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Summary

The Emergent Artistic Object in the Postconceptual Condition

This dissertation investigates the fabric and the infrastructure of contemporary artistic production. The focal question is how the contemporary field of institutional artistic production is organised and how the relations between its actors and functions: artists, curators, institution, governance and theory are structured, and how the artistic object that results from their interaction is produced. The first general backdrop of this investigation, is the condition of *cognitive capitalism*. This condition, that defines production and working-relations in late capitalism as analysed by Paolo Virno, is characterized by the primacy of communications. It presumes that no longer there is a clear demarcation between aesthetics, labour and politics in the general make-up of production and economy. This situation also affects artistic production and the relationships between the main actors: artist, curator and theoretical reflection in regards to who holds the authorship over the artistic object.

The second backdrop is *the postconceptual condition*, as formulated by British philosopher Peter Osborne. In his analysis of the current landscape of artistic production, Osborne describes how the authorship of the art-object has shifted to the institutional platform (museum, Kunsthalle, presentation-space) and how *the project* has become the general mode and form of production, rather than individual artworks or the oeuvre of the artist. Both these movements have led, in my opinion, to significant changes in how to consider the status of authorship in artistic production. Together they shape the theoretical basis for the research.

A special focus is put on the role that theoretical reflection currently holds in the constellation of artistic production. The polemical proposition is made that theory and the diverse practices of knowledge-production, that have become integral part of the institutional apparatus of production, should be added to the line-up of authorial actors of the artistic object (following the Romantic notion of reading as conclusion of the artwork). This proposition is closely tied to the issue of institutional authorship in the model of Contemporary Art and the political implications this holds: it are the institutions and the political-economic constitutive frameworks supporting those, that have become the platformed instances for artistic production.

The second issue that is researched is the meaning of this shifting framework of artistic production for the position of the artist (and subsequent other positions) within already established notions of interdisciplinary production. The perspective chosen for the research is that of artist. My artistic practice, in which I bring the traditional artist-position together with curating, theoretical research and critique, is mobilized to enter into the now considered, authorially assembled field of art.

The methodology that was used is that of participative case studies. The notion of *infrastructural critique* (formulated by Marina Vishmidt) was deployed - and expanded upon - to analyse and delineate the relationships between the actors and instances involved. And to trace how the field of art connects to, and is in part shaped by, the realms of governance and politics.

The selection of cases was based on the criteria that, firstly, they represent the general features of contemporary artistic production, in that they combine art, artists, theoretical reflection, aspects of curating through which forms of interaction between art and aesthetics are organized. Secondly, the choice was informed by how these features together represent – though by no means fully – the scope of institutional artistic production. This way, the respective institutional scales that effect positioning and strategies could be reflected upon and be related to one another. These are: *The Autonomy Project Conference* at the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (the museum), *The Benjamin in Palestine Conference*, Ramallah Palestine (independently organized initiative), Rib Art space, Rotterdam (small size not-for-profit presentation-space), and Witte de With (since 2020 renamed as Melly), Rotterdam, (mid-scale presentation-space).

Jacques Rancière's ideas on the relationship between art and aesthetics (*the Aesthetic Regime of Art*) and how this binds relates to politics of *commoning* were used to critique and situate the Autonomy Project at the Van Abbemuseum. Through Suhail Malik and Susanne Philips' reading of Rancière, together with the particulars of cognitive capitalism, I argue that theoretical reflection should be considered as part of the institutional form. I argue that this holds consequences for the politics of institutions and that the strategy of authorial indeterminacy (the politics of *indeterminacy*) no longer suffices. In the reading of the Benjamin in Palestine Conference, and throughout the thesis, Walter Benjamin's theories on language and authorship in production is used to rethink the relation between art and

academia, and to perceive these as reciprocally active in a politics of communal aesthetics. In the comparison between Rib and Witte de With, the notion and importance of language that connects the operation of the art institution to governance is explored. I demonstrate how language as shared means of communication, functions differently in both fields and how this affects artistic agency. In general, in reading these cases I show how epistemological differences, both within the artistic field and in relation to its heteronomy, weakens artistic coherence. This leaves it negatively susceptible to the division of labour – ordered by the economic regime we find ourselves in and voiced through the bureaucratic apparatus of governance, as formulated by Isabell Lorey – and vulnerable to the logic of capitalism. Any countering therefore comes to depend on all actors and on institutional restructuring.

A final point that is addressed, is how the attribution of creativity to the figure of the artist and mythical status of the arts, serve to uphold the economically exceptional mode of production in the arts, and how this is characteristic of capitalist subsumption. Kerstin Stakemeier and Marina Vishmidt, in this respect, rightly point to the arrangement of *work* and of working conditions (in capitalist subsumption) as the ground-level conditional frame to be considered. Their insights are woven into many of the readings.

The artistic gesture made by me therefore is: to renounce the act of creation and rather to appropriate the role of critic and of theorist *as* artist (a proposal for a different artist position), mapping this ground level of conditions, serves to demonstrate the subsumption we find ourselves in *and* it is a proposition to think authorship as more accessible and proximate. This artistic positioning is unpacked in and demonstrated through the dissertation.