgements of quality ('this is good art, this is bad art'), but epistemological judgements on the order of 'this is art.' 'In the Grip of the Market? On the Relative Heteronomy of Art, the Art World, and Art Criticism', Maria Lind, Olav Velthuis, eds., *Contemporary Art and its Commercial Markets: a Report on Current Conditions and Future Scenarios*, Berlin and Stockholm: Sternberg Press and Tensta Konsthall, 2011, p. 185.
  - 8 Thierry de Duve, *Kant After Duchamp*, as above, pp. 323-4. Also, 'The categorical imperative is the imperative

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of judgment. To make art is to judge art, to decide, to choose.' p. 361.

- 9 Ibid., pp. 358-9.
- 10 See Note 51 in Chapter One of the present work.
- 11 Thierry de Duve, *Kant After Duchamp*, as above, pp. 349-50.
- 12 This is not to impute concrete art institutions and practitioners a uniform tendency to subscribe to such an outlook: the separation of art from labour as constitutive of the social relations of capital places it in this position *structurally*, that is, by default.
- 13 As Peter Osborne illuminatingly writes, 'This is the actual philosophical ground beneath the claim for the autonomy of art: for autonomy not of a type of judgement (Kant), nor merely at the level of appearance (Schiller), but of a certain kind of production of meaning in the object, autopoiesis, distinct from both *techne* and mimesis. Furthermore, this can only be realized under particular historical and institutional conditions, the social relations of which must thus be considered constitutive of the ontological form. This Hegelian addendum, what Adorno called the "dual character of art as autonomy and social fact" (and which might be sharpened into "the dialectical unity of art as autonomy and social fact" ), is crucial if philosophical discourse on art is to be critically mediated with art-historical and cultural-historical discourses, and, thereby, to become capable of engagement with contemporary art in its full and complex specificity.' 'Art Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Criticism, Art History and Contemporary Art', *Art History*, Vol. 27, No. 4, pp. 651-70:670.
- 14 Andrew Culp and Ricky Crano, 'Giving voice to painful things: Interview with Claire Fontaine', *Radical Philosophy*, No. 175, September/October 2012, pp. 43-52: 52.
- 15 See Note 27 in Chapter One of the present work.
- 16 Andrea Fraser, 'From the Critique of Institutions to the Institution of Critique', *Artforum*, September 2005, pp. 277-83: 282.
- 17 Randy Martin, 'From the Derivative to Dance and Back: Economies of Performance', keynote at the 'Performance and Labour' symposium, University College London, 3 November 2012.
- 18 The idea of a 'general performance' as the basis of the new regime of labour and art alike is developed in Sven Lütticken's 'General Performance' in *e-flux journal*, No. 31, January 2012, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/general-performance>
- 19 Denning's analysis is very rich and suggestive, but here I can only touch on this central point of his argument. He writes: 'Unemployment precedes employment, and the informal economy precedes the formal, both historically and conceptually. We must insist that 'proletarian' is not a synonym for 'wage labourer' but for dispossession, expropriation and radical dependence on the market. You don't need a job to be a proletarian: wageless life, not wage labour, is the starting point in understanding the free market.' 'Wageless Life', *New Left Review*, No. 66, November-December 2010, pp. 79-97: 81.
- 20 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume Two, David Fernbach, trans., London: Penguin Books, 1992, p. 271.
- 21 Kerstin Stakemeier, personal correspondence.
- 22 Jason Smith, 'Preface', in Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*, Francesca Cadel and Giuseppina Mecchia, trans., Los Angeles, semiotext(e), 2009, pp. 13-14.
- 23 Diedrich Diederichsen, 'Animation, De-reification, and the New Charm of the Inanimate', *e-flux journal*, no. 36, July 2012, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/animation-de-reification-and-the-new-charm-of-the-inanimate>
- 24 'He must constantly treat his labour-power as his own property, his own commodity, and he can do this only by placing it at the disposal of the buyer, i.e. handing it over to the buyer for him to consume, for a definite period of time, temporarily. In this way, he manages both to alienate [*veräußern*] his labour-power and to avoid

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- renouncing his rights of ownership over it'. (Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume One, Ben Fowkes, trans., London: Penguin Books, 1990, p. 271). It has been suggested that for this reason – the problem of alienating the capacity from the bearer in the same way as any other commodity sold in the market – it is more clarifying to speak of labour-power as rented rather than bought. The problem with the formulation of labour-power as a commodity for sale and purchase stems also from the assumption of 'free labour' that sustains it, that is, a worker free to enter into a contract for the 'sale' of her labour-power. This level of freedom for wage-labour remains far from universal in the present, from the formal or the practical standpoint, as it did in Marx's day, although it was important to heuristically make that assumption in order to make the epochal distinction between wage-labour in capital from feudal (serf or bonded) conditions of labour and slavery.
- 25 Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito, Andrea Casson, trans., Los Angeles and New York: semiotext(e), 2004, p. 83.
- 26 Ibid., p. 82.
- 27 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume One, as above, p. 283.
- 28 Compare Franco "Bifo" Berardi, who writes of 'the submission of intelligent life to the dead object, the domination of the dead over the living.' (*The Soul at Work*, as above, p. 188). In the social form of human capital, the desire to maximise value animates all forms of capital, and the distinction between dead and living ceases to apply; this might signify that the victory of the dead over the living is complete. This is then just a paraphrase of the fetishism of commodities, and thus not a novel observation. It does point to the alchemical capacity of equivalence and exchange to eliminate distinctions – the relationship to money is universal, thus all that exists exists as capital – even while reinforcing competitive and entrepreneurial logics (non-equivalence). Credit and the spread of financialisation more broadly, as I wrote in Chapter Two, is the alembic in which these two not necessarily compatible logics gain social effectivity.
- 29 'Report on the Year's Activities', 1975, Tate Archives (TGA 20042/2/1/3), Tate Britain, London, unpaginated. Accessed 7 August 2012.
- 30 This term was applied to the placements from 1975 onwards.
- 31 John Latham, 'NOIT Now', APG News, No. 1, May 1969. In the accompanying publication to the exhibition *The Individual and the Organisation: Artist Placement Group 1966-79* at Raven Row, London 27 September-16 December 2012, there is a reproduction of APG's letterhead dated 1968 which proclaims them to be an 'Industrial Liaison and Consultant Service'. The change to limited company status in 1970 was meant to open up another income stream for APG, as it would enable them raise funds for services rendered on a commission basis. (exhibition publication, p. 32).
- 32 Margaret A. Rose, *Marx's Lost Aesthetic: Karl Marx and the Visual Arts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- 33 They elaborate on this later in the same report's 'Summary': 'APG is approaching Organisations to represent the Delta factor, or "general other activity" , which in terms of the structure of the whole generates attention potential. These in turn generate "wealth" in its most human manifestation. They have an organic function within a total or world economy. There is no way of predicting where or when this function will appear, or in what form or context. The principle is to cultivate the context.' 'Report on the Year's Activities', 1975, as above.
- 34 Ibid., unpaginated.
- 35 Ibid., unpaginated; John Latham, *Report of a Surveyor*, London and Stuttgart: Edition Hansjörg Mayer, 1984; John A. Walker, *John Latham: The incidental person – his art and ideas*, London: Middlesex University Press, 1995; Claire Bishop, 'The Rate of Return', *Artforum*, October 2010, p. 231-7; Peter Eeley, 'Context is Half the Work', *Frieze*, No. 111, November-December 2007.
- 36 An example of factor X would be the 'Protestant ethic', or other instances of cultural or sociological influence



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- on rational-actor exchange relations. See Robert E. Lucas, 'On the Mechanics of Economic Development', *Journal of Monetary Economics*, No. 22, 1988, pp. 3-42.
- 37 Critiques of APG from the Left claimed that the placements served to legitimise corporations. The APG response to was that the systems of time and measurement used by their critics on the Left and the Right, as well as the designation Left and Right themselves, were inapplicable to a project that was trying to work with a different conception of time and accounting altogether (the latter being the delta unit, or 'unit of attention'). See Claire Bishop, as above; Peter Eeley, as above; Howard Slater, 'The Art of Governance', <http://www.infopool.org.uk/APG.htm>; John A. Walker, 'The Individual and the Organisation', <http://www.artdesigncafe.com/Artist-Placement-Group-APG-John-Latham-Barbara-Steveni>
- 38 Gustav Metzger, 'A Critical Look at Artist Placement Group', *Studio International*, Vol. 183, No. 940, January 1972, pp. 4-5; Stuart Brisley, 'No, it is not on', *Studio International*, Vol. 183, No. 942, March 1972, pp. 95-6.
- 39 Graham Hancock, 'Artist and Organisation Report on APG', September/October 1975. Accessed 10 November 2012 at *The Individual and the Organisation: Artist Placement Group 1966-79* at Raven Row, London.
- 40 Alan Davey, Chief Executive, Arts Council England, 'The Arts Council Plan, 2011-2015', p. 5 [http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/pdf/Arts\\_Council\\_Plan\\_2011-15.pdf](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/pdf/Arts_Council_Plan_2011-15.pdf) Such language is of course mild considered in light of the Scottish government's decision to abolish its own Arts Council in 2008-2010 and establish a quasi-non-governmental organisation called Creative Scotland to 'invest' in a cultural landscape of 'opportunities' that is heavily nationalist and economic in its outlook and strategically does not mention 'artists' as its constituency at all. See <http://www.creativescotland.com/resources/our-publications/corporate-plan> as well as 'Investing, Advocating, Promoting... strategically: Andrew Dixon, Chief Executive of Creative Scotland, interviewed by Daniel Jewesbury', *Variant*, No. 41, <http://www.variant.org.uk/41texts/adixon41.html> and "' Language is never neutral" ', *Variant*, No. 42, <http://www.variant.org.uk/42texts/Languageis.html>
- 41 Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, Robert Hullot-Kentor, trans., London: Continuum, 2007, p. 1.
- 42 Howard Slater, as above.
- 43 John Roberts, 'Productivism and its Contradictions: A Short History of Productivism', (*What is the Use of Art?* Special issue of *Chto Delat?*, Vol. 1, No. 25, March 2009, pp. 10-11) and Maria Gough, *The Artist as Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: California University Press, 2005) are two good instances of art-historical re-assessments of early Soviet experiments with the boundaries of artistic and industrial production. It should here be mentioned 'Productivism' was not a state policy but an experimental approach that emerged from an ongoing debate in the early Soviet groups – which had various degrees of institutionalisation and state support – Proletkult, INKhUK (Institute of Artistic Culture) and the Vkhutemas (Higher Art and Technical Studios). The intention of opening artists', designers' and architects' studios in the factories was to dismantle the traditional forms of labour and provide means to expand this slave-like labour in front of the machines into a creative process. This revolutionizing of the labour process into a more humane and participatory one, as well as the questioning of 'production' as such in a revolutionary situation, evolved gradually into the subsumption to efficiency goals (thus truly 'Productivist' ones) from War Communism and the early 1920s over the transition to NEP and then Stalinism.
- 44 Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, 'Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions', *October*, Vol. 55, Winter 1990, pp. 105-43.
- 45 See especially the chapter on abstract labour in Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 123-186) and my discussion of this material in Chapters One and Two of the present work.
- 46 Karl Marx, 'Draft of an Article on Friedrich List's book: Das Nationale System der Politischen Oekonomie' (1845), *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, Volume 4, Moscow, London and New York: Progress Publishers,

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Lawrence & Wishart and International Publishers, 1975, p. 265.

47 Stefano Harney, personal correspondence. See also B.L., 'The suspended step of communisation', *SJC: International Journal for Communisation*, No. 1, November 2011, pp. 147-69.

48 Stewart Martin, 'Artistic communism - a sketch', *Third Text*, Vol. 23, No. 4, 2009, pp. 481-94.

49 Hegel, in his lectures on aesthetics, has a concise reference to the stakes of Kantian disinterest. Disinterest is deemed crucial not just for the audience of art but constitutive of the kind of activity art is. 'Thus, the interest of art distinguishes itself from the practical interest of *desire* by the fact that it permits its object to subsist freely and in independence, while desire utilizes it in its own service by its destruction.' G. W. F. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, Bernard Bosanquet, trans., edited and with intro and commentary by Michael Inwood, London: Penguin Books, 1993, p. 43.

50 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology, Part One*, C.J. Arthur, ed., London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970.

51 Stewart Martin, 'Artistic communism - a sketch', as above, p. 482.

52 Ibid., p. 484.

53 Ibid., p. 485.

## Conclusion: Whither Speculation?

In this thesis, my project has been to develop a theory of 'speculation as a mode of production' in art and capital which is capable of articulating how speculation is and has been rendered productive for capital – not just in the hegemonic instance of finance, or its transformative effects on the social, but as a general logic which thrives on open-endedness and the conversion of capitalist imperatives like the expansion of value ('real subsumption') into a social logic of infinite creativity at a time of maximal social contraction. Speculation thrives on valorising previously un-capitalised or indirectly capitalised domains. Art is exemplary here because it is a domain that is 'socially speculative' – unconstrained, that is, removed from social, economic or conceptual constraint since it emerged as an autonomous sphere in modernity – and thus in a position to model forms of labour and subjectivity that suggest emancipation, or at least protection, from exposure to capital's orders. What does this mean for the present moment? Insofar as speculation can be deemed a mode of production, it is important to see just how it is rendered productive in order to see how that rendering is thwarted or fragile, and what kinds of co-ordinated social action need to happen to change the circumstances in which it takes place. We need to comprehend how it is that artistic indeterminacy appears in both the guise of an extension of value imperatives and their negation, a dialectic which becomes much more pronounced in the times of social crisis that ensue from capital's inability to successfully valorise itself and when the relations that sustain that valorisation are thrown into doubt as well.

The aim of this thesis has been to depict artistic production, along with the figure of the artist, as emblematic of larger shifts in capital accumulation, the nature of work and the production of subjectivity that goes with a 'speculation' become socially general. In theorizing these conditions, I tried to pick out the contradictions and antagonisms that constitute the negativity of both artistic practice and wage-labour with regard to capital accumulation. In

our era, this accumulation is increasingly premised on occluding the nature of labour and art as not-capital, effecting a de-politicization which identifies their goals with that of capital: self-expansion for the sake of profit. This part of my argument was above all an inquiry into whether contemporary artistic labour can be said to have distinctly modified the character of abstract labour, just as the dominance of fictitious capital heralds a 'speculative' mode overtaking capitalist production and capitalist society.

Further, in drawing attention to this negativity, which lends itself to structural, historical and ontological types of analysis, I wished to retain focus on the correspondence between the artistic subject as it has developed since the modern era and the 'automatic subject' of capital. This is the affirmative axis of art's relationship to capital and one that I have examined through notions such as autonomy and heteronomy, the aesthetic subject, and aesthetic judgement. The establishment of art's 'complicity' with capital was not here the central concern; the objective was rather to establish how art and labour's participation in the 'generic' – analytically and practically – can be compared to the hollow and self-expanding core of capital's relation of itself to itself that preserves its character through all changes in form and context. The idiom of 'human capital', designed to conclusively replace labour-power's potentiality for negation of capital with an all-encompassing desire for valorisation common to labour-power and capital alike seems germane in this respect. It is such a helpful term because it at once reflects an affirmation of capital and a subversive critique. From the side of ideology, it describes the desired symbolic erasure of labour by capital, while as a structural diagnosis, it describes the subject of debt who has no option but to 'self-invest'. The subject is thus at the same time 'human capital' in her own set of constraints, and a source of accumulation to financial capital which extracts profits from her speculative 'investments'. Art, here, is seen as the emancipatory discourse which conveys the 'spontaneous ideology' of neoliberalism's notion of this kind of subject: not a cost-benefit

analysing homo economicus but the creatively fecund subject curating her brand value.

It may be objected here that my account partakes of certain unwelcome conventions of Marxian cultural critiques of 'late capitalism'. According to art theorist Gail Day, such accounts share some features. The use-value of art is denegated, or dismissed as shallowly ideological, in the service of a chiliastic and one-sided prognosis of the irresistible spread of 'social abstraction' across the contemporary lifeworld, in which contradiction and resistance become notional in general and voluntaristic at best. Narratives which see a fully reified art reflecting a fully commodified set of social relations, in which exchange-value has been hypostatized to the degree that there is no longer even a memory of 'loss' much less of what has been lost, tend to depart from two touchstones in particular: Adorno's category of art as the 'absolute commodity' without a particle of use-value and Baudrillard's thesis in *The Mirror of Production* that the prevalence of the 'sign' and its simulacral exchanges has effectively eclipsed the naturalism – and politics – of use-values.<sup>1</sup> The consequences tend to converge on a horizon of abstract radicalism tinged by nostalgia. Day offers an admirable discussion of the closures of such accounts in her recent book, arguing that:

Understanding use value as a socially determinate form is central not only to Marx's account of the historical specificity of social forms and categories but also to his analysis of exploitation and social contradiction. Attending to the specific social form of use value – as opposed to focusing on use value as content alters the perspective on the cultural account of social abstraction.<sup>2</sup>

In full agreement with this stance, I would like to now reflect more precisely about the relationship of the categories I cited above – and throughout the thesis – of abstract labour, art, and speculation, to use-value. The previous chapter's 'Excursus on Use-Value' was intended to set out an orientation to use-value as just such a 'socially determinate form' which bears a very specific relationship to art, whether art is understood as keeping use-value in abeyance or courting it directly. It is important to consider the specificity of this

relationship, for instance, when considering the use-value of labour and art to capital: the use-value of labour to capital is that it generates surplus value, the use-value of art to capital is that it creates an 'aperture in use' – that it is useless because of the kind of social form that it is. Insulated from direct social use, it is very much a commodity, a desirable and profitable asset class. In order to develop this argument, we need to, as Day cautions, see use-value as one side of value, a side of value which the value-form cannot shed without ceasing to exist as a determinate social form in the capitalist society. Thus, 'total' social abstraction, however 'real', is a fanciful polemic, though capital's logic may displace and compress its dealings with the so-called concrete in time and space, and critical analysis should always look for labour and use (value) where it is deemed to be missing, for instance in art. Nonetheless, holding on to the category of use in critical socio-economic analysis which takes as its central lens the form of value does not mean, and cannot mean that, when dealing with art we can unproblematically assign it a category of use-value on the basis of it seeming to be 'objectively' useful to social actors and activities besides the obvious propagandistic use that can devolve upon an exceptional area of unproductive activity (that of legitimating the capital relation or its wealthy specimens). This kind of use is contingent upon art emulating other social activities, such as education or therapy, and the degree of use of this kind depends on a willingness to downplay its character as art, thus downplaying the conditions which allow the emulation to occur. Hence, this scepticism should extend to art which announces its 'use-value' through political or institutional critique, taking care to forswear any simply supportive role which it would locate or have located for it. The use-value of art, insofar as we can speak in these terms, has to be located in the abeyance of use, not in its identifications with it. The reason for this is that the articulations, and even the methodologies, that artistic practices deploy to establish their negativity or surplus to the existent, are effective only insofar as they remain comprehensible as art, even at its extreme boundary of meaning or process. This

comprehensibility relies on the scission of art from use-value and useful labour (labour useful to capital), and so long as social relations are mediated by the form of value, this scission is *absolute*.

Although art is not-labour, I have found that it is both indirectly mediated by and directly contains – whether the analysis is trained at the level of artworks or the institution of art – abstract labour (wage-labour), without which it could not be produced as a special kind of non-labour activity or a special kind of non-use-value bearing commodity. It is in this sense that I spoke of art as 'reproductive' in the sense that reproduction maintains the capital relation without itself being directly mediated by it, like unpaid domestic labour or being a student or community work, with the different degrees of personal and market coercion typically implied in each of these realms. Reproduction has a systemic function which is grounded on its status of exceptionality from the contractual relations of the wage, yet operates in proximity to them. Art is exemplary here because it does not directly produce or reproduce the commodity of labour-power, as Marxist analyses of unpaid housework or education have argued is happening in those spheres. With its proximity to the speculative art market, it reproduces the commodity of labour-power in analogy with the reproduction of the value-form itself by inculcating not-labour in the artist as free activity's pact with capital's own growth process: human capital. Any work that is not done for remuneration is done as an investment, and those who don't work for a living must be investors. This nexus of financial – or, more concisely, capital – logic and autonomy is most crucially illustrated in and by art because art is already defined as that which gives itself its own law and can thus more easily be aligned with the self-valorisation of capital, as opposed to other forms of work which must be visibly transformed through managerial paradigms from work for others into work for self, into entrepreneurship. We thus saw how art is defined in the Modern era, a state exacerbated in the 'post-medium' or 'post-Conceptual' condition, by the emergence of the aesthetic

subject as a particular type of individual whose relationship to social reality is one of judgement and selection, who assumes a critical distance from the types of useful or profitable activity which are deemed normative in that reality. The artist renounces direct influence on social reality in favour of the capacity of contributing something genuinely new to it which will, for that reason, often go unrecognised. This formula, while generative of many kinds of a/political commitments among artists in the past two centuries or so, was both founded in and gave rise to the bourgeois romanticism of the artist and its corollary notion of artistic labour: work cannot be evaluated in 'economic' terms but rather in terms of a 'life', the 'life' which both capitalist and working classes have had to renounce. Art was pre-eminently - if not residually - the only activity available which had its own intrinsic end. In this way it was always 'pure' speculation, since capital's goal - self-expansion - is also intrinsic to itself.

I have proposed that this is important to consider not only in light of art's continued engagements with labour, but the recent emphasis on the sphere of art as not only a place where 'services' and 'experiences' are generated, but as a site where infrastructures are generated - here we can think of distribution networks, educational and archiving 'turns' in 'social practice'. Such practices can be understood as laying the stress on a proximity to extra-artistic forms of socially necessary labour which is pragmatic rather than traditionally critical, deploying the resources and freedom available in the sphere of art, particularly when such infrastructures are deemed to be in crisis more generally. The emphasis on infrastructure highlights the reproductive aspect of contemporary art's relationship to social labour. It additionally reflects the sway of Thierry de Duve's 'generic' in its abdication of artistic marking in favour of a nebulous reflexivity and functionality. One could even say that it hearkens back to the construction of the artist as the (contingent) centre of aesthetic judgement, as explicated by de Duve. Like Duchamp's original gesture, the staging of useful infrastructure in the art institution discloses the power of the institution and the artist in its ability to valorise



any object or practice as art. However, it abjures the institutional critique which that gesture can now be said to have long since exhausted, seeing the art institution as simply a site of material resources and conviviality.

Here it might be apposite to consider the category of 'intrinsic value' as a term currently migrating from arts funding policy to everyday discourse in the UK. 'Intrinsic value' seems to be a term that helpfully marks a conjunction between the notion of human capital and that of the 'Big Society'. 'Intrinsic value' refers to what is produced by work not only when it is disconnected from the cash nexus but as a justification for disconnecting previously paid kinds of work from the cash nexus because it is either satisfying or necessary to perform for its own sake. The work would in fact be less satisfying if it was performed for a wage as the justification for working would be money and not the 'intrinsic value' of the task. The wage, then, comes to signify alienated labour, and its absence, the full identification of the worker with her task. While such constructions are familiar from volunteering and internship contexts, whether they are promoted by the organization or freely assumed by the workers themselves, they start to take on another valence in times of economic contraction where the state is determined to renew accumulation by lowering the value of labour-power. The performance of work of 'intrinsic value' thus comes to guarantee social cohesion in times of austerity. We again see art as pioneering these kinds of concepts and discourses, as the emancipatory valence of labour undertaken for its own sake – without an employer, demand or even an objective in mind - is definitive of the kind of activity art is. Further, it is the centrality of 'intrinsic value' to art as a practice and an institution that defines its reproductive task in the social relations of capital, since it is both absolutely emblematic of the rule of the value-form (the 'absolute commodity') and prefigures a world where labour and exchange can be structured in radically other ways. We could say that art both has a value – market value, say – and is a value: intrinsic value, or, autonomy. 'Intrinsic value' becomes in fact, a

more 'socially useful' inflection for 'autonomy' in art and, as such, is probably the most effective delivery mechanism for heteronomous goals. All sectors of capitalist production which are indirectly mediated by it, and remain relatively un-subsumed, are sectors which are required to demonstrate, or depart from, their 'intrinsic value', and this is what lends them reproductive significance for the system as a whole. As we saw above, this intrinsic value can be used to mediate de-valorisation in sectors of capitalist production and reproduction (such as welfare state institutions), and also e.g. bring art and labour closer together on a shared terrain of value without price. So, under general conditions of the de-valorisation of labour-power, it is evident that abstract labour becomes a more adequate category for discussing the relationship between art and labour. This is because the social form of labour changes in its most typical features as it moves to include those typical facets of artistic labour that help to drive down the value of labour-power overall. Whereas the artist was until not very long ago, and in some quarters is still, the prototype for the ultimately self-exploiting worker of the creative industries and the paragon of the entrepreneurial self, now this entrepreneurship comes back as 'community work' and is mystified as social solidarity. This operation can only be effective because social solidarity is required to compensate for the withdrawal of social provision, turning the effect into its own cause. Labour-power is thus subsumed into capital but without a wage, generating what we might then call 'hyper-surplus value' in sectors which were once reproductive, rather than productive of value.

So here we can see that artistic work, as the paradigm of an activity undertaken for 'its own sake', having only an indirect relationship to financial reward, personal advancement or social instrumentality, becomes the paradigm for promoting wageless labour, more or less coercively (if we think of such labour on a continuum from internships to workfare), where work itself becomes an aspect of an 'experience economy', premised on the subject as her own speculative capital. In this way, artistic labour directly ties into austerity-era re-

structuring of the capital-labour relation, as more and more social activity is re-allocated into the upkeep of this relation even as its material premises show signs of breaking down. We need to look more closely at how the category of art can be used to valorise work which is not directly valorised by capital, that is, through the payment of a wage.

In this light, we can discern the speculative assumptions of artistic subjectivity and artistic labour reflected in the recomposition of work at large, aiding in the promotion of 'imaginary subsumption'. It seems to offer one more, and very apposite, way of thinking about the relation between art and real subsumption, with the vector of 'imaginary' hewing close to the idea of art as a logic and a haven of double-edged 'speculative practices'. The term 'imaginary subsumption', which would need to be developed far more closely and in analytic proximity to Marx and Marxist writers on the category of subsumption, is taken from a recent article by William Clare Roberts on the re-structuring of the university along corporate lines. Roberts defines 'imaginary subsumption' as the process whereby 'prices have been slapped on things that nonetheless have no real value, much as in Marx's discussion of the "imaginary price" that can be set on honor or conscience', a situation in which '[t]he profit motive is not effective, but everyone is supposed to act as if it were.'<sup>13</sup> He notes that imaginary subsumption may lead directly to real subsumption, without passing through formal subsumption: production may be re-organized along capitalist lines without capital coming into ownership or control of the production process. The exemplary instance given by Roberts of this is the university transformed by the 'managerial revolution' into behaving as if it is producing commodities and serving costumers when the nature of education – whatever the price charged – and the relationship between staff and students is nothing of the kind. But we can also think of art institutions, art colleges and artist studios adopting such organizational and disciplinary forms – hierarchies, outputs, performance assessments - even though they do not employ commodity-producing labour (we have to keep in mind that art objects may find a

price in the market but that insofar as they are not produced through surplus-value producing wage-labour, they have no value). Additionally, as we have already said, artistic practice is in a position to promote imaginary subsumption due to its structural role of mediating labour as free activity, even when, under the form of value, unpaid labour can never be anything other than human capital in crisis. It thus has an important role to play in socializing and humanizing capital in its mode of imaginary subsumption, when 'productive labour' is no longer at issue. The resurgence of 'human' or sometimes 'social capital' paradigms seems corollary to a general withdrawal of capital from reproduction of wage-labour, even if it is not averse from drawing profits from the privatization of the resources that are needed for that reproduction. It is also at such times that we can see 'human capital' regain its emancipatory valence, when there doesn't seem to be any other capital around.<sup>4</sup>

Art, again, reflects and transforms this situation and this set of ideological co-ordinates. Once we could say with Hegel, in his analysis of the Romantic concept of artistic genius which held sway in his time and which he was concerned to undermine:

For the work of art came to be regarded no longer as the product of an activity general in mankind, but as the work of a mind endowed with wholly peculiar gifts. This mind, it is thought, has then nothing to do but simply to give free play to its particular gift, as though it were a specific force of nature, and is to be entirely released from attention to laws of universal validity, as also from the interference of reflection in its instinctively creative operation.<sup>5</sup>

Now we live in an era where the 'generic' has supplanted 'genius' as the operative category of art's self-understanding and its relationship to its outside. Since the era of Conceptualism and the various 'de-materializations' of the art object or even the artist (APG), but really onwards from Duchamp, the artist is a 'generic' or 'incidental' subject who need produce no works which would be intuitively interpreted as art – it is simply her selection or production of 'anything', her performance of any kind of activity, that is designated art, since she is ratified as an artist by the art institution, the institution which she reproduces with every work. The

activity of art has collapsed into the aesthetic, since 'judgement' is the emblematic gesture for both. And yet the 'generic' is not equivalent to a return of art to 'general activity' from which the category of genius tried to elevate it: the form of artistic labour remains different from abstract labour, even as its content becomes indistinguishable from any other act of heteronomous or subsumed labour. This is because the 'generic' as a modality of artistic production did not suspend nor do away with the category of the 'genius'; the 'genius' remains the foundation of artistic subjectivity, its principle of identity (and non-identity) and thus of the institution of art, even as 'the generic' becomes the universal parameter of artistic activity. Here we would need to explore the pivotal role of authorship in art as a metric, a currency and added value, and how this relates – often directly – to speculative value as it drives both the financialisation of the economy and the de-monetisation of socially necessary labour.

As John Roberts has discussed extensively, art is mobilized to approach closer, albeit asymptotically, to the current state of 'social technique' which prevails in society, be that the use of technology, legal structures, cultural logics or forms of labour.<sup>6</sup> He posits a dialectic of de-skilling and re-skilling which artistic labour undergoes, refracting these tendencies in non-artistic labour processes. This is proximate to what I am naming 'the generic'. The more art is de-skilled, the more it becomes indistinguishable from other kinds of labour, the more the artistic subject becomes truly automatic, that is, reproducing the art institution as the distinct kind of subject that she is, consolidating herself as an artist regardless of the material and social diversity of her actions or inactions. But the generic, paradoxically, still relies for its justification on the artistic genius cited above. We saw this in the instance of the Artist Placement Group and their 'Incidental Person'. The idea of a non-specialized specialist who can exert transformative agency in sites of business and administration simply by dint of who she is is indebted to the Romantic (and, parenthetically, the Saint-Simonian) notion of the

artist's irreducibly distinct capacities. 'Talent is specific, and genius universal capability, with which a man has not the power to endow himself simply by his own self-conscious activity.'<sup>7</sup> Artmaking can never be mediated as a simple product of 'training'; it takes a special kind of person. This distinctive quality can then in principle be extended to everyone, whether or not their activities are pursued or recognized as art, and this is what is captured in the notion of 'human capital' – the exploitation of distinctive and intangible qualities.

To sum up this discussion on the generic for now, we can connect it to the foregoing discussion of use-value. Use-value is closely imbricated with identity: a worker's identity, for example. If the 'generic' refers to a loss of occupational identity, or to discrete products produced in the labour-process, then we can venture that the condition of the 'generic' can describe greater and greater swathes of concrete labour in capital, as well as being the enabling condition for art. In my third chapter, I briefly mentioned communisation theory and its argument about the loss of positive formations of workers' identity. A positive formation would be a worker's identification with their work, and with the politics deriving from that identity. This means that labour as an identity whose politics are grounded in use as opposed to the power of capital, which is founded in exchange. What, then, could be the use-value of the 'generic'? Use-value is a pole of value, and it is positively separable neither from exchange-value nor from the form of value for this reason. However, it is also one side of a contradiction, since labour-power is the source of value and the immanent negation of capital. There is a structural antagonism between capital and labour, just as there is between art and capital, although both art and labour's role in capital's reproduction disguises this fact. Art has no use-value, but increasingly much of the activity performed as wage-labour does not have it either. Can we then find a way to a dialectical concept of use-value founded in the 'generic' of both art and labour that would pose a challenge to the politics of identity of any kind and to the generic as it currently functions to maintain an unbearable totality? To do

this, we would have to develop a far more concrete and politically responsive understanding of negativity as an operative sphere where use is defended and deconstructed at the same time, and the reifications of use (labour) and uselessness (art) which make capital disappear from the scene of action and analysis, thus preventing this task from getting under way. One way to elaborate such an understanding is to conduct a more in-depth analysis of 'value-reflexive' art: artistic gestures which confront art's affinity to the form of value through their methods and concepts. From this we could go on to deduce how the art market is itself an exemplary and an eccentric instance of speculation as a mode of production, exhibiting its insular and erratic tendencies in high relief, as well as legitimating its accumulation of capital through non-economic motives. This latter is one of the definitive aspect of speculation as a mode of production, and while this work has primarily been concerned to follow the implications of this for the changing conditions of labour, my future research will try to follow this other trajectory of 'value-reflexive' art practices which take financial speculation as their immanent logic.

To conclude, the question could be whether the thesis has fully determined the relevance of art in speculation as a mode of production. It remains an open question, as the object cannot be fully determined since, as an analogue of value, it exists in time and in process. If art can still be considered the antithesis of social fact (autonomy), regardless of how effectively this antithesis can be implemented to support the social fact (heteronomy) – an effectiveness predicated on its autonomy – then it remains a praxis and a model of relations to the individual and collective, to things and concepts, which are other, if not necessarily inimical, to the value relations which currently obtain. It is not to disavow art's reproductive function for those relations, nor the divisions of social labour which produce it as exceptional or the classed, gendered and racialised divisions of labour within the institution of art per se, to acknowledge that art's uselessness is actually as well as potentially a source of antagonism in

a society of 'human capital' where use-value is no longer thinkable apart from exchange-value. Weak and formalistic as this hypothesis might seem on its face, it is this very uselessness that endows art with its characteristic power within real abstraction, be it the emblematic power of enhancing an autonomised capital with the glamorous brand of artistic autonomy or inculcating a knowing alienation from capital's purposes and ideals. This dialectic of autonomy and heteronomy can be seen in the art institution as a site of pedagogy, whose own material conditions necessarily remain beyond the scope of the criticality otherwise encouraged. But it is the presumptive uselessness of art that allows this dialectic to become visible in a way that cannot apply to other sites of critical educational – or professional – practice, where this kind of disjunction between form and content is programmatically subsumed into the tenets of service or professionalism: in other words, where the use-value of an education or a practice can never be seriously questioned. As we saw with the previous chapter's discussion of the politics of German Romantic aesthetics, it is precisely in the distance from calcified use-values that a materialist relation between humanity and the world it has produced has a chance of being actualized. This is the logic of 'speculation' which rhymes with collective experimental praxis of which we cannot afford to lose sight, even if what we know of art, labour and production cease to exist in the process of this actualization.

If art faithfully mirrors and imparts the 'pedagogy of human capital',<sup>8</sup> being a realm of social production accustomed to eliding and mystifying labour, this does not mean that the fidelity has no bounds. On this point, there has been extensive attention to a mooted 're-politicization' of art since the global economic crisis was judged to have affected the health of the art market, while the critical traction of the sorts of complicity and self-referentiality that market used to embrace diminished thanks to the upsurge of popular protest against austerity. Such prognoses have turned out to be more or less hollow- there have been few



structural repercussions for art – or the art market – from the epiphenomena of the crisis. Here, as elsewhere, if we are to look for the sources of art's material and ideal oppositionality to capital's social relations, 'politicization' should not be seen as a matter of consciousness or an empirical tendency observed on a narrow scale. We have to see where art situates itself in the real abstraction that permeates those relations, specifically in the changing configuration of forces between capital and labour. This is not an extrinsic relation, of course: art, in the figure of the aesthetic subject, is constitutive of real abstraction as it developed historically in capitalist modernity. If this figure existed in a relation of alterity to the mainstream of social relations in capital in the 19th century up to the recent past, the normalization of 'human capital' has placed the 'aesthetic subject' and its excess, singularity and speculative ethos at the centre of subject constitution, labour discipline and value production. This can be seen directly, as in worker- management relations, or indirectly, as in culture-led urban re-development projects which elevate speculation above production and flexibility over labour. However, to examine the political possibilities of this new centrality, we would have to return to the substantive Marxist question of the revolutionary determinations stemming from role in the relations of production or, in class composition terms, the relationship between technical and political composition. This is not within the scope of the present work, which must restrict itself to indicating the kinds of contradictions the social centrality of speculation entails for both artistic labour and wage-labour.

Another avenue I have attempted to open up with this thesis might pertain to the formation of 'artistic research' as a field of useless knowledge production. As currently constituted, 'artistic research' is a knowledge field shaped by the existing state of the academy and its hierarchies of discipline and labour. It is thus an entity which aligns, if obliquely in practice, with the disciplinary norms and marketable 'impacts' which organize other fields of knowledge production. However, it also evokes a notion of 'research' as a means whereby the

open-endedness of artistic praxis can veer into practical critique, can enact the negative dialectics of use and uselessness, ornamental and emancipated labour which generally subsist as a mere representation within the confines of the art institution. Without doubt, such a vision stands in tension with 'artistic research' marking the place of art's subsumption into academic protocols and economies, itself a sign of 'imaginary subsumption'. I provisionally conclude here, with this inadequate gesture to the outside of re-conceiving research as a potentially militant praxis for art which can easily wander beyond the weakly subsumptive confines of the academy. 'Weakly subsumptive' contexts may be the best we can hope for at present: other mediations will have to arise in new social configurations which articulate art with its others if art's incalculably dense and strange forms of deixis are to be approached as forms of truth.

The relationship between art and labour in the speculative mode of production has been shown to be one of reference, mimesis, and negativity. Secular changes in the logic of capital valorisation have their respective impacts on the antithetical character of each to the other, finding new economic uses and labour processes for art and new forms of speculative and unwaged self-investment for labour. The historical roots of the emergence of each as a self-contained logic, and the politics of the scission between them have been glossed but much more remains to be excavated and concrete arguments made if we are to assess not only how art and labour have been distorted and re-shaped by a speculative phase of capital, but where their own speculative and negative dynamics are taking them in the future as a crisis-ridden capital can only head further in the direction of speculative valorisation.

Hopefully, this presentation of future research directions has not appeared as a detour into dispersal at just the point where the threads should come together to form a perfect illusion of a landscape in perspective. As my field of investigation has been the speculative and the

indeterminate, my conclusion must remain appropriately provisional, or, rather, the conclusions must be sought as they emerge throughout the thesis and not at its end.

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- 1 Jean Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production*, Mark Poster, trans., New York: Telos Press, 1975.
  - 2 Gail Day, *Dialectical Passions: Negation in Postwar Art Theory*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2011, p. 217. The section 'Uses and Abuses of Uses' from page 204 to page 229 is exceptionally perceptive on this set of points. My reference to an 'exchange-value [which] has been hypostatized to the degree that there is no longer even a memory of 'loss' much less of what has been lost' recalls her discussion of Fredric Jameson in particular.
  - 3 William Clare Roberts, 'What Can Quebec Teach Us? A Preliminary Analysis of the University as a Site of Struggle', posted 5 June 2012 on *Viewpoint Magazine* blog, <http://viewpointmag.com/2012/06/05/what-can-quebec-teach-us-a-preliminary-analysis-of-the-university-as-a-site-of-struggle/>. Roberts notes that the concept draws on Patrick Murray's notion of 'ideal subsumption' in his two-part essay 'Marx's "Truly Social" Labor Theory of Value', in *Historical Materialism*, Volumes 6 and 7 (2000), as well as Marx's discussion of 'imaginary prices' in *Capital*, Volume One, p. 197: 'Hence a thing can, formally speaking, have a price without having a value. The expression of price is in this case imaginary, like certain quantities in mathematics. On the other hand, the imaginary price-form may also conceal a value-relation or one derived from it, as for instance the price of uncultivated land, which is without value because no human labour is objectified in it.'
  - 4 It can be illuminating to think of social 'deprivation' in terms of the deprivation of capital: the withdrawal of capital or deliberate de-valorisation of certain populations or areas.
  - 5 G. W. F. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, Bernard Bosanquet, trans., edited and with introduction and commentary by Michael Inwood, London: Penguin Books, 1993, p. 31.
  - 6 John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade*, London and New York: Verso, 2007.
  - 7 G. W. F. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, as above.
  - 8 Stewart Martin, 'The Pedagogy of Human Capital' *Mute*, Vol. 2, No. 8, 2008; <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/pedagogy-human-capital>

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