

LEA
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JULIAN STALLABRASS / BOOK EDITOR BILL BALASKAS

The Leonardo Electronic Almanac is proud to announce the publication of its first LEA book, titled "Red Art: New Utopias in Data Capitalism." The publication investigates the relevance of socialist utopianism to the current dispositions of New Media Art, through the contributions of renowned and emerging academic researchers, critical theorists, curators and artists.



RED ART

New Utopias in Data Capitalism

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Red Art: New Utopias in Data Capitalism

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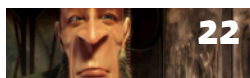
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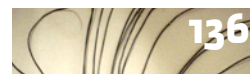


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Commonist Red Art: Blood, Bones, Utopia and Kittens

Does Red Art exist? And if so, who creates it and where can we find it? This special issue of the Leonardo Electronic Almanac addresses these questions and collates a series of perspectives and visual essays that analyze the role, if any, that Red Art plays in the contemporary art world.

Red Art, these are two simple words that can generate complex discussions and verbal feuds since they align the artist to a vision of the world that is 'Red' or 'Communist.'

Nevertheless, even if the two little words when placed together are controversial and filled with *animus*, they are necessary, if not indispensable, to understand contemporary aesthetic issues that are affecting art and how art operates in the context of social versus political power relations within an increasingly technological and socially-mediated world.

Red Art could be translated – within the contemporary hierarchical structures – as the art of the powerless versus the art of the powerful, as the art of the masses versus the art of the few, as the art of the young versus the old, as the art of the technological democrats versus the technological conservatives, as the art of the poor versus the art of the rich... Or it could be described as the art of the revolutionary versus the status quo. In the multitude of the various possible definitions, one appears to stand out for contemporary art and it is the definition of art as bottom-up participation versus art as top-down

prepackaged aesthetic knowledge. And yet, what does Red Art stand for and can it be only restricted to Communist Art?

The contemporary meaning of Red Art is different from what it may have been for example in Italy in the 1970s, since so much has changed in terms of politics, ideology and technology. It is no longer possible to directly identify Red Art with Communist Art (as the art of the ex Union of Soviet Socialist Republics or of its satellite states and globalized Communist political parties which were and continue to be present in the West – albeit inedulcorated forms) nor as the art of the left, but there is a need to analyze the complexity of the diversification and otherization of multiple geopolitical perspectives. ¹

If today's Red Art has to redefine its structures and constructs it becomes necessary to understand who is encompassed within the label of Red Artists and what their common characteristics are. Red Artists – if we wanted to use this category – and their aesthetic production cannot be reduced to the word 'Communist,' borrowing passé ideological constructs. An alternative to the impasse and the ideological collapse of communism is the redefinition of Red Art as the art of the commons: **Commonist Art.** ² If Red Art were to be defined as the art of the commons, Commonist Art, thereby entrenching it clearly within technoutopias and neoliberalist crowd sourcing approaches for collective participation, this would provide a contradictory but functional framework for the realization of

common practices, socially engaged frameworks, short terms goals and 'loose/open' commitments that could be defined in technological terms as *liquid digital utopias* or as a new form of permanent dystopia. ³

The XXIst century appears to be presenting us, then, with the entrenched digitized construct of the common versus the idea of the Paris Commune of 1871, thereby offering a new interpretation of the social space and an alternative to traditional leftist/neoliberal constructs. The idea of the common – as an open access revolving door, is opposed to the concept of the commune – as a highly regulated and hierarchical structure.

The 'semantic' distingo between commons and communes becomes important since both terms are reflections of constructions and terminological frameworks for an understanding of both society and art that is based on 'likes,' actions and commitments for a common or a commune. The commitment, even when disparagingly used to define some of the participants as click-activists and armchair revolutionaries, ⁴ is partial and leaves the subject able to express other likes often in contradiction with one another: e.g. I like the protests against Berlusconi's government and I like the programs on his private TVs.

I find the idea of the commons (knowledge, art, creativity, health and education) liberating, empowering and revolutionary, if only it was not expressed within its own economic corporative structures, creating further layers of contradiction and operational complexities.

The contradictions of contemporary Red Art and contemporary social interactions may be located in the difference between the interpretations of common and commune – the commune upon which the Italian Communist Party, for example, based its foundations in order to build a new 'church.'

The relationships in the commune of the Italian communists (oxymoronically defined Cattocomunisti or Catholic-communist) rests in faith and in compelled actions, in beliefs so rooted that are as blinding as blinding is the light of God in the painting *The Conversion of Saint Paul on the Road to Damascus* by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio.

[...] and from the leadership an aggressive unwillingness to allow any dissent or deviation. 'That time produced one of the sharpest mental frosts I can remember on the Left,' the historian E. P. Thompson would recall from personal knowledge of the CP... ⁵

It is this blind faith that has generated the martyrs of communism and heretical intellectuals, accusations from which not even Antonio Gramsci was able to escape. The vertical hierarchical structure of the commune and of the Communist Party produced heretics and immolations, but also supported artists, intellectuals, academics and writers that operated consonantly with the party's ideals: people that sang from the same preapproved institutional hymn sheet.

Stefania: *This young generation horrifies me. Having been kept for years by this state, as soon as they discover to have two neurons they pack and go to study, to work in the US and London, without giving a damn for who supported them. Oh well, they do not have any civic vocation. When I was young at the occupied faculty of literature, I oozed civic vocation. [...] I have written eleven novels on civic duty and the book on the official history of the Party.*

Jep Gambardella: *How many certainties you have, Stefania. I do not know if I envy you or feel a sensation of disgust. [...] Nobody remembers your civic vocation during your University years. Many instead*

remember, personally, another vocation of yours that was expressed at the time; but was consumed in the bathrooms of the University. You have written the official history of the Party because for years you have been the mistress of the head of the Party. Your eleven novels published by a small publishing house kept by the Party and reviewed by small newspapers close to the Party are irrelevant novels [...] the education of the children that you conduct with sacrifice every minute of your life ... Your children are always without you [...] then you have - to be precise - a butler, a waiter, a cook, a driver that accompanies the boys to school, three babysitters. In short, how and when is your sacrifice manifested? [...] These are your lies and your fragilities. ⁶

To the question, then, if Red Art exists I would have to answer: YES! I have seen Red Art in Italy (as well as abroad), as the Communist Art produced in the name of the party, with party money and for party propaganda, not at all different from the same art produced in the name of right-wing parties with state or corporate money – having both adopted and co-opted the same systems and frameworks of malfeasance shared with sycophantic artists and intellectuals.

In order to understand the misery of this kind of Red Art one would have to look at the Italian aesthetization of failure – which successfully celebrates failure in the *Great Beauty* by Paolo Sorrentino when the character of Stefania, and her ‘oozing civic duty,’ is ripped apart. It is a civic responsibility that is deprived and devoid of any ethics and morals. ⁷

This is but one of the multiple meanings of the concept of Red Art – the definition of Red Art as Communist Art, is the one that can only lead to sterile definitions and autocelebratory constructs based on the ‘aesthetic obfuscation of the lack of meaning’ as a

tool for the obscurity of the aesthetic to act as a producer of meaning when the artist producing it is inept at creating meaning. ⁸ Even more tragically, Red Art leads to the molding of the artist as spokesperson of the party and to the reduction of the artwork, whenever successful, to advertising and propaganda.

Commonist Art, founded on the whim of the ‘like’ and ‘trend,’ on the common that springs from the aggregation around an image, a phrase, a meme or a video, is able to construct something different, a convergence of opinions and actions that can be counted and weighed and that cannot be taken for granted. Could this be a Gramscian utopia of re-construction and re-fashioning of aesthetics according to ‘lower commons’ instead of high and rich ‘exclusivity,’ which as such is unattainable and can only be celebrated through diamond skulls and gold toilets?

Commonist Art – the art that emerges from a common – is a celebration of a personal judgment, partially knowledgeable and mostly instinctive, perhaps manipulated – since every ‘other’ opinion is either manipulated by the media or the result of international lobby’s conspiracies or it can be no more than a reinforcement of the society of the simulacra. Conversely, it may also be that the image and its dissemination online is the representation of a personal diffidence towards systems of hierarchical power and endorsement that can only support ‘their own images and meanings’ in opposition to images that are consumed and exhausted through infinite possibilities of interpretation and re-dissemination. ⁹

If Commonist Art offers the most populist minimum common denominator in an evolutionary framework determined by whims, it is not at all different from the minimum common denominator of inspirational/aspirational codified aesthetics that are defined by the higher echelons of contemporary oligarchies that

have increasingly blurred the boundaries of financial and aesthetic realms.

Commonist Art – if the current trends of protest will continue to affirm themselves even more strongly – will continue to defy power and will increasingly seek within global trends and its own common base viable operational structures that hierarchies will have to recognize, at one point or the other, by subsuming Commonist Art within pre-approved structures.

Red Art, therefore, if intended as Commonist Art becomes the sign of public revolts, in the physical squares or on the Internet. It is art that emerges without institutional ‘approval’ and in some cases in spite of institutional obstacles. Gramsci would perhaps say that Commonist Art is a redefinition of symbolic culture, folk art and traditional imageries that processed and blended through digital media and disseminated via the Internet enable Red Art to build up its own languages and its own aesthetics without having to be institutionally re-processed and receive hierarchical stamps of approval.

Red Art can also be the expression of people whose blood and tears – literally – mark the post-democracies of the first part of the XXIst century. Non-political, non-party, non-believers, ¹⁰ the crowds of the Internet rally around an argument, a sense of justice, a feeling of the future not dominated by carcinogenic politicians, intellectuals and curators, that present themselves every time, according to geographical and cultural spaces, as Sultans, Envoys of God, or even Gods.

Red Art, the Commonist Art that perhaps is worth considering as art, is the one that is self-elevated, built on the blood and bones of people still fighting in the XXIst century for justice, freedom and for a piece of bread. Art that rallies crowds’ likes and dislikes based

on the whims of a liquid Internet structure where people support within their timelines an idea, a utopia, a dream or the image of a kitten. ¹¹

This piece of writing and this whole volume is dedicated to the victims of the economic and political violence since the beginning of the Great Recession and to my father; and to the hope, hard to die off, that some utopia may still be possible.

Lanfranco Aceti

*Editor in Chief, Leonardo Electronic Almanac
Director, Kasa Gallery*



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1. Larry Ray, "At the End of the Post-Communist Transformation? Normalization or Imagining Utopia?" *European Journal of Social Theory* 12 (August 2009), 321-336.
2. Commonism was used by Andy Warhol. In this essay the word is rooted in Internet 'commons,' although similarities, comparisons and contiguities exist with the earlier usage. "Thus Warhol's initial preference for the term 'Commonism' was as ambivalent, and ambiguous, as the oscillating signs 'Factory' and 'Business.' Although it flirted with connotations of the 'common' with the 'Communist' (from cheap and low to 'dignity of the common man'), the term betrayed no hidden, left-wing agenda on Warhol's part." Caroline A. Jones, *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 205.
3. "For one thing, utopia has now been appropriated by the entertainment industry and popular culture – what is termed the contemporary liquid utopia – as a kind of dystopia." Anthony Elliott, *The Contemporary Bauman* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 17.
4. The blurred lines between real and virtual do not exempt click-activists or armchair revolutionaries from the persecutions and abuses of the state police. The sitting room within one's home becomes the public space for conflict and revolts. One example of many around the globe: Alexander Abad-Santos, "Turkey Is Now Arresting Dozens for Using Twitter," *The Wire*, June 5, 2013, <http://www.thewire.com/global/2013/06/turkey-twitter-arrests/65908/> (accessed January 10, 2014).
5. David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain, 1945-1951* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), 342.
6. The English translation from the Italian is from the author. *La Grande Bellezza*, DVD, directed by Paolo Sorrentino (Artificial Eye, 2014).
7. "Anti-communism was never accepted as the moral equivalent of anti-fascism, not only by my parents but also by the overwhelming majority of liberal-minded people. The Left was still morally superior." Nick Cohen, *What's Left?: How the Left Lost its Way* (London: Harper Perennial, 2007), 3. La questione morale or the 'moral issue' in English is the problem identified by Enrico Berlinguer and that questioned the role of the Communist party and the Left in general in Italy. The moral issue has not been resolved to this day and is at the core of the current impossibility to distinguish between the ideological frameworks of Left and Right – since both political areas are perceived as equally and intrinsically corrupt as well as tools for an oligarchic occupation of democracy. For the original interview in Italian of Enrico Berlinguer see: Eugenio Scalfari, "Intervista a Enrico Berlinguer," *La Repubblica*, July 28, 1981 available in "La questione morale di Enrico Berlinguer," Rifondazione Comunista's website, <http://web.rifondazione.it/home/index.php/12-home-page/8766-la-questione-morale-di-enrico-berlinguer> (accessed March 20, 2014).
8. "Under the surface of images, one invests bodies in depth; behind the great abstraction of exchange, there continues the meticulous, concrete training of useful forces; the circuits of communication are the supports of an accumulation and a centralization of knowledge; the play of signs defines the anchorages of power; it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it..." Michel Foucault, "Panopticism," in *The Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Vanessa R. Schwartz and Jeannene M. Przyblyski (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), 78.
9. There are those who think that the image is an extremely rudimentary system in comparison with language and those who think that signification cannot exhaust the image's ineffable richness. Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," in *Visual Culture: The Reader*, ed. Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, 1999), 33.
10. Non-believers stands for skeptics and does not have a religious connotation in this context.
11. Lanfranco Aceti, *Our Little Angel*, Lanfranco Aceti Inc., personal website, January 10, 2014, <http://www.lanfrancoaceti.com/portfolio-items/our-little-angel/> (accessed January 10, 2014).

Changing the Game: Towards an 'Internet of Praxis'

There is a new spectre haunting the art world. Not surprisingly, it has been put forward in recent articles, panel discussions and books as the 'ism' that could, possibly, best describe the current dispositions of contemporary art. The name of the spectre is "post-internet art."¹ Unlike, however, its counterpart that was released in the world by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1848,² this contemporary spectre has not arrived in order to axiomatically change the established order of things; conceivably, it has arrived in order to support it.

Post-internet art refers to the aesthetic qualities defining today's artistic production, which is often influenced by, mimics, or fully adopts elements of the Internet. At the same time, the term incorporates the communication tools and platforms through which contemporary artworks reach their intended (or non-intended) audiences. Notably, in his book *Post Internet* (2011), art writer Gene McHugh suggests that regardless of an artist's intentions, all artworks now find a space on the World Wide Web and, as a result, "[...] contemporary art, as a category, was/is forced, against its will, to deal with this new distribution context or at least acknowledge it."³ Quite naturally, this would seem like a strong oppositional force directed against the modus operandi of the mainstream art world. Yet, further down in the same page, McHugh characterizes this acknowledgement as a constituent part of the much larger "game" that is played by commercial galleries, biennials, museums and auction houses.

Thus, there are inevitable contradictions and challenges in the role that post-internet art is called to fulfil as a movement and/or as a status of cultural production. Firstly, there is an easily identifiable 'anxiety' to historicize a phenomenon that is very much in progress: the Internet is changing so rapidly, that if we think of the online landscape ten years ago, this would be radically different from our present experience of it. Furthermore, the post-internet theorization of contemporary art runs the danger of aestheticizing (or over-aestheticizing) a context that goes well beyond the borders of art: in the same way that we could talk about post-internet art, we could also talk about post-internet commerce, post-internet dating, post-internet travel, post-internet journalism, etc. Therefore, the role and the identity of the post-internet artist are not independent of a much wider set of conditions. This false notion of autonomy is quite easy to recognize if we think, for instance, of 'post-radio art' or 'post-television art' or, even, 'post-videogames art,' and the inherent structural and conceptual limitations of such approaches.⁴

Most importantly, however, any kind of aestheticization may readily become a very effective tool of depoliticization. The idea of distributing images, sounds and words that merely form part of a pre-existing system of power, inescapably eradicates the political significance of distribution. The subversive potentiality inherent in the characterisation of a network as 'distributed' was systematically undermined over the 1990s and the 2000s, due to the ideological perva-

siveness of neoliberalism during the same period. Distribution – not to mention, *equal* distribution – could have enjoyed a much more prominent role as a natural fundament of the Web and, accordingly, as a contributing factor in any investigation of digital art. Last but definitely not least, one cannot ignore the crucial fact that apolitical art is much easier to enter the art market and play the ‘game’ of institutionalization (and vice versa).

To the question: could the Internet and new media at large become true ‘game changers’ in the current historical conjuncture? What does ‘red art’ have to propose, and how does it relate to the previously described ‘post-internet condition’?

Interestingly, the term “post-internet art” was born and grew parallel to the global economic crisis and the Great Recession of 2009. One of the most important objectives of the social movements that were engendered by the crisis has been the effort to “reclaim” and “re-appropriate.” This aspiration referred not only to economic resources, but also to social roles, democratic functions, human rights, and – of course – urban spaces. Syntagma Square in Greece, Puerta del Sol in Madrid, Zuccotti Park in New York, as well as some of the most iconic public locations around the world saw diverse, or even ‘irreconcilable’ in some cases crowds demand change. Within the reality of Data Capitalism and its multiple self-generated crises, people increasingly felt that they have now been totally deprived of a place (“topos” in Greek).

It is worth remembering that the coiner of “utopia,” Thomas More, chose an island as the location where he placed his ideal society.⁵ Any island constitutes a geographic formation that privileges the development of individual traits through a natural process of ‘appropriation.’ This encompasses both the material and the immaterial environment as expressed in the landscape, the biology of the different organisms, and – most relevant to our case – culture. Notably, when it comes to connecting utopianism with the cultural paradigm of new media art, we should not focus merely on the lack of a physical space (as articulated, for instance,

through cyberspace); rather, we should address the juxtaposition of “topos” with a potentially ‘empty’ notion of “space.” The transcendence of space in a ‘digital utopia’ absolutely necessitates the existence of a ‘topos.’ In a similar way to the one that Marx sees capitalism as a stage towards a superior system of production (communism),⁶ the construction of a ‘topos’ is a prerequisite for the flourishing of utopianism.

‘Red Art’ can be understood as a tool for the creation of such ‘topoi.’ The lesson that new media artists can learn from the political osmoses catalyzed by the economic crisis is that, in order to be effective, cyberspace should become part of a strategy that combines physical and online spaces, practically and conceptually, whilst taking into account the individual traits of both. The necessity expressed through this combination constitutes (at least partly) a departure from the developing discourses around the ‘Internet of Things’ or the ‘Internet of Places.’⁷ Alternatively, or additionally, what is proposed here is the formulation of an ‘Internet of Praxis’ (including, of course, artistic praxis). This approach is vividly reflected in several of the projects examined in this publication, as well as in the theoretical frameworks that are outlined.

Digital art is today in a position to capitalize on the participatory potentialities that have been revealed by the socio-political events that defined the early 2010s. The reconceptualization of cyberspace as a ‘cybertopos’ is a constituent part of this new ground on which people are called to stand and build. Accordingly, the emergence of a culture of ‘post-net participation’ in which digital media transcend physical space by consolidating it (instead of ‘merely’ augmenting it), may allow us to explore “concrete utopias”⁸ to a greater extent than ever before in recent times. It is by actively pursuing this objective that we would expect to change the rules of the game. Artists are often the first to try.

Bill Balaskas

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1. The term ‘post-internet art’ is attributed to artist Marisa Olson. See Gene McHugh, *Post Internet* (Brescia: LINK Editions), 5.
2. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels published *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* in London, on February 21, 1848.
3. Gene McHugh, *Post Internet*, 6.
4. The etymological comparison between the terms ‘post-internet art’ and ‘postmodern art’ could also highlight this context. Notably, in the case of this juxtaposition, ‘post-internet art’ puts a tool (the Internet) in the position of a movement (Modernism). If we were to consider the Internet as a movement, then, the natural historical link that would be established through the term ‘post-internet art’ would be with net art. Nevertheless, such a decision would assign net art to a status of ‘legitimization,’ towards which major museums, curators and art fairs have shown a rather consistent hostility. In this instance, historicization becomes a foe, since it would refute a ‘neutral’ relationship of the Web with art. This perspective is closely connected with the formation of an abstract notion of universalism, to which I refer further down (see endnote 8).
5. Thomas More’s *Utopia* was first published in 1516, in Belgium. There are several translations of the book.
6. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, with an introduction by David Harvey (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 51: “What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.”
7. The Internet of Things represents a vision in which physical items become ‘smart’ objects by being equipped with sensors that can be remotely controlled and connected through the Internet. The Internet of Places focuses on the spatial dimension of the capacities that Web 2.0 offers. For an account of the Internet of Things, see Mattern, Friedemann and Christian Floerkemeier, “From the Internet of Computers to the Internet of Things,” in *Informatik-Spektrum*, 33 (2010): 107–121, <http://www.vs.inf.ethz.ch/publ/papers/Internet-of-things.pdf> (accessed February 20, 2014). For an account of the Internet of Places, see Giuseppe Conti, Paul Watson, Nic Shape, Raffaele de Amicis and Federico Prandi, “Enabling the ‘Internet of Places’: a virtual structure of space-time-tasks to find and use Internet resources,” in *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Computing for Geospatial Research & Applications* (New York: ACM, 2011), 9.
8. For more on the concept of ‘concrete utopias’ see Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, tr. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight, 3 vols (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986). Bloch differentiates between ‘abstract utopias’ and ‘concrete utopias,’ associating the latter with the possibility of producing real change in the present. ‘Concrete utopias’ should not be confused with seemingly similar theorizations such as Nicolas Bourriaud’s ‘microtopias,’ which structurally aim at preserving the existing status quo. Bourriaud asserts in *Relational Aesthetics* (2002) that “it seems more pressing to invent possible relations with our neighbours in the present than to bet on happier tomorrows.” Quite evidently, this approach stands far from the universalism that he advocates in his *Altermodern Manifesto* (2009) as a direct result of new technologies and globalization. At a time when neoliberal capitalism was entering its worst ever crisis, Bourriaud chose to largely ignore this context and build on a concept that – in the end – is apolitical and counter-utopian. ‘Post-internet art’ appears to follow a comparably dangerous trajectory.

Suggestions for Art That Could Be Called Red

What is Red Art? Or rather: what could Red Art be in today's post-communist, post-utopian world, a world shaken by conflicts engendered by contrary beliefs and ideologies which have little to do with communism? A world in which countries and societies are disrupted by territorial disputes, and by bloody fights about questions of religious identity, national identity, and ideology? Where communism has been overrun by capitalism with rare exception; where the European left movement is weak. Where the post-industrial era has produced an economic reality that is orders of magnitude more complex, transnational and therefore more difficult to control or change, than history has ever seen. In this situation, can there (still) be art that deals with ideas of communism constructively, or does contemporary art look at communist ideals only with nostalgia?

And let's be clear: is art that simply speaks out against capitalism, globalisation and neo-liberalism from a leftist position – is this kind of art 'red' per se? Do we expect Red Art to be 'red' in content, for instance, in directly addressing topics such as class struggle, the negatives of capitalism and a new neo-liberal world order? And if it does, is it enough to be descriptive or do we want art to be more than that, i.e., provoking, forward-thinking or even militant? In 1970, Jean-Luc Godard drafted a 39-point manifesto *Que faire? What is to be done?* that contrasted the antagonistic practices of making political films and making films 'politically.' It called unequivocally for art that actively takes up the position of the proletarian class and that

aims for nothing less than the transformation of the world. With his legacy, what kind of objectives do we request from Red Art? Do we really still think that art can change the world or is that another idea from the past that has been overwritten by something that we like to call reality? Can art that is for the most part commercialised and produced in a capitalist art market be 'red' at all, or does it have to reject the system established by galleries, fairs and museums in order to be truly 'red'?

Decades ago, when artists started to use new media such as video and the computer, their works were 'new' in the way they were produced and distributed, and changed the relationship between artists and their collaborators as well as between the artworks and their audiences and 'users' respectively. Most of this new-media-based art circulated outside the ordinary market and found other distribution channels. The majority of works were inspired by a quest for the 'new' and consistently broke with old aesthetic principles and functions. Much of it was also driven by a search for the 'better,' by overthrowing old hierarchies and introducing a more liberal and inclusive concept of the world, based on self-determination and active participation. Last but not least the emergence of the Internet brought us a fertile time for new and revisited utopias and artistic experiments dealing with collaboration, distribution of knowledge, shared authorship, and appropriation of technologies. Today we know that neither the Internet nor any other new technology has saved us, but that the hopes for a more demo-

cratic world and alternative economies sparked by it have come true, if only to a minor degree.

So how do artists respond to this post-communist, post-utopian condition? What can be discussed as Red Art in the recent past and present? In this issue of Leonardo we have gathered some answers to these questions in the form of papers, essays and artworks, the latter produced especially for this purpose. Bringing together and editing this issue was challenging because we decided from the start to keep the call for contributions as open as possible and to not pre-define too much. We were interested in what kind of responses our call would produce at a moment when the world is occupied with other, seemingly hotter topics, and it is fascinating to note that the resulting edition quite naturally spans decades of art production and the respective 'new' technologies as they related to ideas of social equality and empowerment – from video art to net art to bio art. This issue shows that the search for alternative ideas and perspectives, and an adherence to leftist ideals is neither futile nor simply nostalgic. But that this search is ever more relevant, particularly at a time when European politics is seemingly consolidating and wars around the world are establishing new regimes of social and economic inequality.

Susanne Jaschko

Why Digital Art is Red

The divide between the art shown in major museums and art fairs and that associated with the new media scene has been deep and durable. Many critics have puzzled over it, particularly because there is much that the two realms share, including the desire to put people into unusual social situations. ¹ Yet some of the reasons for the divide are plain enough, and they are about money, power and social distinction. The economic divide is across competing models of capitalist activity: the exclusive ownership of objects set against the release of reproducible symbols into networks with the ambition that they achieve maximum speed and ubiquity of circulation. The social divide is between a conservative club of super-rich collectors and patrons, and their attendant advisors, who buy their way into what they like to think of as a sophisticated cultural scene (Duchamp Land), against a realm which is closer to the mundane and more evidently compromised world of technological tools (Turing Land). ² Power relations are where the divide appears starkest: in one world, special individuals known as artists make exceptional objects or events with clear boundaries that distinguish them from run-of-the-mill life; and through elite ownership and expert curation, these works are presented for the enlightenment of the rest of us. In the new media world, some 'artists' but also collectives and other shifting and anonymous producers offer up temporary creations onto a scene in which their works are open to copying, alteration and comment, and in which there is little possible control of context, frame or conversation.

This description of the divide has been put in extreme terms for the sake of clarity, and there are a few instances of the split appearing to erode. ³ Yet its persistence remains one of the most striking features of the general fragmentation of the fast-growing and globalising art world. That persistence rests on solid material grounds, laid out by Marx: the clash of economic models is a clear case of the mode and relations of production coming into conflict, and is part of a much wider conflict over the legal, political and social aspects of digital culture, and its synthesis of production and reproduction. ⁴ Copyright is one arena where the clash is very clear. Think of the efforts of museums to control the circulation of images and to levy copyright charges, while at the same time surrendering to the camera-phone as they abandon the attempt to forbid photography in their galleries.

So where is Red Art and the left in this scenario? Amidst the general gloom and lassitude that has beset much of the Left in Europe and the US, the development of the digital realm stands out as an extraordinary gain. It allows for the direct communication, without the intermediary of newspapers and TV, of masses of people globally – who turn out to be more egalitarian, more environmentally concerned and more seditious than the elite had bargained for. Alexander Cockburn, with his long career in activism and journalism, remarks:

Thirty years ago, to find out what was happening in Gaza, you would have to have had a decent short-wave radio, a fax machine, or access to those great newsstands in Times Square and North Hollywood that carried the world's press. Not anymore. We can get a news story from [...] Gaza or Ramallah or Oaxaca or Vidarbha and have it out to a world audience in a matter of hours. ⁵

It is hard to ban social media, it has been claimed, because it entwines video fads, kittens and politics (and banning kittens looks bad). So the insight attributed by some to Lenin – that capitalists will sell us the rope with which to hang them – is still relevant. ⁶

In an era in which the political and artistic avant-gardes have faded, the affiliation of the art world that is founded upon the sale and display of rare and unique objects made by a few exceptional individuals – in which high prices are driven by monopoly rent effects – tends to be with the conspicuous consumption of the state and the super-rich. ⁷ Here, the slightest taint of the common desktop environment is enough to kill aesthetic feeling. The affiliation of at least some of new media art is rather to the kitsch, the populist, and to the egalitarian circulation of images and words, along with discourse and interaction. New media artists who push those attachments work against some of the deepest seated elements of the art world ethos: individualism, distinction, discreteness and preservation for posterity (and long-term investment

value). It should be no surprise that they are frequently and without qualification denied the status of 'artist.'

It is also clear why the death of leftist ideas in elite discourse does not hold in new media circles, where the revival of thinking about the Left, Marxism and Communism is very evident. ⁸ The borders of art are blurred by putting works to explicit political use (in violation of the Kantian imperative still policed in the mainstream art world). ⁹ Very large numbers of people are continually making cultural interventions online, and value lies not in any particular exceptional work but in the massive flow of interaction and exchange. In that world, as it never could in a gallery, the thought may creep in that there is nothing special about any one of us. And this may lead to the greatest scandal of all: think of the statements that artists who deal with politics in the mainstream art world are obliged to make as their ticket of admission – 'my art has no political effect.' They have to say it, even when it is patently absurd; and they have to say it, even as the art world itself becomes more exposed to social media, and is ever less able to protect its exclusive domain and regulate the effects of its displays. So at base, the divide is economic, but at the level of what causes the repulsion from digital art – that puts collectors and critics to flight – it is deeply and incontrovertibly political. ¹⁰ They run headlong from the red.

Julian Stallabrass

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Material Conditions of Production and Hidden Romantic Discourses in New Media Artistic and Creative Practices

by

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NEW MEDIA ART AS NEW MEDIA CREATIVITY?

New Media Art is today a very extended and complex notion that includes those art practices that make use of emergent technologies that explore the cultural and aesthetic possibilities of such technologies. ¹ More specifically, Mark Tribe and Reena Jana situate these practices at the intersection of the notions of 'Art and Technology' (which refers to electronic art, robotics or genetics) and 'Media Art' (which includes media which was not new in the 90's such as video or TV). ² In this regard, new media art practices evolved from individual curiosity and avant-garde experimentation to overcome established conceptions of visual arts and markets in every moment. ³

A well-known example of this is net.art, which emerged two decades ago as an autonomous space for art, challenging the very conditions of contemporary art and its pervading institutionalization. This position, reinforced by the natural features of the works and their technological base, was claimed in the different manifestos written by artists ⁴ and largely discussed within the communities during the second half of the nineties. New Media Art and net.art were then conceived as a democratic, fully accessible art,

ABSTRACT

Despite today's ruling of neoliberal capitalism, New Media Art could be regarded as a place of resistance, where radical ideologies such as communist utopias and other social discourses are able to proliferate and spread through social connectivity. ¹ By looking into this apparent contradiction, we find that whereas New Media Art-work discourses are full of passion, self-realization, freedom, creativity, anti-capitalist values, etc., their material conditions of production are remarkably complex and operate on self-disciplinarity, flexibility, precarity, ²⁻³ and 'lottery economy' work. ⁴ Moreover, the neoliberal regulation of 'mainstream and acceptable' art as well as the creative aesthetic processes as potential economic sources of income has also extended these conditions to most new media creative practices, which exist as separated from the mainstream art world. ⁵

This paper endeavors to capture a detailed view of the previous assumption, based on the analysis of some examples and posing these material conditions side by side with the discourses of creative work, which rely almost solely on old romantic notions of creativity evoking the rewards of such work and yet, the relinquishments -in terms of stable work conditions- to be also made as a counterpart of creative grace. The research we present focuses on initiatives which mediate between creators and industry, specifically comparing the cases of the Talent Factory and Disonancias, both based in the Spanish territory.

which also was usually devised as activist and went against neo-liberal discourses surrounding mainstream contemporary art.

The fact is that despite these fights against the institution, ¹⁰ New Media Art is still currently resisting 'in the margins,' but with limited impact and resonance when compared to traditional art. ¹¹ In this regard, although

New Media Art has contributed to the transformation of the mainstream 'Art World' ¹² (and consequently the definition of art work and contents) its modest acceptance has carried with it a whole array of obligations and relinquishments that New Media Art had to comply with in order to achieve the institutionalization of previously antagonistic aesthetic models. Amongst New Media Art voices who highlighted the risks of

legitimation, some members of the early net.art movement clearly identified such recognition from the art system as a peril pointing to cooption, decay or –as Sara Cook and Vuk Cosic coined- ‘museumification.’¹³

The contradictions regarding the institutional position of New Media Art are also present in the theoretical formulations of it, which have been –sometimes artificially- made apart from the contemporary art forums. In this regard, despite that there is a clear connection between Contemporary and Digital Art, few scholars have explored the points of intersection between them as Edward Shanken and other authors assert.¹⁴

Nevertheless, New Media Art can also be analyzed from the standpoint of theoretical new media discourses, which were moving in the same direction as artistic practices: New Media were thought of as media able to liberate audiences from traditional media companies and allow the possibility for media creative production and self-expression. In this regard, we find some nuances of the utopias projected in technologies, particularly Internet and social media, as something that could unshackle us from the mass media evoked by big companies and institutions that dominated the previous media paradigm. According to some authors¹⁵ new media facilitate users and non- professionals access to cultural production, allowing for self-produced and collaborative projects, such as wikipedia. This ‘liberating’ potential has allowed for theorization of empowered users, alternatively named as prosumers, viewers, and more frequently co-creators. All these definitions suggest and open up a line of collaboration and participation (explicitly or implicitly) between users and industries, which sometimes becomes an easy way for companies to appropriate of user generated content.¹⁶

Finally, both digital art and new media discourses could be analyzed from the perspective of creative industries. John Hartley defines the idea of creative industries

as “The conceptual and practical convergence of the creative arts (individual talent) with the cultural industries (mass scale).”¹⁷ Thus, according to Hartley, the main feature of the creative industries will be to join two originally separate worlds, that is to say, the Fine Arts (traditionally based on individual talent) and the cultural industries (characterized by the mode of industrial production and mass scale). In this framework the consideration of the ‘artist’ as someone exclusively related to art production in the traditional sense –related to galleries and art institutions- is increasingly becoming more unusual, especially because the working conditions of artists bring about the need to undertake different jobs, including both their own art production and commercial assignments or teaching jobs. This condition, which is not absolutely new, is related to the number of graduates in art and design programs (and therefore potential artists) and facilitates the conceptual dissolution of the notion of art into the more generic idea of creativity, which in turn has substantial ideological implications, as the creative industries policies demonstrate.

THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES CONCEPT

The origin of the creative industries’ concept is usually related to the UK policies of the 90’s and its Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). Its first mapping document on the creative industries stated that they should be treated like any other industry ruled by a business model. While recognizing that some institutions and people would still need public support to produce their work, this was regarded as an investment with its corresponding monetary return rather than as an altruistic subsidy given to some dependent artists.¹⁸ The strategy was to end with the “something for nothing” policy. If money was to be invested in the arts, then they ought to do something in return, even if it was a function of social cohesiveness.

Another well-known concept is that of the Creative Class. For Richard Florida, the centrality of creativity in the economy has resulted in a change of the class system –enabling the emergence of the new so-called ‘creative class,’ which represents 30% of the power of American labor, and which includes scientists, engineers, architects, academics, artists, musicians and also of a business and finance professional elite.¹⁹ For Florida, all these professionals are conceived as a whole (a class), and depicted as wealthy and influential. But in contrast to Florida’s blissful picture, some other authors have pointed to existing less pleasurable conditions.^{20 21 22} According to them, workers are becoming integrated in an increasing temporary labor order characterized by flexibility, mobility, freelance work or multiple jobs and in many cases, precarity. This is a risk-tolerant style that rewards the initiative in a kind of lottery format, where the seduction of possible astronomical profits puts security aside.²³

The International Labour Organization’s (ILO) definition of precarious employment, as quoted by Linda McDowell and Susan Christopherson, is a “work relation where employment security, which is considered one of the principal elements of the labor contract, is lacking.”²⁴ We should bear in mind here that what is sometimes referred to as flexibility –which may have a rosier and well regarded purport- implies at the same time a greater lack of security. Close to precarious employment, the notion of ‘precarity’ is specifically used by the Marxist autonomist intellectuals as Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt, Paolo Virno, Franco Berardi and Maurizio Lazzarato. As Rosalind Gill and Andy Pratt explain, the notion of ‘precarity’ used by the autonomists has a double signification: it points not only to its oppressive characteristics but also to its possibly liberating potentials showing the capacity to develop new subjectivities, new socialities and new kinds of politics.²⁵

From the perspective of creative industries and the creative class, many similarities can be found between the working conditions of new media artists and other jobs in the digital economy. Moreover, there is a contradiction between the conceptualization of such jobs and their actual working conditions, the former being promising and the latter precarious. Flexibility is valued as part of a ‘postmodern work ethic’ having both an individualized and a collective acceptance of risk.²⁶ For Gina Neff et al, this individualism seems to point to a general shift, and not merely a reflection of work in rapidly changing industries or libertarian values of the cyber-culture. Despite their aura of hipness, the labor relations within cultural production provide global capital with a model for destabilizing work and denigrating workers’ quality of life.²⁷

Finally, these conceptualizations have opened the space for a line of collaboration between artists and industries developing new roles for the artist in the society, which will be analyzed in greater depth in the next pages.

CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION, EVOKING ROMANTIC NOTIONS

As far as Romanticism may come across from New Media art, we hope to show here how old romantic concepts specially related to creativity are still operating in present-day discourses. We will see this in detail in our case studies, but first let us point to the pertinence of drawing on Romanticism when talking about Marxism in art: As contradictory as it may initially seem, Romanticism had its own ideal of revolution, which Abrams summarized in six characteristics: 1) cleansing explosion of destruction that would reconstitute the then existing political, social, and moral order; 2) a shift from the present era of suffering to an era of peace and justice; 3) it will be led by a militant

elite; 4) it will spread everywhere to all mankind; 5) it is inevitable, which makes for the ineluctable triumph of total justice, community, and happiness on earth.²⁸ Within these characteristics, we can easily pinpoint two interesting assumptions: on the one hand, that of an expected future utopia, and, on the other and even more important for our explanations, the role of a leading elite for liberation. Keeping this revolutionary concept in mind, we now turn to the implications of the concepts of creativity and innovation, which also have their ties to Romantic ideals.

Mark Runco defines creativity as involving originality (novelty, uniqueness) and at the same time, effectiveness and it is also associated with the non-conventional or open-minded personality.²⁹ But, since it involves originality, the very concept of creativity means “building or producing something from nothing”. According to Margaret Boden, this reinforces the mystery often surrounding creativity and it is not surprising then that the paradox of creation is explained in terms of divine inspiration or romantic intuition.³⁰ However, the ideal of the romantic genius -brilliant yet mysterious- is usually tied to the suggestion that creativity implies a high price to be paid, sometimes even leading to self-destruction. The so-called ‘Faustic pact’ would reinforce the common belief that creativity involves risk and resignations,³¹ as Robert J. Sternberg, Linda A. O’Hara and Todd I. Lubart point out.³²

Not surprisingly, if we leave behind these old romantic concepts of creativity and turn to concepts of innovation within the economic arena, we can see how ideas of destruction and risk also surface. On the one hand, Joseph Schumpeter in 1950 described the process of innovation taking place in a market economy by means of new businesses and products destroying older ones. His theory of this process of ‘creative destruction’ is well known and is thought to be an essential part of capitalism. On the other hand, Sternberg,

O’Hara and Lubart propose their “theory of creativity as an investment” where creative people would act as good investors do, that is to say; buying low and selling high, yet these activities would occur in the realm of ideas and not in the stock market. So the process would be to generate ideas, which, like shares, are relatively cheap, unpopular or even openly scorned in the beginning. Then the creative ‘investor’ would attempt to convince others of the value of those ideas, thus being able to finally sell them high. Yet, as it is evident, this also implies a high risk of failure. The creative person is then acting under the dangerous conditions of a broker or an entrepreneur.³³

Again, these ideas of the inevitable paying of fees, possible destruction and risky investments are worth noting, since they will again resurface when we talk about the working conditions of such creative endeavors.

NEW RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ARTISTS AND INDUSTRIES

Resulting from the complex panorama of creative industries, creativity and innovation, there is a real attempt to introduce artists in the context of industries, whether they are creative industries, or other ones. This is not completely new since there are some existing models of collaboration, of which the *Experiments of Art and Technology* in 1966 was a pioneer for promoting contacts between artists and engineers. In short, we could say that there is the Media Lab model, where artists are selected for a residence program with the aim of developing a media research project. This is a well-established system, and such programs are characterized by a short-term approach, and are generally funded by cultural institutions. Then there is another model of collaboration which takes place in scientific institutes and University laboratories and is materialized in research projects funded by scientific

and research institutions. In this framework, artists are considered as researchers and consequently the period of collaboration is conditioned by the duration of the project. And finally, there is an emerging model that is characterized by the mediation between companies and independent creators, most notably artists. The difference between this model and the previous two is that this one emerges at the crossroads of the policies of innovation and creative industries and consequently has been conceptualized in such a way that the role of artists is to execute an intervention in a particular project or company. These mediation projects then try to connect two apparently distant worlds, that of the ‘artists’ –and creators in general- world and the industrial world. That distance between both worlds is the reason why such a mediation role is justified.

After an initial observation amongst the different programs mediating between industries and creators, we distinguished an emergent model with different variations: collaboration could take place in a laboratory or a company, and it could be oriented to a product or to a creative process. In some cases, the strategy was to select artists to work in a particular industrial project as part of a team in a specific company where the artist was expected to add innovation and creativity to the process. In other cases, the aim was to select talented creators to work in a company’s laboratories on a project provided by the creator, whose product – a demo – would be preferably sold to the companies that collaborated with the program in order for it to be produced. Within this model, we followed in recent years two concrete initiatives in the Spanish context, Digitalent (with its Talent Factory) and Disonancias. Both are similar projects and self-defined as ‘mediators’ between artists and industries that have had different trajectories that illustrate quite well the ideas of creativity and innovation and their consequences in terms of labor and working conditions.

On the one hand, Fundació Digitalent³⁴ is a foundation which was created in 2007 with the purpose of bringing creators and industries closer and at the same time fostering innovation and reinforcing the localization of production. In their own words, their aim is: “to detect latent and incipient talent and to encourage the digital culture by bringing this digital talent to the industry and the circuits of cultural dissemination. This is done through fomenting the exhaustive use of information technology and new media.”³⁵ Within the different projects that this foundation embraces, the Talent Factory initiative materializes and shapes the previously defined objective in this current collaboration between creators –or ‘talents,’ as they have labeled them- and (media) industries.

On the other hand, Disonancias³⁶ is a program promoted by the private company Grupo Xavide in association with some partners, which are usually local governments. Disonancias aims to connect artists (in the broad sense of the term) and units of R&D in corporations or technology centers, with the aim of promoting innovation. The first edition of Disonancias took place in 2005, under the name Divergentes and consisted of international artists’ residences in business and technology centers. Thus, this first version had a highly artistic profile that was eliminated in the subsequent editions, and now artists are clearly advised not to develop an autonomous project of art creation, but to work around the industry’s particular demands. In 2010, the project finalized with this title and evolved to the current project Conexiones improbables fostered by some of the people involved in the previous one, in a form of a consultancy company.

THE CONDITIONS FOR COLLABORATION

Although both projects work in a similar way as far as the conditions of collaboration are concerned, each one has its own peculiarities. In the case of the Talent Factory, there was a call for projects addressed to creators in the first editions so that projects and ‘talents’ could be chosen and collaboration could begin. The period of collaboration was three months initially, but it was further extended. The ‘talents’ selected were expected to work regularly in Digitalent facilities and attend several meetings during the process in an unsystematized way. Regarding Disonancias, and currently Conexiones improbables, there is a call for companies, expressing their needs and then there is call for artists (proposing solutions/projects for the companies). Regarding the duration, this is a nine-month alliance at the beginning of which there are some joint meetings where all projects, artists and companies come together with the intention to get to know each other and to learn useful methodologies.

In terms of contracts and exploitation rights, every contractual relationship for the Talent Factory is unique and the Factory owns the exclusive right to sell the project on behalf of the ‘talent’ for a period of a year after a model/demo has been produced. The prospective buyer of the idea/project takes on board any further expenses of the project. After the first year deal, the ‘talent’ gets his/her right back to commercialize the project. In any case, the Foundation would obtain 5% of the revenues of the Project for an unlimited time. The artists will be paid €12,000 (fees for their work). As far as economic conditions are concerned, in the case of Disonancias, each artist or artist group selected will receive a sum of 10,000 - 12,000 euros to cover the fees for the work carried out, travel expenses, lodging and subsistence allowance, and some economic compensation for the exploitation rights granted. The exploitation rights foresee four options, among which the companies can choose before the collaboration begins.³⁷

THE CONCEPTS BEHIND THE COLLABORATION

Regarding the conceptual aspects of the collaboration, talent is envisaged by Fundació Digitalent as a feature which can be attached to people that in some cases can be defined as ‘outsiders’ or, at the very least, bohemians or nerds. This is also clearly related to the traditional role of the artist and, in fact, the foundation is seeking preferably artists as their ‘talents.’ In their view, talent is not a synonym of knowledge, but a synonym of skills and abilities to shape ideas. Therefore, it is not necessarily related to curriculum or education but rather to innate capabilities or gifts. It may come from different areas so it must be molded in order to meet the interests of digital industries. Furthermore, creativity in the Factory is seen as a changing process, not just an attitude. On the one hand, they search creators beyond artistic purposes; however, artists are one of their main targets. In the same way, they do not look for ‘free creativity,’ but for a ‘participatory open environment’ where they can monitor the creative process: according to their directives, ideas should have the potential to be ‘enriched.’ Thus, they do not look for an artistic project which is too personally or individualistically defined by the artists’ strict requisites or agenda. Rather, they seek a kind of broader and vaguer creativity which accepts being turned upside down, being contested and changed. The previous ideas fit with their conception of creativity as a changing and evolutionary process, not just an attitude. Consequently, the initial ideas of an artist could supposedly be out-of-the-box and non-profitable in the beginning but then could be converted into something profitable through the process. With this kind of initiatives, Digitalent implicitly assume the segregation of creation and production in a project, thus investing in funds for the creation (or pre-production process) in this case.

In the case of Disonancias, their discourse revolves around the notions of creativity and innovation. Within Disonancias, the artist is envisioned as a researcher. As

the director of Disonancias stated: “The artist today is not the mythical bohemian of art literature. Today, many of the artists who participate in Disonancias are a good example of this.” This description is indeed so distant from the idea of the romantic genius or the eccentric artist that we have seen before. Yet, on the other hand, if we take into account the opinions of some of the participating companies, they see the creator as the person who ‘thinks out-of-the-box,’ ‘comes with an unconventional idea,’ or ‘breaks our frame of mind.’ And, after all, the name of the program is Disonancias, which means ‘disonance’ or ‘discord.’ This ambivalent conception of the artist can also be found in the case of Digitalent. As we can see, there prevailed the stereotypes of the artist as unstructured, uncommercial or not able to materialize ideas. This reinforces their fear that talent would be lost if it was not integrated into an industrial logic which could effectively extract the profitable project from the initial out-of-the-box idea.

A clear connection might be traced between ideas exposed by Fundació Digitalent regarding creativity and the dimensions of creativity listed by Richard Florida in his work *The Rise of the Creative Class*,³⁸ known to have exercised a deep influence both on the industry and government sectors. Florida mentions breaking accepted rules as a key element: “Creative work in fact is often downright subversive, since it disrupts existing patterns of thought and life.”³⁹ This sense of disruption and difference could be compared to the image of Fundació Digitalent’s banner in its webpage: a bunch of golf balls painted in black and humanized with eyes, cover the whole visual space, except for the discrepancy of a single red ball which really makes the difference amid all the other black ones. The banner text goes ‘Do you think you’re different?’ clearly pointing to that creative soul which so distinctly separates itself from the rest –in the most romantic way, we ought to add. On the other hand, Florida states, “al-

though creativity is often viewed as an individual phenomenon, it is an inescapably social process. It is frequently exercised in creative teams.”⁴⁰ Once more, this is a feature that both Digitalent and Disonancias want to exert by inserting the single creator within teams in their organizations.

Finally, both projects accept the idea that creativity implies hard work; “Stimulating and glamorous as it may sometimes seem to be, creativity is in fact work.”⁴¹ This idea permeates the whole ethic of creative work, as for instance, new media workers build personal websites to advertise their skills; or, invest in entrepreneurial projects in their own time that were useful in demonstrating their business and technical acumen.⁴² This work (or that 90% of perspiration vs. 10% of inspiration, as the saying goes) relates to an ever present theme with Digitalent which is their already mentioned work of redirecting the creator, making him or her redefine themselves, and change and again reshape the project. Similarly, for Disonancias, one of the key points in the mediator’s role is that of offering a useful methodology to convert their creativity in innovation. In this sense, there is an array of actions (like methodology audits by external consultants), which eventually demonstrate the importance of methodology in order to convert the non-useful to the profitable. Again, this sounds familiar when we reconsider the original UK policies regarding creative industries which we have mentioned earlier.

CONCLUSIONS

Summarizing, we can see that the previous examples respond to the need for transformation of some Spanish industry sectors, and therefore, the perceived need for added value based on innovation. This corresponds to the starting point of most cases: the detection of a lack in the industry which starts with the

'problem-solving' process through bringing together creators and industries by means of a mediator agent. The idea behind this is to capture creativity and ideas so as to put them to work within an industrial logic. This somehow reinforces two divergent concepts: on the one hand, talented individuals or creators are romantically seen as 'outsiders.' In some way it could be said that they are seen as having the seed of the solution for the problem of the industries. Yet, on the other hand, this is only the seed. So for this seed to evolve into a real problem-solver, it must be closely nurtured by a strongly directed process through which ideas are 'enriched' by the Factory and monitored in the case of Disonancias. This clearly brings to light a latent distrust regarding the 'inertia' of the creative process, which could go astray if left to itself. This correlates with short periods, non permanent kind of collaboration and a clear differentiation of the 'creator' and the 'producer' in the case of the Talent Factory. In this regard, it is worth noting that project-based work was previously limited to specific milieux (such as advertising, film production and operating rooms), but the development of the new media industry has made it more visible and elevated it as a general model that is also present in the mediation initiatives.⁴³

From a conceptual point of view, it could be stated that the Disonancias case, and more generally the projects of mediation and collaboration between artists and industries, present ambivalent and contradictory concepts of creativity. This is not a trivial point, mainly for two reasons: the first one is that the way these concepts are defined is very much related with the role that artists can play in our societies nowadays as crucial actors in innovation, something which is already happening in Europe with initiatives such as Creative Clash⁴⁴ and the second one is that these conceptions influence the structural or labor conditions of the artistic or creative professions, and as many authors point out, not necessarily for their own good.

These contradictory discourses seem to be far from being solved in the short-term, since the initiatives of mediation are quite new, but at the same time they have been very attractive as well as other co-creation initiatives for governments and policy makers in a context of an economic crisis. We have only delved into the more conceptual aspects in this paper but it is to be seen how the results of such initiatives have a real impact on the economy, and more importantly if these experiences provide equal benefits for both parties involved; artists and industries.

For now, at least, it seems that such experiences reinforce a model of artist/creator that is also seen in other areas of New Media Art or creative industries: someone who due to their specific characteristics and training can offer a novel and different point of view free from the predictable industrial logic and yet someone who, by the same token, is only committed to a short, partial and fragile job. As Kate Oakley and Brooke Sperry conclude, this is someone who possesses high degrees of critical thinking, as well as communication skills and aesthetic understanding. And at the same time, someone who shows flexibility, adaptability, entrepreneurship, self-exploitation and tolerance of risk,⁴⁵ all of which are hallmark qualities of precarious labor and the same for the artistic career. This has been called "an artistic mode of production,"⁴⁶ and it can be seen as the consequence of using the cultural attributes of 'cool' in the service of increasing profits in postindustrial capitalism. In other words, this "industrialization of bohemia," is reinforced by the positive self-image of workers in the new media and other creative sectors,⁴⁷ maybe unconsciously fuelled by the romantic features of creativity, which are deep-seated in our culture.

Should we therefore conclude that such a model of creative worker, albeit its disregard for industrial logic and its opposing position is, in the end, the perfect

exploited worker under the capitalist conditions of nowadays?

Marx posited alienation from the process and products of labor could be jokingly eluded by converting labor into art. This is eventually what Florida and other creative industries proponents seem to imply. As Imre Szeman says: "At its core, what is expressed in Florida's book is a fantasy of labor under capitalism: the possibility within capitalism of work without exploitation, of work as equivalent to play."⁴⁸ If art takes the place of work, then this model of creator and artist could indeed take the place of the future worker. ■

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