



INTRODUCTION:
THE RIGHT TO ANOTHER ARTWORLD:
FROM ENTREPRENEURSHIP
TO AUTONOMY¹

Nina Mihaljinac, Bojana Matejić, Milan Đorđević

1 This publication is realized within the scientific project *Empowering Participation in Culture and Architecture: Activating Public Resources for and with Local Community* – EPICA (No. 7744648) supported by the Science Fund Republic of Serbia. The printing of the publication is supported by the Ministry of Culture and Information of Serbia.

This book contributes to a better understanding of the extent of inequality in the field of art, particularly in the visual arts, which have emerged as a critical area in which the world's increasingly pronounced social and class gap can be seen. In a capitalist society defined by austerity measures, privatisation, the growth of non-standard forms of employment and the obstruction of trade union self-organisation of employees, artistic work is seen exclusively through entrepreneurship and the art market. Many states' cultural policies have counted on the entrepreneurial potential of the cultural and creative sectors, which in practice can only flourish with massive state subsidies, which led to an almost complete lack of support for artists. So far, in underdeveloped countries such as Serbia, poor material conditions in which art work takes place were only discussed in the context of an underdeveloped art market – until the Covid-19 pandemic revealed that both in neo-liberal capitalist countries and the capitalist periphery, art became the exclusive right of materially secure individuals. On the other hand, today, self-organisation in the Western world primarily, oscillates between the self and the group, self-imposed bureaucratisation and flexibilism, aestheticization and activism, as a result of local and international cultural policy programs (Stine and Karlsen, 2013).

These circumstances are so threatening that more and more artists and cultural professionals around the world are increasingly fighting for new organisational modes. It could be said that for that reason, the *fair pay* movement emerged. Numerous organizations and initiatives that advocate fair practice try to empower position of artists and cultural workers in negotiating better working conditions – such as, *Wagency* (W.A.G.E., USA), *Fair Practice Code* (Platform BK, the Netherlands), *Hyperunionization* (Art Workers Italia, Italy), *Paying Artists* (a-n/AIR, UK), *Trade union for creativity and culture ZASUK* (Slovenia), *Fair Arts Almanac* (SOTA, Belgium), ULUS Debate programme initiatives (The Association of Fine Artists of Serbia), etc. Following the UNESCO Brainstorming session report 2018, UNESCO launched a global consultation on the implemen-

tation of the *1980 Recommendation concerning the Status of the Artist* in 2022, stressing the urgency of improving the status of artists and cultural workers on policy level. There is rising pressure on cultural organizations to refrain from controversial funding – e.g. *BP of Not BP* protest at London's British Museum against its continuing sponsorship from the oil giant British Petroleum, or to confront colonial past by removal of monuments valorising white supremacist or colonial figures. These initiatives keep pace with larger social movements, from Black Lives Matter protests to the Indignados of Europe in the summer of 2011, the work of the NYC general assemblies prior to September, and the wave of home reclamation projects related to the housing policies and practices that have happened in late 2011. Our effort to produce these collections of papers represents another way to support this struggle. It is a result of our response to inequalities and strengthening the fight for the right to art; a right to another artworld.

The artworld is not an innocent, autonomous field, but a heteronomous, controlled space of knowledge production by the institutional dispositives (state apparatuses, funds, administrative measures, etc.). On one hand, neoliberalism puts pressure on public art institutions to make them apolitical institutions that ought to produce precarious creative individuals, technically and cognitively skilled, according to the needs of cognitive capitalism (co-optation of activity, knowledge production, virtuosity, immaterial labour, etc.). Knowledge becomes one of the main mediums of neoliberal financial investments, yet, at the same time, a battlefield of social transformation. On other hand, artistic practice is usually considered as an activity purportedly done *ex nihilo*, meaning that, it is not treated as work (Martin, 2016: 43). The humanist episteme on Art (Art History, Aesthetics, Philosophy of Art, etc.) advocate the dominant thesis that such labour is creative, non-utilitarian human activity, opposite of work, in service of human self-fulfilling and expressive needs in and of itself (Praznik, 2021: 17). This also serves as one of the hiding masks of the ne-

oliberal, post-political condition that blurs the extraction of surplus value out of, predominately, participatory, and collaborative modes of working. As Bojana Kunst writes, „people intervene all the time (...) academics participate in meaningless debates and so on“ which is a hallmark of the reduction of politics to the expert management of social life (Kunst, 2015: 7).

In such global post-political condition many contemporary art discourses, from the global (Western) to the glocal, are based on a critical meta-language, pseudo-active models of art market, where art appears as „autonomous“ field of freedom. At the same time, one faces a growing political powerlessness of art: “The art of today seems to be generated in this field in-between pseudo-activity and the quest for a real effect; it is profoundly marked by the loss of the event and the desire for a radical cut at the same time” (Kunst, 2015: 7). These circumstances go hand in hand with the *recombinant* phenomena that has taken a central role in politics and in the culture of the 1990s in the Western part of the World. According to Berardi, *recombinant* is based on alliance of cognitive labour and financial capital that has produce cultural effects based on identification of labour and enterprise. The consequence of such alliance is the entrepreneurial form in which financial capital and highly productive cognitive labour met. The main actors in such world are cognitive workers who invest their expertise (knowledge, skills, creativity, etc.) and find the means on the stock market to create enterprises. The result of such alliance is a reproduction of an army of self-employed cognitive entrepreneurs on the „free market“. According to Berardi, what neoliberalism has supported is not the „free market“, but monopoly that has robbed the mass of shareholders and cognitive labour. By producing its own negation, neoliberalism cooptated the productive power of the cognitive workers for the purpose of re-production of the semicapitalism. The contemporary neoliberal condition generates the split between the financial accumulation and privatization of public knowledge and the inscription of the productive labour in the cognitive functions of society.

In such conditions, artistic work is no longer exceptional. Actually, this very exceptionality of Art is a construct of the modernist Fordist rhetoric. Contemporary artistic work predominately does not end in a material result (autonomous and remaining work) (especially when considering participatory practices), since it became linguistic and communicative. Yet, as Kunst maintains, Art preserves its exceptional place within the capital and economic speculations on artistic life. Therefore, many theoreticians strive to find new organisational modes. For instance, Franco Bifo Berardi offers a concept of „autonomy“ that presupposes forms of social life that do not depend on the disciplinary regulations imposed by economic power, but also on the internal displacement, shifts, dissolutions, self-compositions of living society, struggle, withdrawal, sabotage, refusal of work. He sees the possible autonomy of *self-regulation* of the social body in its independence and its interaction with the disciplinary norm (Berardi, 2009: 75). The scrutinization of the relationship between art and the working and organisational modes thus becomes crucial.

Just because of that, we started dealing with the topic of various new organisational modes more intensively when we decided to organise an international conference entitled „ANOTHER ARTWORLD: Manifestations and Conditions of Equity in Visual Arts“ at the UNESCO Chair for Cultural Policy and Management in cooperation with the New Media Department of the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of the Arts in Belgrade and the Association of Fine Artists of Serbia. Held in December 2020 while the country was under lockdown, the conference initiated a conversation about democratic governance principles and decision-making models in the visual arts, a subject that had previously received little attention from the general public or from the scientific community. More than seventy scholars and practitioners discussed features of the democratic functioning of the contemporary visual arts system, the re-definition of it and the place of artists and cultural workers within it. The conference reconsidered historical and contemporary examples of practice that are contribut-

ing to the comprehensive decentralisation and democratisation of the visual arts field, in search of new models that might be effectively applied.

As editors, we come from a country in the Global South, so the problems we feel are far more pronounced than those of our colleagues from the Global North. However, we keep the memory and certain knowledge related to self-government in culture (self-governing period of the former SFR Yugoslavia). We, therefore, thought that it was a combination of experience of scientists and researchers who have memory and contact with the revolutionary achievements of self-government on one hand, and the experience of colleagues from developed Western countries on the other (although both groups feel the numerous upheavals brought about by the capitalist logic of action in culture) can provide really important guidelines for thinking about the future of the art world. Still, some questions remain: is it possible to reinvent critical potentialities of this knowledge production from the „spacial“ geopolitical context in the present capitalist, post-Fordist circumstances? How to recontextualize and make this knowledge a powerful tool for the present and future transnational struggle movements?

That is why the book opens with a text by Lev Kreft, a colleague coming from Slovenia (one of the ex-Yugoslavian countries), who introduces two key concepts of the collection: democratisation and equity. This paper focuses on the period of Yugoslav self-government, which is characterised by the anti-capitalist struggle and cultural democracy. Two following texts help the understanding of two crucial principles of the cultural policy during the self-management period, but from the contemporary point of view: a critique of elitism in arts in the neoliberal period (written by feminist economist Gabriele Mihalich) and the value of collective action, as well as the possibilities of radical turn through radical imagination (written by Irena Ristić). This corpus is followed by the texts that show local practices of opposing neoliberalism in art (Cuba, Indonesia, Poland, Slovenia, Italy, etc.). Their authors (Annelies Van Assche, Pablo Müller, Ginevra Ludovici, Mateusz Sapija, Vito Vo-

gnic-Purcsár, Stephanie Dieckvoss, Mary Gatenby, Anna Battiston, Camille Prunet) mostly come from the countries of Western Europe, where more and more work is being done on re-examining Western democracy and introducing alternative models of artistic work and organization. The last text written by an artist Milica Lapčević “rethinks possibilities of social engagement of artists in contemporary society, in which labor in ancient coal mines under unfair conditions is replaced with new sort of invisible mining – that of digital data.” The collection therefore covers numerous topics related to the issue of unfavourable working conditions and democratising the art world: self-organisation, precarity, access to art, possibilities of political action through art, and the question of the art market.

The first paper written by Lav Kreft *From Marx to Majstorović: Between Democratization of Culture and Cultural Democracy* discusses key notions of the entire book: equity and cultural democracy. In the context of modern Serbia, which has entered a post-transition phase and is suffering the terrible consequences of the development of capitalism - Majstorović's work served as the greatest inspiration in determining the topic and editing this book - precisely because he was a researcher and practitioner in the field of cultural policy who developed his concepts of culture, art and cultural policy during the Yugoslav self-government. This period of development of the former state is now in the sphere of interest of domestic researchers precisely because more and more work is being done to discover organizational models that will be alternative to the current capitalist system of the state system, including the cultural system. Lev Kreft's text analyzes the possibilities of political emancipation and de-westernization, considering the model of non-aligned policies and the Ljubljana period of self-government. The text is also important from the standpoint of the history of Yugoslavia and socialist ideas because it deals with the Cultural Action Congress in Kragujevac, as well as with the Praxis group who developed critical Marxism within the journal and international meetings of Marxists on the Croatian island of Korčula.

To better understand the key concept of the book – equity – a quote from Kreft’s introductory text will be used, responding to frequent criticisms of self-management as an unsustainable model of functioning:

„There is a fault in this system, indeed, but the transformation of cultural politics in Yugoslavia from the democratization of culture to cultural democracy is still worth studying because it is a unique case of realization, ideologization and radical criticism. Not in spite of but with the help of utopian imagination, the **promotion of equity instead of equality proved its non-utopian capacity for actualization.**“

(Kreft, 2022)

Theorizing the question of democratization and critique of neoliberalism continues in the work of Gabriele Michalitsch *Artwork or Cultural Commodity? Neoliberalism, De-Democratization, and Authoritarianism*. As an economist of left-wing political beliefs, Gabriele warns of the many negative consequences of the spread of capitalist logic in culture (elaborates on phenomena such as self-commodification, self-rationalization), assessing this system as repressive and authoritarian. Her brief critique of the relationship between the public and private sectors in the development of art and artistic practice is especially significant since, in the contemporary world of art, the positive participation of the private sector is almost unquestionable. In this regard, Gabriele notes that the work of art has ceased to be an agent of criticism and reflection and has become a marker of social rank, as well as an object of investment and speculation. The consequence of that transformation is democratization.

According to many theoreticians, practitioners and politicians - SELF-ORGANIZATION appears as a response to the problems created by the system of capitalism and representative democracy. One of the conditions for self-organization is the strengthening of collective creativity and radical imagination (Vigotsky). Text by Irena Ristić *Paths of radical imagination or How to make a collective? ex-*

plains these concepts and warns of potential pitfalls in the development of the collective, advocating the idea of the necessity of collective work, association and self-organization as a way to destroy models of capitalist, hierarchical governance. Ristić writes about testing the model of collective work, their growth and simultaneous performance, progressing towards new forms of collectivity, and maybe even collective autonomy. It is precisely art collectives that can be the driving force of social change, which is why our book is in the first place for artists and employees in the field of culture.

Introductory texts that map the most general themes and problems of inequality of the art world - as an illustration, and more thorough analysis - are followed by papers dealing with local art scenes or collectives - Slovenia, Belgium, Switzerland, Cuba, Indonesia, etc. They also analyze diverse factors influencing art field development: financing, education, and organization. The common goal of these texts is to find alternative models and solutions to identified problems such as commoning and self-organization. As Müller points out: Some actually postulate self-organization as a mode of action in response to the impact of neoliberal policies which is also felt in the art world (Müller, 2021).

The paper *The Contemporary Dance World and the Thin Line between Self-Realization and Self-Precarization* by Annelies Van Assche critically reflects the handbook on precarious work in the field of art "Become the ideal cultural worker in 86 steps (2016)", whose context is the performing arts scene in Slovenia. This text can be understood as a direct response to the statements presented in the text by Gabriela Mihalich; Annelies writes: „collective tactics and commoning practices project-based funding systems, for example, simply copy neoliberalism's competitive model artistic labour remains under the domination of a neoliberal paradigm, oscillating between poles of self-realization and self-precarization“ (Van Assche, 2022).

Writing about self-organised practices in Switzerland, Pablo Müller's paper *The Self-organised Art Scene in Switzerland. In between Professionalization and Collabora-*

tive Agency, very thoroughly explains the notion of self-organisation (distinguishing it according to an ideological line from terms such as self-help and self-enterprize) and offers ideas and values that oppose the authoritarianism of the contemporary art world: collaboration, caring and sharing, polyphonic and dialogical work, diversity. The focus is put on financing, competitive bidding with donors and the issue of fair pay, so the paper advocates the idea of the possibility of operating beyond financial logic and cultivating a different approach to art.

The paper of Ginevra Ludovici also deals with self-organization under the title *Self-initiated institutions: the case of artists-run educational platforms*. It examines the role of artists in the so-called educational turn. Ginevra states that art schools and universities started to experience a major shift from experimentation toward the bureaucratization and standardization of knowledge-based production. She especially criticizes the Bologna process that reduces education merely to utilitarian purposes related to the access to the work environment and gives three examples of self-organised education initiatives – INSTAR (Tania Bruguera), Cuba, Silent University (Ahmet Ögüt), international, and GUDSKUL (Grafis Huru Hara, ruangrupa and Serrum), Jakarta. Ludovici writes about these initiatives: „Such long-term projects, moving away from vertical structures and teaching models, aim to put into action inclusive and democratic practices that also take current issues and the participants’ needs into account. These are cases born in different contexts where forms of hegemonic cultural structures limit access to the public sphere“ (2022). Furthermore, she states that „turning authorial voices – like the ones of the various initiators examined - into multi-layered, polyphonic voices show a commitment to extending the spaces of possibility for concrete action and share their social responsibilities“.

While previous texts have considered the functioning of collectives and organizations, the paper authored by Mateusz Sapija deals with the possibilities of using an individual event such as an exhibition - ([S]election.pl. (Center for Con-

temporary Art, Warszawa, 2005) for the purpose of opening space for the introduction, implementation and promotion of radical democracy. The goal of this exhibition was the representation of the contemporary Polish art scene and several curators were invited. Artur Zmijewski and Pavel Althamer, among them, hijacked the exhibition in order to question the function of art and its position in contemporary society. The action tried to undermine the format of a traditional exhibition, which is why the paper elaborates notions and concepts such as participation, civic action and conversation, „collaborative“, „participatory“, „social practice“, „dialogic“, or „new genre public art“, „emancipated public“, „applied social arts“, anti-exhibition. The special value of this paper lies in the fact that it was based on the personal conversation between Sapia and two curators.

Vito Vojnits-Purcsár in his text *Schlingensief's Failed Chance for Direct Democracy, Failure as Chance. A Case Study*, offer a reflection on Christoph Schlingensief's work in relationship with experiments with direct democracy dictum. He puts emphasis on the concept of the so-called *atonal democracy* which Schlingensief developed in the wake of atonal music of Arnold Schönberg. Atonality presupposes an aesthetic attitude and *political non-correctness*, which as a practice might be found in the Schlingensief's action 7 days disposal for Graz - artists against human rights (Purcsár, 2022). This articulation of the rebellion in the socially engaged art he further explores on the examples of works by Russell Brand, Renzo Martens, etc. The particular contribution of this paper lies in the introducing of social antagonism in the current participatory turn in the contemporary art.

In their text Stephanie Dieckvoss and Mary Gatenby tackle the problem of the politics of financing of art between 2003 and 2020 in post-Saddam public and commercial art scenes in Iraq. This text offers a challenging insight into the influence of nongovernmental organization (NGOs) as market agents on artistic scene in the wake of Iraq invasion in 2003 by American, British, Australian and Polish forces. This research is based on the investigation of the

production of the so-called *war art* from the geographies that have been affected by the war in the last twenty years. It is an original contribution to the recent inquiries related to the NGO sector in the democratic transformations of the culture in Eastern and Southern part of the world.

In reference to various alternative models of social experimentation in the contemporary art world, Anna Battiston in her paper examines the politics and practice of commons in the Artist-run-spaces (new territories of the art) and self-run social centers. She tries to make a distinction between the neoliberal cooptation of these third places' cultural spaces (gentrification) – especially in the example of the development of the Italian Autonomy worker movement during 1970, wherein the model places like the CSOC (occupied social centers of the Italian matrix) that will be exported to different European countries – and its „real” political effects.

In the last theoretical text of this book art theorist, Camille Prunet opens the topic of criticism of neoliberal effects on the contemporary art and art market in the post humanist context of ecological crisis. She tackles the concept of third nature as a space of „what manages to live in the ruins of capitalism” (Prunet, 2022), based on the preference of mining thoughts, gestures, and representations from the “rubble of a depleted” capitalism. She sees this concept of a third nature as a powerful theoretical tool, of a struggle for new critical modes in the contemporary (art)world. A living community is a presupposition of the new modes of organizing on the post- and trans-humanist level – between plants, animals, viruses, tries, (non-)humans, creatures, rocks, etc. The matter of care, co-genesis of forms, sharing and balance, symbiopoietic thinking, according to Prunet, might produce new modes to counter the exploitative pressures of capitalism and the cynical violence of the art market.

References

Berardi, Franco B. (2009). “Autonomy Today”, *Precarious Rhapsody. Semiocapitalism and the Pathologies of the Post-Alpha Generation*, London: Minor Compositions

Kunst, B. (2015). *Artist at Work. Proximity of Art and Capitalism*, New York: Zero Books

Martin, R. (2016). "Art's Politics: an Interventionist Curriculum", *TkH Journal for Performing Arts Theory*, no. 23

Stine, H. and Anne Szefer K. (eds.). (2013). *Self-Organised*, London: Open Editions

Praznik, K. (2021). "The Autonomy of Art and the Emancipation of Artistic Labour", *Artwork: Invisible Labour and the Legacy of Yugoslav Socialism*, Toronto-Buffalo-London: University of Toronto Press