

**POST SCRIPTUM:** Writing these lines after having finished writing the text itself, I must admit that I conceived this article based on an intuition, an intuition that is much smaller in its significance and application, but indebted in its explanatory aspiration to that of Sohn-Rethel that it seeks to expand. Yet, as I progressed in committing my intuition to paper, it seemed less and less certain and it led to less and less trenchant conclusions. Some intellectual endeavors, in want of greater clarity of thought, are destined for failure.

Here I have drawn rigid distinctions between art and knowledge in order to better discern the changes of institutional make-ups, individual agencies and commitments in art and academia, to better discern the underlying transformations in social and artistic production and circulation that are the drivers of those changes, in a situation where artists increasingly pursue research-oriented activities outside and inside the institutional preserve of research that is the academia and we increasingly face the need to understand the methodological implications of research in art and art in academic research. My developments here lack the empirical purview that its explanatory aspirations might require, but part of the underlying argument that empirical facts are in themselves a synthesis of real abstractions, relational forms of socio-economic realities that this article has set its eye on. This might turn out to have been a failed thought experiment. And admittedly, as is always the case with intellectual gestures of self-disavowal, stating one's own failure is not without a slight tongue-in-cheek element – as one still expects that such a thought wager will provoke discussions that might ultimately defeat its temerity.

In fact, I rewrite these lines as two such discussions have already taken place and use the benefit of hindsight to address some of the unclarities and dubious arguments in the footnotes. I also wish to thank the participants of these discussions for their valuable comments and critiques.

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In this article I will try to describe the processes that can account for the growing importance of formalized knowledge production [1] in the arts. This article, taking the form of knowledge-work rather than artwork, comes as a part of a research project conducted by a group of artists and as a reflection on their artistic practice. The aim of the project was to try to trace the conceptual frameworks that allow us to better understand and subsequently work with the effects that artworks, particularly performing artworks, produce in their circulation once they are finished and start to circulate. Hence, the name of the research project: “post-hoc dramaturgy”.

That I as an artist should be writing a scholarly article is not without certain implausibility and complication. An artist claiming the territory of experts qualified to write, speak, teach about art? My trade is my art, but to write about my art is another man's trade. Thus, in this article, occasioned by this seemingly curious conflation of trades, I want to get to the bottom of the fact that we – including myself – obviously find nothing curious that an artist should be a knowledge producer too.

[1] Implied under the notion of knowledge production in this article is knowledge that is formalized and embedded in the processes of its material reproduction. Although I do not dispel the idea that art produces knowledge in itself, it does not produce knowledge qua knowledge, knowledge for itself, knowledge that is methodologically formalized and transmitted in the knowledge-form. If the English usage of “science” would permit a more general use to include unambiguously the Geisteswissenschaften and applied knowledge of artmaking that is subject to different modes of transfer by training and apprenticeship.

I must admit though that I'm not quite fully an artist either. In fact, I come from that uncircumscribable profession of philosophy. But the fact that I find myself in the role of an artist and that philosophical knowledge is my primary artistic 'instrument' in no way diminishes my intuition that there's still a gradual conflation of positions between the artist and the knowledge producer here at work today. True, there's nothing that prevented an artist from becoming a knowledge producer before. But this was, more often than not, a biographic circumstance. In fact, not a very rare circumstance at all. A mastery of two trades, so to say. However, I want to posit here that presently this conflation, given certain developments that I'll explain in detail in a moment, is less accidental now than it was before. That now it is the effect of a particular historic conjecture of broader political, social and economic transformations that are reshaping the artistic disciplines and their respective fields of study.

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Three processes are at the root of the growing significance of (formalized) knowledge production in the arts, the rise to prominence of the artist as knowledge producer and the proliferation of artistic research as an academic endeavor. Two are external and one is internal to artistic production. The first has to do with the changing political mandate of art owing to the rising tide of post-democratic politics in liberal democracies. The second has to do with the recomposition of the labor force in the process of deindustrialization. The third has to do with displacements in the very epistemologies of art as a consequence of the dominant transnationalization of the circulation and production of art. The two exogenous processes are not of our immediate interest here and would necessitate a study in their own right. Here I'll just outline them in passing and then move on to deal more extensively with the third process.

1) At the core of post-democratic or, as some prefer to call it, post-political politics is the growing disconnect between the production of social meanings and their enactment into self-binding legislative decisions through the political process and collective behaviors. The normative model of liberal democracies and the public sphere was premised on the idea that acts follow words, that utterances made by political representatives needed to be substantiated by their capacity to transform them into political decisions and social facts. The political representatives could achieve that by seeing them through the legislative and governmental process and, more importantly, by mustering support from their respective political bases, so that the political bases would provide legitimation for their enactment and transform them into a social process. True, this is a normative model of liberal democracies and it is subject to doubt if it was ever more than a model: if it wasn't just a teleology that from day one was subverted and upended by overreaching influences, propagandistic distortions, institutional perversions or social pathologies. Or, if the liberal model itself wasn't a screen, a pretext for class domination.

[2]  
It is worth noting that this process is not the sole consequence of troubled liberal democracies. There are at least two other prominent processes that can be discerned as having contributed to the representative mandate of art. First, in the wake of growing modern-day globalization artists have sought to represent the social pathologies that nation states are creating abroad in order to secure their social reproduction at home. The artists have thus provided a voice, critique and appeal where no effective democratic representation can exist. Second, the dematerialization and post-mediatric practices have allowed for a greater mobility of the artistic process and resulting artworks, allowing artworks to be executed with widely available everyday technologies with the participation of non-artists and to be easily presentable in a variety of contexts.

Be that as it may, the class composition, the hegemony of middle classes and the strength of organized labor in that brief moment of social-democracies after the Second World War created the actual prerequisites for broad political participation and de facto creation of that two-way bond of representation and legitimation between the political representatives and their bases - there was a de facto high degree of reciprocity between the social composition and political representation. However, with the economic crisis of the 1970s and the backlash against labor, the ties between the political representatives and their traditional social constituencies have slowly gradually eroded and been dismantled.

Other than resorting to the mobilization of religious sentiments and fantasies of besieged majorities, parties nowadays have no constituencies left to turn to, no bases to appeal to in order to guarantee that their utterances find sustained legitimation, and that in turn their representation stays accountable to their legitimating groups. An additional turn of the screw in that post-democratic disconnect has been the hypermediatization and radical democratization of media. As politicians find no sustained legitimation in their now decimated bases, they find themselves delivered to televised or internetized audiences, to the flux of affective liking and disliking that they are gradually learning to navigate. Instead of acts that follow words, we now have words that follow words. Promises after promises. Promises that don't deliver. Something that we have come to know as populism or Berlusconiism. To circumvent this impasse, this uncertainty of legitimation, politics has learned to increasingly seek alliances in the extra-political domains of business or entertainment.

It is in this post-political disconnect that art has seen its social mandate change from a position of modernist autonomy to the ever growing expectation that it is art that should step into the shoes of politics and take up the role of representing the social realities. [2] Consequently, we have seen the growth - and growing support by cultural policies too - of various forms of art in a social context, art for social change, participative art, community art, etc., etc. Art has increasingly become the voice of the marginalized and the disenfranchised, the warning system for social pathologies, the social ersatz of accountability where the political is lacking. This has pushed artists into a position where they have become organic intellectuals of the day, experts on the social and representation of the social.

2) Since the economic downturn of the 1970s, the recomposition of the labor force has been a parallel process to the rise of post-democratic politics. With the de-industrialization and re-location of labor-intensive industrial production to countries with lower costs of labor, jobs in the industrial sector were lost and their replacement was sought in the labor-non-intensive service, know-how, knowledge, creative economies - as they were sequentially touted by political job-creating programs. With that change of labor policies and the labor market, the non-industrial professions have grown. With the growth of non-industrial profes-

sions, increased importance was being placed on education in those sectors too. In consequence, and be that it is simply a professional training measure or a measure to decrease the pressure on the labor market through mass education, artistic education has seen growth, with growing ranks of artists being drafted into the role of teachers, trainers and researchers. This has had an effect on the ever growing number of trained artists being released into the art sector in search of work, but also growth in the demand for artists as knowledge producers who find jobs in education.

3) O.K. so far so good. All fairly evident and maybe known. But let's now turn to the immanent aspect of the growing importance of knowledge production in the arts and the shifting position of the artist in the knowledge economy. This is a transformation that does not come as a consequence of external exigencies of social transformations, but rather from the changes in the art practice itself: a transformation unfolding in the production and circulation of art that is in turn transforming the epistemology of art. Or, to anticipate the theoretical development that I'll elaborate in the following paragraphs, a recomposition of the knowledge-form as a consequence of the recomposition of the commodity-form of artwork.

But before retracing the actual recomposition in the knowledge-form back to the transformations of the commodity-form of artwork, let us establish the theoretical framework. In his seminal, yet somewhat forgotten work *The Intellectual and Manual Labor*, Alfred Sohn-Rethel, [3] one of those rare intellectuals whose life's work revolved around a single intuition, elaborates the genealogy of pure reason from the process of commodity exchange. Expanding on the Marxian idea of real abstraction, whereby concrete labor for consumption is abstracted through its inclusion into the production of commodities destined for exchange, Sohn-Rethel develops a schematic and historic account how ideal abstraction - i.e., reason and its categories that were conceived by idealist epistemology as ahistoric, pre-social, a priori givens - is in fact a result of the real abstraction of economic exchange and its development throughout history. It is the capacity of the exchange to abstract labor from its embeddedness into immediate consumption, to abstract from the immediate properties of products of labor to establish their equivalence as commodities exchangeable in the market, to abstract human communities into atomized and separate owners of tradeable commodities and labor that are bound together into a society through the medium of commodity exchange, - it is this abstract and abstracting character of human relations and practice that pre-dates and is the material precondition of mental abstractions. Raising the critique of epistemology to the level of Marxian critique of political economy, Sohn-Rethel premises the thought-form on the commodity-form [4], abstraction on the social relations, consciousness on the social being.

In Sohn-Rethel's schematic historic exposition - whose particular formations and transformations he studies in concrete - once we leave the primordial communal form of production, where labor and its products haven't undergone the process of differentiation and specialization, where everyone produces for their own needs or

[3]  
Alfred Sohn-Rethel,  
*The Intellectual  
and Manual Labor,  
A Critique of  
Epistemology*,  
MacMillan, London,  
1978.

[4]  
For more on the  
differentiation  
between commodity-  
form and thought-  
form, see Alfred  
Sohn-Rethel,  
"Warenform und  
Denkform",  
in *Warenform und  
Denkform, Aufsätze*,  
Europäische  
Verlagsanstalt,  
Frankfurt am Main,  
1971.

produces for the direct consumption of their own community, we enter into a process of exchange and socialization of labor. In order for an exchange to take place, the concrete products of labor are abstracted into commodities all equal in their exchangeable quality and only different in their quantifiable value. Their use is delayed and their use value is abstracted into the exchange value and readied for circulation as commodities, whereby the concrete labor that produced them is in turn abstracted into socialized labor. The exchange value of commodities, embodied in the abstract medium of money and, particularly, in the non-commodified fiat money that only has a token value and no commodity value in itself, abstracts possession into private ownership and people into abstract individuals in their role as owners and traders. [5] All the building blocks of pure reason are the result of that abstraction: time and space as the abstract medium where transactions and circulation of commodified goods unfold, substance as the constant and non-perishable quality of commodity, causation as the negative implication of commodity's potential perishability. Furthermore, the process of commodity exchange, i.e., the market, serves as a form of social synthesis whereby the relations between private individuals acting as owners is mediated to form a society. In the advanced capitalist economy, labor is thoroughly socialized, i.e., fully and completely integrated into the circuit of private exchange of commodified products of labor. Labor thus abstracted and stored in commodities, so that it can be first exchanged and only later consumed, is "dead labor". [6]

[5]  
Ibid.,  
p. 105.

[6]  
Alfred Sohn-Rethel,  
The Intellectual  
and Manual Labor,  
A Critique of  
Epistemology,  
p. 169.

[7]  
Sohn-Rethel under-  
writes Marx's idea  
that empirical  
social facts are  
not immediate and  
concrete givens in  
themselves rather  
that they are the  
materialized  
synthesis of dif-  
ferent abstraction  
processes that  
shape them and that  
need to be studied  
as concrete. For  
an overview of  
Marxian real  
abstraction and its  
later transmogrifi-  
cations, see  
Alberto Toscano,  
"The Open Secret of  
Real Abstraction",  
in Rethinking  
Marxism,  
April 2008,  
pp. 273-287.

Returning to epistemology, Sohn-Rethel's extrapolation of thought-form from commodity-form allows him to draw a difference between intellectual and manual labor, or, as he frequently formulates, between head and hand labor. Intellectual labor comes into being only once the abstraction of commodity exchange comes into being, once concrete labor is abstracted and socially mediated, once the production becomes dictated under circulation, leading in turn to the constitutive illusion of private abstract reason in the mind of private individuals forming a society through the synthesis of socialized labor and commodity exchange. [7] Thus, the division between intellectual and manual labor is not merely the difference between work on immaterial and material objects, the difference between writing a book and carving a table, rather intellectual labor are the forms of labor that come into being only once the productive labor is separated from the socialization of labor, the exchange of its products as commodities. Those are the forms of labor that result from the separation that creates both ideal abstractions as objects of immaterial labor, but also it is the processes of that separation that are the trades of intellectual labor. Intellectual labor is the reification, material and objective form of that abstraction. Only once we have the commodity-form, can we have the thought-form. Only once we have the real abstraction of people exchanging commodities, can we have the ideal abstractions of thinking subjects. Only once we have the separation of productive labor and socialization of labor, can we have the trade that reproduces itself by reproducing that abstraction. The opposition between intellectual and manual labor is an immanent antagonism of the constitutive illusion of the private

mind solidified into a profession by bourgeois epistemology. In order for this separation between intellectual and manual labor to be overcome, it is the separation between productive labor and the socialization of its production that has to be overcome. And, according to Sohn-Rethel, it can be overcome only through the direct commensuration between labors circumventing the commensuration of labor through commodity exchange. [8]

[8]  
Alfred Sohn-Rethel,  
The Intellectual  
and Manual Labor,  
A Critique of  
Epistemology,  
p. 171.

Finally, before I go on to extend Sohn-Rethel's analysis to epistemology and the circulation of contemporary art, I should expand the understanding of real abstraction a step further by including a perspective that can provide us with a better understanding of the centrality of intellectual labor and intellect in the contemporary organization of economy and its productivity: the theoretical perspective of the (post-)operaist thought of Virno, Negri, and their peers [7, OSRA, 283]. While their accounts of the post-fordist economy have been subjected to harsh critiques for purporting the hegemony of cognitive labor over industrial labor, the dominance of cognitive capitalism, the emancipatory ambivalence of the subordination of social production under the capitalist mode of production, etc., etc., here we are dealing with the limited domain of intellectual and creative production proper and can take them at their word. The important point here is that intellect and communication (in (post-)operaist understood as general intellect and social communication) hold the ambivalent position of being both the primary productive factors, producing difference and producing value in the economy based around creativity and innovation, while at the same time being the medium of social interaction and human collaboration. It is the separation between productive labor and the socialization of production through circulation, forming the foundation of intellectual labor, that becomes productive labor and that transform social communication and interaction into a productive force, giving a political valence to intellectual labor. Or, as Virno, writes: "The crucial question goes like this: is it possible to split that which today is united, that is, the Intellect (the general intellect) and (wage) Labor, and to unite that which today is divided, that is, Intellect and political Action? Is it possible to move from the 'ancient alliance' of Intellect/Labor to a 'new alliance' of Intellect/political Action?...The salient traits of post-fordist experience (servile virtuosity, exploitation of the very faculty of language, unflinching relation to the "presence of others", etc.) postulate, as a form of conflictual retaliation. Nothing less than a radically new form of democracy." [9]

[9]  
Paolo Virno,  
A Grammar of the  
Multitude:  
For an Analysis of  
Contemporary Forms  
of Life,  
Semiotext(e)  
/ Foreign Agents,  
2003, p. 68.

The salient takeaway points from these theoretical expositions of real abstraction for our further analysis are the following: concrete social facts are synthetic results of interlocking processes of abstraction that need to be understood in order to explain social fact; epistemology is historic, social and trans-individual; its transformations reflect the transformations in the mode of production and circulation; knowledge-form is nowadays completely subsumed under the capitalist mode of production, it is ambiguously reproductive and productive, and thus reflects the internal contradictions of the capitalist mode of production; finally, it is the capacity of capitalist reproduction and the faculties of po-



litical emancipation that converge in knowledge production, making its efforts to transform its own mode of production potentially emancipatory.

If we keep in mind these points while looking at the developments in contemporary arts, and in performing arts in particular (where these developments have been picking up only lately, decades later after having done so in the visual arts for instance), we can observe that the absorption of artworks into the trans-national circulation has led to their growing dissociation from their particular local communicational contexts and commitments. The communicational context has become transnational and the key to communicating with non-local, non-specific, non-particular audiences has become finding the proper modality of generalizing the particular (which in turn, in its individual instantiations, also implies particularizing the general) – so that it can be related and understood everywhere it travels, while trying to engage with each instance of somewhere (be it even the trans-national circuit it is included into). This is now the crucial development: as artworks have de-contextualized, so has the knowledge production around them, replacing the old morphology of disciplinary knowledge formerly tied to local disciplinary histories and material genealogies giving rise to a new, universal organon reflecting the universal circulation of artworks. The compound consequence of the trans-nationalization of production and circulation of art and the universalization of disciplinary knowledge unfolding through that trans-nationalization is that the artist finds herself in an equal, if not privileged position to produce knowledge about her work or, tendentially, to switch track altogether and produce knowledge instead of artwork. This does not mean that experts are gone, just that the knowledge and capacity to conceptualize, contextualize, interpret, theorize are more equally distributed – or, rather, more equally fleeting – between the artist, the mediator, programmer or curator, and the scientist.

We are now approaching our conclusions. As the relations at the basis of real abstraction have been changing, so have epistemologies been displacing. As the labor force has been recomposing, so has knowledge production in creative professions been growing. As democratic politics has been declining, so has art's mandate to represent the social been gaining ground. If our preliminary observations, i.e., the immanent and external processes of social transformation that I have described, are correct, producing the compound effect of growing significance of (formalized) knowledge production in the arts, how can this be actively reflected and absorbed into the poetics of art-making? In particular, how can we start transforming knowledge itself by transforming the circulation of artworks? Can we transform the circulation by transforming the production? Can this be done after the fact, as an experimentation with the modes of re-production? Could we see there an opening for a poetics of knowledge? A transformation of the institutional makeup of knowledge production starting from the production and circulation of artworks. There are no unambivalent prescriptions here. While processes are de-contextualizing and universalizing, they are no less being re-contextualized and re-particularized back as soon as their circulation is interrupted and use

is instantiated, only to become de-contextualized and universalized again. In this oscillatory and deterritorializing movement of circulation it is only an ambivalent non-prescriptive poetics that can address the balancing act between the general and the particular, the constantly de-contextualized and the intermittently re-contextualized. Still our analyses provide some indications as to what poetics after production, a post-hoc poetics, might entail. Starting from the more conclusive and going to the more illusive and uncertain, these would be propositions to consider: Haunt and hunt politics that have renegaded, become fleeting and gone post-political, and never concede to the mandate of representing the social – don't simply do political art, do art and politics. Do politics starting from your position in the art system or your institutional affiliations, understand that there's a reserve labor army out there and that accounting for privileged access to the means of production is critical. Pursue institutional politics of generosity. Commensurate knowledge with irruptive acts and works, create an economy of difference and intensity rather than an equivalence of commodifiable commensurability of knowledge, pursue a Tardian economy of passionate interests. [10]

[10]

For an overview of Gabriel Tarde's project of economic psychology, his attempt at an expanded critique of political economy, where the affective investments into commodities and the production of difference are the drivers of economic and social transformation, see Bruno Latour and Vincent Antonin Lépinay, *The Science of Passionate Interests: An Introduction to Gabriel Tarde's Economic Anthropology*. In the Marxian context of commensuration of labor beyond commodity circulation, the Tardian perspective provides an astute reminder that we cannot simply do away with the socialization of labor through circulation without accounting for commodities' entanglement with libidinal investments, desires and ideologies. The envisioned commensuration of labor through labor will require a recomposition of that libidinal (aspect of) economy, spurring passionate investments into differences of products of labor to replace consumerist attachments to equivalences of commodity.

And more unlikely propositions: Present your work conjecturally, engaging in random or unlikely connections with other objects, venues, events, persons. When presenting works, create serendipitous assemblages. Heterogenize, for instance do a show for an audience in the midst of a public. When the work is final, you've presented it and you have no plans for it, create a sequel. Cut the work up into diachronic trajectories and parallel synchronic strata, move them around the time-space axes, recompose it and see the effect it takes. Continue imagining unlikely propositions, execute them every once in a while.

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