

Artist at Work Against Work?

Aldo Milohnić

Translated by Katja Kosi

Aldo Milohnić, PhD in sociology of culture, is a lecturer in theatre history, editor of the book series *Politike*, editor of many compendiums and special topic issues of cultural magazines, co-author of many books and the author of *Teorije sodobnega gledališča in performansa* [*Theories of Contemporary Theatre and Performance Art*].

This contribution draws on the concluding chapter of the book *Artist at Work* by Bojana Kunst, in which she summarises key findings about the relation between work and life and, among other things, writes down this thought: “[Artistic work] is no longer exceptional, because it is subjected to the necessity of labour (because it is becoming more and more labour and less and less creativity), nevertheless, it still holds its exceptional place in financial and economic speculations about artistic life, which is attributed social and economic value precisely as work-free life, which in contemporary bizarre fantasies about creativity becomes ‘pure creativity’.”¹ The appeal of this formulation lies in the condensation of the relation between “labour” and “creativity”, the very relation that has (in a historical perspective) framed the formation of the cult of genius as the ideological base to obscure the material conditions that have excluded “art” from everyday life practice. Firstly, I will show that – in a historical perspective – the shift from “work” to “creativity” was a mere ideological *salto mortale* of the modern (bourgeois) artist, and then, in the second part, shed some light on the position of the artist in a time when (as maintained by Bojana Kunst) “artistic work is becoming more and more work and less and less creativity”.

Autonomous artistic work

In the 1970s, a group of (then) younger art historians from the German University of Marburg published a collection of historical-materialist studies, *Autonomy of Art: Toward a*

1 Bojana Kunst, *Umetnik na delu: bližina umetnosti in kapitalizma*, Ljubljana: Maska, 2012, p. 152.

2 Michael Müller et al., *Autonomie der Kunst – Zur Genese und Kritik einer bürgerlichen Kategorie*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972 (in continuation: *Autonomie der Kunst*).

3 *Autonomie der Kunst*, p. 176.

4 For numerous examples and a detailed historical analysis of this subjection, see Martin Warnke's book *Hofkünstler: zur Vorgeschichte des modernen Künstlers*, Köln: DuMont Buchverlag, 1985. Martin Warnke was a professor at the University of Marburg when the research group was, on his initiative, preparing the compendium *Autonomie der Kunst*.

5 Cf. *Autonomie der Kunst*, pp. 92–93.

6 Peter Bürger, *Teorija avangarde*, Belgrade: Narodna knjiga/Alfa, 1998, p. 64.

7 Arnold Hauser, *Sociologija umjetnosti*, Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1986, pp. 139–140.

8 Hauser, *ibid.*, p. 139.

9 Hauser, *ibid.*, p. 217.

genesis and critique of a bourgeois category.² Their central thesis was that the process of the “autonomisation” of art started as far back as the early Renaissance as a specific response by artists to one important structural change: the introduction of a new mode of production, which is connected to the transition from the feudal to the capitalist (or at least, as argued by Braudel, “protocapitalist”) formation.

The researchers arrived at the conclusion that the artist managed to avoid the division of labour brought about by the historical process of divorcing the producers from the means of production. Berthold Hinz states: “The reason that an artist’s product could acquire importance as something special, ‘autonomous’, seems to lie in the continuation of the handicraft mode of production after the historical division of labour had set in.”³ When in the early Renaissance, the artistic craftsman – supported by church and secular patrons – started disengaging from the guild and without reluctance began transforming into a “court artist”, the artist responded to these structural changes in a “feudal” way, namely, he disavowed his guild status and perceived himself as a genius.

Although a court artist, who does not yet function in a market situation in the strict sense of the word, became “autonomous” in relation to the guild and its rules (artisanal production mode, price and product quality control, etc.), he still had to yield to the demands of a church or secular patron.⁴ In his study “Autonomy and Asceticism”, Horst Bredekamp, also a member of the Marburg historians, compares the positions of the Middle Age artisan and the Renaissance court artist. His conclusion is that the court artist had no autonomy at all: the function of a Renaissance artist is to give legitimacy to the wealth and pomp of his commissioners, while the declared “autonomous” art, allegedly subjected to no other purpose than its own rules (*zweckfreie Selbstgesetzgebung*), is only a semblance.⁵ According to Peter Bürger, the cult of a genius, propagated by both court artists and their patrons, created an ideological base for “obscuring the historical circumstances” through which “art withdrew from [everyday] social practice.”⁶ The “free” bourgeois artist, who is already working on the market, cuts his personal ties with the patron, thus gaining “autonomy” in relation to the great commissioner, but falling under the rule of capital. His subjective sense of “creative freedom” is objectivised through commodification of his creations; his autonomous position is an idealistic negation of his real existential conditions.

Arnold Hauser maintains that the development of the market economy was of key importance for the emergence of artistic autonomy, and a part of this process was also the formation of the art market: “After the dissolution of the guilds and the abolition of the regulation of production and consumption by forces like the court and the government, the boom on the market changes into a wild competitive strug-

gle and for the first time in the history of the plastic arts [...] we have a class that can be called an artistic proletariat.”⁷ So, from this perspective, the “turn in the economic situation and the social position of the artist in 17th century Holland”⁸ was apparently more important than the “episode” with Renaissance court artists. This is the time of the last, “Amsterdam” cycle of the domination of urban centres, which is followed by the period of economic superiority of modern states and national economies, that is, the process of expansion on the new markets of the so-called “national states”, which begins in 18th century England, if we rely on Braudel’s dating of its beginning. In the 17th century, as much as fifty percent of the Dutch population lived in the cities of the United Provinces, which was at the time the highest percentage of urban population in Europe. Because the Dutch agriculture relied heavily on cereal importation, it underwent industrialisation very early on: agricultural production shifted to the production of industrial crops, especially dyeing plants used for the finishing treatment of English raw cloth. High incomes were generated by trade that rested, logistically, on ships, ports and large storehouses, which enabled huge purchases and resales, and, financially, on low interest rates and freed up financial capital. The other, not so pleasant side of the “Amsterdam cycle” was the pauperisation of the proletariat: “the Dutch owed their prosperity also to the existence of a massive proletariat milling in miserable holes and getting by on bad food.”⁹ Collateral victims of market economy expansion are also Dutch artists, who, of course, cannot be considered as characteristic representatives of the exploited proletariat, but who are, because of their miserable scraping by on the art market, by Hauser nevertheless seen as a part of the then proletariat. Artists thus managed to fend off their servility to court or church patrons, but now, they had to serve another “master” – the art market. While the art market “freed” them from the yoke of feudal, church and court gentry, it brought them the modern, capitalist vassalage.

All this leads us to the conclusion that there is not one “autonomy” of art, there are more autonomies, and this view is strongly supported by historical analyses of the social position of the artist from the early Renaissance to today. Moreover, not only that there are more autonomies, all forms of artistic autonomy are also illusionary.

Author as “creator” and (creative) “genius”

The autonomisation of social “spheres” has thus provided the bourgeois artist his own artistic “sphere”; he became “equal” and “free”, like all other bourgeois subjects; what’s more, his work supposedly had distinctive characteristics, namely, it was thought to be the creation of a (creative) genius.

Reading Tatarkiewicz, we learn that the ancient Greeks did not know a word for “creativity” or “creator”. The period of

10 Cf. Władysław Tatarkiewicz, *Zgodovina šestih pojmov*, Ljubljana: Literarno-umetniško društvo Literatura, 2000, p. 201.

11 Cf. Leonardo da Vinci, *Traktat o slikarstvu*, Ljubljana: Studia humanitatis, 2005, p. 31.

12 But even then only conditionally, for even Vasari is so set in his ways that he often compares the artist's creativity with God's creation. Cf. Giorgio Vasari, *Življenja umetnikov*, Ljubljana: Studia humanitatis, 2006, passim.

13 Cf. Hauser, *ibid.*, pp. 449–450.

14 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Nemška ideologija*, in: Marx and Engels, *Izbrana dela*, book 2, Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1976, p. 259. On the page following this quote, Marx and Engels write down the infamous thought that "in a communist society, there are no painters, but at most people who engage in painting, among other things" (*ibid.*, p. 260). Their prediction came true before it was even uttered (of course,

in a perverted form!) – in 17th century Holland: "Here begins the social rootlessness of the artist and insecurity of his existence, which seems to be meaningless, because there is already plenty of what he creates. Dutch painters mainly lived in such paltry circumstances that they had to find themselves other income beside their artistic professions." (Hauser, *ibid.*, p. 445) Dutch painters traded tulips (van Goyen), sold canvases (van de Velde), were innkeepers (Jan Steen) and so on,

while in post-industrial capitalism, being an artist more or less means being a precarious labour force in different cognitive branches, with artists actually being – and we are not saying this without a taste of bitter irony – "people who engage in painting, among other things", since they surely cannot make a living solely from painting.

15 Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Kritika razsodne moči*, Ljubljana: Založba ZRC SAZU, 1999, pp. 143–144.

Christianity marked an important shift, as the word *creation* started to be associated with god creating from nothing (*creation ex nihilo*).¹⁰ Thomas Aquinas, for example, believed that man can only reshape what was already created by god. In the early Renaissance, "natural talent" (lat. *ingenium*, ital. *ingegno*) as well as learnable "skill" (*ars, arte*) were in the domain of *artes liberales*, although "art" was, in this period, placed neither in the *trivium* (grammar, logic, rhetoric) nor in the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, music, geometry, astronomy) of the seven classical "liberal arts". Architecture and "decorative arts" (painting, sculpture) ended up in the category *artes mechanicae*, that is, in the category of mechanical and manual skills. In the beginning of the 15th century, Cennino Cennini, an artist from Florence, published a treatise in which he argued that these arts were part of *artes liberales*, too, an idea that can be found later with certain other authors of the Italian Renaissance. Leonardo da Vinci considered painting to be a science ("if the painters have not described the art of painting, and reduced it to a science, the fault must not be imputed to painting," he says); on the other hand, sculpture was not a science, "but a mechanical art, because it causes the brow of the artist who practices it to sweat, and wearies his body."¹¹ It wasn't until the period of the high Renaissance, when the "court artist" was already well established, that the artist and his work began to be associated with what present-day art theory connects to "creativity".¹²

In the Renaissance, some of the former guild artisans established themselves as "ingenious" painters, sculptors and architects. Due to commissions by wealthy patrons, these artists succeeded in getting around the guild-practiced artisanship, though they still practiced a collective way of working: while they kept the execution of the finest bravura to themselves, they let the less demanding works (such as painting less important parts of frescoes, roughing out and the like) be done by apprentices and experienced co-workers. Raphael still worked in this manufacture style; however, Michelangelo was already a proto-modern type of artist – an individualistic loner who does all his work by himself, leaving only few purely technical tasks (plaster preparation, grinding pigments for preparing colours, etc.) to his co-workers. In early 17th century Flemish painting (for example, with Rubens), the artistic procedure is still carried out as a manufacture, but only for a short while, as this production was also rapidly individualised.¹³ At the level of individual production, the division of labour thus gradually strengthened the artist's aura as well as the cult of genius, while at the level of social production, as argued by Marx and Engels, it resulted in an "exclusive concentration of artistic talent in particular individuals and its suppression in the broad masses."¹⁴ At the turn of the 19th century – with the French Revolution, the rise of capitalist production mode and the onset of the Industrial Revolution –

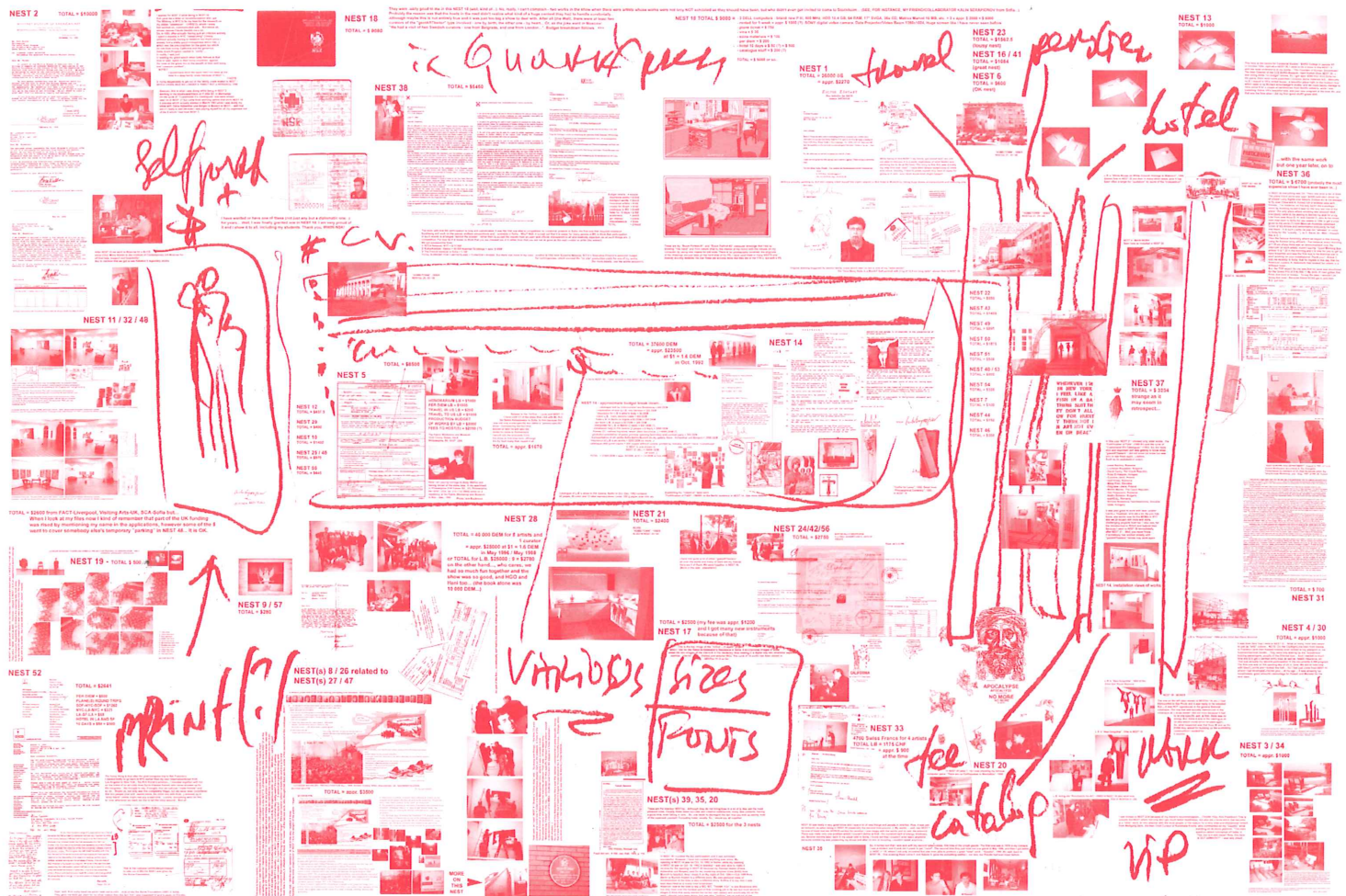
the discourses about the "creative genius", who is considered to be an exceptional artistic personality, a talented individual and eccentric, are strengthened. The modern glorification of artistic genius is thus an ideological compensation for the loss of status and privileges enjoyed by former "court artists".

By the end of the 18th century, the debates about the exceptionality of creative genius in philosophical circles were stimulated by the publication of Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (1790). Kant sets about by defining the difference between art and other "spheres": nature, science and craft (that is, "economy").¹⁵ Although art is not nature, "fine art must have the look of nature", and a work of art seems natural when it "conforms to the rules". Nature does not endow fine arts with the rules directly, but through a mediator, an exceptional individual, a refractor with talent, "native talent", with which he makes exceptional works that later evolve into rules. Talent as "an innate productive ability of the artist" belongs to nature, it is not learnable, and this is why a genius' first characteristic is his "originality". The products of a genius are "exemplary", for "they do not themselves arise from imitation, still they must serve others for this, e.g., as a standard or rule by which to judge." The third characteristic of a genius is that he cannot "describe or indicate scientifically how he brings about his products," since the rule arises from nature, his work on the rule is only "secondary processing", he breaks it down through the prism of his talent, if we paraphrase Medvedev. According to Kant, genius can be found only in the (fine) arts, not in the sciences or the economy (craft): the reason why it cannot be found in science is its own (scientific) method ("clear rules that define its procedure");¹⁶ the economy is the sphere of wage labour, where other rules apply, rules allegedly unsuitable for "geniuses", but fit for wage labourers and craftsmen (fine art "must be free [...] in the sense of not being a mercenary occupation [...] whose magnitude can be judged, exacted or paid according to a determinate standard").¹⁷ The artist-genius, namely, makes his own "rules", since, according to Kant's definition, a genius is "the exemplary originality of a natural endowment in the free use of his cognitive powers." A genius is a "nature's favourite and so must be regarded as a rare phenomenon, his example gives rise to a school for other good minds, i.e., a methodical instruction by means of rules."¹⁸ Fine arts are thus wholly dependent on the Prometheus-like figure of a genius, for it is this nature's "favourite" who lays down their rules of imitation.

Kant's separation of the "free", "naturally talented", ingenious artist from the scientist and wage labourer is a philosophical-idealist equivalent of the autonomisation of social spheres (economy, science, culture, etc.), declared at the structural level by the bourgeois and Industrial revolutions soon after the publication of *Critique of Judgement*. Kant's "free artist" is distinguished by his exceptionality that guarantees

- 16 Kant, *ibid.*, p. 158.
 17 Kant, *ibid.*, p. 162.
 18 Kant, *ibid.*, p. 158.
 19 "Ostentatious genius was the artist's weapon at the time when their emancipation began [from the aristocratic patronage and the transition to market-based art production – note by A. M.]. [...] To be allowed to be a 'genius' was a sign of freedom which had scarcely been achieved; no longer wishing or having to be a

genius is the sign of a condition in which artistic freedom is taken for granted." (Hauser, *ibid.*, p. 122)



Luciezar Boyadjev, *GastARTbeiter*, 2000.

him a special position in society, but at the same time forces him to exaltation, toward the invention of life styles beyond the common public morality, which is, from the 19th century on, most clearly seen in the figure of the bohemian artist. The cult of genius is every so often venerated still in the 20th century, especially as a "zero" or "floating" signifier, that is, as a universal interpretative means always conveniently used when there is no other explanation. This phenomenon is not typical only for professional interpreters and the broader audiences, but also for artists themselves, who, by using fluidly magical terms, such as "talent", "inspiration" or "ingenious", consciously or unwittingly reproduce Kant's view of the ingenious artist who is indebted for his ideas not, for example, to formation (*Bildung*) or some other socially conditioned scenario, but to the transcendental mind. On the other hand, in more recent discussions about "creative genius" (or the ingenious artist), we can every now and then stumble upon estimations saying that – at least from mid 20th century on – artists themselves (and not only academic experts) preferred

using technical-interpretative terms over evoking the mysterious "inspiration" or mystical "ingeniousness" of the Romantic artist. We can thus arrive at the conclusion, and so does Hauser,¹⁹ that any reference to the ingeniousness of artistic procedure or the practice of a bohemian lifestyle of a "misunderstood", socially "outcast", martyred artist is, in this day and age, a mere antiquated reawakening of former "competition means" for breaking into the art market.

Copyright

The myth about the creative author and the creative "genius" is, on the other hand, still alive, although, interestingly, not so much at the level of metaphysics, but as the ideological backdrop of the legal category of copyright. Legal experts and philosophers grounded the author's exclusive right to his work in natural law postulates, thus contributing importantly to the creation and consolidation of this myth. From the 18th century on, there persists a false belief that copyright has "always" been there, that it is inextricably bound to the

universal, trans-historical figure of the author, and that the copyright legislation only follows this “natural” givenness. The other, more pragmatic, but no less frequent explanation of the formal-legal regulation of copyright attributes to the legislator a certain charitable tendency towards “creative genius”, since it is precisely the material benefits guaranteed by this right that supposedly stimulate his creativity.

I have called attention earlier to Kant’s apotheosis of genius; besides him, Herder, Goethe, Fichte and others have also made important contributions. Four years after the publication of Kant’s *Critique of Judgement*, the first law regulating, among other, author’s rights was passed in Prussia, while in the meantime, Fichte published his essay “Proof of the Unlawfulness of Reprinting” (*Beweis der Unrechtmässigkeit des Büchernachdrucks*, 1793), which also had an impact on certain provisions of this Prussian law. If, for Kant, a genius is constituted by his exceptionality, which generates ground-breaking works, Fichte’s author is a “creator” (*Urheber*), if not for anything else, because his “personal expressivity” begets unrepeatable, original (*eigentümlich*) forms. Consistent with Fichte’s idealistic philosophy, this conceptual process (and not the author’s work in its materiality) is intellectual property that should be safeguarded by the law. So, it is already with Fichte that we come across the notion of individualised “expressivity”, which in the 19th and 20th centuries occupies an important place in the “standard repertoire” of copyright, especially in its Anglo-Saxon variant.

An ingenious creator is the foundation myth of copyright: in the 18th century, it served as a useful pretence by which to abolish the system of privileges and to dismantle guild monopolies, while today, it is a mere legal fiction in which the sophisticated legal infrastructure, ensuring legal protection for extra profits of monopolistic corporations and multinational enterprises, is embedded. This illusion gives concrete material gains to the few above-average commercial authors, while the pauperised masses of the cultural proletariat get the crumbs and hope to somehow miraculously enter the promised land of eternal fame and lifelong income. In spite of lofty words about “protecting the author” and “encouraging creativity”, which can be found in many 18th century texts (philosophical treatises, early copyright formulations, the French declaration on human rights, the American constitution, etc.), the history of copyright is above all a story about adjusting the normative framework to the needs of “creative industries” and the interests of the capital.

Despite often referring to “creative genius”, the modern copyright legislation does not originate from a possible romantic enthusiasm, but from a solid material base, established by the invention of the printing press and its industrial usage, the rise of the capitalist mode of production and the spread of the liberal notion of private property to the area of “creative” production. In the time of globalisation, when the capital is relentlessly penetrating new territories (the so-called *emerging markets*) and privatising the last oases of social solidarity, the monopolistic potential of the notion of

copyright proves to be the ideal means for a colonisation of local industries and the maximisation of profit.

Author as productive worker

In the area of science and arts, “intellectual” work produces “creations” that are “cognitive”. The assumed (non)materiality of a product (say, performance of a theatre actor, musician, dancer, or a spoken lecture, etc.) is oftentimes the source of misunderstandings: from Adam Smith on, the question whether we can speak of “productive” work in these cases at all has been asked by many. At this level, the question is not whether an author is a “producer”, which Walter Benjamin maintained, but the problem is that as a producer, he is “unproductive”. We can find a jocular thematisation of this question in a series of photos by Mladen Stilinović entitled *Artist at Work* (1978), in which he portrays himself in deep sleep. A more recent instance of this same problem is a quote by the actor Tadej Toš in *Mladina* magazine: “When a kindergarten girl was once asked what did her daddy do, she said: ‘He is lying on the couch.’”²⁰

Let’s have a look at an example from contemporary dance theory. In his *Social Choreography*, Andrew Hewitt asks the following: when talking about dance, “are we to think of the ‘work’ of art as noun or verb, as artifact or activity?” Because “dance is a process of work that produces no work or artifact as residue.”²¹ Without mentioning Hewitt, Bojana Kunst brilliantly and firmly cuts through this seeming Gordian knot; she accurately points out that here we shouldn’t be thinking about the content (representation), but about the form (labour): “It is a well-known fact that today’s production of contemporary dance is becoming flexible because of an ongoing mobility, where the exchange of the eternally young and eternally experimental performances (a kind of cheap working force for an increasingly globalised performance market) goes hand in hand with spectacle performances to encourage collaboration for collaboration’s sake and that the endless mobility of the working force is inevitable. [...] Dance connects to the questions of labour not because it can function as representation of labour and the working process, but because it is labour [...]”²² I’d like to add to this diagnosis of contemporary dance as labour a casual observation that theatrical dance, like all other performative arts, is marked by an unusual fact that in the body of a dancer/performer, all elements of the production process are inextricably glued together: workforce, working means and the product of work. This is why the work of a performer is somewhat specific, if compared to the work of other producers in the field of contemporary art.

Let us now take a look at a slightly older example that may be illustrative for a characteristic (false) understanding of the relation between productive and unproductive labour in art: “There is a difficult passage in the *Grundrisse* in which [Marx] argues that [...] the man who makes a piano is a productive worker [...]; he probably is, since he contributes to the realisation of surplus value. Yet when it comes to the

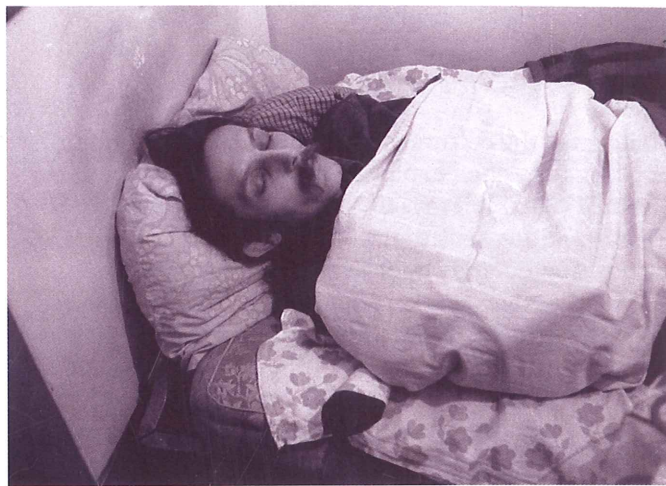
23 Raymond Williams, *Navadna kultura: izabrani spisi*, Ljubljana: Studia humanitatis, 1997, p. 233.

24 I have given a more in-depth analysis of

the relation between productive and unproductive labour in the article "On 'Productivisation' and 'Flexibilisation' of (Cultural) Workers", *Borec*, Year 64 (2012), Nos. 685-689, pp. 233-248.

25 Mark Banks, *The Politics of Cultural Work*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p. 58.

Mladen Stilinović: *Umetnik na delu/Artist at Work*, Zagreb, 1978.
Foto/Photo: (c) Mladen Stilinović.



man who plays the piano, whether to himself or to others, there is no question, he is not a productive worker at all. So the piano-maker is base, but the pianist super-structure."²³ In this passage, Raymond Williams totally misinterprets Marx's distinction between productive and unproductive labour and repeats the mistake made by Adam Smith in his *The Wealth of Nations* in which he used (non)materiality of a product as a distinguishing criterion.

For Marx, the content of labour is not important, as it is not important whether a material good is produced in the working process or not. The owner of capital is not interested in the use value of commodities, may the commodity be a product or productive force. His sole interest lies in the commodity's exchange value, which has to be higher than what he paid. In the case of productive wage labour, this means that "he will get back more labour-time than he paid for in the form of a wage."²⁴

In 19th century capitalism, discussed exhaustively by Marx, clear lines of demarcation are drawn between labour and non-labour. Surplus labour, the source of surplus value for capital, is limited to the appropriate part of labour-time. Surplus value can be increased also in this position, for example, by extending working hours or increasing surplus labour,

though this option is limited because of class struggles to set limits on working hours. The transition to post-Fordist (post-industrial) capitalism opens up a new opportunity: through precarisation and flexibilisation of labour, capital has now achieved the extension of the working time, which is no longer legally and unambiguously defined, being informally and without control extended to production time, while production time is blending with the time of non-work. Working time has thus been extended *de facto*, but since it was not extended *de iure*, precarious and flexibilised workers in contemporary capitalism have very limited options to resist this present-day vampirism of capital.

In the cultural sector, like in other areas, "productivisation" is nowadays ensured by the increasing precarisation, including self-exploitation. In the so-called "liberal professions", instances of major exploitation of labour force are quite common; the work is stressful, insecure, working time is prolonged to evenings, even nights and holidays – in other words, work is being done more or less at all times, since the time of work and non-work is no longer so rigidly split up. "The love of art," states Mark Banks, "can lead workers to neglect the care of the self."²⁵ Or, as Janez Janša, then probably still Emil Hrvatin, once said in a discussion about the position

26 "Produktiver Arbeiter zu sein ist ... kein Glück, sondern ein Pech". Karl Marx, *Kapital* 1, Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1986, p. 460.

27 I'm not talking about the banishment of human creativity *per se*, but about the abolition of wage labour. André Gorz has put it extremely well: "the abolition of work does not mean the abolition of the need for effort, the desire for activity, the pleasure of creation, the need to cooperate with others and be of some use to the

community. [...] The demand to 'work less' does not mean or imply the right to 'rest more', but the right to 'live more'. It means the right to do many more things for ourselves than money can buy – and even to do some of the things which money at present can buy." Cf. André Gorz, "Devet tez za bodočo levico", in: Slavko Gaber, Tonči Kuzmanić and Tomaž Mastnak (eds.), *Boj proti delu*, Ljubljana: UK ZSMS and RK ZSMS (series Krt), 1985, pp. 110–111.

28 Paul Lafargue, "Pravica do lenobe", in: Slavko Gaber, Tonči Kuzmanić and Tomaž Mastnak (eds.), *Boj proti delu*, Ljubljana: UK ZSMS and RK ZSMS (series Krt), 1985, p. 50.

29 As in "on sale". [trans.]

30 I am quoting his letter to Marion von Osten that was included in the *GastARTbeiter*. The word "GastARTbeiter" is a compound from the German word *Gastarbeiter*, used in Germany [but also in Slovenia, editor's note] for migrant

workers (especially from East European countries), and the English word *art*. Though the word doesn't follow the German spelling, the meaning of the word play is clear enough.

31 Bojana Kunst, *Umetnik na delu: bližina umetnosti in kapitalizma*, Ljubljana: Maska, 2012, p. 115.

of freelancers in the cultural sector (quoting from memory): "I am looking for a good exploiter, for no one can exploit me better than I can exploit myself."

The present-day cultural worker is thrust in this schizophrenic position not only by the capital, but also by the cultural politics of the state. Workers have been cleverly exploited already by the socialist, reputedly workers' state, which was elegantly demonstrated already by Tomaž Mastnak in the beginning of the 1980s in his book *Toward a Critique of Stalinism*, so it shouldn't come as a surprise that the contemporary, capitalist state is doing the same.

The German National Socialists, who were socialists only on paper, while, in fact, they were mere commonplace Nazis, have put the inscription "Work is liberty" (*Arbeit macht frei*) over the gates of the concentration camp in Auschwitz. If the Nazis hadn't been throwing Marx's *Capital* (and the books of many other freethinking writers) so zealously into the fire, they would have known that "to be a productive labourer is not a piece of luck, but a misfortune."²⁶ As we can learn from history, work is not liberty, but death. I'm not talking about work in general, about an imaginary, ahistorical, universalist notion of labour, but about forced and heteronomous labour, labour of exploitation, which is productive in Marx's sense, which is productive for capital and, if I may add, also for the capitalist state.²⁷ Paul Lafargue, Marx's son-in-law, begins his treatise "The Right to Be Lazy" (1883) with the words: "A strange madness has taken possession of the working-classes of those nations in which capitalist civilisation dominates. This madness brings in its wake the individual and collective sufferings that for two centuries have tortured an unhappy humanity. This madness is the love of work, the destructive desire for labour, carried even to the extent of exhausting the vital forces of the individual and his offspring."²⁸

Struggle against (creative) work

The so-called liberal professions, including the arts, cannot go around this historical form of work, whether they are creative or uncreative, since they too are part of the production mode of contemporary capitalism. Moreover, it is precisely the creative industries that are increasingly becoming the source of generating surplus value in contemporary globalised capitalism. The position of a contemporary, globalised artist, who is always travelling, exhibiting, presenting, speaking, going to meetings and doing whatever is expected of him by today's curators, art supporters and art dealers, was wittily and self-ironically described by Lúchezar Boyadjiev in his work *GastARTbeiter* (2000). In this billboard-sized poster, Boyadjiev depicts his artistic work during the 1990s and tries to calculate how much money has been spent by organisers of different events he had attended for his travelling expanses, accommodation and fees. He calculates that in a decade, the

"West" has invested in him (as an "East European artist") from 130 to 150 thousand dollars. In a letter to his friend Marion von Osten, the then curator in Shedhalle in Zürich, he wrote: "It seems to me that I've become a 'cultural gastARTbeiter' (I'm not sure whether the word is written in proper German, but you know what I'm trying to say...). For obvious reasons, I think I should be very, very careful so as not to be considered a 'seller',²⁹ a compromising ass, or even worse, a neoliberal."³⁰ Boyadjiev goes on to explain that the organisers of exhibitions, conferences and other events apparently see him as "valuable goods", though this artistic boom didn't bring him much in the material sense – he had acquired no wealth and his pockets are still empty.

Perhaps it was possible for Kant to still believe that the economy belongs to the sphere of wage labour where there are rules that are supposedly suitable for wage labourers and craftsmen, but not for creative "geniuses". But since the constitution of the art market – and with it the autonomous, liberal artist – and especially in present-day post-Fordist and post-industrial society, creative work is no longer absolutely safe in the idealistic imaginarium of a genius artist. Or, as Bojana Kunst has put it: "artistic work is becoming more and more labour and less and less creativity."

In this view, I dare maintain that the present day may well be a historical opportunity for a contemporary artist to jettison the ideological clutter and attack both the artificial division between "labour" and "creativity" and labour itself (labour productive for capital, heteronomous and exploitation labour, etc.). In my interpretation, the formula for a political programme of contemporary art, insofar it is political and insofar it is critical, thus boils down to the following: what is at work in (creative) work is a struggle against (creative) work.

There are, of course, no quick solutions; a contemporary artist can, at the most, focus his creativity on their invention. Some starting points and inspirations can be found already in the cited book by Bojana Kunst, in the chapter entitled "The visibility of work", in which the author, among other, examines a refocus of attention from the artwork (artistic work) to artist's work and the necessity of a critique of project work and the projective temporality associated with it. The chapter also offers an important conclusion, namely, that "the disappearing boundary between life and work, placed at the centre of emancipatory tendencies by many 20th century artists, today stands in the centre of capitalist processes of exploitation of life. For this reason, it often seems that the artist is an ideal worker for contemporary capitalism [...]."³¹ This conclusion inevitably leads to a question that demands serious consideration: what can a contemporary artist do to free himself of this look and in what ways can he contribute to our full liberation from capitalism, whether we are its "ideal" or just "ordinary" workers? As long as there is capitalism, there will be wage

labour, with which, as argued by André Gorz, we "purchase the right to live [...] by alienating our time and our lives,"³² or in other words, we are wasting our lives to earn for it.

Abstract

The starting point for the essay is a thesis by Bojana Kunst, saying that the work of a contemporary artist is, on the one hand, bound to the "bizarre fantasies about creativity", on the other, it is "becoming more and more labour and less and less creativity." The relation between labour and creativity is examined in a historical perspective: through phenomena of autonomous artistic work, philosophical idealisation of creative "genius" and emergence of copyright. The relation between productive and unproductive labour and growing tendencies toward "productivisation" in culture and art are also considered. The article concludes that what is at work in (creative) work is a struggle against (creative) work.

Keywords

Artist, creativity, work, labour, autonomous work, productive work, unproductive work, genius, author, copyright.

Works cited

- Mark Banks, *The Politics of Cultural Work*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Peter Bürger, *Teorija avangarde*, Belgrade: Narodna knjiga/Alfa, 1998.
- Leonardo da Vinci, *Traktat o slikarstvu*, Ljubljana: Studia humanitatis, 2005.
- André Gorz, "Devet tez za bodočo levico", in: Slavko Gaber, Tonči Kuzmanić and Tomaž Mastnak (eds.), *Boj proti delu*, Ljubljana: UK ZSMS and RK ZSMS (series Krt), 1985, pp. 109–121.
- Arnold Hauser, *Sociologija umjetnosti*, Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1986.
- Andrew Hewitt, *Social Choreography: Ideology as Performance in Dance and Everyday Movement*, Durham – London: Duke University Press, 2005.
- Immanuel Kant, *Kritika razsodne moči*, Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 1999.
- Bojana Kunst, *Umetnik na delu: bližina umetnosti in kapitalizma*, Ljubljana: Maska, 2012.
- Paul Lafargue, "Pravica do lenobe", in: Slavko Gaber, Tonči Kuzmanić and Tomaž Mastnak (eds.), *Boj proti delu*, Ljubljana: UK ZSMS and RK ZSMS (series Krt), 1985, pp. 49–80.
- Karl Marx, *Kapital 1*, Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1986.
- Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Nemška ideologija*, in: Marx in Engels. *Izbrana dela*, book 2. Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1976.
- Aldo Milohnić, "O 'produktivizaciji' in 'fleksibilizaciji' delavcev (v kulturi)", *Borec*, Year 64 (2012), Nos. 685–689, pp. 233–248.
- Michael Müller et al., *Autonomie der Kunst – Zur Genese und Kritik einer bürgerlichen Kategorie*, Frankfurt am Mein: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972.
- Władysław Tatarkiewicz, *Zgodovina šestih pojmov*, Ljubljana: Literarno-umetniško društvo Literatura, 2000.
- Giorgio Vasari, *Življenja umetnikov*, Ljubljana: Studia humanitatis, 2006.
- Martin Warnke, *Hofkünstler: zur Vorgeschichte des modernen Künstlers*, Köln: DuMont Buchverlag, 1985.
- Raymond Williams, *Navadna kultura: izbrani spisi*, Ljubljana: Studia humanitatis, 1997.