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(End)Zones and (Out)Fields of Production: Contemporary Conditions of Labor and Artistic Critique

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Art History

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ABSTRACT

In a 2013 exhibition publication titled *It's the Political Economy, Stupid!*, John Roberts made the observation that “Over the last ten years we have become witness to an extraordinary assimilation of art theory and practice into the categories of labor and production.” Whereas once art claimed for itself a critical capacity in relation to the larger system of capitalist domination by its status as a putatively ‘autonomous’ sphere of production from which it leveraged its difference and critique, today it is largely acknowledged that there is no longer any such ‘outside’ to be aspired to. If, in the recent past, the immaterial, informational, creative, experiential, and affective elements of conceptual art were seen as potential resistant forces, in our current climate, where these forms of labor have become the dominant mode of production for the capitalist economy, these potentialities are now being widely questioned.

With these developments in mind, this dissertation consists of a series of integrated articles that focus on the increasingly diffuse and interconnected circuits of global exchange and labor as they interact with specific sites and interventions of contemporary artistic production. In this, they coalesce around a general binding inquiry: does artistic labor today have the capacity to function as a critique of the (transforming) mechanisms of control and exploitation characteristic of capitalism in the twenty-first century? And if not, what does that entail about the continued political viability, and persisting social functions of contemporary artworks? Drawing on autonomist Marxist thought, the sociology of work and labor, performance studies, and critical readings on the relationship between artistic labor and recent forms of capitalist production, the chapters are organized around exhibitions and artworks which represent, critique, or

(re)produce the conditions of production in late capitalism, while situating these within a global economy characterized by an uneven network of productive relations. In so doing, they trace the trajectory of labor relations and production practices as they have transformed over the last half decade through artworks and exhibitions that engage specific emblematic sites of production—the factory, the prison, and the museum (or amalgams of these spaces), and attempts to tease out places where reflection on the relationship between ‘artistic’ and ‘non-artistic’ labor in each may lead to clarity regarding the socio-political efficacy of contemporary art in an increasingly saturated and complex economic infrastructure.

KEYWORDS: Contemporary Art, Labor, Work, Political Economy, Capitalism, Fordism, Post-Fordism, Deindustrialization, Antonio Vega Macotela, Tehching Hsieh, Stoke-on-Trent, Time, Michael Hardt, Henri Bergson

SUMMARY FOR LAY AUDIENCE

This dissertation consists of a series of integrated articles that focus on the relationship between art production and the general economy, through analysis of artworks and exhibitions that specifically engage with themes of labor, work, value, and exchange. In this, they coalesce around a general binding inquiry: does artistic labor today have the capacity to function as a critique of the (transforming) mechanisms of control and exploitation characteristic of capitalism in the twenty-first century? And if not, what does that say about the political and social functions of contemporary artworks? Drawing on political theory, the sociology of work and labor, performance studies, and critical readings on the relationship between artistic labor and recent forms of capitalist production, the chapters are organized around exhibitions and artworks which represent, critique, or (re)produce the conditions of production in late capitalism, while situating these within a global economy characterized by an uneven network of productive relations. In so doing, they trace the trajectory of labor relations and production practices as they have transformed over the last half decade through artworks and exhibitions that engage specific emblematic sites of production—the factory, the prison, and the museum (or amalgams of these spaces), and attempts to tease out places where reflection on the relationship between ‘artistic’ and ‘non-artistic’ labor in each may help elucidate the socio-political role of contemporary art in an increasingly saturated and complex economic infrastructure.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

During my time at Western University, I have been incredibly fortunate to have had the guidance and support of many generous faculty and staff. This dissertation has benefitted greatly from the feedback of my committee and readers over the years, including Professors Christine Sprengler, Christof Migone, Michael Gardiner, and especially my final committee members—Dr. Helen Fielding, thank you for your guidance and support as I worked through the key philosophical texts that initially informed my thinking about this project. I very much appreciated our conversations, as well as your thoughtful and incisive feedback on early drafts of this thesis. Dr. Sarah Bassnett, I have greatly valued your mentorship and guidance in many different capacities during my time as a graduate student at Western—as a professor, a TA supervisor, and as a reader and committee member. Your comments and feedback over the past several months have helped me greatly in shaping the direction of this research as I continue to flesh out its conceptual and socio-political framework. I am also extremely grateful to Dr. Alison Hearn, Dr. Claudette Lauzon, and Dr. Christine Sprengler for taking the time during this unprecedented and overwhelming time to read and evaluate this dissertation and take part in the defense.

As for my supervisor, Dr. Kirsty Robertson, I honestly don't know where to begin. Anything I can say here will certainly fail to do justice to my gratitude for your ongoing support, advice, motivation, and intellectual and professional guidance over the past ten years. I have been constantly amazed and inspired by your energy, your insight, and your dedication to your students and advisees. I feel incredibly lucky to have had the privilege of working with you.

I owe *many* thanks to all of the administrators in the Department of Visual Arts—Paula Dias, Joanne Gribbon, Marlene Jones, Meghan Edmiston, Julia Beltrano, Jennifer Slauenwhite—who have supported my advancement through the program in uncountable ways. I would also like to acknowledge the funding provided for this research by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at Western University.

Finally, to those closest to me, to my family and friends, thank you for being with me through the successes and frustrations of this process. I would like to express my thanks to my current and former fellow doctoral students: Katie Oates, Ruth Skinner, Margherita Papadatos, and Jessica Cappuccitti, all brilliant people who I admire greatly. A special thanks to Al Whitts, Dylan Vaughan, Heidi Kellett, Stephanie Radu, David Guignon, Hélène Bigras Dutrisac, Courtney Harper, Ryan Shuvera, Nick Walling, and Jessica Sinka, for listening, for making me laugh, for feeding me (Heidi, David, and Helene!), and for generally being the amazing, weird, inspiring people that you are. To my Auntie Pat and Uncle Walter for your love and support throughout my life—you have always been there for me, I truly wouldn't have been able to accomplish this goal without you. To my mother, for being a model of strength and resilience. And, to MCA, to whom I dedicate this work. *Dulcius ex asperis. De novo.*

Thank you.

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“I only achieve simplicity with enormous effort.”

~ Clarice Lispector, *The Hour of the Star*

INTRODUCTION

CONTEMPORARY CONDITIONS OF LABOR AND ARTISTIC CRITIQUE

For a brief period in 1999, the exhibition space of Vleeshal—a contemporary art museum in Middleburg, the Netherlands—transgressed its function as a museum and became, instead, a functioning factory. As part of a project conceived by Danish conceptual artist Jens Haaning, the gallery was temporarily occupied by the twelve workers of the Turkish-owned clothing factory *Maras Confectie*, who relocated their operations and equipment (including offices and lunchroom) into the exhibition space. Here, the workers—from Iran, Turkey and Bosnia—continued with their production of goods according to their regular schedule, with the caveat that the workers received additional compensation for any time ‘wasted’ engaging in conversation with visitors.¹ As a budding tourist economy, Middleburg in the 1990s was exemplary of the ongoing shift toward the dominance of the post-industrial ‘experience economy’ (of which the museum itself, formerly a meat market, was a key component), here pushed up against the culture of labor whose peripheralization underlies this transformation.²

In 2002, in a seemingly similar gesture, the South London Gallery (SLG, London, England) also became the site for a factory production line. However, in this case the ‘workers’ were the museum visitors themselves. For his exhibition *Flames Maquiladora* (Fig. 1), Mexican artist Carlos Amoraes provided the materials for visitors to cut-out and

¹ Marina Vishmidt, “Situation Wanted: Something About Labor,” *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry*, Issue 19 (Autumn/Winter 2009): 34.

² Lars Bang Larson describes the “tourist pandemonium” of Middleburg at this time. Lars Bang Larsen, “Jens Hanning,” *Frieze Magazine*, Issue 31 (November/December 1996), http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/jens_haaning/.

assemble glossy red wrestling boots within the gallery space, after which they were to be displayed in neat rows along shelves on the gallery wall and sold as artworks. The term *maquiladora* refers to a type of factory in Mexico—mostly located near the US-Mexico border—which are exempt from tariff and duty fees and thus are frequently used by US firms seeking cheap manufacturing labor abroad. Amoraes’ work thus proposes an equation between this exploited labor and the global art-world system—an instructional poster in the exhibition advertised the slogan, ‘Work for Fun, Work for Me,’ gesturing toward the free labor of the visiting public. Indeed in the end, as scholar Alberto López Cuenca points out, “visitors did not produce any wrestling shoes but simply the spectacle of performing *artistic labour*. The audience was the concrete work-force that made the art piece happen. In other words, Amoraes’s installation was not just a metaphor: it actually outsourced the free labour that made it possible.”³

Both of these works explored the relationship between the museum and the factory through a direct installation of the latter into the former, while also situating post-Fordist economies (within which the artworld and its own shifting modes of production is deeply embedded) in relation to the politics of transnational labor mobilities and global capitalism’s production of a highly unequal geopolitical landscape.⁴ Within this nexus, I am interested in unpacking the role of the museum and artworld in mediating such extrinsic labor practices through the lens of art, where artistic and non-artistic labor come together to form a critique of contemporary capitalism’s conditions of work, value, and production. These two works are exemplary of a pervasive preoccupation with labor and

³ Alberto López Cuenca, “Artistic Labor, Enclosure and the New Economy,” *Afterall*, No. 30 (Summer 2012): 5.

⁴ Albeit with different degrees of remove – i.e. unlike the above work, the laborers that serve as a reference point for *Flames Maquiladora* are notably absent.

production of all types in artistic and curatorial practices since the 1960s—from unpaid domestic and maintenance labor (such as Mierle Aderman Ukeles’ well-known ‘maintenance works’ or Martha Rosler’s *Backyard Economy* films, both from the 1970s), to factory labor (including the works discussed above and many others that will be the focus of this dissertation), to office work, business, and finance (for example Harun Farocki’s *A New Product*, 2012; Pilvi Takala, *The Trainee*, 2008; or the work of Cheyney Thompson employing financial algorithms), and immaterial labor of all kinds.⁵ I find them useful as a starting point in that they open up a number questions about the representation and representability of labor in contemporary art that will be central to each of the essays comprising this integrated article dissertation. In performing *as* factory (rather than merely representing one), these works open up a productive space in which to explore the relationship between so-called artistic and non-artistic labor in their respective (and shifting) spheres of production. As written by Lars Bang Larsen in a review of the Vleeshal show:

The transformation of de Vleeshal into a factory marks a total reversal of artistic economies: the factory perfectly apprehends the space of the institution and makes it its own.... When industry, with all its economic power, enters the institution, the former loses its anchoring in society and plays with the significance of value.”⁶

As Larson emphasized, *Middleburg Summer* is in fact one of a series of other production-line projects by Haaning, including *Weapon Production* (1995), which tasked a group of

⁵ See also Heather Goodchild’s, *Uniform Factory*, Art Gallery of Ontario, July-August 2012.

⁶ Lars Bang Larsen, “Jens Hanning,” *Frieze Magazine*, Issue 31 (November/December 1996), http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/jens_haaning/.

young people with making illegal street weapons, and *Flag Production* (1996), where participants sewed flags for an ‘unknown nation.’ However, *Middelburg Summer* was the first time that a “ready-made production line” was used rather than “mere simulations.”⁷ This may seem a trivial distinction, however I believe it is a highly significant one, and that the developments that led up to the very possibility of such a “reversal of artistic economies” are vital for understanding the relationship between the field of art and global capitalism today. While drawing on Larson’s comments above, I question whether the factory does indeed ‘perfectly apprehend’ the space of the museum, but argue that the subtle misapprehensions that occur in the conceptual dis-/relocation of labor is the critical heart of the artistic practices discussed in each of the chapters that follow, which include an examination of artistic engagements with time and labor in the prison system as an index of broader disciplinary apparatus (Chapter One); the (slow) viewing of the gestures of industrial labor within the museum (Chapter Two); and the full-scale transformation of a former ceramics factory into an art venue and tourist destination (Chapter Three). All three rely on the perception of the museum as an in-between space, neither fully subsumed by, nor completely outside of, the productive or disciplinary mechanisms of contemporary global capitalism.

ART, PRODUCTIVE LABOR, AND CRITICAL MIMESIS

In the opening to her essay “Situation Wanted: Something About Labor,” Marina Vishmidt invokes a 2006 lecture by Jeff Wall in which he coined the term “second

⁷ Lars Bang Larsen, “Jens Hanning,” *Frieze Magazine*, Issue 31 (November/December 1996), http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/jens_hanning/.

appearance.”⁸ The term, for Wall, designates a transposition made possible by the expansion of the field of (canonical) art since the 1960s, which increasingly integrated ‘non-art’ institutions and forms, thus allowing them to make a ‘second appearance’ as contemporary art.⁹ Initially, Wall refers to media such as video, performance, site-specific interventions, sound installation, and dance which, when incorporated into fine art practices, venues, and discourses, shed to some extent their narrow identification within a particular field (such as theatre, cinema, or dance), and gain a second—‘more universal’ according to Wall—identity as ‘instances of contemporary art.’¹⁰ By this train of thought, for example, Wall considers a dance performed in a museum to simultaneously assert itself as dance and ‘not dance,’ as the self-reflexivity provided by what he calls the ‘conceptual reduction’ forces a change in identity. He writes: “In making its ‘second appearance’, or gaining a second identity, the art form in question transcends itself and becomes more significant than it would be if it remained theatre or cinema or dance.”¹¹

The initial expansion of the field of art signaled by its incorporation of art-adjacent fields such as film, dance and music, has of course intensified dramatically since the 1970s, folding in social institutions and practices far afield from what could previously be construed as art. Wall traces this next stage of expansion to the “fusion of

⁸ Marina Vishmidt, “Situation Wanted: Something About Labor,” *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry*, Issue 19 (Autumn/Winter 2009).

⁹ Jeff Wall, “Depiction, Object, Event,” *Hermeslezing Hermes Lecture*, ‘s Hertogenbosch, the Netherlands, 2006.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Warhol's factory concept with post-conceptual mimesis."¹² He writes:

If Warhol could imitate a media firm, others coming after him could imitate a museum department, a research institute, an archive, a community-service organisation and so on ... without thereby having to renounce the making of works and abandon the artworld and its patronage. ... Instead of disappearing from art into therapy, communitarianism, anthropology, or radical pedagogy, they realized that these phenomena, too, can make their own second appearance within, and therefore as, art. Within the domain of second appearance, artists are able to try out this or that mimesis of extra-artistic creative experimentation.¹³

The conceptual transgression of the 'line drawn in the sand'¹⁴ between 'art' and 'non-art' (or art and life) enacted by Wall's concept of the 'second appearance,' is helpful in unpacking the artistic practices discussed in this dissertation, which tread a fine line between so-called art and other social institutions and forms, particularly in relation to work and labor. However, they also highlight the ways in which the realm of art (its production, reception, and distribution) is already immanently in-relation-to the social, economic, and political institutions and forms under consideration in what follows. Nonetheless, it is the *appearance* of (and general consensus about) art's exceptionalism as an autonomous zone of production that allows the mimetic relation to work as a potentially critical one.¹⁵

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ For further reading see Dave Beech, *Art and Value: Art's Economic Exceptionalism in Classical, Neoclassical and Marxist Economics* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016).

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ART AND THE GENERAL ECONOMY

In a 2013 reader published to accompany the exhibition *It's the Political Economy, Stupid* (Austrian Cultural Forum New York, January 24–April 22, 2012),¹⁶ John Roberts made the observation that “[o]ver the last ten years we have become witness to an extraordinary assimilation of art theory and practice into the categories of labor and production.”¹⁷ The assertion echoes an opinion that has appeared with increasing frequency in art historical and theoretical scholarship (to the point of ubiquity) since the 1960s.¹⁸ Indeed, as early as 1968, Leo Steinberg similarly argued in his essay ‘Other Criteria’ that art “no longer understood itself as art, but rather as labour, as work,”¹⁹ and as such it necessitated a new mode of art criticism, one that centered a socio-cultural, rather than purely aesthetic or historical, perspective.²⁰ Since then, as Roberts continues, it has become common for “the theorization of the making and distribution of art [to be] addressed explicitly in relation to the categories of political economy: value-from, labor-power, productive labor, non-productive labor, immaterial labor, the collective intellect, and general intellect.”²¹

This change in attitude and approach was perhaps exemplified by the prevalent use of the term ‘art workers’ from the 1970s onward. Julia Bryan-Wilson’s influential

¹⁶ Gregory Sholette and Oliver Ressler, eds. *It's the Political Economy, Stupid: The Global Financial Crisis in Art and Theory* (London, UK: Pluto Press, 2013).

¹⁷ John Roberts, “The Political Economization of Art,” in *It's the Political Economy, Stupid: The Global Financial Crisis in Art and Theory*, Gregory Sholette and Oliver Ressler, eds. (London, UK: Pluto Press, 2013): 62.

¹⁸ Not coincidentally, I believe concurring with the observations made by Wall about the rapid expansion of the field of art in this moment.

¹⁹ Leo Steinberg, “Other Criteria,” in *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1972): 55-91, quoted in Maria von Osten, “Another Criteria... or, What is the Attitude of a Work in the Relations of Production of It's Time?” *Afterall*, No. 25 (Autumn/Winter 2010): 61.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Roberts, “The Political Economization of Art,” 64,

book *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam Era*, specifically looks at the emergence of a group of leftist artists in the US—primary among them Hans Haacke, Lucy Lippard, Robert Morris, and Carl Andre (around whom each of the chapters are organized)—who sought to re-signify the nature and value of artistic labor by identifying themselves as ‘art workers.’ Associated with the Art Workers Coalition (AWC), an assembly of artists, filmmakers, museum workers, and other cultural workers that emerged in New York City in 1969,²² the term was used politically to advocate *for* artists rights (such as fair compensation and copyright protection) and *against* discrimination along the lines of race and gender in arts institutions (especially the lack of representation of Black and Puerto Rican artists at the MoMA and other NYC institutions), among other goals.²³ Here, then, the characterization of art-making as labor had a specific political advantage, allowing artists to insist that their work demanded the same protections as other kinds of workers, and hoping to force a conversation between artists and the (often corporate-sponsored) institutions which were the primary arbiters of value and visibility for the artworld at large.

²² Among the participating artists were: Carl Andre, Architects’ Resistance, Robert Barry, Gregory Battcock, Jon Bauch, Ernst Benkert, Don Bernshouse, Gloria Greenberg Bressler, Selma Brody, Bruce Brown, Bob Carter, Frederick Castle, Rosemarie Castoro, Michael Chapman, Iris Crump, John Denmark, Joseph Di Donato, Mark Di Suvero, George Dworzan, Farman, Hollis Frampton, Dan Graham, Chuck Ginnever, Bill Gordy, Alex Gross, Hans Haacke, Clarence Hagin, Harvey, Gerry Herman, Frank Hewitt, D. Holmes, Robert Huot, Ken Jacobs, Joseph Kosuth, David Lee, Naomi Levine, Sol LeWitt, Lucy Lippard, Tom Lloyd, Lee Lozano, Len Lye, James McDonald, Edwin Mieczkowski, Minority A, Vernita Nemece, Barnett Newman, John Perreault, Stephen Phillips, Lil Picard, Peter Pinchbeck, Joanna Pousette-Dart, Barbara Reise, Faith Ringgold, Steve Rosenthal, Theresa Schwarz, Seth Siegelau, Gary Smith, Michael Snow, Anita Steckel, Carl Strueckland, Gene Swenson, Julius Tobias, Jean Toche, Ruth Vollmer, Iain Whitecross, Jay Wholly, Ann Wilson, and Wilbur Woods. “Open Hearing: Art Workers Coalition,” *Primary Information*, <https://primaryinformation.org/product/art-workers-coalition-open-hearing/>

²³ According to one source, “Following the *Open Hearing*, AWC’s emphasis broadened to address the political and social events and concerns of its time: racism, sexism, abortion rights, Vietnam, and Kent State, among others. With so many issues, AWC eventually splintered, with groups like Women Artists in Revolution, Guerilla Art Action Group, and Art Strike addressing specific concerns while remaining affiliated with AWC.” “Art Workers’ Coalition,” *Primary Information*, accessed October 16, 2020, <https://primaryinformation.org/art-workers-coalition/#>. Today, more examples of such groups exist, i.e. groups like W.A.G.E. (Working Artists in the Greater Economy) and Arts & Labor, both run out of NYC, and CARFAC in Canada.

However, although they were invested in flattening, to a certain degree, the distinction between art-making and other types of work, often relying on material and symbolic references to so-called ‘non-artistic’ labor—Bryan Wilson refers to examples such as Carl Andre’s use of a visual language evocative of bricklaying (Fig. 2); Robert Morris’s large installations of wooden beams and other materials resembling construction sites (and often employing construction workers in their assembly), such as *Untitled (Concrete, Timbers, Steel)* (1970) (Fig. 3); Richard Serra’s evocation of a lumber yard in his work *Sawing: Base Plate Measure (12 Fir Trees)* (1969); Mierle Aderman Ukeles various performative ‘maintenance works,’ including *Hartford Wash: Washing, Tracks, Maintenance: Inside* (performed at the Wadsworth Athenium, Hartford, Connecticut, 1973) (Fig. 4); and Hans Haacke’s ‘office works’ consisting of installations of various bureaucratic tasks and correspondences—these references, analogies, and collaborations were often highly fraught. The degree to which the artists associated with the AWC were invested in populism varied, and often, according to Bryan-Wilson, they were “not primarily concerned with making [their] images accessible to the very people with whom these artists asserted a fragile solidarity.”²⁴ The sometimes contentious relationship with these other types of workers whose labor was increasingly a site of identification for artists of the AWC and beyond emerges as a central theme in Bryan-Wilson’s book, and points to the importance of approaching such apparent solidarities with caution, and with a view to the interests and effects represented and produced in the respective contexts of production, circulation, and display that make up the case studies explored in this dissertation. Although many artists and institutions engage with work and labor as both

²⁴ Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009): 3.

subject and form, they do so with different degrees of self-reflexivity about their own positioning in relation to the broader practices and politics that are purportedly the subject of their work, when representing the artist *as* worker, or the museum *as* factory, for example. I have tried to attend to both the critical potential of the relationality between art and labor, and the biases, interests, and blind-spots that often emerge when artists appropriate and/or aestheticize highly fraught and deeply problematic zones of labor and production, often far removed from their original contexts.

One of the first *exhibitions* to engage deeply and critically with the emerging preoccupation with labor in the arts was the highly influential (and now oft-cited) *Work Ethic*, first shown at the Baltimore Museum of Art in 2003. Curated by Helen Molesworth, the show focused on a range of works that actively engaged with then recent shifts in labor and production both within and beyond the arts, especially artistic responses to the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism (or primarily manufacturing-based economies to those dominated by service industries and information technology) in the US, a key transition explored in the articles that make up this dissertation. The expansive catalogue for *Work Ethic* mirrors the categories that were established in the exhibition itself, each of which evokes the type of artistic mimesis described by Wall, equating artistic labor with extra-artistic fields of work. The section ‘The Artist as Manager and Worker: The Artist Creates and Completes a Task,’ for example, sought to challenge the traditional division between mental and manual labor, through satirical works involving the ‘nonproductive’ performance of seemingly unskilled manual labor. Most of these works consisted of highly monotonous, repetitive tasks, including: Vito Acconci’s *Step Piece* from 1970 documenting the artist stepping up and down from a stool in his

apartment at a rate of 30 steps per minute for as long as the artist was able; Bruce Nauman's *Bouncing Two Balls Between the Floor and Ceiling with Changing Rhythms* (1967-68) (consisting of exactly the activity indicated by the title); and Chris Burden's *Honest Labor* (1979) (Fig. 5), for which the artist, on being invited to give a guest lecture at the Emily Carr College of Art and Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, instead spent his time over four days digging a "straight ditch about 2 ½ feet wide and 3 feet deep...from 9A.M. until 5 P.M.,"²⁵ thus in effect substituting his (seemingly purposeless) manual labor for the intellectual labor requested from him.

The section also included mention of Tom Friedman's presentation of a blank sheet of paper under the title *1000 Hours of Staring* (1992-1997); Martha Rosler's *Backyard Economy* series (Fig. 6) and *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, featuring the banal (and at times defunctionalized) performance of traditionally gendered domestic tasks such as cooking, gardening, and laundry; and documentation of the durational work *One Year Performance, 1980-1981 (Time Piece)* by Taiwanese artist Tehching Hsieh, which I will discuss in depth in Chapter One. The works as a group pose an implicit challenge to ideas about artistic creativity, not coincidentally, I believe, in tandem with the increasing integration of creativity into the larger economy as an economic generator (which was, around the same time, explicitly advocated for by the likes of Richard Florida in his articulation of the 'Creative Class'²⁶). At the same time, the works presented an implicit challenge to the ways that value is invested in (or denied) diverse types of labor and work

²⁵ Quoted Helen Molesworth, ed., *Work Ethic* (Baltimore Museum of Art; Penn State University Press, 2003)" 115.

²⁶ See Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community, and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2002). See also, Oliver Wainwright, "Everything is gentrification now': but Richard Florida isn't sorry," *The Guardian*, October 26, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/oct/26/gentrification-richard-florida-interview-creative-class-new-urban-crisis>.

in society at large, through elevating undervalued, invisible, or nonproductive activities.

The second and third sections of *Work Ethic*, “Artist as Manager: The Artist Sets a Task for Others to Complete,” and “The Artist as Experience Maker: The Audience Completes the Work,” both draw upon the central tenet of conceptualism, which emphasizes the primacy of the Idea over the physical production of the work itself, largely through artworks consisting of instructions for others to produce. By undermining of the primacy of authorship and emphasizing the participatory engagement of the museum visitor, both evoke key transitions in art discourse over the past several decades, especially the centrality of participatory and experiential practices, traced in the exhibition to Allan Kaprow’s ‘Happenings’ from the 1950s and ‘60s and his ideas about the ‘blurring of art and life,’ which has since frequently been likened to the primary modes of production in the experience economy at large.

It is notable that while many of the earlier works referenced in Bryan-Wilson’s book and associated with the AWC were working at the edge of the shift from a Fordist, to a post-Fordist economy, the context in which *Work Ethic* emerged (and in which Jeff Wall was writing), was one characterized by the hegemony of post-Fordist modes of production. One of the key developments identified within this shift is the blurring of the traditional line between work and leisure, as leisure-time itself has become productive for the broader economy in myriad ways. The catalogue cites Ernest Mandel, who wrote in his 1978 book *Late Capitalism* about the ways in which, “[m]echanization, standardization, over-specialization, and parcellation of labor, which in the past determined only the realm of commodity production in actual industry, now penetrate

into all sectors of social life”²⁷ As Maurizio Lazzarato states, the realm of immaterial labor involves activities not typically recognized as ‘work’ at all, including “the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion”²⁸ By drawing a direct analogy between the leisure of the museum visitor and the realm of work and labor which was the subject of the show, *Work Ethic* sought to emphasize the newly productive capacity of ‘free time.’ Such a relation was signaled, perhaps most explicitly, by Gabriel Orozco’s *Mesa de ping-pong con estanque (Ping Pond Table)* (1998) (Fig. 7), a modified ping pong table with paddles and balls on which visitors were invited to play, drawing an equivalence between the viewer’s leisure time as simultaneously productive of the work itself.

Within the new economy, differentiating between so-called productive and non-productive zones of activity is a more complicated endeavor than in the past, requiring some analysis in order to establish how (or whether) ‘non-productivity’ can be conceptualized under current conditions. This tension was borne out in the final section of *Work Ethic* titled ‘Quitting Time: The Artist Tries Not to Work’, which encompassed various strategies of artistic refusal and non-work, while also re-emphasizing the blurred distinction between work and non-work that characterizes post-Fordist society. Engaging with the infiltration of work into all aspects of everyday life, several artists featured in the

²⁷ Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, trans. Joris De Bres (London: Verso, 1978): 387. Quoted in *Work Ethic*, 198. As Keti Chukhrov argues in “Towards the Space of the General: On Labor beyond Materiality and Immateriality,” alongside the shift in the primary means of production in Post-Fordist societies, “production activates and occupies life, social and societal space, the intellect, the ‘soul.’” Keti Chukhrov, in “Towards the Space of the General: On Labor beyond Materiality and Immateriality,” *E-Flux*, No. 20 (November 2010): n.p.

²⁸ Maurizio Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor,” (1996), Trans. Paul Colilli and Ed Emery, *Generation Online*, <https://www.generation-online.org/c/fcimmateriallabour3.htm>.

exhibition attempted to deny the art system's "demand for product" by converting activities traditionally considered leisure into artistic labor.²⁹ An example includes Tom Marioni's work, "The Act of Drinking Beer with Friends is the Highest Form of Art" (1970), in which the artist invited friends to join him in drinking beer and socializing, after which the empty bottles and residue would be exhibited for the duration of the show.³⁰ By necessitating that the gallery compensate the artist for his leisure as well as his 'work', the piece problematizes the boundary between work and leisure under late capitalism, and the infiltration of productivity into all realms of life.

Since the 1960s, artists have experimented with various modes of 'not working' which, according to the exhibition, have generally taken one of three forms: mechanization, strikes, and play, represented in the exhibition by a number of artists who simply denied their labor altogether.³¹ These strategies are epitomized by Lee Lozano's *Untitled (General Strike Piece, Feb. 8, 1969)* (1969) during which she pledged to stop exhibiting her work or attending 'artworld' functions in order to "pursue investigation of total personal and public revolution,"³² and Robert Barry's *Closed Gallery* (1969), during which, as the title states, the Art & Project gallery in Amsterdam remained closed for the duration of the exhibition. What becomes evident, however, is that a lack of work does not necessarily equate to a lack of production (in the sense of the production of value, or of a material product), which points to a potential pitfall of artistic methods which use the refusal of work as a critical strategy in the climate of today's economy. By attempting to

²⁹ Molesworth, ed., *Work Ethic*, 202.

³⁰ The work engages with Kathi Week's defense of leisure as an end in itself, not for mere recuperation to reproduce the work cycle, but as the pleasurable space/time of non-work, and her defense of laziness (discussed through Paul Lafargue) as a virtue which denies the capitalist creed of usefulness." See Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Duke University Press, 2011): 79 and 41.

³¹ Helen Molesworth, ed., *Work Ethic* (Baltimore Museum of Art; Penn State University Press, 2003): 201.

³² Quoted in Molesworth, ed., *Work Ethic*, 216.

evade production by disavowing the ‘work ethic,’ and attempting to evade production altogether, these artists potentially presented a critique of our current work-dominated culture. However, existing as they do within the institution of ‘art’, their work does not escape the production of value itself, in fact drawing these various forms of inactivity into the zone of artistic production, and thereby highlighting a key tension that extends to society generally.

Work Ethic has come to be viewed as something of a touchstone exhibition, and despite its seeming exhaustiveness, exhibitions focusing on the relationship between art and labor have appeared with remarkable frequency in recent decades, and, at the time of writing this dissertation, have not waned. To list just a handful of examples, exhibitions that will be mentioned in what follows include: *Labor in a Single Shot* (Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2015); *Work in Motion* (MAST. Gallery, Bologna, 2017); *Time & Motion: Redefining Working Life* (FACT, Liverpool, 2014); *Arbeidstid* (“work time”) (Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Norway, 2013); *It’s the Political Economy, Stupid* (Austrian Cultural Forum New York, January 24–April 22, 2012); *Labor and Wait* (Santa Barbara Museum of Art, July 2–September 22, 2013); *Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker: Work/Travail/Arbeid* (MOMA, Mar 29–Apr 2, 2017); and *The Work Of Art: An Exhibition Of Art, Labour And Working Life* (The Digital Ethnography Research Centre, Melbourne, May 1-11, 2018), a list to which *many* others could be added. Perhaps unsurprisingly, an equally large body of scholarship about the convergence of art and labor has also emerged, as indicated by the proliferation of readers on the topic—in addition to *It’s the Political Economy, Stupid*, examples include: *Are You Working Too Much?: Post-Fordism, Precarity, and the Labor of Art* (Sternberg Press, 2011); *I Can’t*

Work Like This: A Reader on Recent Boycott's and Contemporary Art (Sternberg Press, 2017); *Living Labor* (Sternberg Press, 2017); *Brave New Work: A Reader on Harun Farocki's Film A New Product* (Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2014); and *Work, Work, Work: A Reader on Art and Labor* (Sternberg Press, 2012).³³

These examples of scholarship, artworks, and exhibitions dealing with the relationship between art and labor, however, are largely centered around the politics and ideologies attached to *artistic* labor itself, even when they incorporate or engage extra-artistic forms and contexts. I am interested in engaging this relationship from a different vantage point, exploring the ways in which artistic practices both participate and intervene in the shifting global landscapes of control and exploitation produced by contemporary capitalism. In “Artistic Labour, Enclosure and the New Economy,” Alberto López Cuenca addresses the frequency with which labor has become a topic in contemporary art. Like Bryan-Wilson, his analysis focuses on the ways in which contemporary artists themselves labor (and think about their labor), but he is also interested in the ways in which art’s self-reflexive positioning in relation to capitalism’s hegemonic modes of production might produce “forms of creativity that can oppose the logic of the New Economy.”³⁴ In other words, he is interested not only in how artistic labor itself has evolved *in response to* the new economy, but also how (or whether) it can be a force of demystification and resistance to the increasingly exploitative and untenable landscape of late capitalism at large, leveraging this relationality to critical ends. Work

³³ Joanna Warsza, ed., *I Can't Work Like This: A Reader on Recent Boycott's and Contemporary Art* (Sternberg Press, 2017); Milena Hoegsberg and Cora Fisher, eds., *Living Labor* (Sternberg Press, 2013); Nina Möntmann, ed., *Brave New Work: A Reader on Harun Farocki's Film A New Product* (Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2014); Jonatan Habib Engqvist, Annika Enqvist, Michele Masucci, Lisa Rosendahl, Cecilia Widenheim, eds., *Work, Work, Work: A Reader on Art and Labor* (Sternberg Press, 2012).

³⁴ Cuenca, “Artistic Labor, Enclosure and the New Economy,” 5

such as Maria von Osten's essay "Another Criteria... or, What is the Attitude of a Work in the Relations of Production of Its Time?," and John Roberts' "The Political Economization of Art," begs a similar question, opening up a less insular examination of a subset of artistic and exhibitionary practices that seek to represent or critique these historically recent changes in the modes and relations of production in contemporary capitalism.

As Cuenca notes, artists and cultural workers have long engaged in the kind of contingent, precarious labor that has become increasingly generalized under neoliberal economic regimes:

In contrast to the rest of the work-force during the rise of capitalism in the nineteenth century, artists who abandoned the art academies, or never joined them, tended to labour without fixed schedules, with long periods of inactivity, and were often unable to predict the profits of their experimentations. Artistic labour was... never a significant resource in the production of capital.³⁵

That such a condition persists is the main contention of Gregory Sholette's concept of *Dark Matter*, with which the author identifies what he calls the 'lumpen army' of art, a 'reserve-army' of (often unemployed) "professionally-trained artists occupying a limbo-like space that is simultaneously necessary and superfluous to both the fiscal and symbolic economy of high culture."³⁶ This reserve army of overlooked artists form the necessary background "against which the small percentages of artists who succeed appear

³⁵ Cuenca, "Artistic Labor, Enclosure and the New Economy," 5.

³⁶ Gregory Sholette, "Swampwalls: Dark Matter and the Lumpen Army of Art," *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory*, Vol. 26, Nos. 2 (2016): 175.

sharply focused.”³⁷ They thus form, for Sholette, a problem for “mainstream market valorization,” in that they represent “an actual excess of labor that, even under ideal economic conditions, would be impossible to openly and productively integrate under global capitalism.”³⁸ As Cuenca notes, the question arises, then, of what it is that these art workers are producing, if not participating in the production of profit.³⁹ It also, importantly poses the question of *who* composes this reserve army of ‘superfluous’ marginalized labor, a question that is often overlooked in discussions of precarity in the field of art. The division between the ‘dark matter’ of the artworld and the successful minority of professional artists is sharply divided by gender and race, making social inequality a constitutive element in upholding the mainstream art world, even *as* it often presents as a site of critique.⁴⁰

The ambiguous relationship between art’s ‘productive’ and ‘non-productive’ role within the market is complicated by the fact that today, as suggested above, the modes of ‘creative’ production associated with the arts have become key expedients for the post-Fordist economy at large. Indeed, the argument that the post-1960s flourishing of ‘artistic critique’ was instrumental in the shift to post-Fordism is one of the key arguments made in Boltanski and Chiapello’s *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, which has been widely cited since its publication in 1999.⁴¹ Artists, who have long represented liberated subjectivity

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 179.

³⁹ Alberto López Cuenca, “Economic Value, Equivalence and the Nonidentical” Contemporary Art Practices in the Grey Zone of Human and Commercial Economies,” *Parse*, No. 2 (Autumn 2015): 48-49.

⁴⁰ See Nicole Bernhardt. “Racialized Precarious Employment and the Inadequacies of the Canadian Welfare State,” *SAGE Open* (April 2015), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244015575639>; C. J. Cranford, L. F. Vosko, & N. Zukewich, “The Gender of Precarious Employment in Canada,” *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, Vol. 58, No. 3 (2003): 454–482.

⁴¹ Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London and New York: Verso, 2005) are the main advocates of this now popular view. See also Maurizio Lazzarato in ‘The

and autonomy, are the models for the new economy.⁴² As von Osten notes: “The imperative to turn oneself into a ‘creative being’ and ‘entrepreneurial self’ has absorbed the slogans for autonomy of the 1960s and 70s. The call for self-determination and participation no longer only denotes an emancipatory utopia, but also a social obligation in globalised economies”⁴³ With this observation in mind, Carlos Amorales slogan “Work for Fun,” gains new resonance, pointing to the full subsumption of artistic critique within the productive mechanisms of neoliberal capitalism’s ‘creative destruction.’⁴⁴ As such, whereas once art claimed for itself a critical capacity in relation to the larger system of capitalist domination by its status as a putatively ‘autonomous’ sphere of production from which it leveraged its difference and critique, today it is largely acknowledged that there is no longer any such ‘outside’ to be aspired to. If, in the recent past, the immaterial, informational, creative, experiential, and affective elements of contemporary art were seen as potential forces of resistance, in our current climate, where these forms of labor have become a dominant mode of production for the capitalist economy, these potentialities are now being widely questioned.

In the book *Artist at Work: Proximity of Art and Capitalism*, Bojana Kunst addresses the antagonism between these two common (often coinciding) interpretations of art’s positioning within contemporary capitalism—the first being the desire to attribute critical and political potential to artistic work (or, for the artist, to create work with both

Misfortunes of the “Artistic Critique” and of Cultural Employment’, transversal [online journal], January 2007, available at <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0207/lazzarato/en> (last accessed on 17 January 2012).

⁴² Jackson Petsche, “The Importance of Being Autonomous: Toward a Marxist Defense of Art for Art’s Sake,”

⁴³ Marion von Osten, “Double-Edged,” *Multitudes*, No. 15 (Winter 2004), n.p. <https://www.multitudes.net/Double-Edged/>

⁴⁴ See Alberto López Cuenca, “Artistic Labor, Enclosure and the New Economy,” *Afterall*, No. 30 (Summer 2012).

political content and *impact*) and, on the other hand, the seemingly contradictory (but equally common) charge that art (even at its most overtly critical) has been fully subsumed and appropriated within contemporary capitalist production (an opinion exemplified by Roberts' comment cited above).⁴⁵ She begs the question then, of what precisely the relationship between work and artistic labor is, arguing that the ambivalence of art's proximity with capitalism may have affirmative potential. As such Kunst mirrors the question posed by Cuenca, asking what exactly art produces, and what sort of worker an artist is (and, by extension, what is their form of workers' revolt?).⁴⁶ Von Osten argues that:

[A]rtistic investigations — if we take their production of meaning and discursive ability seriously — make a more important contribution to the possible critique of predominant economic discourses than has been assumed. As a producer of discourses, of critical translations of societal trends, art stands discursively in partial opposition to the modern industrial and service society, which continues to perpetuate the difference between the cognitive and the manual under the notion of immaterial labour.⁴⁷

In my approach, I draw on Kunst's choice of the word *proximity* and von Osten's qualification of art's *partial* opposition to capitalist production at large, pointing to the "ambiguous relationship that artistic labour has maintained with the market economy."⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Bojana Kunst, *Artist at Work: Proximity of Art and Capitalism* (Winchester, UK; Washington, USA: Zero Books, 2015): 1.

⁴⁶ Kunst, *Artist at Work*, 1-2.

⁴⁷ Von Osten, "Another Criteria... or, What is the Attitude of a Work *in* the Relations of Production of It's Time?," 65.

⁴⁸ Cuenca, "Artistic Labor, Enclosure and the New Economy," 6.

This ambiguity is a central underlying thread that binds together the essays in this dissertation. The case studies I explore neither fall neatly within the tradition of artists self-reflexively exploring the conditions and politics of artistic labor itself, nor within the increasing body of works which engage in direct political activism and protest.⁴⁹ However they nonetheless are in proximity to these practices, offering sites to unpack the politics of artists' (albeit complicated and often contested) solidarity with workers in other fields, and their interest in making marginalized and undervalued sites of labor, and the global inequalities in which they are embedded, visible. While each of the case studies discussed has the potential to be read as a critique of contemporary capitalism, their respective artistic strategies and interests imply different levels of aesthetic distance, at times risking complicity, perhaps even a depoliticized engagement with contemporary production.

With these frames in mind, this dissertation consists of a series of integrated articles that focus on the increasingly diffuse and interconnected circuits of global exchange and labor as they interact with specific sites and interventions of contemporary artistic production. While each chapter engages a distinct set of case studies and interpretive approach, they coalesce around the general binding inquiry: does artistic labor today have the capacity to function as a critique of the (transforming) mechanisms of control and exploitation characteristic of capitalism in the twenty-first century? And if not, what does that entail about the continued political viability, and persisting social functions of contemporary artworks? Through an interdisciplinary frame drawing on sources from art history, theory, and philosophy (including autonomist Marxist thought),

⁴⁹ See Yates McKee, *Strike Art: Contemporary Art and the Post-Occupy Condition* (Verso, 2017).

the sociology of work and labor, performance studies, geography, and critical readings on the relationship between artistic labor and recent forms of capitalist production, the chapters are organized around exhibitions and artworks which represent, critique, or (re)produce the conditions of production in late capitalism, while situating these within a global economy characterized by an uneven network of productive relations. In so doing, they trace the trajectory of labor relations and production practices as they have transformed over the last half decade through artworks and exhibitions that engage specific emblematic sites of production—the factory, the prison, and the museum (or amalgams of these spaces) – and attempts to tease out places where reflection on the relationship between ‘artistic’ and ‘non-artistic’ labor in each may lead to clarity regarding the socio-political efficacy of contemporary art in an increasingly saturated and complex economic infrastructure.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

1. Hard Time: Carcerality and The Economy of Time in Contemporary Art

Chapter One, “Hard Time: Carcerality and the Economy of Time in Contemporary Art,” begins with an analysis of a participatory artistic project deeply invested in confronting the systems of value upon which contemporary capitalism is predicated, by proposing an alternative system of production and exchange, one which attributes a liberatory role to artistic practice. For Antonio Vega Macotela’s long-term work titled *Time Divisa* (2006-2010), the artist engaged in a series of ‘time exchanges’ with inmates at the *Santa Martha Acatitla* prison in Mexico City, during which each party (the artist and the incarcerated individual with whom he conducted the exchange) would simultaneously perform a task

of the other's choosing. The title of the project (which translates to 'Time Currency'), suggests a commercial logic underlying these interactions, and yet the exchanges paradoxically represented for the artist the possibility of undermining the intensifying mechanisms of exploitation and control characteristic of late capitalism, in which the naturalization of 'time-as-measure' and the mediation of currency have led to the almost full expropriation of life by capitalist systems of accumulation.

Bypassing monetary exchange, in *Time Divisa* value was invested directly in time, labor, and, above all, experience itself. And yet, by situating the project within the prison, and positioning his own presumably 'free time' in direct juxtaposition with the 'unfree time' of his collaborators, *Time Divisa* points to the unevenness with which time regimes are distributed across what Michel Foucault calls the 'carceral continuum' of society at large, instantiating the claim made by Theodor Adorno, Michael Hardt, Foucault and others that, "[f]ree time is shackled to its opposite."⁵⁰ Notably, while the tasks requested of Vega Macotela largely required that he perform (primarily social) activities beyond the prison walls—in effect becoming a proxy for the incarcerated participant on the outside—they in turn created artworks documenting their own lived time within the spatial parameters of the prison. As such, artistic production and its association with emancipated labor and liberated subjectivity is a core premise on which the exchanges gained meaning.

With Macotela's project as a starting point, this chapter explores a selection of contemporary time-based performance and participatory art—especially Tehching

⁵⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, "Free Time," in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991).

Hsieh's *Cage Piece* and Cameron Rowland's exhibition *91020000*—which directly interrogate institutional structures of control and confinement to challenge the contemporary conditions of 'free' and 'unfree' time at—and across—the 'prison boundary,' and in artistic practice. For Hsieh's durational *One Year Performance 1978-1979 (Cage Piece)*, the artist remained inside a cell-like cage constructed in his New York apartment and committed to 'producing nothing' for the duration of one year—speaking, reading, television, etc. were all prohibited. For the installation *Down the River*, Andrea Fraser projected ambient sound, recorded in 'A Block' of Sing Sing Correctional Facility, into a large empty room at the Whitney Museum of American Art, NY, directly superimposing the leisure time of museum-goers and the unfree time represented by the audio recording of prison life. And Cameron Rowland's *91020000* exhibited a series of minimalist ready-made objects—produced through compulsory inmate labor in state prisons in New York and California and purchased through state agencies like Corcraft in New York—indexing the reified labor (and time) of incarcerated individuals while commenting on capitalism's extraction of value from the prison system (which, for Rowland, is directly descended from the legacies of slavery and forced labor in the US).

All of these works rely upon a direct juxtaposition between 'free time' (and, by extension, labor)—embodied in the artistic autonomy of the artist or the leisure time of museum visitors—with the unfree time exemplified by real incarcerated individuals. As such, they point to a complicated set of ethical challenges inherent to aesthetic considerations of 'prison time,'⁵¹ while nonetheless opening a space in which public discourse about the concrete politics of the justice system might emerge. Drawing on

⁵¹ See Michael Hardt, "Prison Time," *Yale French Studies*, No. 91 (1997).

productive points of intersection between prison sociology and carceral geography about the experiential time of incarcerated individuals and scholarship about time-based art and performance studies, this chapter bridges disciplinary boundaries in the interest of a more nuanced understanding of the politics of time and its relation to contemporary systems of power and control, while considering the friction that appears within this dichotomy and its reliance on structures of unequal opportunity.

Importantly as a framework for the dissertation as a whole, this chapter is situated between two important ‘turns’ in post 1960s artistic practice: Firstly, what art historian Christine Ross has called the “temporal turn” in contemporary art; and secondly, the “social turn” (a term coined by critic Claire Bishop), encompassing a range of recent socially-engaged artistic practices as historicised by Shannon Jackson in her book *Social Works*.⁵² The temporal turn refers to an increased attention to historical, geological, and experiential time in contemporary art. In her book, *The Past is the Present; It’s the Future Too: The Temporal Turn in Contemporary Art*, Ross analyses a range of works in performance, film, and installation art in which time itself is a site of sustained inquiry.⁵³ Many of these belong to a set of practices known as ‘durational performance,’ consisting of extended—generally highly restrictive—periods of repetitive or laborious activity (or, alternatively, ‘doing nothing,’ as I will discuss below), as a way to isolate and manipulate

⁵² The term ‘social turn’ was coined by art historian Claire Bishop in 2006 to describe the trend toward socially engaged art (work that is collaborative, often participatory and involves people and relationships as the medium or material of the work See Claire Bishop, “The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents,” *Artforum*, Vol. 44, No. 6 (2006): 178-183. Socially engaged practice often aims to directly engage communities and/or to enact real social and political change. See also Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2011)

⁵³ See Christine Ross, *The Past is the Present; It’s the Future Too: The Temporal Turn in Contemporary Art* (New York and London: Continuum Publishing, 2012).

the subjective experience of lived time.⁵⁴ These performances often create the perceived effect of *slowing down* time—an effect Ross describes as “the aesthetic suspension of forward movement”—as a way to reorient the viewer’s relationship to time.

Recent scholarship across a range of disciplines considers such strategies of ‘slowing down’ to be a radical mode of resistance to the accelerating temporalities of contemporary capitalist society.⁵⁵ However, Jackson and Julia Bryan-Wilson rightfully point out that such temporal strategies are never socially neutral. In their essay “Time Zones,” they emphasize the unevenness of experiential time, characterized by “inequitable accelerations and drags” across socio-political, cultural and economic contexts.⁵⁶ Importantly, Jackson argues in *Social Works* that the aesthetic interest in “time’s palpability” rests upon an underlying class basis: as she indicates, time is already “quite palpable to those who watch the clock for a living.”⁵⁷ Ross too identifies temporally marginalized groups—those “at the margins of the public time of vital opportunities, including access to power, employment, and social recognition,” and who “...live...not at a spatial periphery but literally in another time.”⁵⁸

Interestingly, the language used to describe and interpret the deliberate production of protracted time in contemporary art is echoed in scholarship in the social sciences, carceral geography, and critical theory which addresses the qualitative differences

⁵⁴ See Lara Shalson, *Endurance Performance: Art and Politics Since 1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

⁵⁵ See Jonathan Crary’s *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (Verso, 2014).

⁵⁶ Shannon Jackson and Julia Bryan-Wilson, “Time Zones: Durational Art and Its Contexts,” *Representations*, Vol. 136 No. 1 (Fall 2016): 1-20.

⁵⁷ Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2011): 66.

⁵⁸ Daniel Innerarity quoted in Christine Ross, *The Past is the Present; It’s the Future Too: The Temporal Turn in Contemporary Art* (New York and London: Continuum Publishing, 2012): 78

incarcerated individuals describe between time spent in prison and that spent on the “outside.”⁵⁹ According to Azrini Wahidin, “Prisoners...focus on how to manage time in prison by learning to ‘serve time’, to differentiate between ‘hard time’, and ‘easy time’, to ‘kill time’ and try ultimately to survive ‘dead time.’ They have a dual sense of time passing and standing still.”⁶⁰ Others view their time in prison as “an interruption of life, not part of it, like a form of cryogenic suspension.”⁶¹ Based on such first hand accounts, prison life seems to embody both spatial marginalization and temporal ‘drag,’ as Jackson describes it. My research thus brings to light an important socio-political dimension of the temporal turn in contemporary art, highlighting time’s imbrication in global structures of social regulation, exploitation, punishment, and control. It suggests a productive point of intersection between art and performance studies on the one hand, and critical prison studies on the other, in addition to the framework of global labor relations that structures the following two chapters.

Coinciding with the ‘turns’ toward temporal and social engagement in artistic practice discussed above, the same period has witnessed the vast expansion of carceral logics across diverse zones of contemporary society, described in the social sciences as the ‘punitive’ or ‘carceral turn.’⁶² According to my project, this coincidence is not accidental. While valuable work has been undertaken separately relating the prison and

⁵⁹ See Rives, J. *Dead Time: Poems from Prison* (Hamilton, Ontario: Mini Mocho Press, 1989); Matthews, R. *Doing Time: An Introduction to the Sociology of Punishment* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1999); Goifman, Kiko. “Killing Time in the Brazilian Slammer.” *Ethnography* 3, No. 4 (2002): 435-441.

⁶⁰ Azrini Wahidin, “Time and the Prison Experience,” *Sociological Research Online*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2006): 6.1.

⁶¹ R.J. Sapsford, *Life Sentence Prisoners: Reaction, Response and Change* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1983): 96.

⁶² See De Lissovoy N. “Conceptualising the Carceral Turn: Neoliberalism, Racism, and Violation.” *Critical Sociology*, Vol. 39, No. 5 (2012): 739–755; Dowell, Deborah, Claudrena N Harold and Juan Battle, *The Punitive Turn: New Approaches to Race and Incarceration*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013.

time to recent histories of visual and performance art, this chapter asserts that they must be thought *together* in order to understand the historical specificity of lived-time in both art history and broader socio-economic/punitive structures. The case studies I examine bridge this gap: merging, or oscillating between, aesthetic considerations of time and the socio-political implications of the temporal turn expressed by the prison and related institutions.

As I will elaborate, art institutions themselves are not immune from implication in the broader systemic constellation of contemporary carcerality. In fact, the primary implication of Fraser's *Down the River* (discussed above), is to show how the museum and the prison are structurally linked. Fraser traces the "dual museum and prison boom," during which both museums and prisons have expanded exponentially since the 1970s, to income inequality in the US—while the museum boom has been fuelled by the increasing concentration of wealth at the top of society, the prison boom is one repercussion of a rise in poverty and social instability in an increasingly polarized society sharply divided by race, class, and geography.⁶³ By considering—through the relation between time, labor, carcerality, and contemporary art—the degree to which 'free' and 'unfree time' are coeval with neoliberalism, this chapter seeks to illuminate the complex structures, experiences, and politics of unfree time of the "contemporary continuum of incarceration" in contemporary art and its imbrication with (racial) capitalism.⁶⁴

2. *Choreographies of Work: Time, Rhythm, and Global Capitalism*

⁶³ Fraser, Andrea. *Down the River*. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2016. For further on the relationship between the rising demand for both museums and prisons in the US, see Joe Day, *Corrections and Collections: Architectures for Art and Crime* (Routledge, 2013).

⁶⁴ Jackie Wang. *Carceral Capitalism*. South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2018.

Building on the investigation of the politics of time, labor, and power in Chapter One, Chapter Two, “Choreographies of Work: Time, Rhythm, and Global Capitalism,” moves from the site of the prison to the factory, engaging in a close reading of a single exhibition which is exemplary of a range of similarly-oriented exhibitions in which traditional blue collar work makes a ‘second appearance,’ to use Wall’s term, as contemporary art. Like the case studies examined in Chapter One, *In Time (the Rhythm of the Workshop)* (Museum of Arts and Design, NYC in 2015), placed artistic labor in direct ‘proximity’ to extra-artistic modes and sites of production, begging the question of the museum’s role as mediator in the representation of the politics of work under global capitalism. Comprised of works by artists Andreas Bunte, Daniel Eisenberg, Denis Côté, and Varvara Guljajeva and Mar Canet (Varvara & Mar), *In Time* focused specifically on the role of gesture in late capitalism and the impact of labor on bodies, by considering the ‘choreography of fabrication’ in varied contexts, and encouraging (slow) reflection on the tempo(s) of work, objects of labor as measures of time, and the “unexpected ways material becomes immaterial” in a globally distributed economic landscape.⁶⁵

In its presentation of what the exhibition text described as “a group of time-based labor portraits” consisting largely of filmic representations of repetitive factory work, *In Time* is exemplary of a subtle yet telling shift in the representation of labor, one concerned less with the symbolism of work or the class dimension of the worker than with the minutia of its gestures, choreographies, rhythms, and sounds. I argue that these exhibitions make *sensible* (rather than strictly visible) the experiential world of global circuits of production in a time when it has become increasingly difficult to cognize the diffuse and indirect global economic entanglements of the present. In this, the works

⁶⁵ Exhibition text, *In Time: The Rhythm of the Workshop*, Museum of Arts and Design, NYC, 2016.

exhibited in *In Time* exemplify the search for methods of what Frederic Jameson calls ‘cognitive mapping’ to confront the increasing volatility of global labor conditions. According to Jameson, in the “corporate multinational global economy of late capitalism...the subject is disconnected and fragmented in a more exaggerated form than ever before.”⁶⁶ In the face of the increasing disconnection of the individual from the economic forces that shape their being, cognitive mapping seeks to overcome the perceived impossibility of representing such a complex totality, making it cognitively perceptible. As such, cognitive mapping, for Jameson, represents “a means by which the individual subject can locate and structure perception of social and class relations in a world where the local no longer drives social, political, and cultural structures or allows the individual subject to make sense of his or her environment.”⁶⁷

In his essay “Navigating Neoliberalism,” Nick Srnicek identifies an important role for art and aesthetics in developing much needed new modes of cognitive mapping. He writes: “These two strands—the collapse of neoliberalism and the absence of alternatives—can find their resolution in a third strand, which is a particular emerging approach to aesthetics.”⁶⁸ For Srnicek the most promising role of art in revealing the ‘mystery’ of global capitalism (and thereby enhancing our capacities to ‘imagine a better future’) lies in what he calls an ‘aesthetics of the interface,’ mobilizing the capacities of technology and science, and relying heavily on complex data visualization to mediate “between big and complex data on the one hand, and our finite cognitive capacities on the

⁶⁶See Fran Mason, “A Poor Person’s Cognitive Mapping,” in *Conspiracy Nation: the Politics of Paranoia in Postwar America*, edited by Peter Knight (New York: New York University Press, 2002): 40-56.

⁶⁷ Nick Srnicek, “Navigating Neoliberalism” Political Aesthetics in an Age of Crisis,” *Medium*, October 19, 2015, <https://medium.com/after-us/navigating-neoliberalism-f9fae2405488>.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

other.”⁶⁹ However, these kinds of data-driven strategies for visualizing the mechanisms and failures of neoliberal globalization have an equally prevalent counterpoint in a set of practices that rely heavily on bodily and affective experience to mediate between the local and the global. Importantly, in the space of *In Time*, these intricate global relations were not only seen, they were *felt*, designed to foreground aural, rather than purely visual, perception.

By producing an immersive space in which—by all appearances—labor has no instrumental end, and by shifting the focus from the cognitive to the sensorial, *In Time* presented the possibility of a mode of cognitive mapping by other means, in which the experiential nature of time and rhythm potentially intervene in dominant discourses about the changing global terrain of labor and production. Here, the increasing installation of film and other time-based media in the museum facilitates the juxtaposition of different, politically inflected, ‘time zones.’ Importantly, time itself has emerged as an important framework of analysis in globalization studies generally, including work in sociology and political economy about the global landscape(s) of labor.⁷⁰ As Barrows writes, “Globalization demands the synchronized coordination of multiple and diverse rhythms, from the volatility of global stock markets to the variability of weather patterns, from the biorhythms of seasonal agricultural workers to the flex-times of corporate culture” while acknowledging that, “[t]hese necessarily diverse rhythmic patterns are uneasily harmonized by global processes that protect and privilege the economic, cultural, and

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ See Adam Barrows, “Living the Rhythms of the Global: Time, Globalization Discourse, and Rhythm-Analysis,” In *Time, Globalization and Human Experience*, Paul Huebener, Susie O'Brien, Tony Porter et.al., eds. (New York: Routledge, 2017).

political foundations of some rhythms at the expense of others.”⁷¹ To some degree, *In Time* functioned as an intervention in the cultural glorification of speed and immaterial production by highlighting the peripheralized (often invisible in Western deindustrialized culture) labor that holds up the global economy, while also highlighting the inherent tensions in any attempt to represent or challenge global capitalism, where the need for generalizations butts up against the equal necessity for situated local representations and responses, including understanding of the class-based and racialized politics that undergird local and global economic relations.

In his essay, “Art and the Politics of Time-as-Substance,” Roberts questions the role and value of art which responds directly to the present moment. He writes: “the job of art under capitalism is not just to return a picture of capitalism to capitalism, but to make the free labor of art a space of resistance to the temporal pressures of the value-form...”⁷² With this assertion in mind, I consider how the presentation of industrial labor in *In Time* and similar aesthetic contexts is transformed when these forms make a ‘second appearance’ as art, and to what ends? What is the function of this conceptual dis-/relocation? How might the aesthetic interest in work processes be situated in relation to—or serve as an index of—the increasingly complex connections between immaterial labor, artisanal labor, the continued peripheralization of industrial labor, and deindustrialization in a global post-Fordist economy? How do they sit in tension with the myriad aesthetic representations of industry that have long been used to uphold the ideologies of (technological) progress, manifest destiny, the human domination of nature, and related practices of colonization, resource extraction, and labor exploitation? And

⁷¹ Barrows, “Living the Rhythms of the Global: Time, Globalization Discourse, and Rhythm-Analysis,” 174.

⁷² Roberts, “Art and the Politics of Time-as-Substance,” 39.

finally, what is the significance of the museum (with its increasing focus on time-based media) as a container for such presentations, given the shifting terrain of production towards the ‘real subsumption’ of the totality of life under capital, and the museum’s own imbrication in new modes of post-Fordist production? Possibly in light of such shifts, returning to the depiction of labor becomes, according to Jennifer Peterson, a way to represent the “increasingly urgent themes of labor and industry in the face of ongoing crises in global capitalism.”⁷³

3. Undead Pottery: Death and Revival in the Self-Reflexive Practices of Contemporary British Ceramics

Finally, Chapter Three in some sense reverses the relationship between the museum and the factory analyzed in the previous chapter, exploring the occupation of a former factory district by a range of arts-based interventions, and their integration into the ‘postindustrial’ economy. Titled “Undead Pottery: Death and Revival in the Self-Reflexive Practices of Contemporary British Ceramics,” this chapter explores the memories, histories, and contradictions underlying the pervasive nostalgia that frames the pottery district of Stoke-On-Trent, England, through analysis of works by a selection of contemporary ceramic artists responding to its decline. Stoke-On-Trent was historically the centre of British ceramic production and innovation, world renowned as the home of such iconic manufactories as Wedgwood, Royal Doulton, Minton, Carleton Ware, and Spode, producers of wares that have become deeply associated with the very heart of

⁷³ Peterson, Jennifer. “Workers Leaving the Factory: Witnessing Industry in the Digital Age,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Sound and Image in Digital Media*, Edited by Carol Vernallis, Amy Herzog, and John Richardson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): 1-15.

English national identity.⁷⁴ Since the 1970s, however, the once thriving industrial center has been in steady decline, impacted heavily by broad economic shifts in the post-Thatcher era, some of which will be discussed in greater detail below. In the past 30 years alone, the UK's manufacturing sector has shrunk by two-thirds,⁷⁵ coinciding with the deindustrialization and 'dematerialization' of broad swathes of the economy, orienting production away from manufacturing and toward the service industries, digital technology, finance, and various 'creativity-led' industries in the shift to the 'knowledge economy.'

Stoke has been hit hard by these developments. In the early 2000s a number of major pottery firms, including Wedgwood itself, lapsed into administration,⁷⁶ largely due to the increasing necessity of outsourcing labor to Indonesia and China where production costs are lower, in addition to the displacement by advanced production technology of many of the traditional hand skills central to the industry.⁷⁷ As a result, thousands of factory employees have been laid off and countless once bustling factories have been

⁷⁴ Most people will recognize the iconic blue and white motifs of Spode and Wedgwood ceramics, which became incredibly popular in the nineteenth century, and have been widely collected, reproduced and appropriated as national symbols, both domestically and internationally.

⁷⁵ According to *The Guardian*, the UK has faced 'the greatest deindustrialisation of any major nation.' Aditya Chakraborty, "Why Britain doesn't Make Things Anymore," *The Guardian*, November 16, 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/business/2011/nov/16/why-britain-doesnt-make-things-manufacturing>.

⁷⁶ According to the *Guardian*, "In 2009 the Irish-owned Waterford Wedgwood went into administration and the buildings looked destined for the wrecker's ball. Then an American private equity company, KPS Capital Partners, stepped in and invested in contemporary designs. Waterford Wedgwood Royal Doulton has since been sold again for £280m to Fiskars, a Finnish heritage brand." Vanessa Thorpe, "Now Bake Off is ending, the next hot craze is about to come out of the oven..." *The Guardian*, October 3, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/oct/03/great-british-pottery-throw-down-television>.

⁷⁷ On 23 April 2009, Portmeirion Potteries Ltd purchased (the brands) Royal Worcester and Spode brands, after they had been placed into administration the previous November. See the *Stoke Sentinel*, <http://www.stokesentinel.co.uk/Stoke-kilns-fired-Spode/story-12520079-detail/story.html>. Waterford Wedgwood went into administration in 2009, but was subsequently revived by a US-based private equity company, KPS Capital Partners, who updated designs, catering to new sectors such as more accessible home décor, and advertised the brand internationally, "particularly Asia, where the quintessential English design resonates strongly." In 2015, Waterford Wedgwood Royal Doulton (WWRD) was sold again, going for £280million to Finnish heritage brand Fiskars. See Bethan Ryder, "For the Love of Crocks...the British Ceramics Revival," *The Telegraph*, July 16, 2015, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/11743826/For-the-love-of-crocks...-the-British-ceramics-revival.html>.

swiftly abandoned and left to stagnate, leaving behind a conspicuous landscape of decline. Out of this atmosphere, a number of ceramic artists, including Neil Brownsowrd and Clare Twomey, began in the early 2000s, to engage with the landscape and materials of decline, incorporating these into new creative amalgams. Further, their use of a method of ‘industrial archaeology,’ has become an officially encouraged activity—since the inauguration of the British Ceramics Biennial (BCB) in 2009, it has taken place in the abandoned Spode factory, left untouched so that contemporary artists might engage in melancholic site-specific interventions with the materials of post-industry.

While often represented primarily as a way to ‘excavate’ or preserve the fast-vanishing history and knowledge that lies dormant within the remnants of post-industry—an engagement with the past that is equal parts eulogy and celebration—I argue that the works discussed in this chapter serve as a mode of working-through the relationship between emerging and endangered modes of production, as a way of resituating and re-signifying both contemporary and historical practice, and as powerful nodes of contact and negotiation which make visible—in concentrated form—the intersections of global forces at the local level. Through the obsessive re-enactment of the death and renewal of the ceramics industry in Stoke, and their mediation through conceptual and performative ceramic practices, I propose that these examples of recent artistic production represent a model of ‘self-reflexive craft’ which, by directly incorporating or otherwise referencing historical modes of production and their objects—either as subject, content or form—constitute a meta-archive of the cultural, aesthetic, and socio-economic transition which frames the medium of ceramics, both locally and on a broader international scale, pointing most significantly to the complex relationship

between nostalgia and economic regeneration in a context of (post)industrial restructuring. Their potency, I believe, derives in part from their paradoxical relationship to the content they encode, in that they both reflect on (and incorporate within themselves) the very matter of Stoke's declining pottery industry, and are themselves operational in the post-industrial restructuring which is currently being ushered in to take its place.

Through mournful expressions of loss, fragmentation, and death, the artists discussed here facilitate analysis of the ways in which social anxieties about globalization, deindustrialization, labor, skill, art, and identity (both personal and national) are played out through the medium of ceramics, showing the way contemporary artists participate in the local reimagining of an industry in transition. At the same time, the paradoxical incorporation of nostalgia for a 'lost' culture of industrial ceramic production points to the often contradictory positioning of arts-based approaches to community revitalization, even where critical perspectives are presented. As such, this chapter bridges a gap between existing scholarship about craft's shifting identity and cultural positioning (both in relation to traditional industry and the 'fine arts'), and the growing body of scholarship about the relationship between the museum and the growing field of postindustrial tourism as a mode of economic regeneration.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ See Monika Murzyn-Kupisz and Jarosław Działek, eds. *The Impact of Artists on Contemporary Urban Development in Europe* (Springer, 2017); Alexander H.J. Otgaar, Leo van den Berg, Rachel Xiang Feng, Christian Berger, *Industrial Tourism: Opportunities for City and Enterprise* (Routledge, 2010); Tim Stangleman. "'Smokestack Nostalgia,' 'Ruin Porn' or Working-Class Obituary: The Role and Meaning of Deindustrial Representation," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, Vol. 84 (Fall 2013): 23-37; Shales, Ezra. "Mass Production as an Academic Imaginary (or, if more must be said of Marcel, "Evacuating Duchampian Conjecture in the Age of Recursive Scholarship")," *The Journal of Modern Craft*, Volume 6, No. 3 (2013): Dahn, Jo. "Elastic/Expanding: Contemporary Conceptual Ceramics." In *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, edited by Maria Elena Buszek (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); de Waal, Edmund. *20th Century Ceramics* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2003); Barnard, Rob, Natasha Daintry and Clare Twomey. *Breaking the Mould: New Approaches to*

A Note on the Integrated Article Format

Choosing to approach this dissertation as a series of integrated articles rather than a traditional monographic thesis has had its advantages and its drawbacks. The format has facilitated the juxtaposition of seemingly disconnected case studies, in this case from far-afield geographic locations, thereby allowing me to draw broad connections and trace international networks of relations. I made this decision in part as a response to Bryan Wilson, Jackson, and Sarah Sharma's use of 'time zones,' as a means of navigating between local and global contexts of analysis, increasingly important given capitalism's embeddedness in global flows. Sarah Sharma argues that: "Solidarity must be temporalized, synchronized transnationally, to occur at the very same time irrespective of time zones in order for the global linkages of coeval agency to emerge."⁷⁹ Simultaneously taking a global perspective *and* considering local and regional contexts is a tall order, however I do believe contemporary art practices and institutions may be uniquely situated to facilitate bringing different 'time frames'⁸⁰ together in a single space. However, this perspective must be undertaken self-reflexively, recognizing the perspectives, biases, and interests that these bring into play, especially here in relation to inequalities along the lines of gender, race, class, and geography. It has been noted that the broad geo-political approach of 'global art history' is both necessary and potentially fraught:

Ceramics (London: Black Dog Publishing Ltd., 2007); Chambers, Ruth, Amy Gogarty and Mireille Perron, eds. *Utopic Impulses: Contemporary Ceramics Practice* (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2007).

⁷⁹ Sarah Sharma, "Checked Baggage: An Afterward," In *Time, Globalization and Human Experience*, Paul Huebener, Susie O'Brien, Tony Porter et.al., eds. (New York: Routledge, 2017): 194.

⁸⁰ See Sarah Sharma, "The Biopolitical Economy of Time," *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (2011).

Less an attempt to study the whole world, the global is a methodology that has been used to decenter national discourses and challenge Euro-American-centrism and Orientalist narratives. At its best, global art history and curatorial practices emphasize mobility, exchange, networks, transnational and transcultural studies. At its worst, the global turn has engendered and normalized travel dependent practices that celebrate biennials, art fairs and a roster of globe-trotting curators, collectors and artists.

Whatever its (very real) perils, I have tried to use the integrated article format to mediate between global abstractions and local specificities, while highlighting the sometimes ambivalent positioning of art and its institutions in ‘revealing’ these relationalities. At the same time, due to the non-linear nature of this format, what I present here is by no means a ‘full picture’ and makes no attempt to simulate one—the ‘frames’ that I have chosen are few among many. These could easily be shifted, reversed, zoomed in or out in relation to the issues and contexts under consideration—my hope is to maintain an unsteady frame of reference in continuing to think and write about these topics, so far as is fruitful for understanding the shifting and interdependent political and artistic landscapes in this moment. Nevertheless, each case study is especially indicative of concrete but widespread transformations in both the global political economy of labor (and the valuation of time) and the artistic forms which double, appropriate, aestheticize, or formally parallel them, and thus I hope to present a snapshot of their relations in recent and contemporary art.

CHAPTER ONE

HARD TIME: CARCERALITY AND THE ECONOMY OF TIME IN CONTEMPORARY ART

Freedom, that is, the control of our time, is conceived as the keystone and the most coveted possession in modern society, equal to all. By an indubitable logic, then, the paradigm for punishment is the loss of this most precious asset that all possess equally: time.

~Michael Hardt, “Prison Time”

Prison time doesn't move forward toward any horizon; it gapes. A gaping abyss that must be filled at any cost, they say, or else you go under. That gaping time—you've got to kill it.... 'keep busy'.... live fast, intense, no holes in your time. Time is the enemy.... But time is the dimension in which people live. To kill time is to denature life, deprive it of meaning. To inflict the punishment of 'time to kill' on a man (the definition of imprisonment) is to exclude him from the realm of meaning, put him to social death.⁸¹

~Claude Lucas, *Suerte: L'exclusion volontaire*

SPENDING TIME: CRITICAL EXCHANGE IN CARCERAL TIMESPACE

Between 2006 and 2010, artist Antonio Vega Macotela engaged in a series of unusual activities. He serenaded a stranger's mother, he asked forgiveness from another's wife, he

⁸¹ Translation by Guilbaud Fabrice, “Working in Prison: Time as Experienced by Inmate-Workers,” *Revue française de sociologie* Vol. 5, No. 51 (2010): 41.

witnessed the first steps of a child he'd never met before. In fact, he spent intimate moments with many mothers, daughters, sons, brothers, and neighbors that were not his own, celebrating their birthdays, teaching them to read, visiting their graves, listening to them sing, and otherwise forging deeply personal connections with virtual strangers. These activities took him across Mexico City, into unfamiliar territory, and yet he was welcomed with open arms into the homes and lives of each. For these individuals, Vega Macotela was not a stranger at all. In their eyes, he was in fact their son, father, brother, friend.

Each of the interactions listed above took place as Vega Macotela's part of a 'time exchange'—one of 365 that the artist undertook with inmates at the *Santa Acatitla Prison* in Mexico City. The terms of these exchanges were as follows: On a mutually agreed upon day and time, each party (Vega Macotela and the incarcerated individual with whom he was conducting the exchange) simultaneously performed a task of the other's choosing. While Vega Macotela performed various actions in the world beyond the prison as requested, his collaborators produced a series of objects based on instructions by—or developed in discussion with—the artist. However, as I will discuss, the composition of these objects was necessarily determined and delimited by the institutional parameters of the prison, including restricted access to materials and limited freedom of movement. For example, for *Time Divisa 291* (2009), Vega Macotela was asked to search for a woman whom 'El kamala,' (then incarcerated in the prison), had met in a corner store years earlier. In exchange El kamala was asked to repeatedly scratch a copy of Alexandre Dumas's novel *El Conde de Montecristo* (*The Count of Monte Cristo*), using a nervous tick in his right hand (Fig. 1). Over the course of Vega

Macotela's (ultimately successful) thirteen hour search, El kamala bore a hole most of the way through the 500 page tome.⁸² Another inmate, 'El superratón,' collected and ordered all of the cigarette butts that he found in his cell into a type of relief sculpture, in exchange for Vega Macotela witnessing his son's first steps. Other inmates collected toenails, created drawings, sculpted aromatic soaps, told stories, and made a variety of objects and artworks from things found around the prison (Fig. 1-10). According to the artist: "Since we perform our tasks at the same time, a really weird and strong connection gets made between the two of us.... They become me and I become them, for a little while."⁸³

The title of the project, *Time Divisa* (which translates to 'Time Currency'), highlights the commercial logic underlying these interactions: the various activities, social interactions, and experiences that Vega Macotela engaged in were documented and recorded, and then given to each participant as evidence of their having taken place. Importantly, *this* documentation is absent from subsequent exhibitions of the project, as Vega Macotela, honoring the conditions of the exchange, considers these actions the property of his collaborators (and thus not his to display or claim authorship of). Similarly, each task requested by Vega Macotela in exchange resulted in an object or 'product' which served as both documentation and verification of the 'time spent' by each participant—in a sense, authenticating and verifying the fulfillment of the unwritten 'contract' underwriting the exchange. For Vega Macotela, these alternative, creative

⁸² This necessarily durational endeavour, for one reviewer, recalled "Dantès' own years-long attempt to escape prison by slowly digging through stone." However, I would go even further to say that the work adds an element of futility to the gesture—a sort of aesthetic reflection on the nature of time in prison. Chus Martinez, "Jose Antonio Vega Macotela," *Artforum* (May 2011): 270.

⁸³ Antonio Vega Macotela, As Told To Gabriella Gómez-Mont, "Mexican Rashes: Contraband, Commerce, and Art in One of Mexico's Most Overcrowded Prisons," *Vice*, May 31, 2008, https://www.vice.com/en_ca/article/dpx87v/mexican-rashes-137-v15n6

forms of documentation constitute the currency of the project. As such, there is a bureaucratic, juridical, and commercial logic at the heart of the *Time Divisa*, and yet the resulting series of exchanges represented, for Vega Macotela, the possibility of undermining the intensifying mechanisms of exploitation and control characteristic of late capitalism, in which the naturalization of ‘time-as-measure’ and the mediation of currency have led to the almost full expropriation of life by capitalist systems of accumulation, speculation, and exploitation. Bypassing the exchange of currency in the form of money, in *Time Divisa*, value is invested directly in time, labor, and, above all, experience. By situating the project within the prison, and positioning his own presumably ‘free’ time in direct juxtaposition with the un-free time of those on the other end of the exchange, the project questions the ways in which time—within and outside of the prison—is made ‘productive’ in relation to the culturally dominant norms of productivity, work, and leisure in contemporary Western culture. It poses questions about how value is invested in ‘creative’ endeavors, as well as affective experiences and personal connections such as those deprived of inmates during their confinement, and, in *Time Divisa*, experienced by Vega Macotela in their stead. On what grounds can such an exchange be meaningful?

I would like, here, to consider both the possibilities and limits of such an exchange within the unique parameters of *Time Divisa*, firstly by situating Vega Macotela’s work alongside other artistic projects that enact strategies of ‘critical exchange’ as potentially resistant forces within contemporary capitalism generally, and through examining the specific set of power relations that prison life brings into this conversation given the impossible yet theoretically fertile proposition that agency can be

experienced vicariously. I argue that the works produced in *Time Divisa* serve both as powerful indexes of the experiential time of incarceration (particularly in its relationship to space), and as potentially critical interventions into a system that represents the generalized instrumentality of time in its most concentrated and punishing form. With a focus on highlighting time's imbrication in global structures of social regulation, exploitation, punishment, and control, the work suggests a potential point of synergy between critical prison studies (including prison sociology and the emerging field of carceral geography), and existing scholarship about contemporary performance and installation art in which time-based, spatial, and social practices are central.

INSIDE OUT: TRANSGRESSING THE 'PRISON BOUNDARY'

Despite the clear importance of time as a frame for the exchanges that took place for *Time Divisa* (highlighted in part by the emphasis placed on the simultaneity of the activities exchanges), *Time Divisa* has been variously described as exchanging time, and exchanging *action*, highlighting the interrelatedness of these terms. Importantly, Vega Macotella's conceptualization of time in each exchange (both his own and that of his collaborators), is tied intrinsically to activity, 'productive' or otherwise. This is in part due to Vega Macotella's investment in highlighting the evacuation and instrumentalization of time-as-measure—the flattening of human activity/experience as production/consumption—under contemporary capitalism. As mentioned above, the appropriation of time by institutions is one of the primary concerns informing *Time Divisa*. In the artist's words, under capitalism:

Our work time is converted into salary, and our leisure time into consumption. So we can actually represent and measure time with bills and coins. In the instant that time is transformed into hours, minutes, and seconds instead of experiences, well, then time has been taken from us. It has become objective instead of subjective.⁸⁴

In choosing to address these issues through the lens of the prison, Vega Macotela reveals, and perhaps denaturalizes, the relationship between ‘prison time’ and the temporal regimes that characterize ‘free society’ outside the prison walls. His perspective is heavily reminiscent of Michel Foucault’s identification of a “carceral continuum” dispersed broadly across a range of institutions,⁸⁵ however it is perhaps in the writing of political philosopher Michael Hardt where the relationship Vega Macotela seeks to address is most clearly articulated in the interest of a liberatory project.

In the essay “Prison Time,” Michael Hardt presents a particularly relevant framework of interpretation for the work at hand. Engaging in an investigation of the title concept as a way to highlight the relationship between time and power both within and beyond the prison system, Hardt suggests that an analysis of the experiential parameters of the prison provides a compelling entrance point to a broader discussion of the culturally specific ways in which notions of time and productive activity are organized and understood (while introducing several conspicuous exclusions that will be addressed at the end of this chapter). As Hardt notes, the prison system of punishment both relies upon and constitutes the conceptualization of time (i.e. the control over our time), as the

⁸⁴ Antonio Vega Macotela, As Told To Gabriella Gómez-Mont, “Mexican Rashes: Contraband, Commerce, and Art in One of Mexico’s Most Overcrowded Prisons,” *Vice*, May 31, 2008, https://www.vice.com/en_ca/article/dpx87v/mexican-rashes-137-v15n6

⁸⁵ In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault traces in detail the ways in which a carceral rationality is dispersed across a range of institutions designed to discreetly surveil citizens and to normalize systems of self-discipline. Among these, he includes not only the penitentiary, but the judicial system at large, state welfare and educational systems, etc. See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York and Toronto: Random House Inc., 1978).

keystone to human freedom—as the precondition for the *loss* of time to serve as a punishment for crime, “power is invested directly in time.”⁸⁶ Like Vega Macotela, Hardt parallels the equation between labor-time and value under capitalism to the use of time as punishment, which similarly requires the quantification of concrete crimes into quantities of time, determined more or less arbitrarily: “The crime is abstracted, multiplied by a mysterious variable, and then made concrete again as punishment in a precise quantity of time.”⁸⁷ As Hardt notes, this “elaborate calculus” is familiar to us all, taken-for-granted and rarely questioned: “while we may often question the relative values on the two sides of the equation, we seldom doubt the viability of the calculus itself.”⁸⁸

In considering the possibility of exchanging time—in this case, ‘free time,’ for ‘unfree time’ (and, as I will argue, pointing toward the inevitable impossibility of such a transfer), Vega Macotela undermines the underlying logic of both capitalist systems of exchange and the prison system of punishment, while opening up a discussion of their common origins and socio-political implications.⁸⁹ In this, the project is in alignment

⁸⁶ Michael Hardt, “Prison Time,” *Yale French Studies*, No. 91 (1997): 65.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁸⁹ For an early discussion of the concurrent development of capitalism and the prison system of punishment see Rusche and Kirchheimer, *Punishment and Social Structure* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939). Here they note that, “[E]very system of production tends to discover punishments which correspond to its productive relationships.” One consequence of the naturalization of prison time as the common-sense form of punishment in contemporary Western society is its potential to obscure the historical development of punishment throughout history, in which the use of time as punishment is historically relatively recent. Historians and social scientists have noted the correspondence between transformations in the dominant system of punishment at key moments in history, and those that took place in the prevailing economic system, making Vega Macotela’s equation between the prison system of punishment and systems of economic exchange under capitalism especially apt. According to Alessandro De Giorgio, prison constitutes “the technology of punishment peculiar to modernity.” In “Punishment and Political Economy,” he addresses some of the reasons why this form of punishment became dominant, and remains so in contemporary societies. In particular, he elucidates the link between the birth of the penitentiary and the emergence of the capitalist system of production (based on the exploitation of wage labor), tracing both to the constitution of new conceptions of time conducive to exploitation under capitalist regimes of accumulation. As De Giorgio argues, forms of punishment “are structurally linked to the dominant relations of production and to the hegemonic forms of work organization.” Alessandro De

with Hardt's broader investment in understanding how such a framework of critique might lend itself to a deeper understanding of what might constitute 'free time,' or, 'full time'⁹⁰ by paradoxically seeking to "grasp a fullness of time where it is most denied."⁹¹ As such, it is the *quality* of unfree time (and, by extension, free time) that concerns him.

Hardt is far from alone in interrogating time as a central organizing principle of the prison system—attention to the qualitative differences that incarcerated individuals experience between time spent in prison and that spent on the 'outside' has long been a key focus of work in criminology and carceral sociology.⁹² Of course experiential time—inside or outside of the prison context—is not a uniform thing, but rather is impacted by factors such as age, race, gender, ability, location, and a range of other factors, but in general a heightened *awareness* of time, and the implementation of intricate strategies to manage time, have been found to be pervasive across studies in diverse prison contexts.⁹³ According to Azrini Wahidin, based on fieldwork and interviews in 8 male and female prison establishments in England and Wales.

Giorgio, "Punishment and Political Economy," in *The Sage Handbook of Punishment and Society*, Jonathan Simon and Richard Sparks, eds. (Sage Publishing, 2013): 40-41.

⁹⁰ Hardt distinguishes between "full" time, and "empty time," a distinction that is mirrored in the scholarship of Hans-Georg Gadamer. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Concerning empty and full-filled time," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 8, No. 4 (1970): 341-353.

⁹¹ Hardt, "Prison Time," 67.

⁹² As observed by Azrini Wahidin, work in criminology and carceral sociology often describes the experience of imprisonment through temporal metaphors such as *Dead Time*; *Doing Time*; *Killing Time*; the list could go on. See J. Rives, *Dead Time: Poems from Prison* (Hamilton, Ontario: Mini Mocho Press, 1989), R. Matthews, *Doing Time: An Introduction to the Sociology of Punishment* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1999), Kiko Goifman, "Killing time in the Brazilian slammer," *Ethnography* 3, No. 4 (2002), Azrini Wahidin, "Time and the Prison Experience," *Sociological Research Online*, 11, No. 1 (2006); 6.1

⁹³ Much has been written about the unevenness with which time regimes are experienced across society generally—what Christine Ross describes as the "unequal distribution of time," and the ways in which conceptual art, film, and performance can bring to light important socio-political dimensions of the what Ross has called the 'temporal turn' in contemporary art. See Christine Ross, *The Past is the Present; It's the Future Too: The Temporal Turn in Contemporary Art* (New York and London: Continuum Publishing, 2012): 75; Shannon Jackson and Julia Bryan-Wilson, "Time Zones: Durational Art and Its Contexts," *Representations*, Vol. 136 No. 1 (Fall 2016): 1-20; Sharma, Sarah. *In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014; Rashad Shabazz, *Spatializing Blackness: Architectures of Confinement and Black Masculinity in Chicago*. Illinois: University of Press, 2015.

Prisoners, unlike time users on the outside, focus on how to manage time in prison by learning to ‘serve time’, to differentiate between ‘hard time’, and ‘easy time’, to ‘kill time’ and try to ultimately survive ‘dead time’. They have a dual sense of time passing and standing still.⁹⁴

Others have described their time in prison as “an interruption of life, not part of it, like a form of cryogenic suspension.”⁹⁵ Such evocations of a sense of stalled time, lost time, or empty time mirror Hardt’s contention that, “inmates live prison as an exile from life, or rather, from the time of living.”⁹⁶ This distinction is not to be passed over lightly—to be exiled from one’s life is a different matter from being exiled from *living*, a claim which seems to be undermined in facets of *Time Divisa* discussed below. And yet, the feeling that the prison system “denatures life” pervades existing literature about the experience of confinement. Through the repetitiveness and ‘purposelessness’ of life in prison, Hardt argues, “[p]rison wastes time, destroys time, empties time.”⁹⁷ For him, ‘empty time’ is a main defining characteristic of prison life.

However, importantly for the work at hand, for Hardt, the logic of the prison system reflects the power of time beyond its walls. He asks:

If I am living that elsewhere of full being that inmates dream of, is my time really so full? Is my life really not wasted? My life too is structured through disciplinary regimes, my days move on with mechanical repetitiveness—work, commute, tv, sleep.... I live prison time in our free society, exiled from living. But how could

⁹⁴ Wahidin, “Time and the Prison Experience,” 6.1

⁹⁵ R. Sapsford, *Life Sentence Prisoners - Reaction, Response and Change* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1983): 96, cited in Wahidin, “Time and the Prison Experience,” 6.9

⁹⁶ Hardt, “Prison Time,” 65-66.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

one redeem time, how could one live a full time? The very existence of prison makes these questions necessary and urgent.⁹⁸

In the conflation of the disciplinary time that defines life within and outside of the prison, it is not (I don't believe) that Hardt means to claim his own experience of 'unfree time' as equal to those incarcerated in the prison system. Rather, he calls into question dominant understandings of freedom itself, here in its spatial, experiential, and temporal dimensions. His project requires a denaturalization of the prison boundary as the line that separates free from unfree time. As Hardt puts it:

When you get close to the prison...you realize that it is not really a site of exclusion, separate from society, but rather a focal point, the site of *the highest concentration* of a logic of power that is generally diffused throughout the world.

Prison is our society in its most realized form.⁹⁹ (emphasis added)

Here, the prison comes into view as the place where the relationship between time and power in society at large is most concretely concentrated and highlighted, positioning Hardt's essay alongside historical and emerging scholarship in the social sciences, political philosophy, critical theory, and the emerging field of 'carceral geography' in which the concrete walls marking the boundary between inside and outside of the prison are presented as increasingly porous.¹⁰⁰

Throughout his subsequent discussion, Hardt attempts to identify moments within prison life where larger structures of exploitation and control fail to capture and delimit the value-producing capacity of human activity through an exploration of chance, love,

⁹⁸ Ibid., 66.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, Jennifer Turner, *The Prison Boundary: Between Society and Carceral Space* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), as an example of this burgeoning approach in prison studies.

the ‘event,’ and, especially, the ‘joyful encounter,’ to which I will return.¹⁰¹ In short, he attempts to locate free time within the very site that epitomizes disciplinary time regimes in their most pure form, an endeavour which coheres with the aims of *Time Divisa* on several levels. The central claim of both Hardt’s essay and Vega Macotela’s work, I argue, can be excavated from Vega Macotela’s own statement quoted above, in which he identifies the core problem with contemporary capitalism as a devaluation of ‘experiences,’¹⁰² or, rather, the commodification of experience to such a degree that experience per se is evacuated of content. It is thus through the relationship between time, space, and *experience*, that the critical potential of *Time Divisa* emerges, a proposition which, I hope to show, is very much in alignment with Hardt’s own speculations about the location and nature of ‘free time.’

TIME BEYOND REPRESENTATION

*Time is not a representation.*¹⁰³

~Antonio Vega Macotela

As noted above, central to the conceptual impetus for *Time Divisa* was Vega Macotela’s broad interest in exploring “[t]ime’s ability to be transferred.”¹⁰⁴ Interestingly, as the project progressed, Vega Macotela noted that the tasks most commonly requested by the

¹⁰¹ Hardt, “Prison Time,” 73-79.

¹⁰² Antonio Vega Macotela, As Told To Gabriella Gómez-Mont, “Mexican Rashes: Contraband, Commerce, and Art in One of Mexico’s Most Overcrowded Prisons,” n.p.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Tori Bush, “José Antonio Vega Macotela at Prospect.3,” *Daily Serving*, December 9, 2014, <https://www.dailyserving.com/2014/12/jose-antonio-vega-macotela-at-prospect-3/>.

inmates required that he “*literally take their place* in the outside world.”¹⁰⁵ (emphasis added) As the artist recounts:

I’ve visited the tombs of their brothers and said a few words. I’ve asked their fathers for forgiveness. I’ve gone dancing with their mothers. I’ve met their sons and acted as their father for a day. I’ve read a letter out loud to a dying relative in the hospital. One prisoner even asked me to go to his girlfriend’s house and watch her masturbate so that I could describe the scene for him, bit by bit.¹⁰⁶

On the other end of the exchanges, in a sense each incarcerated participant was simultaneously acting as a proxy for the artist—spending their time producing art (the activity that he himself might have been doing otherwise). As such, the ‘exchanges’ that took place in *Time Divisa* went beyond the performance of tasks *for* another (thereby distinguishing this project from ‘time banks’ and other examples of time-based currencies dating back to the 19th century), by proposing the possibility of a literal transference of subjectivity itself, enabling a sort of symbolic crossing of the threshold of the ‘prison boundary.’¹⁰⁷ Critic Chuz Martinez has gone so far as to evoke just this sort of ‘corporeal’ transference, arguing that:

Macotella was not merely substituting himself for the inmates in an administrative or judicial sense (as in, say, a marriage by proxy, where the corporality of the proxy is secondary to his or her institutional function), but enacting a bluntly physical displacement, becoming, in effect, a father-body, friend-body, son-body,

¹⁰⁵ Antonio Vega Macotela, As Told To Gabriella Gómez-Mont, “Mexican Rashes: Contraband, Commerce, and Art in One of Mexico’s Most Overcrowded Prisons,” n.p.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ A time-based currency is an alternative currency in which the unit of exchange is time (for example, the ‘person-hour’), rather than money. Often ‘timebanks’ are community based and involve the exchange of services. For discussion of the ‘Prison Boundary’ see Jennifer Turner, *The Prison Boundary: Between Society and Carceral Space* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

husband-body, erotic body. And, correspondingly, the prisoners became his artist-body.¹⁰⁸

To re-quote Vega Macotela, “They become me and I become them, for a little while.”¹⁰⁹

However, in seeking to liberate lived time from the clutches of institutional power, the work relies upon the inequality of opportunity that characterizes *Time Divisa*, even while imagining how the idea of appropriated time as represented by the prison might be transformed. Reflecting on his conceptualization of the work’s premise, the artist recalled thinking:

The only way one can feel time is through the free acts and personal moments that we create within it. And following this train of thought, I came to the conclusion that a prison is a kind of physical representation of this idea of appropriated time.

Doing time—doing time for others, abiding other people’s instructions...¹¹⁰

While those in prison do their time ‘for others’ in the sense that their time is not their own (from both a legal and experiential standpoint), during the five years of the project Vega Macotela also undertook a project of doing time for others, in an attempt to locate and/or create ‘free acts and personal moments’ at the prison boundary.

Vega Macotela’s reference to the idea of ‘doing time for others,’ has led a number of scholars to interpret *Time Divisa* in relation to the conventions of the gift—making the claim that Vega Macotela’s way of “doing time for others” entails an element of charity or generosity by which the agency of the artist is “gifted,” or shared with the incarcerated

¹⁰⁸ Chus Martinez, “Jose Antonio Vega Macotela,” *Artforum* (May 2011): 270.

¹⁰⁹ Antonio Vega Macotela, As Told To Gabriella Gómez-Mont, “Mexican Rashes: Contraband, Commerce, and Art in One of Mexico’s Most Overcrowded Prisons,” n.p. Thus, in the absence of ‘full time,’ Vega Macotela and the participants performed, reciprocally, what Deleuze calls a “counter-actualization”—that which constitutes the time of the event, a concept which will become important in the following chapter.

¹¹⁰ Antonio Vega Macotela, As Told To Gabriella Gómez-Mont, “Mexican Rashes: Contraband, Commerce, and Art in One of Mexico’s Most Overcrowded Prisons,” n.p.

participants in his project. For, example, Marie-Ève Charron points to “the humanist dimension of these apparently fair exchanges—which by proxy afforded prisoners the possibility of being different subjects despite the penal context, in particular through the attribution of their work.”¹¹¹ Chin-Chin Yap also comments that Vega Macotela, “bestows the temporary gift of creative freedom upon incarcerated individuals in a game-like fashion...”¹¹² And yet, the very framework of the exchange seems to undermine the (quite patronizing) argument that the artist’s generosity is at play in the work. As noted above, in *Time Divisa*, both parties engage in these activities of exchange purely on a quid-pro-quo basis. If there is indeed generosity at play here, it is most certainly a mutual one—Vega Macotela credits the inmates at *Santa Martha Acatitla* with facilitating his safe navigation in the prison, something that was only achieved after weeks of negotiation—they are, in a very real sense, the condition of the project’s possibility.¹¹³ Indeed, given the give-and-take dynamic of the work, the concept of ‘critical exchanges’ in contemporary art may provide a more useful lens through which to further unpack *Time Divisa*’s critical potential.

In the book *What We Want is Free: Critical Exchanges in Recent Art*, Purves et al. trace a history of artworks involving what they call ‘critical exchange,’ a subset of artistic practices generally associated with the ‘social turn’ (coined by Claire Bishop) in contemporary art.¹¹⁴ According to Purves:

¹¹¹ Marie-Ève Charron, “Les ingouvernables/The Ungovernables,” *Indignation* 77 (Winter 2013): 45.

¹¹² Chin-Chin Yap, “Prison Breaks,” *ArtAsiaPacific* 79 (Jul/Aug 2012): <http://artasiapacific.com/Magazine/79/PrisonBreaks>.

¹¹³ Vega Macotela relates the difficulty he initially had in gaining the trust of the inmates (he was often threatened, for example). It was only by the eventual protection of some of the influential prisoners that he was able to engage in this project at all. See Antonio Vega Macotela, As Told To Gabriella Gómez-Mont, “Mexican Rashes: Contraband, Commerce, and Art in One of Mexico’s Most Overcrowded Prisons,” n.p.

¹¹⁴ The term ‘social turn’ was coined by art historian Claire Bishop in 2006 in her essay “The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents,” to describe the trend toward socially engaged art (work that is

Critical exchanges occur within works in which the participants (audience/collaborators/institutions) are made consciously aware of the *transfers* that occur within the work. They make visible the conditions and stakes that are required for the production of the work, and, at times, the participants may have a voice within the process...This awareness of the transfer(s) of power, of material, of resources, or knowledge, forms a core aspect of both the work itself and its attendant meanings. Rather than emphasizing process or production as the outcome, the exchange itself becomes the most important outcome...”¹¹⁵ (original emphasis)

In his analysis of a number of works in which constitutive transfers are the ‘most important outcome,’ Purves, too, refers to the tactical use of the gift, citing the “democratic gesture of redistributing your own privileges as an artist to an audience or community”¹¹⁶ as an example of a critical exchange. Within this conceptualization lies a premise that seems to be a core underlying assumption of such practices (one which frames the reviews of *Time Divisa* quoted above): the idea that the artist has a unique freedom and autonomy, which they can ‘redistribute’ through participatory projects.¹¹⁷ Popular conceptions of artistic labor have tended to equate ‘creativity’ with ‘freedom,’ an assumption that facilitates the characterization of art-making (as ‘expression’), as a

collaborative, often participatory and involves people and relationships as the medium or material of the work. Socially engaged practice often aims to directly engage communities and/or to enact real social and political change. See also Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2011).

¹¹⁵ Ted Purves, “Candies in Endless Supply: From Generosity to Critical Exchange,” in *What We Want is Free: Critical Exchanges in Recent Art*, Ted Purves and Shane Selzer, eds. (New York: SUNY Press, 2013): 2-3.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹¹⁷ This is tied to the idea that art-work is extra-economic (ie. that artists make art for the love of it), hence the persistent undervaluing of artistic labor in the broader economy—see various movements to gain fair compensation for artists and cultural workers as discussed briefly in the Introduction.

liberating force within the prison walls in the reviews cited above. For reasons I will discuss in the next chapter, I believe we should be wary of such claims, and yet *Time Divisa* proves uniquely suited to open up a space of reflection about these ideas, precisely through its dependence on their terms.

Purves envisions the critical exchange as a device which lends itself to the demystification of power relations, arguing that: “During a critical exchange, the conditions of the exchange itself are highlighted in such a way that they provide an expanded view of the cultural, historical, and sociopolitical forces at play.”¹¹⁸ Despite the seeming equivalency of the exchanges that constitute *Time Divisa*, it is impossible to ignore the fact that disparity is at the heart of what makes these exchanges meaningful (indeed, it is what initiated the artist’s project)—at its core the work generated a direct juxtaposition between the ‘free time’ of the artist, and the ‘unfree time’ of his collaborators.¹¹⁹ As such, Martinez questions the critical potential of the work, noting that:

Macotella—avoiding the reflexivity that plagues much participatory art, however much it may wish to exceed such boundaries—is entering into and intervening in a system that is already governed by an uncompromising principle of mutual

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 3

¹¹⁹ This dynamic is one that I plan to explore across a range of works with remarkable conceptual similarities, foremost the installation *Down the River*, by Andrea Fraser, for which the artist projected ambient sound recorded in ‘A Block’ of Sing Sing Correctional Facility into a large empty room at the Whitney Museum of American Art, NY, directly superimposing the leisure time of museum-goers and the unfree time represented by the audio recording of prison life. Both of these works rely upon a direct juxtaposition between ‘free time’—embodied in the artistic autonomy of the artist or the leisure time of museum visitors—with the unfree time exemplified by real incarcerated individuals. As such, they point to a complicated set of ethical challenges inherent in aesthetic considerations of ‘prison time,’ while nonetheless opening a space in which the concrete politics of the justice system can be disseminated and possibly transformed.

instrumentalization.¹²⁰

However I believe the work goes beyond this blunt juxtaposition, modifying the perception and representation of time in both the contexts of production and reception, undermining economic instrumentality and the conceptualization of time-as-punishment through a kind of critical occupation of carceral time and space marked by a radical relationality, undetermined by economic instrumentality.

Several of the objects made by the incarcerated participants inscribe in their very form the institutional limitations of the prison. Most commonly, this can be seen in works that reproduced, symbolically, the spatial and acoustic parameters of the prison environment. In *Time Exchange 331* (2010), for example, Vega Macotela spied on Eduardo's ex-lover in Mexico City, in exchange for a map of the prison, which Eduardo fashioned from his own hair (Fig. 2).¹²¹ For *Time Divisa 66*, the artist "serenaded Ivan's mother at her home and in exchange, Ivan drew an acoustic map of the prison codifying the environmental sounds he could hear within a 360 degree radius."¹²² (Fig. 5) And in *Time Divisa 302, 307, 332, 341 – 348* (2010), Vega Macotela took steps to advance Fernando's petition for freedom, in exchange for which Fernando drew every footstep he took while travelling all possible paths through the prison, drawing a black footstep each time he encountered surveillance.¹²³ (Fig. 6) Similarly, for exchanges 87, 89 and 91–97

¹²⁰ Martinez, "Jose Antonio Vega Macotela," 270.

¹²¹ Questions about the agency of the inmate's loved ones and other 'participants' in these exchanges is something that has been rarely discussed in relation to *Time Divisa*, and will be an important area of analysis in future iterations of this essay—thank you to Dr. Kirsty Robertson for highlighting this issue. Vega Macotela was, according to his descriptions, welcomed by the inmate's relatives, who treated him as if they were in fact the person for whom he was serving as proxy, however very few details about these interactions are provided in the exhibition of the project, for reasons noted above. Additionally, many of the projects (such as the one cited here) seem to involve an unaware third party whose consent could not have been received in advance.

¹²² Antonio Vega Macotela, "Labor," <https://docplayer.net/11820812-Antonio-vega-macotela.html>.

¹²³ Ibid.

(2008), ‘El Picos’ asked the artist to “look for the location of his mother-in-law’s house to find out where his children were staying.”¹²⁴ In exchange for each attempt, El Picos would walk around his cell recording each step. It seems that these works continue to index the makers’ restricted agency, making it visible—in the resulting works, disembodied footprints mark restricted paths, encountering boundaries, serving as a subjective blueprint of carceral space.¹²⁵ In this, the works seem to enact the strictly ‘demystifying’ potential Purves identifies with the critical exchange. And yet as spatializing processes, the potential for these actions to function as creative re-appropriations *within* the disciplinary context cannot be overlooked.

MA(R)KING TIME: CARCERAL TIMESPACE

Inmates try in vain to hold on to this ephemeral, fleeting time, giving it some concrete, if only symbolic, substance, crossing out days on a calendar, scratching notches in the wall—they mark time.

~Michael Hardt, “Prison Time”

Of note here is a powerful synergy between *Time Divisa* and recent developments in criminology, prison sociology, and carceral geography that focus on the concept of ‘timespace’ as a way of emphasizing the experiential inseparability of time and space in

¹²⁴ Ibid. Closely related to the ethical issues mentioned in note 42, the question of the intentions behind this particular project has been posed to me as an example of where the problem of a potential lack of consent presents itself. As put by Dr. Kirsty Robertson: “Does he want to know so he can imagine the neighborhood where the kids are living? Or does he want to know for other more nefarious reasons? And if it’s the latter, where is Vega Macotela’s ‘generosity’ towards what might have been a violent relationship?”

¹²⁵ Vega Macotela notes that: “In prison, the degree of submission is proportional to the degree of institutional freedom: submitting confers ‘benefits’, from a shorter sentence to forming part of the power structure within the prison.” Antonio Vega Macotela, “Cinco Años,” *Índex 2* (2011).

the prison context, with the contention that (as argued by Diana Medlicott), “[i]nmates’ experience attests to the fact that the prison is a sophisticated time-place, where the temporal and the spatial characteristics are structurally productive of prison life and culture.”¹²⁶ As Patricia Liggins Hill argues in an analysis of the poetry of Etheridge Knight (author of *Poems from Prison*, written while serving an eight year prison sentence in the United States beginning in 1960): “A prison consciousness is preoccupied with the concepts of ‘time’ and ‘space.’ In prison, ‘time’ comes to mean ‘restriction,’ and ‘space’ implies ‘confinement.’”¹²⁷ Hill argues that Knight’s poetry was concerned with “freeing ‘time’ and ‘space’ from inertia,”¹²⁸ a goal that also to some extent frames *Time Divisa*’s interrogations of experiential time “in a context where (clock) time ‘moves on’ but space is fixed.”¹²⁹

In addition to works whose parameters were shaped by the spatial restrictions inherent in prison life, the scarcity of material available in the prison also impacted the tasks requested by Vega Macotela, and led to a number of works produced using the participants’ own bodies as material. Vega Macotela describes the body as our only real, subjective way of measuring time. As such, the actions he most often requested from the participants involved producing measurements of time using their bodies, creating objects

¹²⁶ Medlicott, D., “Surviving in the Time Machine: Suicidal Prisoners and the pains of prison time,” *Time and Society*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (1999): 216. Quoted in Dominique Moran, “‘Doing Time’ in Carceral Space: Timespace and Carceral Geography,” *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, Vol. 94, No. 4 (2012): 305-316.

¹²⁷ Patricia Liggins Hill, “‘The Violent Space’: The Function of the New Black Aesthetic in Etheridge Knight’s Prison Poetry,” *Black American Literature Forum*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Autumn 1980): 115-121.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ Dominique Moran, “‘Doing Time’ in Carceral Space: Timespace and Carceral Geography,” *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, Vol. 94, No. 4 (2012): 305-316. A key distinction to be made here is that Etheridge Knight’s poetry, essays, and activist work engaged specifically with the politics and history of the prison system, especially its impact on Black communities in America, with an aim to initiate concrete change through his leadership in the civil rights movement. This will be discussed in more detail at the end of this chapter. In comparison, Vega Macotela’s work seems to exist at a conceptual remove from the prison, even as it directly intervenes within it.

and artworks which, in a sense, concretized the time spent working on them.¹³⁰ As the artist describes:

The body—its rhythms and repetitions—was the first thing I latched onto in an attempt to create an alternative system for the representation of the time that the inmates gave me: for each action that they asked me to perform on the outside, they gave me their breaths, heartbeats and other bodily rhythms as manifest in drawings...¹³¹

In exchange for having dinner with Humberto's family, Humberto captured his own heartbeat on paper—holding his hand to his neck for three hours, he made a scribble on a piece of paper for each heartbeat he felt, which he then gave to Vega Macotela.¹³² In *Time Divisa 7* (2006), an exchange undertaken with Chucho, the artist agreed to “listen to his brother sing as he used to,” in exchange for which Chucho documented, through a drawing, every time he breathed during the period of an hour (Fig. 8). The marking of steps, noted above, also served as an index of embodied rhythms and rituals, both ordinary and exceptional—in addition to the previous examples, in *Time Exchange 82*, Vega Macotela danced with the inmate's mother to the song “How Fortunate It Is” by Sonora Matancera, while the inmate danced along to the same song in his cell, drawing the steps he took.¹³³

I think it is not insignificant that these and other gestures enacted by the participants in *Time Divisa*—and the objects resulting from them—are in some ways not

¹³⁰ Antonio Vega Macotela, As Told To Gabriella Gómez-Mont, “Mexican Rashes: Contraband, Commerce, and Art in One of Mexico's Most Overcrowded Prisons,” n.p.

¹³¹ Antonio Vega Macotela, “Cinco Años,” *Índex 2* (2011):18. Author's translation.

¹³² Antonio Vega Macotela, As Told To Gabriella Gómez-Mont, “Mexican Rashes: Contraband, Commerce, and Art in One of Mexico's Most Overcrowded Prisons,” n.p.

¹³³ ¹³³ Lily Lampe, More Love: Art, Politics, and Sharing since the 1990s, *Burnaway*, April 11, 2013, <https://burnaway.org/review/review-more-love-art-politics-and-sharing-since-the-1990s-elides-affecting-art-to-reveal-new-meaning/>

formally unlike works in the canon of post-1960s conceptual art that similarly document a repeated action or duration of time spent by the maker, as an aesthetic gesture. Consider, for example, Tom Friedman's *1000 Hours Staring* (1992-1997), which purportedly 'records' an extended duration of the artist's attention (as labor), or such seminal works of conceptual and performance art as Richard Long's *Line Made by Walking* (1967), both premised upon the marking and display of physical traces of the artist's repetitive, banal labor (in Long's case a physical line made in a field by the artist walking backwards and forwards through the grass).¹³⁴ As I explore elsewhere, there are also correlations with the work of Bruce Nauman, especially the video piece *Walking in an Exaggerated Manner Around the Perimeter of a Square* (1968), which documents the artist walking or dancing repetitively along the perimeter of a square marked out in tape on his studio floor, thus combining performative repetition with (self-imposed) spatial restriction. Perhaps most obviously comparable to *Time Divisa* conceptually is Allan Kaprow's *Time Pieces* (1973), which asked participants to variously record the sounds of their pulses and breathing, listen to them, and exchange them with partners over the telephone and face-to-face.¹³⁵ Often such works as these have been interpreted as reflections on themes such as boredom, repetition, intersubjectivity, and temporal experience, rendering these aesthetically legible. And yet, these experiments in time, labor, and their representation are often presented as relatively politically neutral.¹³⁶

Through bringing such artistic strategies into direct dialogue with socially and

¹³⁴ Other formally similar works include Sam Winston's *Drawing Breath*, a durational work where the artist used a pencil line to record the length of every exhalation over a 15 hour day without break, Francis Alÿs's *Sometimes Making Something Leads to Nothing*, or perhaps Cheyney Thompson's *Chronochrome* series.

¹³⁵ Kathrin Becker, "Allan Kaprow," *n.b.k.*, https://www.nbk.org/en/ausstellungen/allan_kaprow.html

¹³⁶ An exception here would be certain works of feminist art, like the Mierle Laderman Ukeles *Maintenance Works*, etc.

politically tenuous notions of freedom, justice, control, and institutional power, *Time Divisa*, serves to highlight the politics immanent in any aesthetic consideration of experiential time. While the objects produced may be formally similar to those cited above, the identities of the makers and the conditions of their production pervade the interpretation of these objects. In terms of the internal dynamics of the work, it is notable that while Vega Macotela's 'activities' were almost exclusively social (action), many of the activities Vega Macotela requested of his collaborators (like those above) simply involved the documentation of being alive. However, in manifesting the basic physiological traces of being alive in the form of the production of artworks, they are infused with some kind of meaning that marking time alone doesn't allow.¹³⁷ The participants 'recorded,' in various forms, the nature of 'prison time' from their own individual subjective standpoints, and with a strong sense of self-reflexive attention.

Moreover, these diagrams of 'empty time'—when viewed in the context of the exchanges taking place—highlight the unevenness with which time regimes are experienced across society generally—what Christine Ross describes as the “unequal distribution of time.”¹³⁸ In her book *The Past is the Present; It's the Future Too: The Temporal Turn In Contemporary Art*, Ross refers to *temporally* marginalized groups—those “at the margins of the public time of vital opportunities, including access to power, employment, and social recognition.”¹³⁹ She quotes the philosopher Daniel Innerarity, who describes those who are marginalized by contemporaneity as those who “live...not at

¹³⁷ I owe credit and thanks to Dr. Helen Fielding for offering this perspective on the work.

¹³⁸ Christine Ross, *The Past is the Present; It's the Future Too: The Temporal Turn in Contemporary Art* (New York and London: Continuum Publishing, 2012): 75.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

a spatial periphery but literally in another time.”¹⁴⁰ Prison life seems to embody both spatial marginalization and temporal ‘lag’, as Ross describes it.¹⁴¹ This relation is shown up in sociological fieldwork (like that cited above), in which incarcerated individuals describe a sense of being ‘exiled from living’ (Hardt), and often recount feeling themselves to be in a state of waiting, simply ‘killing’ time—a sort of suspended time that delays the passing of past into future.¹⁴² *Time Divisa* at first glance seems to merely highlight qualitative differences between time regimes inside and outside of the prison, juxtaposing the ‘full’ time experienced by the artist with the so-called ‘empty’ time (in some of the works ‘filled’ only with the biological processes of living) recorded by the incarcerated participants. However, closer analysis opens up a more nuanced perspective on this dynamic as it played out in practice, one which allows an exploration of the ethical considerations involved in the generalizing characterization of prison life (including the devaluation, by Hardt and others, of the experiential time of incarcerated individuals).¹⁴³ To the extent that the time represented is ‘emptied’ out, as Hardt argues, it is equally invested with critical potential.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 78.

¹⁴¹ In the book *The Past is the Present; It's the Future Too: The Temporal Turn In Contemporary Art*, Christine Ross argues that in time-based works of art, repetitive and non-productive labor can facilitate different orientations toward time. It can, she argues, ‘suspend forwardness’ in such a way that challenges linear, progressive notions of time and history, and forces a temporal reorientation of the artist and/or viewer. Ross, 75.

¹⁴² Gilles Deleuze might characterize this as the distinction between the present which passes and the “time of Aion.” See Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, Edited by Constantin V. Boundas. Translated by Mark Lester with Charles Stivale (Columbia University Press, 1993).

¹⁴³ Wahidin argues that, “The artificial, abstract construction of penal time inscribes, governs and penetrates into the intimate bodily functions; the biological functions of sleeping, waking and using the toilet become regimented by the prison order of time.” Wahidin, n.p.

REDEEMING TIME

Other inmates take consolation in feverishly imagining the fullness of a life of freedom outside the walls of their imprisonment—either in their real past, an alternative present, or a future after their release.... This full being and full time cannot coincide with their existence, but must be projected always elsewhere.¹⁴⁴

~ Michael Hardt, “Prison Time”

...prison time lies at the heart of our social order, and...its destruction is the condition for any revolution.¹⁴⁵

– Michael Hardt, “Prison Time”

...can there anything good come out of prison

- Etheridge Knight, *The Cell*

In “Time and the Prison Experience,” Azrini Wahidin argues that the mediation of time in prison—by the system of formal rules and procedures imposed from above by the institution—transforms the experiential nature of time in prison, so that, “the capacity to create meaningful and symbolic relations with prison-time and external time in the free society”¹⁴⁶ is systematically denied, replaced by the experience of “time as imposed.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Hardt, “Prison Time,” 66.

¹⁴⁵ Hardt, “Prison Time,” 64.

¹⁴⁶ Wahidin, “Time and the Prison Experience,” n.p.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

It has been argued that Vega Macotela, in forging new links between ‘prison-time’ and external ‘free time,’ offers a series of proposals for alternative experiences to emerge in the space between. Taking up a similar line of thinking, Chuz Martinez makes a strong argument that *Time Divisa* actualizes some of this potential, asserting that it:

...recasts the prisoners as active agents, engaged in processes of subjectivation that go beyond their cultural function and social circumstances. To accomplish this recasting, Vega Macotela needed to enable movement and connections between the previously disconnected temporalities of the prison and “free” space.¹⁴⁸

For Martinez, Vega Macotela’s project is politically radical because it, “is premised on his articulation of possibilities for agency, solidarity, and even trust within this system...”¹⁴⁹ However, I have doubts about whether this potential is realized in the exchanges themselves—rather, I would argue that their *impossibility* seems to be at the core of their significance. For after all, Vega Macotela does *not* receive the heartbeats, or breaths, of his incarcerated collaborators. What he receives are mere documents, indexical traces of an activity. On the other end of the exchanges, what his collaborators receive is not a lived event, but an account or reproduction of an experience that cannot be re-lived, transferred, or re-created, but only recounted (or, at times, indirectly witnessed). As such, it has been noted that in the end, the exchanges can only be, at least in some sense, unsatisfactory. One reviewer noted that in *Exchange 82*, for example: “the inmate cannot see his mother’s smile or feel her hand in his. Instead, this begets a wistful

¹⁴⁸ Martinez, “Jose Antonio Vega Macotela,” 270.

¹⁴⁹ Chus Martinez, “Jose Antonio Vega Macotela,” *Artforum* (May 2011); 270.

moment of imagined freedom.”¹⁵⁰ In this regard, *Time Divisa* seems to reproduce, rather than undermine, Hardt’s contention that the inmate’s, “full being and full time cannot coincide with their existence, but must be projected always elsewhere,” constituting a deferral of the ‘time of living.’

And yet, by virtue of this failure, the significance of the exchanges and experiences that took place exceeded the physical objects that, for Vega Macotela, ‘form the currency,’ of the project. In other words, something was produced beyond what could be concretized in those objects of exchange.¹⁵¹ They cannot, in the end, be reduced to the ‘objective’ form of time that Vega Macotela critiques, but are exceeded by the contingent, subjective, creative, ‘memorable’ and personal artefacts of encounter which, for both Hardt and Vega Macotela, constitute ‘full time.’

Vega Macotela himself seems to have come to a similar focus on the core relationality at the center of the work, writing that: “As the project progressed, the representation of time ceased to be my main concern, and the *relationships* that took shape between the inmates with whom I exchanged time and myself became crucial.”¹⁵² (emphasis added)

Contrary to what I might have thought, in prison there is a code of honour that could be summed up as ‘If you keep your word, I’ll keep mine’. This is deeper

¹⁵⁰ Lily Lampe, More Love: Art, Politics, and Sharing since the 1990s, *Burnaway*, April 11, 2013, <https://burnaway.org/review/review-more-love-art-politics-and-sharing-since-the-1990s-elides-affecting-art-to-reveal-new-meaning/>

¹⁵¹ This also means that the experience of the viewer (ie. the visitor to the museum), can also only be incomplete. WE don’t have access to any of this extraneous detail, we only encounter the object of exchange.

¹⁵² There is room to elaborate a connection to relational aesthetics here – a critique could certainly be made in relation to Bishop’s argument about antagonism (or a lack thereof) in this sort of strategy. Antonio Vega Macotela, “Five Years,” *Index 2* (2011). But, it must be noted, this aspect of the project is notably only accessible to the artist and his collaborators—as noted above visitors who encounter the resultant work in the context of an exhibition have access *only* to the objects produced.

than it might first appear, since it implies that the idea of collaboration goes hand in hand with trust, and trust with building ties. As the bonds between the prisoners and myself grew stronger, I felt more and more identified with them. Indeed, at a certain point I had a hard time considering myself an agent outside the prison.¹⁵³

He noted further that “...for the final exchanges...we did not exchange time, but rather conversed and ate together. I no longer entered the prison as an artist working on a project; instead, like a family member hoping to visit a loved one....”¹⁵⁴ Perhaps it is the tension evoked by this impossible (and eventually abandoned) transaction—which, in the end, cannot be reduced to the terms of the exchange—that realizes a remainder of non-instrumentalized time, the lived if ‘distant,’ time of experience.¹⁵⁵

FROM EVENT TO DURATION: TEHCHING’S HSIEH’S LIFE SENTENCE

*“Time in prison is something which is lived through but not in the real sense lived.”*¹⁵⁶

~ Azrini Wahidin

“Life is a life sentence; life is passing time; life is freethinking.”

~ Tehching Hsieh

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ There of course remain a large number of ethical and other issues that are in need of opening up around this work, including whether the work in fact enacts this transformative potential beyond the timeframe of the original project, and its reception in the context of the various international exhibitions that the resultant objects have been featured in, where this critical potential is perhaps quite different, and where a range of other (potentially problematic) issues come into play.

¹⁵⁶ Wahidin, n.p.

“Free time is shackled to its opposite”

- Theodor Adorno

In one of the most widely circulated images of Tehching Hsieh’s *One Year Performance 1978-79 (Cage Piece)*, the artist is captured in what appears to be a moment of repose (Fig. 11). Lounging in bed, arms casually supporting his head, the image of Hsieh might at first glance be fruitfully considered alongside other well-known images of artists at rest (ie. Mladen Stilinović, *Artist at Work*, 1978, Fig. 12), and positioned in relation to the larger artistic preoccupation with inactivity, withdrawal, stillness and other forms of non-production considered as a mode of resistance to neoliberalism’s demand for 24/7 productivity (some of which will be discussed later in this dissertation).¹⁵⁷ However, this particular depiction of Hsieh at rest, and the larger performance of which it serves as a documentary trace, employed a specific set of restrictive constraints that to my mind pose an important set of critical questions about such strategies, constraints materialized by the bars that come into view when the camera pans out from the original viewpoint (Fig. 14). In what follows I would like to suggest that Hsieh’s work presents two important interventions in predominant strains of post 1960s art discourse. Firstly, it points fruitfully to some of the limitations and blind-spots inherent in the turn to non-productivity (or ‘time out’) as a mode of resistance to the subsumption of life by capital (especially in recent performance art). Secondly (and I see these two points as linked), *Cage Piece* lends nuance to the artistic consideration of contemporary notions of free and unfree time as they intersect with the longstanding interest in conceptual art practices in

¹⁵⁷ See Pierre Huyghe’s “Association for Freed Time.”

the relationship between art and life (including the work by Vega Macotela discussed above), through Hsieh's particular enmeshment at the nexus of these terms.¹⁵⁸

Hsieh's work as a whole is often described as being about time. Although his early practice included work in a variety of media (especially painting), he is most associated in the art historical canon with what has come to be termed 'durational performance.' Between 1978 and 1986, Hsieh conceived and executed a series of five "One Year Performances," each with a different set of highly limiting parameters and guarantees. Common to each was a basis in some kind of restriction or confinement, either literal (physical) or symbolic. However, their respective boundaries and conditions were not neutral, nor merely formal—each one either directly or indirectly referenced a particular dimension of social reality. The politics of working life, precarity, homelessness and, in the case of the work I will focus on below, various forms of imprisonment and detention, are some of the practical social concerns that have been layered upon Hsieh's work through years of criticism and interpretation. Couched in a reflection on the relationship between art and life (one that has been a longstanding preoccupation in post-1960s conceptual art), the one-year performances point to the inextricable relationship between (an aesthetic consideration of) time and the interrelated categories of space, activity, and value, and their imbrication in social inequities within contemporary capitalist societies.¹⁵⁹

The image described above (Fig. 14) is a documentary photograph from Hsieh's inaugural one-year piece, titled *One Year Performance 1978-79 (Cage Piece)*, which

¹⁵⁸ See, especially, Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, Jeff Kelley, ed. (California: University of California Press, 2003).

¹⁵⁹ Roberta Smith, "A Year in a Cage: A Life Shrunken to Expand Art," *New York Times* (February 18, 2009): http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/19/arts/design/19perf.html?_r=0&adxnnl=1&adxnnlx=1418760201-niSsN9zpxz24ezTha8GiPw

unfolded as follows: On Sept. 30, 1978, Hsieh entered a cell-like cage of dimensions 11.5 x 9 feet by 8 feet high, constructed of wooden dowels within his studio/apartment in Tribeca, NY, where he would remain until September 30, 1979. The cage contained nothing but a single bed, a blanket, a sink, a lightbulb, and a pail. Upon entering, he shaved his head, donned a uniform containing only a numerical signifier, and in a written legal contract (that also serves to identify the parameters of the work), Hsieh declared that during the entirety of one year, he would permit himself none of the activities that could generally be considered 'productive': speaking, reading, writing, watching television or listening to the radio, were among the activities explicitly forbidden by the contract (although his physical confinement and the prohibition of communication would of course make many other activities impossible). As small exceptions, despite his commitment to non-production, Hsieh did produce material artefacts of the passage of time throughout the performance. In a gesture which unavoidably evokes cinematic representations of prison life, for example, he marked the passage of each day as a scratch on the wall behind his bed (Fig. 16). Additionally, he documented his own physical appearance over time through a photograph of himself taken each day (as with each of his year long performances, he shaved his head at the outset of the project). Visitors were invited to observe the performance on 18 designated days. However, besides these highly restricted hours, the artist could have almost no contact with the outside world (apart from one important exception that I will address at the close of this chapter).

In a sense, during *Cage Piece* Hsieh committed, for one year, to a life stripped down to its most bare essentials, enacting 'empty time' as defined by Michael Hardt in as

pure a form as could be artificially produced (ie. *not* imposed from outside, but undertaken voluntarily—a vital point not to be overlooked here). Despite the use of the term cage (rather than cell, for example), to describe the architecture of his confinement, the structure inevitably conjures references to captivity and incarceration, linking the conceptual work (intentionally or not) to a constellation of real spaces of imprisonment and detention.¹⁶⁰ And yet, many scholars of Hsieh’s work insist that his performances as a group represent a sustained inquiry into the nature and location of *freedom*.¹⁶¹ I would like here to reflect on the paradoxical nature of this claim, given the restrictive parameters of *Cage Piece* and Hsieh’s other performances. Much like *Time Divisa*, Hsieh’s work in some ways enacts the claim made by Theodor Adorno (quoted above) and others (including Hardt) that, “Free time is shackled to its opposite,”¹⁶² offering a point of reflection on the nature of ‘free time’ through confrontation with its opposite. And yet, while Vega Macotela’s work seeks a redemption of empty time through the power of the ‘event’ of encounter, *Cage Piece* seems at first blush merely to intensify the emptiness of time (despite a seemingly endless expanse of so-called ‘free time,’ ie. with no obligatory duties). Where, then, is the reflection on freedom to be located in this work? What does the intensification of empty time that Hsieh performs achieve? I propose that it is precisely by dwelling in ‘empty time’ that Hsieh exposes and overturns the *misrecognition* of what constitutes human freedom under contemporary capitalism. By enacting a shift in focus from the event to duration, or what Henri Bergson calls ‘pure

¹⁶⁰ At the same time, the fragile wooden dowel construction of the cage points to its own penetrability, highlighting the fact that Hsieh could easily leave if he wanted to (doing so would only break his contract, so what keeps him there is a combination of personal will and legal guarantee).

¹⁶¹ See Heathfield, for one example.

¹⁶² Theodor W. Adorno, “Free Time,” in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991).

time' (to be discussed below), Hsieh facilitates consideration of the meaning and value of human life through activities and actions that seem antithetical to 'living,' to meaningful existence (at least by common standards). By severing pure, experiential time from the instrumental conceptions of time that currently dominate, *Cage Piece* isolates time itself, in effect producing 'free time,' as defined by Hardt. Foregoing purely intellectual investigation, the work offers, I suggest, alternative, embodied, and experiential modes of "critical perception."¹⁶³

"LIFE IS A LIFE SENTENCE"

An analysis of the ways in which the question of freedom emerges in Hsieh's works might begin by identifying a set of concerns in common with those articulated by Vega Macotela as the background for his investigation of time in *Time Divisa*. Both artists are concerned with undermining the predominant logics of work, value, and productivity under contemporary capitalism. Their critiques of contemporary notions of freedom call to mind those put forth in the 1960s by Adorno, who considered the concept of 'free time' to be a (self)delusion produced by capitalism. Adorno argued that instrumentalised rationality has created a powerful adhesive between collective ideas about 'freedom' in the West and the capitalist imperative for production, as a result of which he argues that society's "own need for freedom gets functionalized, extended and reproduced by business,"¹⁶⁴ before being marketed back to society as 'leisure.'¹⁶⁵ Adorno

¹⁶³ Julia A. Sienkewicz, "Critical Perception: An Exploration of the Cognitive Gains of Material Culture Pedagogy," *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 47, No. 2/3 (Summer/Autumn 2013), pp. 117-138.

¹⁶⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, "Free Time," in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991): 190-191.

¹⁶⁵ Adorno writes: "The reason why people can actually do so little with their free time is that the truncation of their imagination deprives them of the faculty which made the state of freedom pleasurable in the first

and Hardt both present an image of contemporary society at large in which the illusion of individual freedom masks insidious forms of (self)discipline, control, surveillance, exploitation, and other forms of unfreedom.

Revealingly, for Hsieh, the form of living enacted for *Cage Piece* was not qualitatively worse than that which he had lived ‘outside’ the cage. Living as an undocumented immigrant in the US at the time, Hsieh had resorted to working 12 hours a day washing dishes to make ends meet, living in constant fear of being caught by immigration officers.¹⁶⁶ In the artists’ own words:

I had already wasted four years [doing menial work], so I could waste one more year of time to do art! *I just changed the way of passing time.* [Laughs] Of course, in my mind I thought it was new, but it was not really new—life before was already harsh. Staying in the cage was extreme, but if you turn back you just return to harsh reality. I tried to make it better than what went before.¹⁶⁷
[emphasis added]

In response to this comment, Hsieh’s interviewer replied, “It was better because you made the decision to do it.”¹⁶⁸ To which Hsieh stated: “If I didn’t make it and went back to washing dishes, it would have been worse.”¹⁶⁹

place. People have been refused freedom, and its value belittled, for such a long time that now people no longer like it. They need the shallow entertainment, by means of which cultural conservatism patronizes and humiliates them, in order to summon up the strength for work, which is required of them under the arrangement of society which cultural conservatism defends. This is one good reason why people have remained chained to their work, and to a system which trains them for work, long after that system has ceased to require their labour.” Adorno, “Free Time,” 193.

¹⁶⁶ Barry Schwabsky, “Live Work,” *Frieze*, October 1, 2009, <https://frieze.com/article/live-work>.

¹⁶⁷ Iona Whittaker, “Doing Time: Interview with Tehching Hsieh,” *RanDian*, March 19, 2015, http://www.randian-online.com/np_feature/doing-time-interview-with-tehching-hsieh/

¹⁶⁸ Whittaker, n.p.

¹⁶⁹ Whittaker, n.p.

Hsieh's observation that he had *already been* wasting time prior to undertaking the performance of restricted activity and movement is representative of his longstanding interest in examining the systemic instrumentalisation of time generally, much in line with Vega Macotela's approach. As such it similarly serves to highlight the unevenness of experiential time across society generally. Scholars such as Sarah Sharma, Christine Ross (cited above), Shannon Jackson, and Julia Bryan-Wilson have all problematized the generalizing equation of contemporary capitalism with speed, arguing that such a homogenous perspective overlooks the production by capitalist systems of a diverse range of temporalities across socio-economic contexts.¹⁷⁰ The rise of the prison industrial complex alongside the expansion of global capitalism is just one site in which the production of speed is accompanied by an imposition of slow time as a dimension of life, making the unavoidable reference to incarceration in Hsieh's work worth unpacking in depth. However, like *Time Divisa* Hsieh's work also emphasizes that 'unfree time,' is experienced across diverse zones of contemporary life—as such, Adrian Heathfield argues that the *Cage Piece* amounts to something like a subversive literalization of the constraints imposed on him and others living in a state of precarity.¹⁷¹

This conceptual interest is thrown into relief when considering *Cage Piece* in relation to the artist's other durational performance works. Interestingly, his second (and most well-known) in the series of year-long works, titled *One Year Performance 1980-1981 (Time Clock Piece)*, more explicitly reflects his interest in the connection between

¹⁷⁰ Christine Ross, *The Past is the Present; It's the Future Too: The Temporal Turn in Contemporary Art* (New York and London: Continuum Publishing, 2012): 75; Shannon Jackson and Julia Bryan-Wilson, "Time Zones: Durational Art and Its Contexts," *Representations*, Vol. 136 No. 1 (Fall 2016): 1-20; Sharma, Sarah. *In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014; Rashad Shabazz, *Spatializing Blackness: Architectures of Confinement and Black Masculinity in Chicago*. Illinois: University of Press, 2015.

¹⁷¹ Heathfield, 26. See postscript for further commentary on the political stakes of Hsieh's mobilization of 'unfree time.'

time and working culture, while drawing on a set of productive similarities with *Cage Piece*. For this work, the artist installed a worker's time punch clock in his studio and committed to punching in on the hour, every hour for the duration of the entire year (Fig. 21). While in theory *Time Clock Piece* allowed Hsieh more mobility and freedom than *Cage Piece*, in practice his ability to engage in many of the activities that make up daily life was extremely limited. Due to the use of the time clock and its association with wage labor, Hsieh took on the appearance of the prototypical worker, and yet, due to the specific time constraints of the piece, the very act of 'punching in' made any sort of 'productive' work nearly impossible—Hsieh could travel, at most, the distance from his studio that he could travel in 30 minutes, imposing an invisible barrier to his freedom of movement and making spatial confinement an inherent condition of the temporal requirements of *Time Clock Piece*. Additionally, Hsieh was unable to sleep for more than one hour at any time over the course of the year, making rejuvenation impossible.¹⁷² For the year of the performance the entirety of his life rhythm was structured by the clock, everything down to his bodily functions and biological rhythms regulated by strict routine. As such, here, as in *Cage Piece*, Hsieh effectively "produce[d] nothing."¹⁷³ Or rather, one might say, the *work* he performed consisted of (re)producing the sign of work itself, representing (and perhaps undermining, through exaggeration) its position as a dominating ideology. Whereas technologies of worker tracking like the time clock were designed in large part to eliminate wasted time, Heathfield argues that in *Time Clock Piece*, "it was this wasting of time that Hsieh deployed in order to return to rationalized

¹⁷² For a discussion of the instrumentalization of sleep itself see Jonathan Crary's *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (Verso, 2014).

¹⁷³ O'Donnell, 84.

and capitalized logics their necessarily excluded term.”¹⁷⁴ He writes that, “In giving over his corporeality to these orders [Hsieh] makes apparent the human stakes involved in the yoking of labor to an economic imperative.”¹⁷⁵

Indeed, most writing about the piece considers it to be a reflection on working culture, especially regulated, repetitive action, determined by the clock, with a focus on temporal constraint.¹⁷⁶ Hsieh, however, is careful to clarify that the subject is about more than the politics of wage labor. In an interview, he points to the common misinterpretation of *Time Clock Piece* as a work strictly about industrial workers, noting:

But that is talking only about working. I’m also talking about life. It’s not a 9-5 job: I lived in it, 24 hours a day for a year—it is life. Your heartbeat continues. ...
For me, life is a life sentence; life is passing time, life is free thinking.¹⁷⁷

His aim then, seemed to be not only to represent the stultifying and ‘unfree’ nature of contemporary time regimes, but to reframe the relationship between living and passing time in a way that seeks to generate a new understanding of the nature and location of freedom, or, of life as ‘passing time.’

“WHERE IS THE WORK?”: EMPTY LABOR/DEAD TIME

The problem is how to make time explicit as it comes into being and makes itself evident, time at all times underlying the notion of time, not as

¹⁷⁴ Heathfield, 32.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ See Heathfield.

¹⁷⁷ Whittaker, n.p.

an object of our knowledge, but as a dimension of our being.

~ Maurice Merleau-Ponty

*The more a person limits himself, the more resourceful he becomes. A solitary prisoner for life is extremely resourceful; to him a spider can be a source of great amusement... What a meticulous observer one becomes, detecting every little sound or movement. Here is the extreme boundary of that principle that seeks relief not through extensity but through intensity.*¹⁷⁸

– Søren Kierkegaard

Upon entering Hsieh’s apartment during one of the designated viewing periods for *Cage Piece*, a perplexed visitor entered, scanned the room, and disconcertedly asked, “Where is the work?”¹⁷⁹ Due to the restrictive parameters of the performance, Hsieh, of course, could not respond, but it is interesting to speculate on how he might have addressed this visitor’s confusion about the location of the ‘work.’ Taking the question as it was likely intended, one could ponder about the location of the—for this viewer mystifying— ‘work of art’ that is *Cage Piece*. However, one might also productively misapprehend the visitor’s question to contemplate not only the location of the ‘work of art’ under

¹⁷⁸ Søren Kierkegaard, “The Rotation of Crops: A Venture in a Theory of Social Prudence,” in *The Essential Kierkegaard*, Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, eds. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980): 56

¹⁷⁹ Heathfield, 327. See also Ian O’donnell, “Time and Isolation as Performance Art: A Note.” *Crime, Media, Culture: An International Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (April 2014): 81–86.

consideration, but also the labor associated with producing this performance of non-productivity.

I would argue that it is precisely the seeming lack of production or action (indicated by the visitor's confusion) that constitutes the labor that produced this work, a conclusion which necessitates a rethinking of the nature of production itself. Heathfield notes that: "[t]hough symbolically, in comparison to [*Cage Piece*], 'Time Clock Piece' might appear more 'free,' in psychological and experiential terms it was highly demanding."¹⁸⁰ The (in)activity of 'producing nothing' across Hsieh's work, thus comes to the fore as a feat of great labor.¹⁸¹ This labor, however, is emptied of its conventional content—by committing to producing nothing, (and effectively consuming nothing, beyond the basic necessities of survival), common interpretations suggest that Hsieh reduced his being to merely reproducing the biological conditions necessary to sustain life.¹⁸² As such, the labor that produces the work of art coincides with the labor of producing life itself.¹⁸³ Recalling several of the works produced by the participants in

¹⁸⁰ Heathfield, 30. Heathfield further observes that in *Time Clock Piece*, Hsieh was "pressed into an extreme state of broken dreaming and subdued consciousness, where the primary function of the body is *simply to produce...*," a statement seemingly at odds with the intention of the project, but one that is enlightening for the argument I am trying to make. Heathfield, 32.

¹⁸¹ See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*.

¹⁸² Steven Shaviro argues that in enacting solitude and isolation, *Cage Piece*, "...questions the inner limits of identity and being." For him, the most significant scarcities Hsieh experienced in stripping himself down to the "bare minimum of subsistence," were social contact, material comfort, and opportunities for amusement. He asks: "How much of all this can one give up, and still remain oneself? What does it mean to reduce the self to its narrowest possible compass? What does it mean to think, without the opportunity to communicate or record what we are thinking?" I would add to Shaviro's list of questions: what is to be gained from intentionally performing such a lack? From choosing to immerse oneself in it under the classification of an artistic project? See Steven Shaviro, "Performing Life: The Work of Tehching Hsieh," *performancelogia*, n.p., <http://performancelogia.blogspot.com/2008/01/performing-life-work-of-tehching-hsieh.html>.

¹⁸³ According to the press release for the show, each of Hsieh's performances are, "about forms of bare existence in which resilience is pitched against adversity, and the fugitive qualities of life are valued in their passing." "Taiwan Pavilion at the Venice Biennale," *E-flux*, December 4, 2016, <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/78610/tehching-hsiehdoing-time/>

Time Divisa, in *Cage Piece* the equation between art and *living* was radically reduced, so that it became, instead, art as merely ‘surviving’.

Indeed, beyond the radically reduced quality of living that Hsieh performs during *Cage Piece*, the artist makes repeated references to the biological processes of sustaining life as being central to his conceptualization of the durational works produced over the course of his career. When asked generally about his switch from making material-based works such as paintings to working in performance, or “action itself,” Hsieh replied: “Right. Like breathing, lived in art-time.”¹⁸⁴ Elsewhere, Hsieh commented: “Well, it’s not easy to complete the work, but the work is not about endurance. I pass time in an art form. I did work every hour, continuously, like breathing.”¹⁸⁵ I will return to consider what the concept of ‘art-time’ might lend to Hsieh’s performance of the labor of survival, but here will simply note the equation by which Hsieh equates the ‘work’ (both in terms of labor and the work of art), with simply, ‘staying alive’ – breathing, passing time, existing... as art. This aspect of the work is especially evident in subsequent exhibitions which have employed the daily photographs of Hsieh taken during *Cage Piece* as documentary traces of the performance—displayed en-masse, these images provide a visual representation of a year spent strictly ‘passing time’ (in Hsieh’s words)—they document a body which continues to breathe, digest, grow hair, become fatigued, and otherwise sustain the biological processes of life despite any effort to halt time or evade production generally (Fig. 27).

The equation between art and survival reframes the stakes of existing debates about the ‘blurring of art and life’ by artists like Allan Kaprow and other contemporaries

¹⁸⁴ Whittaker, n.p.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

of Hsieh, posing critical questions about what constitutes meaningful experience in the human sphere of existence. But further, it is the radical reduction of activity to the “bare minimum of subsistence”¹⁸⁶ that allowed Hsieh to isolate time itself for consideration, as exemplified by one reviewer’s observation that, “What’s most tangible about the ‘Cage Piece’ is the almost palpable immensity and emptiness of time, nothing but time, of life as the filling of time.... He said he spent the time staying alive and thinking about his art.”¹⁸⁷

It is in bringing these themes together that I believe the critical potential of Hsieh’s work emerges most clearly. The idea that Hsieh’s work facilitates an experience of something variously described as ‘pure’ time, or time itself, has frequently been noted as an intuitive way of interpreting works like *Time Clock Piece* and *Cage Piece*, and yet the means through which such an experience functions and the potential critical implications of this operation have been less fully fleshed out in the scholarship on these works. Steven Shaviro makes a compelling argument that *Time Clock Piece* isolates time by challenging the ubiquitous association between time and work, arguing that:

In his performance, Hsieh stripped all...contents and contexts away, in order to experience something like time’s pure passage. He did this by pushing to an extreme the way our society equates time with work. Hsieh used a time clock, that device of the workplace that mechanically divides time into precisely equal segments, and that mercilessly judges human accomplishment by the measure of time spent. In this way, the passage of time itself, devoid of any particular content, became the sole object of his labors. By pushing our society’s reification

¹⁸⁶ Shaviro, n.p.

¹⁸⁷ Smith, n.p.

of time to its ultimate point, Hsieh was able to rediscover an inner experience of time, a sense of pure eventless Duration.”¹⁸⁸

The conception of ‘eventless’ time is also evoked by Hsieh himself, who insists about his performances: “It is one year, a cycle. It doesn’t matter if you’re creative not, or if you are poor or rich. The quantity of one year of time is the same; that is universal.”¹⁸⁹ The question remains, how does the preoccupation with time-in-itself relate to the discourses about human freedom so often associated with Hsieh’s work?

I was recently struck by a quote by Hito Steyerl in which she makes a dual observation. Noting the fragmented and plural nature of ‘real time’ today, she argues that “Real time as a monolith block only happens in detention, in a prison, some kinds of monastery [or watching soccer.]”¹⁹⁰ I find this observation fruitful as it begs the direct comparison between the two works by Hsieh that I have focused on here, between the fragmented and plural temporalities of global capitalism represented in *Time Clock Piece*, and “real time as a monolith,” accessible, accorded to Steyerl, only in detention, and materialized by Hsieh in the form of a cage.

The qualitative distinction between instrumental and experiential time is one with many precedents. Significantly for this analysis, Henri Bergson distinguishes similarly between two forms of time: what he called ‘pure time’ and ‘mathematical time.’ While mathematical time consists of various forms of time-as-measure—the division of time into discrete units which allow time to be measured, subdivided, and thereby

¹⁸⁸ Shaviro, n.p. Heathfield too has said that Hsieh’s work is all about “becoming a sentient witness of time,” (111) and that “Hsieh’s rendition of art as being-in-duration, as a life-course of becoming, directly raises questions about the nature of time itself, and his works resonate with the living forces of duration.” Heathfield, 113.

¹⁸⁹ Whittaker, n.p.

¹⁹⁰ Hito Steyerl in conversation with João Fernandes, “Art, A Test Site,” *comparative cinema*, Vol. 7, No. 12 (2019): 120.

quantified,¹⁹¹ the flow of ‘real’ (or ‘pure time’), for Bergson, cannot be ‘understood’ intellectually, but can only be grasped by what he calls ‘intuition’¹⁹²—knowledge that is immediate, rather than intellectual, and comes about through encounter, experience, or imagination. Pure time, for Bergson, is continuous and indivisible—in his terms, it has ‘real duration,’ and exists as ‘lived consciousness.’¹⁹³ I have begun to think about *Cage Piece* as facilitating just this sort of encounter with ‘pure time,’ immersing the artist in both immediacy and continuity, undermining ‘useful,’ mathematical conceptions of time and their utilization for economic imperatives, and enacting, in a sense, Bergson’s argument that, “to think intuitively is to think in duration.”¹⁹⁴ Following Bergson, while ‘pure time’ cannot be understood intellectually, through concepts, it may be experienced through the encounter with the artwork. Importantly, Bergson’s notion of freedom is intrinsically tied to his concept of duration, to direct intuition of ‘real time,’¹⁹⁵ suggesting that ‘pure time’ may be a promising site of resistance, offering a means of consolidating the terms of his equation between ‘time and freewill.’¹⁹⁶

¹⁹¹ Anawat Bunnag argues: “According to Bergson, real time cannot be analyzed mathematically. Any activity to measure time means generating a break or disruption in time. In order to try to understand the flow of time, the intellect forms concepts of time as consisting of defined moments or intervals. But to try to intellectualize the experience of duration is to falsify it. Real duration can only be experienced by intuition ... The intellect analyzes time as having measurable duration, but the flow of real time can only be known by intuition.” Anawat Bunnag, “The concept of time in philosophy: A comparative study between Theravada Buddhist and Henri Bergson’s concept of time from Thai philosophers’ perspectives,” *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences*, No. 30 (2017): 1-7.

¹⁹² See Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, F.L. Pogson, trans. (M.A. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1910).

¹⁹³ Anawat Bunnag, “The concept of time in philosophy: A comparative study between Theravada Buddhist and Henri Bergson’s concept of time from Thai philosophers’ perspectives,” *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences*, No. 30 (2017): 1-7.

¹⁹⁴ S.E. Stumpf, *Philosophy: History and problems book I* (New York: McGraw- Hill, 1982); 371, qtd. in Bunnag, “The concept of time in philosophy: A comparative study between Theravada Buddhist and Henri Bergson’s concept of time from Thai philosophers’ perspectives,” 1-7.

¹⁹⁵ See Bergson, *Time and Freewill: An essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

If contemporary time regimes demand that time itself be “yoked to an economic imperative,”¹⁹⁷ then in *Cage Piece* a contradictory relationship emerges, in which the imposition of a radical discipline is paradoxically employed to ‘free’ time from its economic instrumentalization through an intense exaggeration of imposed norms. *Cage Piece* seems to be an inversion of this relation, employing a hyperbolic performance of non-instrumentalized time. Here, time appears not as something to be filled or spent—disassociated from the temporality of the event, the work produces ‘empty time’ as a mode of (experientially) accessing the time of duration in and for itself. But, a consideration of freedom cannot end here without addressing the question of what emerges to ‘fill’ the seeming lacuna of meaning, of ‘empty’ time.

Hsieh himself places great emphasis, as quoted above, on ‘freethinking’ as the site where freedom can be located in his work, finding, alongside Kierkegaard, relief “not through extensity but through intensity.”¹⁹⁸ Mimicking Kierkegaard’s focus on the value of intensity for the person in confinement in the quote that opened this section, Heathfield too seems to suggest that freedom in *Cage Piece* is located in “freedom of thought.”¹⁹⁹ In this, he is drawing on Hsieh’s own thinking about the relationship between his art and ‘life,’ as quoted at the outset of this chapter: “Life is a life sentence; life is passing time; life is *freethinking*.”²⁰⁰ (emphasis added). Elsewhere as well, the artist seems to suggest a mutual dependence between the performative enactment of “wasting time and freethinking,”²⁰¹ posing questions about how these two terms interrelate across his body of works. Hardt too suggests that the slowness, repetition, even emptiness of time in

¹⁹⁷ Heathfield, 32.

¹⁹⁸ Kierkegaard, “The Rotation of Crops: A Venture in a Theory of Social Prudence,” 56.

¹⁹⁹ Heathfield, 30.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

confinement opens up the power to ‘create time,’ offering the possibility to locate “a space of freedom within captivity.”²⁰² Writing about the representation of prison life in Genet’s novel *Our Lady of the Flowers*, he argues that “The fullness of being [in confinement] begins with the fact that [one] never seeks an essence elsewhere — being resides only and immediately in our existence.”²⁰³

This argument is very much in alignment with Heathfield’s suggestion that “a subject may—through a wilful and witnessed re-embodiment of forces that constrain it—experience, understand and eventually usurp these powers.”²⁰⁴ As noted above, during *Cage Piece*, Hsieh’s time was freed from the toil, obligation, and uncertainty that had characterized his precarious existence living as an undocumented immigrant in the US, through a strategy of ‘refusal,’ but the question remains, as posed by philosopher Helen Fielding “What value is freedom if a life is disengaged from almost everything that allows for phenomenally experiencing it,” and, I would add, from the realm of social value and relations?²⁰⁵ I believe a possible answer to this question lies in the very impossibility of the premise of *Cage Piece*, and in the fact that such a disengagement is

²⁰² Catherine Malibou, “Life and Prison,” *Alienocene: Journal of the First Outernational*, October 23, 2018, n.p. <https://alienocene.com/2018/10/23/life-and-prison/>

²⁰³ Hardt, “Prison Time,” (look up page!)

²⁰⁴ Heathfield, 25. To me, these arguments remain problematic in that this may be an option only available to the artist—in light of such contentions an important consideration to once again return to is the element of *choice* at the heart of *Cage Piece*. Despite his self-imposed confinement and isolation, Hsieh (unlike the participants in Vega Macotela’s project and others like them), had the comparative luxury of engaging aesthetically and intellectually with ‘unfree time’ as an artistic project. It is relatively common to read *Cage Piece* as a work about the power of non-instrumentalised time – Heathfield describes it as a reclaiming, Hsieh himself argues that the work is about freethinking as a site of freedom. He somewhat romanticizes his time in the cage, saying he spent it thinking about his art. This is at odds with all studies about the impact of solitary confinement on humans, which has, unsurprisingly, terrible consequences for mental, emotional, and physical health. Further, at the end of September 29, 1979, Hsieh emerged from his wooden cage, unmarked socially or politically by his year in ‘solitary confinement.’ Similarly, writing about *Time Divisa* some time later, Vega Macotela comments that, “Little by little, the symbolic ties that I had (and still have) to the prison have faded.” (Vega Macotela, “Five Years”). On the other hand, for those in prison, or even for former inmates that have served their sentence and been released, there are many ways that life beyond the prison continues to be shaped by it. Angela Davis writes about myriad ways in which formerly incarcerated individuals continue to be excluded from the realm of social value and many political rights.

²⁰⁵ See Angela Davis about prison as a form of what she calls ‘social death.’

ultimately doomed to fall short. Much like the core impossibility I propose to be at the heart of *Time Divisa*, unavoidable residues of labor and production persist in and around *Cage Piece*.

This point might best be illuminated by another, only rarely acknowledged condition of possibility for *Cage Piece*. Throughout the duration of the year-long performance, Hsieh's bodily needs of course continued to need tending. His waste needed to be removed regularly, and he required food and water daily—one needs to survive in order to waste time, pointing to one limit-point of non-productivity as a strategy of refusal. Here it was Hsieh's roommate, Cheng Wei Kuong, who most often took care of these needs, bringing food and removing waste. Deborah Sontag cites an anecdote from Hsieh, in which he recalls that “after weeks of beef and broccoli ... he wordlessly threw one meal to the floor when it was delivered, for which he later felt bad.”²⁰⁶ I mention this aspect of the piece to note that, despite the outward emphasis on isolation and non-productivity, in fact at the very heart of the work is a structure of care (and care-taking) that is not often emphasized. Hsieh may have produced almost nothing, but only through the (presumably free), labor of another.²⁰⁷ This relation pierces to some extent the framing structure of the cage as an apparatus which removes Hsieh from the broader cycles of production, and inserts relationality back into the work.²⁰⁸

I find myself wondering about the experience of this other person who, for the duration of an entire year, agreed to structure their own life around the care of another, in the interest of their friend's art practice. How might *Cage Piece* be read differently if

²⁰⁶ Sontag, n.p.

²⁰⁷ With this larger picture of the performance in view, *Cage Piece* seems to be less purely “*about* solitude and isolation,” (emphasis added) as Steven Shaviro and many others have argued. Shaviro, n.p.

²⁰⁸ Link to *Rope Piece*

viewed from the perspective of this other performer of the work? While Hsieh's own views on freedom seem to be based in a European existential tradition focused heavily on individualism, where freedom can be located and produced internally, in *thought*,²⁰⁹ this often overlooked component of *Cage Piece* points to a necessary relationality, pairing material dependence with a commitment to care. Indeed, in his attempt to remove himself from the cycles of capitalist value, Hsieh was able to eliminate virtually all productive labor *except* this care. In this failure (which I would argue is one of its most fertile aspects), the work serves as a powerful call to rethink the socio-political stakes of what and who is considered valuable and productive, and begs a re-envisioning of the critical potential of the work in several ways.

Firstly, it in fact aids Hsieh's efforts to cast a critical light on capitalism's subsumption of life—opening up a point of mutual concern with Vega Macotela's concluding thoughts about *Time Divisa*—through a centering of non-capitalist care. Certainly there is an analogy to be drawn between the invisible yet essential labor performed 'behind the scenes' of *Cage Piece* and the enormous workforce of overlooked and undervalued labor that capitalism depends on, including domestic labor, maintenance work, care work, and diverse forms of service.²¹⁰ Scholars across the social sciences and humanities have noted a 'care deficit' under contemporary capitalism generally, as more and more social relations are subordinated to economic relations, and due to a system that

²⁰⁹ Deborah Sontag writes: "Every three weeks he allowed spectators, but he did not acknowledge them. He was too busy thinking — about his past, his art, the passing of time and the boundaries of space. He was thinking about how his *physical confinement liberated his mind*. 'That piece was an ode to freedom,' Mr. Biesenbach said." (emphasis added). Sontag, n.p. Additionally, because Hsieh chose to be in the cage, the relationship of *domination* is taken out of the equation.

²¹⁰ Notably predominantly performed by women.

advocates individualism, competition, and mobility (often leading to a deficit of enduring social bonds). As Nancy Fraser articulates:

In capitalist societies, the capacities available for social reproduction are accorded no monetized value. They are taken for granted, treated as free and infinitely available ‘gifts,’ which require no attention or replenishment. It’s assumed that there will always be sufficient energies to sustain the social connections on which economic production, and society more generally, depend. ... In fact, neither nature nor social reproductive capacities are infinite; both of them can be stretched to the breaking point. ... When a society simultaneously withdraws public support for social reproduction and conscripts the chief providers of it into long and grueling hours of paid work, it depletes the very social capacities on which it depends. This is exactly our situation today. The current, financialized form of capitalism is systematically consuming our capacities to sustain social bonds, like a tiger that eats its own tail. The result is a ‘crisis of care’ (...).²¹¹

The call that seems to be at the heart of both Vega Macotela’s and Hsieh’s work—for time (*Cage Piece*), activity and relationships (*Time Divisa*) that are not reduced to relations of economic exchange—point (if indirectly) to this crisis of care.

Importantly, given the emphasis on confinement and/or incarceration across these works, care is also a central concern in anticarceral scholarship as a point from which a radical unthinking of carcerality might take place.²¹² In her writing about anti-carceral activism, Angela Davis similarly advocates an unthinking of the cultural valorization of

²¹¹ Sarah Leonard and Nancy Fraser, “Capitalism’s Crisis of Care,” *Dissent*, Fall 2016, <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/nancy-fraser-interview-capitalism-crisis-of-care>

²¹² Thank you to Dr. Kirsty Robertson for drawing this point to my attention.

individualism that is at the core of dominant neoliberal ideologies today, pointing to a shared goal between anti-capitalist and anti-carceral scholarship and activism.²¹³ However, Davis warns of an underlying ‘economic reductionism’ common in approaches to socio-political reform. According to Davis, such economic reductionism tends to bracket out the importance of intersectional inequalities along the lines of class and race and, she argues, “prevents [people] from ... developing a vocabulary that allows [them] to speak in ways that enlighten us about the persistence of racism, racist violence, state violence.”²¹⁴ These resonances and blindspots bring me to my second (and final) point, which requires a return to the question of what might be at stake in Hsieh’s use of a cage as the structure that facilitates the isolation of (free and unfree) time—of so-called ‘pure time’—for aesthetic consideration.

Hsieh has consistently denied that *Cage Piece* has anything to do with the prison. As such, although both reviews and scholarship about the work often liken Hsieh to a prisoner, and his cage to a prison or detention centre, the analysis of the linkage tends to end there, left as mere metaphor. In fact, Hsieh has actively made decisions to ensure the work is *not* interpreted as a piece about carceral spaces. When he was chosen to represent Taiwan at the 57th Venice Biennale in 2017 (with a retrospective exhibition titled *Doing Time*),

²¹³ Davis emphasizes the ways in which racial and economic oppression are linked, and, as she writes, “the extent to which capitalism is racial capitalism, as Cedric Robinson pointed out. Capitalism was built on slavery. And throughout the history of capitalism, we see the extent to which racism is intertwined with economic oppression.” She challenges the commonly held idea (in this case referring to Bernie Sanders ideas for economic reform) that “economic justice will automatically lead us to racial justice.” Amy Goodman and Angela Davis, “Angela Davis on Not Endorsing Any Presidential Candidate: ‘I Think We Need a New Party,’” *Democracy Now*, March 28, 2016, https://www.democracynow.org/2016/3/28/angela_davis_on_the_fascist_appeal?fbclid=IwAR1PG7hGpVGxYgdnUImCRcvjN-Ha-bq_xSAqebSDMIBvv_p5cJSEB2CkBZU. See also Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Change Everything: Racial Capitalism and the Case for Abolition* (Haymarket Books, forthcoming 2021) and *Golden Gulag: Prison, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007).

²¹⁴ Amy Goodman and Angela Davis, “Angela Davis on Not Endorsing Any Presidential Candidate: ‘I Think We Need a New Party,’” n.p.

Cage Piece was notably absent from the show. The Taiwan pavilion is located in the *Palazzo delle Prigioni*, which originally functioned as a jail (in conjunction with those at the *Palazzo Ducale*), and Hsieh told an interviewer: “Once they told me it was a former prison, I knew then I would not show the ‘Cage Piece,’ as that would endow it with too much political meaning.”²¹⁵

However, despite attempts to depoliticize the work—to separate Hsieh’s self-erected ‘cage’ from spaces such as prison cells and related structures of imposed confinement—to my mind the performance is inseparable from the lived experiences of those inhabiting such spaces as their everyday reality.²¹⁶ Indeed, one of Hsieh’s most quoted statements, that ‘Life is a sentence,’ relies upon a direct evocation of the prison sentence to reinforce an observation about time that we all hold in common. In fact it would be relatively effortless to map onto *Cage Piece* Hardt’s theoretical considerations of ‘prison time’ outlined above, similarly taking the prison as an index of the relationship between time and (un)free time in society at large. Hsieh’s contention that living in the cage was merely an extreme version of the ways of ‘passing time’ that characterized his daily life is not a far cry from Hardt’s view that “Prison is our society in its most realized form.”²¹⁷ Certainly the quality of time that Hsieh performed in *Cage Piece* has much in common with Hardt’s mobilization of ‘prison time’ as a concept that can be applied widely as a diagnostic for the systems of control and discipline that characterize contemporary time regimes beyond the prison. In this, however, they both engage in a

²¹⁵ Travis Jeppesen, “Performance: Time Out,” *Art in America*, April 21, 2017, <https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/features/performance-time-out-63257/>

²¹⁶ It certainly requires no leap of the imagination to link *Cage Piece* to the prison—in addition to the notes above, the original contract used the term ‘solitary confinement’ to describe his undertaking; Hsieh’s jumpsuit, marked with numerical signifier, and the gesture of marking days on a wall, bring to mind countless filmic representations of prison life.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

flattening of the terrain of experiential time—the picture of *our society* conjured by Hardt is one without contour, an undifferentiated, generalized commons seemingly all impacted equally, or in the same way, by ‘prison time.’ What is left out of this generalization has direct implications for both Hsieh and Vega Macotela’s considerations of non-instrumentalized, free or ‘pure time,’ within the relations of production of contemporary capitalism.

In drawing (I believe rightly) a direct relationship between the conceptualization of time as punishment in the prison system, and the systems of control and discipline that characterize society at large, such a generalization of ‘prison time’ nonetheless obscures the socio-economic and political inequalities that shape the experience of time, space, and freedom in the ‘larger society,’ and that very specifically link certain populations in the ‘free’ world to the prison in a concrete and historically determined way (especially rooted in histories of slavery and colonialism).²¹⁸ Importantly, scholars working from intersections between critical prison studies and critical race studies, like Davis, begin from a premise that at first sounds very similar to Hardt’s, positioning the prison as a ‘focal point’ rather than a space of exclusion: Davis writes that, “In many ways you can say that the prison serves as an institution that consolidates the state’s inability and refusal to address the most pressing social problems of this era.”²¹⁹ However, they refuse the generalizing conceptualization of prison time that Hardt proposes by emphasizing the direct relationship between prison time and life lived on ‘the outside’ for Black,

²¹⁸ A similar criticism of Hardt’s essay is made by Frank Henderson III in the book *Red, White, & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010).

²¹⁹ Angela Y. Davis, *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement*, F. Barat, ed. (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2016).

Indigenous, and People of Color who are disproportionately affected by the “contemporary continuum of incarceration.”²²⁰

Mirroring this language, Patricia Liggins Hill, cited briefly above, argues that Etheridge Knight’s poetry was particularly concerned with tying his own experience in prison to the experiences of Black people in the United States generally. Hill argues that, “[w]hile Knight was ‘inside’ prison, he was constantly aware that other Blacks resided in the ‘larger prison outside.’ The ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ prison experiences become interchangeable within the structure of Knight’s poems....”²²¹ She cites Knight’s ‘Preface’ to his anthology *Black Voices from Prison* as an example that shows this up. Here Knight writes:

From the time the first of our fathers were bound and shackled and herded into the dark hold of a ‘Christian’ slaveship—right on up to the present day, the whole experience of the black man in America can be summed up in one word: prison ... and it is all too clear that there is a direct relationship between men behind prison walls and men behind myriad walls that permeate society.²²²

These observations and others like them by those addressing the disproportionate impact of incarceration on BIPOC communities in North America, add vital nuance to Hardt’s conceptualization of ‘prison time’ as a representation of “*our society* in its most realized form,”²²³ by making clear that the relationship between time and freedom ‘inside’ and

²²⁰ See Jackie Wang, *Carceral Capitalism* (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2018).

²²¹ Hill argues that: “In particular, he fuses various elements and definitions of ‘time’ and ‘space’ not only to denote his own imprisonment, but also to connote the present social conditions of Black people in general. In his prison poems Blacks are seen as existing in a void (or what I prefer to term ‘the violent space,’ which is also the title of one of his poems), a ‘space’ that must be filled with freedom if the race is to have a future.” Hill, p.

²²² Etheridge Knight, *Black Voices from Prison* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970): 5.

²²³ Ibid.

‘outside’ of the prison walls has a more direct correlation for some than others (and that, contrary to the statement quoted by Hardt in the epigraph that opened this chapter, time is *not* a resource possessed equally by all²²⁴).²²⁵ While *Cage Piece* seems initially to gesture toward such an engagement with the socio-political inequalities that structure lived time (by drawing an analogy between his experience in the cage and his life outside of the project living as an undocumented immigrant in the US, gesturing toward the racial politics and experience of citizenship, employment, and confinement for refugees and immigrants in the US, among other things²²⁶), it then actively forecloses any such investigation by shying away from proximity to the real spaces, systems, and politics of incarceration (including immigrant detention, which some critics have referenced in relation to Hsieh’s performance) in North America.²²⁷

²²⁴ For example, life expectancy by zip code in the US.

²²⁵ Because of this awareness, Lee Bernstein notes that prisoners became focal points of the Black Arts movement in the US in the 1960s and 70s. He writes: “Many intellectuals and artists struggled to show the parallels between lives lived in poor African American communities and behind prison walls: limited control, consistent physical and ideological oppression, and the daily experience of racism.” As such, he notes that incarcerated people became central to the efforts of ‘free’ writers and artists and activists working to transform Black consciousness and conditions. As he continues: “In addition, incarcerated artists and writers participated in the movement by fostering connections with writers and artists outside, nurturing solidarity around resistance to oppression and racism, of which prisons were the ultimate manifestation. But the presence of prisoners in the Black Arts movement was ultimately more than symbolic: they revealed that prisons could be sites of transformation and that convicts could be key participants in the revolution that followed the shift in consciousness.”²²⁵ For these artists and activists, within and outside of the prison, the relationship between the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of the prison was not symbolic (as in Hsieh and Hardt’s work), but a nexus for structural societal change. Lee Bernstein, *America Is the Prison: Arts and Politics in Prison in the 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010): 128. For further discussion of the work of imprisoned and formerly imprisoned artists in the United States see Nicole Fleetwood, *Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration* (London, England: Harvard University Press, 2020).

²²⁶ For an analysis of experiential time in Immigrant Detention Centres see Gashi, Liridona, Willy Pedersen, and Thomas Ugelvik, “The Pains of Detainment: Experience of Time and Coping Strategies at Immigration Detention Centres,” *Theoretical Criminology* (July 2019).

²²⁷ I would argue that *Time Divisa* also does this, despite its engagement with the actual prison, by focusing on systems of economic value in capitalism generally while making little mention of the complex range of issues that face the prison system in Mexico. For example, in an interview Vega Macotela mentioned that he had originally conducted these exchanges in a women’s prison as well, but was eventually disallowed from continuing there. However, he expressed relief at this due to the particularly devastating experience women have in prisons in Mexico (for example, he notes that children are kept with their mothers in prison until the age of six. As such there are many young children who grow up in the prison, develop an

Any consideration of ‘prison time’ as a conceptual or aesthetic project must reckon with these unavoidable linkages, and with the fact that time itself is neither socially nor politically neutral.²²⁸ The work under consideration brings to light an important socio-political dimension of the temporal turn in contemporary art, highlighting time’s imbrication in global structures of social regulation, exploitation, punishment, and control, and suggesting a productive point of intersection between art and performance studies and critical prison studies. While this might undermine the possibility of locating or producing ‘pure time,’ it opens up other opportunities. I want to cautiously argue that both Hsieh and Vega Macotela’s projects (and, by extension, Hardt’s writing about ‘prison time’) participate to some extent in the ‘economic reductivism’ critiqued by Davis by presuming that the most important nexus of power operating across society is an economic one, and by piggybacking (either literally or symbolically) on the prison as a conceptual illustration of capitalism’s ills while bracketing out the complex politics that structure it.²²⁹

The primarily conceptual emphasis of both Vega Macotela and Hsieh’s work means that there is a blindspot for these sorts of concrete systemic inequalities. There are, however, a number of artists currently working to address this exclusion. Exemplary in

extremely close bond with their mothers, and then are abruptly torn from the only caregiver they’ve known on their 6th birthday. He also noted that women receive less support in prison (due to women being the primary caregivers, etc.). In general, the work focuses conceptual engagement over political commentary (on the prison system).

²²⁸ Recent scholarship across a range of disciplines considers such strategies of ‘slowing down’ to be a radical mode of resistance to the accelerating temporalities of contemporary capitalist society (see Crary, 24/7, 2014). However, Jackson and Julia Bryan-Wilson rightfully point out that such temporal strategies of resistance are never socially neutral. In their essay “Time Zones,” they emphasize the unevenness of experiential time, characterized by “inequitable accelerations and drags” across socio-political, cultural and economic contexts. Importantly, Jackson argues in *Social Works* that the aesthetic interest in “time’s palpability” rests upon an underlying class basis: as she indicates, time is already “quite palpable to those who watch the clock for a living” (66).

²²⁹ Artists such as Cameron Rowland, Kent Monkman, Kapwani Kiwanga and Amy Elkins (who I plan to discuss in relation to Hsieh’s work in a future project), all make work specifically addressing the racial politics of ‘timespace’ represented by the prison industrial complex in Canada and the US.

this regard is Cameron Rowland, whose work bridges the gap between the conceptual interest in the prison, and the concrete histories and politics underlying the prison industrial complex in the US, especially with regard to racial inequalities and the legacies of the transatlantic slave trade in the prison system and society at large. Works such as those exhibited in the solo exhibition *91020000* (Artists Space, Manhattan, 2013) and *Public Money*, featured at the 2017 Whitney Biennial, especially highlight the implicit relationality between carceral systems and racial capitalism.

At first glance the exhibition *91020000* (Artists Space, Manhattan, 2013) (Fig. 29) consisted simply of a sparse, minimalist arrangement of readymade objects—a nondescript office desk, four wooden benches of the type one might find in a courtroom or church, two hanging Nomex firesuits, and a grouping of manhole extenders. However, encountered in relation to a number of dense labels and explanatory texts, visitors learned that most of the objects on display were produced by compulsory inmate labor in US prisons, for wages well below the US minimum wage of \$7.25 (some as low as ten cents per hour).²³⁰ The Department of Corrections requires “of every able-bodied prisoner imprisoned in any state prison as many hours of faithful labor in each day and every day during his or her term of imprisonment as shall be prescribed by the rules and regulations of the Director of Corrections.”²³¹ In New York and elsewhere, the products produced by inmate labor can be purchased by eligible not-for-profit organizations from state agencies of the National Correctional Industries Association. Compelled to take advantage of this program by Rowland, Artists’ Space purchased the objects on display for the show from

²³⁰ Roberta Smith, “In Cameron Rowland’s ‘91020000,’ Disquieting Sculptures,” *The New York Times*, January 28, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/29/arts/design/in-cameron-rowlands-91020000-disquieting-sculptures.html>

²³¹ “Cameron Rowland, *1st Defense NFPA 1977, 2011, 2016*,” *MOMA*, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/216232>

Corcraft in NY, and their customer number became the title of the exhibition (see Fig. 33).

With this information the objects gain new resonance. The two firesuits, titled “1st Defense NFPA 1977, 2011” (2016) (Fig. 30), signify on multiple levels. Through the didactics viewers learned that the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, Prison Industry Authority (CALPIA) employs inmates to produce the orange Nomex fire suits for the state's 4300 inmate firefighters (the yellow ones are for non-inmate firefighters).²³² The label for the desk, titled “Attica Desk Series” (after the New York prison in which it was crafted) (Fig. 31), specifically references a strike that took place at the Attica prison in 1971, during which the inmates took “command of Attica’s D Yard,” over, among other things, the demand for minimum compensation for their work. As Jackie Wang explains:

“...the neoliberal state indexes the productivity of prisoner labour in terms of savings rather than profits. Thus, incarcerated firefighters, who are paid as little as one dollar an hour, ‘save’ the state US\$100 million annually. But not only does the state ‘save’ by compelling prisoners to work: prisoner labour has historically been used to expand both state and commercial capacity through road construction and the maintenance of public infrastructure. ...In other words, by expanding state capacity, prisoners are compelled to contribute indirectly to the conditions of their own displacement from society.”²³³

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Jackie Wang, “Cameron Rowland and the Carceral Laboratory,” *Frieze*, October 29, 2018, <https://www.frieze.com/article/cameron-rowland-and-carceral-laboratory>

This relationship is gestured toward (somewhat ironically) by the benches in the exhibition—titled “New York State Unified Court System” (2016) (Fig. 32), which point toward to the production by inmate labor of the very seating that populates the punitive system itself (all while saving the public money).

The series of minimalist ready-made objects thus indexed the reified labor (and time) of incarcerated individuals while commenting on capitalism’s extraction of value from the prison system.²³⁴ However, other objects in the exhibition deepened the interpretive framework of the show even further. As noted by Roberta Smith, the manhole leveler rings included in the show—produced by inmates at the Elmira Correctional Facility—evoke the long history of coerced inmate labor (and the conception of labor-as-punishment) through indirect reference to ‘chain gangs’ used in the US as recently as the early 2000s.²³⁵ Further, one notable inclusion that was *not* produced by inmate labor sheds new light on the other works in the show. Under the title *Insurance*, Rowland included a series of container lashing bars, used to secure stacks of containers to ships for transport. The objects work on multiple levels—the label explains that:

²³⁴ The networks of profit around the prison system are complicated even further in other of Rowland’s works, especially *Public Money*, for which Rowland compelled the Whitney Museum of American Art to invest US\$25,000 into a Social Impact Bond titled the Ventura County Project to Support Re-Entry, a program to reduce recidivism in Ventura, California. Social Impact Bonds are a means through which governments privatize social services in order to reduce public spending—as investments, they represent the private financial speculation on ‘specific social outcomes,’ and thus the infiltration of (highly interested) financial interests into the realm of public social services, including the prison system and related institutions. Exhibition text for Cameron Rowland, *Public Money*, 2017, Whitney Museum of American Art.

²³⁵ Roberta Smith, “In Cameron Rowland’s ‘91020000,’ Disquieting Sculptures,” *The New York Times*, January 28, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/29/arts/design/in-cameron-rowlands-91020000-disquieting-sculptures.html>

Lloyd's of London monopolized the marine insurance of the slave trade by the early eighteenth century. Lloyd's Register was established in 1760 as the first classification society in order to provide insurance underwriters information on the quality of vessels. The classification of the ship allows for a more accurate assessment of its risk. Lloyd's Register and other classification societies continue to survey and certify shipping vessels and their equipment.²³⁶

The unavoidable takeaway, as noted by Smith, is that when “slave ships crowded with people stolen from their homelands sank, it was not a total loss for shipowners,”²³⁷ indexing the reduction of human lives to property values evaluated as part of the cost and risk assessment for ship-owners. In this view, the word ‘lashing’ in the bar’s title cannot help but evoke the transatlantic slave trade in relation to the prison system.

These connections are not merely symbolic. In a lengthy brochure accompanying the works, Rowland frames the current racial imbalance in the prison system as a continuation of enslavement in a new form. Drawing on Douglas A. Blackman’s 2009 book *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II*, he describes the “re-enslavement of newly freed blacks in the South after the Civil War.”²³⁸ As explained in the exhibition text:

The 13th constitutional amendment outlawed private chattel slavery; however, its exception clause legalized slavery and involuntary servitude when administered ‘as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted.’

²³⁶ “Cameron Rowland, Insurance, 2017,” *MOMA*, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/203674>.

²³⁷ Smith, “In Cameron Rowland’s ‘91020000,’ Disquieting Sculptures,” n.p.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

Immediately following the passage of the 13th amendment the advent of laws designed to criminalize black life, known as Black Codes, aligned the status of the ex-slave and the pre-criminal.²³⁹

This system in effect incentivized harsh, racially biased sentencing, facilitating the financialization of inmate labor through the convict leasing system, in which Rowland notes that many former slaves were leased back to their former slave owners.²⁴⁰ Later, the private leasing system was replaced by the ‘chain gang’ system, consisting of restricted policies limiting the use of inmate labor to the state. Through this development, according to Rowland:

The interwoven economy of road improvement and prison labor expanded on previous stages of industrialization. The development of transport infrastructure and logistics was a precondition for the shipping of slaves across the Atlantic, and was the primary purpose of the slave and convict leased labor used to build U.S. railroads. The transition to chain gang labor extended this genealogy, adapting it to the development of publicly owned infrastructure.²⁴¹

The ways in which Rowland’s work reveals the intricate means through which racialized surplus populations are financialized through the prison system are more multifaceted than I am able to fully elaborate here, however I introduce this work in closing to shed light on a blindspot produced by the other works I have analyzed in this chapter, and to gesture toward the expanded relationality between carcerality, labor, and racial capitalism

²³⁹ Cameron Rowland, Exhibition text for *91020000* (Artists Space, NYC, January 17 - March 13, 2016).

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

as revealed in this work. Rowland's work shows the degree to which, "[t]hrough an increasing set of capitalizations, people in prison have become part of a nexus of government economic interests."²⁴² It shows that, while the prison is indeed inextricably tied up with the politics of time and contemporary capitalism,²⁴³ engagement with this nexus necessitates unpacking its specific coordinates as they have been, and continue to be, *produced* around the prison itself, including by the legacies of colonial histories, discriminatory economic policies (the relationship between mass incarceration and the highly racialized 'war on poverty' in the US, for example), continued systemic discrimination in education, employment, housing, and the justice system—especially racial bias in policing and sentencing—and a range of other issues that connect, in concrete, traceable ways, the relation between so-called 'free' and 'unfree' time asserted by Adorno and others as discussed in this chapter.²⁴⁴ Rowland's work thus points to the deep socio-political, economic and historical implications of artistic practices which seek to locate or produce 'free time' through engaging sites and practices of restriction and confinement, to challenge or re-imagine existing systems of value (of life, work, and social relations) in the time of capitalist subsumption.²⁴⁵

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ See note 136.

²⁴⁴ See Loïc Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009) and Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2016).

²⁴⁵ Writing about *Time Divisa* some time later, Vega Macotela comments that, "Little by little, the symbolic ties that I had (and still have) to the prison have faded."²⁴⁵ At the end of September 29, 1979, Hsieh emerged from his wooden cage, unmarked socially or politically by his year in 'solitary confinement.' I have been thinking about this work in relationship to Laurie Jo Reynolds' project *Tamms Year Ten*, which in more ways than one could be construed as a durational project with fruitful comparisons to Hsieh's work. The project was initiated to fight for the closure of Tamms supermax prison in Illinois, an institution designed for 'maximum deprivation'—prisoners there were held in perpetual solitary confinement, with no communal activities or visits allowed. Although the maximum time an inmate would spend there was supposed to be limited to one year, many were held for up to ten years. Within five years of Reynolds initiating the grassroots activist project, Tamms was closed. See "Tamms Year Ten," *Arte Útil*, <https://www.arte-util.org/projects/tamms-year-ten/>.

CHAPTER TWO

CHOREOGRAPHIES OF WORK: TIME, RHYTHM, AND GLOBAL CAPITALISM²⁴⁶

Labour is the living, form-giving fire; it is the transitoriness of things, their temporality, as their formation by living time.

~ Karl Marx

When visitors entered the exhibition *In Time: The Rhythm of the Workshop* (Museum of Arts and Design, NYC, Feb 23 – May 22, 2016), they initially may have *seen* very little. Indeed, by design, the initial sensory experience of visitors was not visual but aural. A rhythmic ‘ticking’ greeted most people upon entering, emitted by the work *Speed of Markets* by Varvara Guljajeva and Mar Canet (Varvara & Mar) (Fig. 1). This installation, through which viewers had to pass to reach the rest of the space, consisted of seven black metronomes programmed to translate into rhythm live financial data tracking the trade volumes of the world’s seven major stock markets. Against this irregular percussive backbeat, from the adjoining rooms of the exhibition other sounds—with still more competing rhythms—were emitted. Three films composed the remainder of the show, each of which heavily featured sites and processes of industrial manufacture: Andreas Bunte’s *Two Films About Pressure* (Fig. 9-12), is a conceptual investigation into the human attempt to replicate instances of high or low pressure occurring in nature,

²⁴⁶ This paper grew out of an interview and subsequent conference presentation between myself, Dr. Kirsty Robertson (Western University) and curator Shannon Stratton (then chief curator of the Museums of Arts and Design, NYC). As such I would like to acknowledge the contributions of Kirsty and Shannon to the ideas presented in this paper, many of which I would not have come to without the discussions and collaborative thinking that took place in our conversation around *In Time*. See Kirsty Robertson, Stephanie Grace Anderson, Shannon Stratton, “Time and Time Again: A Conversation,” Paper presented at *Running With Concepts: The Choreographic*, Blackwood Gallery, Mississauga, September 16-18, 2016.

positioned against the political backdrop of German reunification; Daniel Eisenberg's film *The Unstable Object II* (Fig. 2-8) closely and slowly takes viewers on a tour of the supply chain of a German prosthetics company; and Côté's film *Joy of Man's Desiring* (Fig. 13-19) presents a fictionalized documentary-style study of contemporary conditions of work—set in an amorphous factory-workshop space, it combines long monotonous scenes of machinery in operation with perplexing and poetic monologues by a cast of disaffected workers. Considered together as an immersive experiential and sonic environment, show as a whole was designed (according to the exhibition text) as “an opportunity to not only witness the highly skilled process-based work that is still significant to industrial manufacturing, but also to consider the complex relationships between time, skilled handwork, labor, value, and of course, the craftsmanship of time-based media and its role in capturing and measuring durational activity.”²⁴⁷

In its presentation of what the exhibition text described as “a group of time-based labor portraits,” *In Time* is exemplary of an ongoing shift in the representation of labor in contemporary art, encapsulating a particular constellation of concerns that have framed a large number of recent art exhibitions, characterized by a focus on the relationship between time, movement, and work in the global economic context. Although I focus on *In Time* here in order to facilitate a close reading, the exhibition compares in this respect to several others, such as *Labor in a Single Shot* (Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2015), *Work in Motion* (MAST Gallery, Bologna, 2017), *Time & Motion: Redefining Working*

²⁴⁷ “MAD Presents ‘In Time (The Rhythm of the Workshop): Andreas Bunte, Denis Côté, Daniel Eisenberg and Varvara & Mar,” *MAD Press Room*, January 27, 2016, <https://madmuseum.org/press/releases/mad-presents-%E2%80%98time-rhythm-workshop-andreas-bunte-denis-c%C3%B4t%C3%A9-daniel-eisenberg-and>. In this statement, Stratton deftly weaves together a constellation of concerns that have preoccupied many curators and scholars over the past several decades, namely, the interrelated trajectories of labor and film, where film appears as a medium that both encapsulates and captures the change in modes and relations of production since the onset of the industrial revolution, as signified by Walter Benjamin's seminal essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.”

Life (FACT, Liverpool, 2014), and *Arbeidstid* (“work time”) (Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Norway, 2013), among others.²⁴⁸ Each of these explore contemporary modes and relations of ongoing industrial production by attending to the *temporal* experience of labor and the motion and choreography of working bodies and machines, bringing together a cast of internationally exhibiting artists, themselves caught in complex circuits of art-world exchange (e.g. the biennial system). Positioning *In Time* alongside these similarly oriented exhibitions, this chapter attempts to elucidate the historical, artistic, and curatorial motivations of these recent presentations of labor (industrial and post-Fordist alike) through the formal qualities of its durational experience.

Compared to recent practices, these exhibitions and films seem to represent a subtle yet telling shift in the representation of labor, one concerned less with the symbolism of work or the class dimension of the worker than with the minutia of its gestures, choreographies, rhythms, and sounds. I argue that these exhibitions make *sensible* (rather than strictly visible) the experiential world of global circuits of production in a time when it has become increasingly difficult to cognize the diffuse and indirect economic entanglements of the present. I ask: How might the aesthetic interest in work processes be situated in relation to—or serve as an index of—the increasingly intricate connections between immaterial labor, artisanal labor, the continued peripheralization of industrial labor, and deindustrialization in a global post-Fordist economy? How do they sit in tension with the myriad aesthetic representations of industry that have long been used to uphold the ideologies of (technological) progress,

²⁴⁸ Others include *It's the Political Economy, Stupid* (Austrian Cultural Forum New York, January 24–April 22, 2012); *Arbeidstid* (“work-time”) (HOK, Norway, May 23–September 1, 2013); *Labor and Wait* (Santa Barbara Museum of Art, July 2–September 22, 2013); *The Work Of Art: An Exhibition Of Art, Labour And Working Life* (The Digital Ethnography Research Centre, Melbourne, May 1-11, 2018); *Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker: Work/Travail/Arbeid* (MOMA, Mar 29–Apr 2, 2017).

manifest destiny, the human domination of nature, and related practices of colonization, resource extraction, and labor exploitation? And finally, what is the significance of the museum (with its increasing focus on time-based media) as a container for such presentations, given the shifting terrain of production towards the ‘real subsumption’ of the totality of life under capital, and the museum’s own imbrication in new modes of post-Fordist production? Possibly in light of such shifts, returning to the depiction of labor becomes, according to Jennifer Peterson, a way to represent the “increasingly urgent themes of labor and industry in the face of ongoing crises in global capitalism.”²⁴⁹

THE FACTORY’S LACUNA OF MEANING

A photograph of the Krupp works or the AEG tells us next to nothing about these institutions. Actual reality has slipped into the functional. The reification of human relations—the factory, say—means that they are no longer explicit. So something must in fact be built up, something artificial, posed.

~ Bertolt Brecht

A large body of scholarship produced over the last few decades has been preoccupied with the seeming historical *incompatibility* between the labor of the factory floor and the realm of representation (especially filmic representation). Writers, artists and filmmakers such as Harun Farocki, John Roberts, Bojana Kunst and others have documented exhaustively the recurrent expulsion of the camera from the factory over the

²⁴⁹ Jennifer Peterson, “Workers Leaving the Factory: Witnessing Industry in the Digital Age,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Sound and Image in Digital Media*, Edited by Carol Vernallis, Amy Herzog, and John Richardson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): 2.

past half-century, claiming that film has historically had a “fundamental resistance”²⁵⁰ to the labor of the blue-collar workplace.²⁵¹ As documented in Farocki’s now oft-cited film *Workers Leaving the Factory in 11 Decades*,²⁵² the factory itself has featured primarily as a site of departure, the backdrop against which characters (and viewers) differentiate the space/time of non-work—“that part of life where work has been left behind.”²⁵³ By extension, Roberts traces an inherent irreconcilability between cinema and the factory, arguing that film itself begins when, “in imagination and actuality, the audience have disconnected from their labours, and the labours of others”²⁵⁴ (such as in the leisure-space of the cinema). As such he goes so far as to describe cinema as “the imaginary opposite to the factory, as a condition of the audience’s liberation from waged labour.”²⁵⁵ After all, who wants to spend their scarce leisure time viewing the conditions of their own daily slog (a question indeed central to the exhibition under discussion in this chapter!).

However, for John Roberts, the source of the factory’s “fundamental resistance” to filmic representation goes beyond the working class viewer’s desire to leave the space of work behind. For him, the source of this resistance is twofold: Firstly, it encompasses literal barriers to access that filmmakers have historically faced in seeking to capture the

²⁵⁰ John Roberts, “The Missing Factory,” *Mute Magazine*, July 11, 2012, <https://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/missing-factory>

²⁵¹ See Harun Farocki, “Workers Leaving the Factory,” in *Time & Motion: Redefining Working Life*, Edited by Emily Gee and Jeremy Myerson (FACT Liverpool, 2014): 77-92 (as well as his video work of the same name); John Roberts, “The Missing Factory”; Bojana Kunst, *Artist at Work: Proximity of Art and Capital* (Winchester, UK; Washington, USA: Zero Books, 2015): and others

²⁵² *Workers Leaving the Factory in 11 Decades* is a video installation consisting of a row of twelve monitors showing excerpts from film history depicting workers leaving, or outside of, factories. See “Workers leaving the Factory in 11 Decades,” *TATE*, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/farocki-workers-leaving-the-factory-in-11-decades-t14332>.

²⁵³ Farocki, “Workers Leaving the Factory.” Citing an interview with Godard, Roberts notes the director’s opinion that: “the working class does not want to see images of itself laboring...and therefore any filmmaker who inflicts this on their audience is in direct contravention of the spirit of cinema.” He quotes Godard: ““The worker would be bored to tears if he had to watch himself. People don’t want to see their lives, only a little bit of their lives.”” Roberts, “The Missing Factory,” n.p.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

(real) factory in operation. As he notes, “Factory managers do not want documentary film-makers or Hollywood producers disrupting the flow of production, and certainly do not want film-makers asking questions that might reflect badly on worker-management relations.”²⁵⁶ Secondly, however, the factory’s resistance to representation is also a symbolic and, by extension, a political one. Even when the factory, real or fictional, has been depicted in filmic history (which of course it has), it is a question of what exactly is *revealed* at the level of these representations (and, more importantly, what remains inaccessible to representation).²⁵⁷ Roberts argues that, “in fictive reconstructions of the factory, the noise, intense repetitive labour and, as such, the enforced silence of workers at the point of production, make the social interactions of workers on the shop floor a dramatic dead zone.”²⁵⁸ In other words, the factory as a space of reified social and economic relations is hidden at the point of production, as is its central role in the production of the value-form (to say nothing of the obscured subjectivity and political agency of workers themselves). As Roberts continues: “...under these conditions labour can only be *seen* and not represented...and as such, filming soon surrenders itself to the inertial drag of repetitive labour—that is, at the risk of abandoning the representation of

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Roberts notes: “Factory managers do not want documentary film-makers or Hollywood producers disrupting the flow of production, and certainly do not want film-makers asking questions that might reflect badly on worker-management relations. Similarly in fictive reconstructions of the factory, the noise, intense repetitive labour and, as such, the enforced silence of workers at the point of production, make the social interactions of workers on the shop floor a dramatic dead zone. Moreover, we shouldn’t assume that these conditions are any less oppressive today and, therefore, that the facticity of these conditions is any less powerful. These conditions remain as widespread under post-Fordism as they did under Fordism, with the arrival of the mega-Fordist factory in the East and South (China, India and Russia). To present workers’ speech in the factory, therefore, is to either denaturalise the conditions of this enunciation – to allow workers to speak when they are unable realistically to speak – or to present speech as moments of respite from the intensity and repetitions of labour (something that narrative cinema, say in the workshop scene in a prison movie such as *The Shawshank Redemption*, is particularly adept at).” Roberts, “The Missing Factory,” n.p.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

the intensity of the factory altogether.”²⁵⁹ In his analysis of the representation of labor struggles in Hollywood film (particularly focusing on Jean-Luc Godard’s 1972 film *Tout va bien*, centering on a strike at a sausage factory), Roberts’ comes to the conclusion that “Labour has to stop before it can be represented, that is, before workers are able to establish the conditions for their own autonomous speech.”²⁶⁰ Indeed, the general thrust of this argument, that the *disruption* of work has historically been a condition of its presentation, is born out in such iconic portrayals as Charlie Chaplin’s *Modern Times* or ‘The Chocolate Factory’ episode of *I Love Lucy*, both of which feature a worker whose body is fully out of synch with the assembly line, disrupting its productive function. Hence the observation made by Kunst and others that in the history of film, “The inside of the factory has...only been featured when it becomes a space of conflict rather than a dull and repetitive space of work routine.”²⁶¹

Given these observations about the representation—or lack thereof—of industrial manufacturing, the recent turn (represented both by individual films and the growing number of recent exhibitions in which they are featured), toward representing the factory and other spaces of labor precisely as a ‘dull and repetitive space of work routine’ is striking, begging the question of what is achieved or represented in these all-engulfing

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Roberts writes: “Workers speak – as workers – insofar as they are *not* working, namely striking. That is, the strike at the factory allows Godard to abandon naturalism, inviting the workers (who are played by unemployed actors in the film) to direct their demands and grievances directly to camera, in neo-Brechtian style. If he had staged this at the point of production itself, with workers stopping their labour to speak directly to the camera it would have likely turned the action into the equivalent of a revue, familiar from the comedic anti-naturalistic break in action in a musical, in which the actor switches, with light-hearted and implausible dexterity, from one activity to the next. So, in *Tout Va Bien* the representation of labour – of the capital-labour relation – begins precisely when the labour of the factory has stopped. Consequently, we might say, the representation of the factory begins, or can begin, once we no longer see the factory working, when the production of value is interrupted.” John Roberts, “The Missing Factory,” n.p.

²⁶¹ Bojana Kunst, *Artist at Work: Proximity of Art and Capital* (Winchester, UK; Washington, USA: Zero Books, 2015): 100. An example is the 1972 film *Tout Va Bien*, featuring a strike at a meat packing company.

environments saturated by work, where the seemingly non-conflictual and straightforward work-process is on view.

Industrial Labor at the MAD

At least in part, *In Time* was intended to counter the invisibility of industrial labor by placing routine work front and center. In this, it should be noted that the predominant focus on mass production in the industrial workplace had special significance at the MAD. Founded in 1956 as the Museum of Contemporary Crafts (later reopened as the American Craft Museum after an expansion in 1979), the institution has a long history of celebrating high-end, handmade avant-garde objects.²⁶² While the institution has had a stated mission since the 1970s to blur the traditional hierarchies between art, craft, and industry, the realm of mass commodity production was nonetheless relegated to a marginal (often invisible) position in its exhibition history. The focus on spectacular, bespoke or highly sophisticated luxury objects of craft and design persisted since a second re-branding of the institution in 2002 as The Museum of Arts and Design (MAD), a change intended to expand the collecting and exhibition mandate to a broader range of objects, media and performances.²⁶³

Shannon Stratton, the curator of *In Time* and then chief curator of the MAD, recounts thinking about the history of MAD's programming in her conceptualization of the exhibition. Importantly, the concurrent exhibitions then on view included work by

²⁶² Linda Norden, "Time and Time Again," *Artforum*, May 20, 2016, <https://www.artforum.com/film/linda-norden-on-in-time-the-rhythm-of-the-workshop-at-the-mad-60148>

²⁶³ In this, MAD's programming has in many ways exemplified the broader fixation on the handmade in Western consumer culture, where the label 'Made by Hand' (often used as a marketing slogan for mass-produced and bespoke goods alike²⁶³) is seen as a signifier of authenticity and material connection, and often relying on a direct denigration of 'the factory' (ie., Pret a Manger's slogan "Made by Hand (Never in Factory)," Levis "Made & Crafted" line, etc.).

artists Wendell Castle, Ebony G. Patterson, Marvin Lipofsky and collaborators Job Smeets, whose work was described on MAD's website as 'highly expressive and opulent.'²⁶⁴ Stratton imagined the average visitor to MAD first encountering these high-end craft objects before entering a space dominated by industrial manufacture. As such, she envisioned *In Time* as a disruptive force, using the juxtaposition between studio craft/high-end design and industrial manufacture to trouble the value systems attached to these two poles of consumer goods and their concomitant modes of production (and, by extension, the construction of craft as a category).²⁶⁵ The exhibition text notes that, "[a]ll three films scrutinize the act of making, positioning the viewer to consider manufacturing labor as carefully as they would other skilled hand-making," showing the ways in which the valorization of industrial labor was intended to counter both the mythos of the individual artisan underlying craft's celebration of 'the hand,' and the pervasive invisibility of manufacturing in contemporary consumer culture in the West. By foregrounding the 'maker' in the representation of industrial labor, *In Time* thereby turned the ideologies and value systems that framed MAD's history upon themselves, elevating a mode of production that has typically served as the invisible counterpoint against which luxury craft objects gain their exclusive value.

Indeed, in its presentation *In Time* complicates the celebratory elevation of luxury craft objects and the denigration of deskilling in commercial mass production by highlighting the skill that remains central to even highly automated modes of

²⁶⁴ "Studio Job MAD HOUSE," MAD, <https://madmuseum.org/exhibition/studio-job-mad-house>.

²⁶⁵ This ideology extends broadly into consumer culture in the West, exemplified by advertising campaigns, for example.

production.²⁶⁶ However, as I will discuss in detail in what follows, the representation of labor presented in *In Time* was (despite first appearances), not neutral, but constituted a highly aestheticized presentation of work. By superimposing these spaces of production, most notably (but not solely) the factory and the workshop, into the gallery space, *In Time* performed a mediation of time and labor between the bodies represented within the films themselves and the body of the spectator in the museum space. More significantly, in so doing it directly juxtaposes material and immaterial labor, bringing into view the museum and the visitor's imbrication in broad economic and technological transformations. The increasingly common introduction of film into the museum allows labor to be captured durationally; it allows diverse 'time frames'²⁶⁷ to be brought together in the principally spatial logic of the museum, facilitating a new kind of what Frederic Jameson calls 'cognitive mapping' relying on sensual rather than intellectual modes of 'understanding' global capitalism. However, indirectly, it also implicates both the viewer and the museum in this relation, creating an environment exploring the importance of embodied time and rhythm as an index of changing conditions of work and labor on a global scale whose consequences reach, not just the representation or visibility of global industrial labor, but also the institution of the museum and the receptivity of the viewer.

²⁶⁶ On challenging narratives of deskilling in industrial production, see Ezra Shales, "Mass Production as an Academic Imaginary (or, if more must be said of Marcel, "Evacuating Duchampian Conjecture in the Age of Recursive Scholarship")," *The Journal of Modern Craft*, Volume 6, No. 3 (2013): 267-274. See also Jessica Hemmings, "How things get made and the people who make them," *Norwegian Crafts*, May 15, 2019, <http://www.norwegiancrafts.no/articles/how-things-get-made>

²⁶⁷ See Sarah Sharma, to be discussed further in this chapter.

THE MUSEUM, TIME-BASED MEDIA, AND COGNITIVE MAPPING

Eisenberg's three-channel video installation titled *The Unstable Object II* explicitly traces the complex and globally-distributed networks of production and consumption that shape commodities as they traverse through a range of physically and culturally mediated circuits of value, meaning, and exchange. The work is part of a broader series of 20-30 minute 'portraits' of the contemporary conditions of factory production across the globe, through which Eisenberg seeks to portray "the particular structural, ethical, sensual, and economic relationships that vary from one factory context to the next."²⁶⁸ Featured in the digital triptych exhibited at the MAD was detailed footage from the manufacturing facilities of the German prosthetics company Ottobock. Eisenberg describes the Ottobock factory in Duderstadt as a sophisticated vertically integrated factory:

"It has its own wood drying kiln and wood shop, its own forge and stamping facilities, its own machine shop, carbon fibre fabrication, foam production and fabrication, logistics center, silicone prosthetics fabrication and final fitting clinic. They recycle all but 12% of their energy, recycle all their waste materials, and have produced their own software for inventory and distribution for every part that's produced. It's uncannily self-contained."²⁶⁹

As such, Eisenberg sought to capture several kinds of labor contained within the Duderstadt factory, from "extremely repetitive, relatively low-skilled tasks, all the way to

²⁶⁸ Exhibition text, *In Time*, MAD, NYC.

²⁶⁹ Artist's description, "Unstable Object (II) Installation," *Daniel Eisenberg*, 2014, <http://www.danieleisenberg.com/new-page>

highly artisanal, creative craftwork and high-end technical expertise.”²⁷⁰ The film begins with mass production and concludes with the personalized fitting of a prosthetic foot for Olympic athlete Dominique Bizimana, who lost his lower leg fighting for the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) during the Rwandan Civil War in 1994 (and thereby referencing not only the labor that is directly productive of the prosthetics themselves, but also the production of this part of the *market* for them). According to the exhibition text, the film seeks to “piece together a portrait of contemporary labor and a geography of contemporary capitalism.”²⁷¹ Across the installation the viewer is presented with the full transformation from raw materials to the finished prosthetic limbs, through production, distribution, and use, and thus follows the supply chain “from rural Africa to large international urban centers... from wooden feet to microprocessor-controlled knees.”²⁷² And yet, as suggested above, these specificities are subsumed within the attempt to represent visibly the ‘sum total’ of capitalism.

Eisenberg observes that although offshoring and outsourcing are “taking the sources of labor and resources further and further apart from the sites of consumption ... global culture has yet to produce something essentially necessary for this moment: a consciousness of the subtle and deep connections that a global economy produces between individuals, all over the world.”²⁷³ His work thus seeks to reveal—and perhaps

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ According to the artist, “These prosthetics are often designed to be as invisible as possible, but what remains most unseen and unspoken of about them are the causes for their proliferation: land mines, wars, terrorist incidents, industrial and vehicular accidents, and medically necessary amputations, all of which multiply annually, to make prosthetics a reliable growth industry.” Daniel Eisenberg, quoted in “The Unstable Object (II),” *Third Istanbul Design Biennial: Are We Human?*, <http://arewehuman.iksv.org/exhibition/the-unstable-object-ii/>

²⁷² Artist’s description, “Unstable Object (II) Installation,” *Daniel Eisenberg*, 2014, <http://www.danieleisenberg.com/new-page>

²⁷³ Daniel Eisenberg, “The Unstable Object,” *Video Data Bank*, <http://www.vdb.org/titles/unstable-object>.

mobilize—this already implicit connection. In the tradition of much material culture and Marxist scholarship, the artist focuses on ‘things’ as condensations of relations, where the object (in this case the commodity) is seen as a “medium for the transmission of *sensation*” (emphasis added) from the producer(s) to the consumer(s).²⁷⁴ Consumer products create networks of unspoken communication across (often vast) geographical distances. He considers the factory, then, as a place that can make these connections immediately perceptible.^{275 276} In his investigation, Eisenberg poses the questions:

What are the diverse attachments and experiences produced by those who make these things and those who consume them? What exchanges take place through the object itself—sensually, esthetically, abstractly? We often forget that most of the things we use are made by the labor of others, often in distant places, living dramatically different, diverse lives. What do these objects mean to them? How does their labor, their aspirations, their sense of alienation or satisfaction connect to ours?²⁷⁷

When viewed in juxtaposition with one another, the individual ‘snapshots’ of labor provide a vivid picture of the uneven and varied array of production methods and technologies, economic and social relationships that characterise ‘the factory’ in diverse contexts. They are both situated (i.e. representing a named location²⁷⁸), and abstracted,

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Milton Friedman, “Free to Choose,” (PBS, 1980), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dngqR9gcDDw>.

²⁷⁷ Daniel Eisenberg, “The Unstable Object,” *Video Data Bank*, <http://www.vdb.org/titles/unstable-object>.

²⁷⁸ Importantly, the workers themselves are not named, they become de-subjectivized ‘workers,’ amplifying the fact that the exhibition is *not* strictly about the politics of labor in a specific place, but rather relies upon an anonymized labor force as a stand-in for a global ‘workforce.’ Real laborers are depicted, but not identified, and I think this is an important distinction.

removed from their original contexts and, through juxtaposition, come to ‘represent’ a globalized productive apparatus.

Such a focus remained central in the most politically situated of the works exhibited. In a more politically inflected representation of labor (and its absence), German filmmaker Andreas Bunte’s *Two Films About Pressure* were positioned literally back-to-back in the exhibition space, begging viewers to directly juxtapose distinct considerations of the role and definition of pressure in two scenes/environments of production. According to the exhibition didactics, both films address the simulation of natural processes (high and low pressure in the environment) against the backdrop of the former GDR. The first, *Künstliche Diamanten (Synthetic Diamonds)*, closely follows the entire production process for the creation of synthetic diamonds, filmed at the Vollstädt Diamant GmbH, a company established by mineralogist Heiner Vollstädt (the man responsible for developing the method in the 1970s). In following the high-tech means used to replicate the extreme conditions in nature (heat and pressure) required to form natural diamonds, hints are provided which link the impetus behind the project to the politics of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) government in Germany, who apparently supported Vollstädt’s project in hopes that it would decrease reliance on the foreign import of diamonds, especially from the USSR. After Germany’s reunification in 1990, the Zentralinstitut für Physik der Erde (Central Institute for Physics of the Earth), where the process was developed, was shut down.

Unterdruck (Low-Pressure), on the other hand, features a slow, meandering pan of a 1970s East German athletic training facility (Kienbaum) built outside Berlin to simulate the effects of high altitude (low-pressure and oxygen deficiency), in order to

enhance the athletic performance of its athletes.²⁷⁹ However, here the sculpted bodies of former East German athletes are long gone, their careful training in a high altitude facility solely a relic of times gone by.²⁸⁰ Against the sounds of production emitted through the other films in the exhibition, *Low Pressure* is dominated by a low, near imperceptible hum (presumably attributable the building's air conditioning system or lighting). Like the *Zentralinstitut für Physik der Erde*, the training facility was abandoned in 1989, but remains as a material relic of Eastern Bloc Communism. Bunte considers both films to be a mirror of the “artifice and simulation,” produced under the GDR, and as “quiet reminders of the constant political pressure under which East German citizens lived.”²⁸¹ However, in the film themselves these politics are hardly overt – the methodical labor of producing the epitome of luxury commodities is juxtaposed with the physical remainders of an absent physical movement and labor—slow pans over stilled equipment, dilapidated architecture, historical footage, all reference the passage of time, begging comparison with the contemporary moment.²⁸²

The relational networks traced within Eisenberg and Bunte's films were extended through juxtaposition with the other works in the exhibition. Importantly, however, as reflected in the statements above, Eisenberg's work also extends the reach of the “supply chain,” to encompass the aesthetic *consumption* of the labor captured on film and transposed into the gallery space (here packaged as a spectacle in itself rather than as

²⁷⁹ Exhibition text, *In Time: The Rhythm of the Workshop*, Museum of Arts and Design, NYC, Feb 23rd – May 22nd 2016, <https://madmuseum.org/exhibition/time-rhythm-workshop>.

²⁸⁰ Kirsty Robertson, Stephanie Grace Anderson, Shannon Stratton, “Time and Time Again: A Conversation,” Paper presented at *Running With Concepts: The Choreographic*, Blackwood Gallery, Mississauga, September 16-18, 2016.

²⁸¹ Exhibition text, *In Time: The Rhythm of the Workshop*, Museum of Arts and Design, NYC, Feb 23rd – May 22nd 2016, <https://madmuseum.org/exhibition/time-rhythm-workshop>

²⁸² Bunte has noted that he is interested in filming architecture in particular, as it is a site where change is difficult to perceive, but is nonetheless concretized.

mere means to the production of a physical commodity). This is a transformative dislocation, one that is related to Eisenburg's focus on *sensation* as a means of forging a link between the 'producers' of consumer objects (captured on film) and the consumers of those same objects (who would presumably be the primary demographic of visitors to the MAD).

SENSING GLOBAL CAPITAL "IN TIME"

"The rhythm that is proper to capital is the rhythm of producing (everything: things, men, people, etc.) and destroying (through wars, through progress, through inventions and brutal interventions, through speculation, etc.)."

~ Henri Lefebvre

In many ways, the works exhibited in *In Time* exemplify the search for methods of what Frederic Jameson calls 'cognitive mapping' to confront the increasing volatility of global labor conditions. According to Jameson, in the "corporate multinational global economy of late capitalism...the subject is disconnected and fragmented in a more exaggerated form than ever before."²⁸³ In the face of the increasing disconnection of the individual from the economic forces that shape their being, cognitive mapping seeks to overcome the perceived impossibility of representing such a complex totality, making it cognitively perceptible. As such, cognitive mapping, for Jameson, represents "a means by which the individual subject can locate and structure perception of social and class relations in a

²⁸³See Fran Mason, "A Poor Person's Cognitive Mapping," in *Conspiracy Nation: the Politics of Paranoia in Postwar America*, edited by Peter Knight (New York: New York University Press, 2002): 40-56.

world where the local no longer drives social, political, and cultural structures or allows the individual subject to make sense of his or her environment.”²⁸⁴

In his essay “Navigating Neoliberalism,” Nick Srnicek identifies an important role for art and aesthetics in developing much needed new modes of cognitive mapping. He writes: “These two strands — the collapse of neoliberalism and the absence of alternatives — can find their resolution in a third strand, which is a particular emerging approach to aesthetics.”²⁸⁵ For Srnicek the most promising of role of art in revealing the ‘mystery’ of global capitalism (and thereby enhancing our capacities to ‘imagine a better future’) lies in what he calls an ‘aesthetics of the interface,’ mobilizing the capacities of technology and science, and relying heavily on complex data visualization to mediate “between big and complex data on the one hand, and our finite cognitive capacities on the other.”²⁸⁶ A promising prototype for such a project might look something like Hito Steyerl’s *Actual Reality OS*, which literally virtually projects economic data about wealth inequality and other social and economic issues onto physical sites that, in the process, are revealed as powerful reifications of the statistics themselves.²⁸⁷

However, these kinds of data-driven strategies for visualizing the mechanisms and failures of neoliberal globalization have an equally prevalent counterpoint in a set of

²⁸⁴ Nick Srnicek, “Navigating Neoliberalism” Political Aesthetics in an Age of Crisis,” *Medium*, October 19, 2015, <https://medium.com/after-us/navigating-neoliberalism-f9fae2405488>.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁷ In a review of “Hito Steyerl: Power Plants,” (Serpentine Sackler Gallery, London, from 11 April to 6 May 2019), Adrian Searle observed that, “Using the *Actual Reality app*, the gallery facade morphs into a three-dimensional graph, a mountain-scape, detailing social inequality, the distribution of London’s wealth, hunger and austerity in the UK. The products of deep data mining, AI technologies and predictive modelling are now extensively used to ascertain housing and social benefit provision. Steyerl and researchers and collaborators in effect use the technology to expose itself. The Serpentine Gallery, and its location in Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, becomes a site for institutional and social critique. Adrian Searle, “‘Much of the experience is meant to be horrible’: Hito Steyerl review,” *The Guardian*, April 10, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/apr/10/hito-steyerl-review-serpentine-sackler-gallery-london>.

practices that rely heavily on bodily and affective experience to mediate between the local and the global. Importantly, in the space of *In Time*, these intricate global relations were not only seen, they were *felt*. Indeed, as noted in the introduction to this chapter, *In Time* was designed to foreground aural, rather than purely visual, perception. This focus was signaled directly upon entry to the exhibition, as visitor's encountered the rhythmic 'ticking' emitted by the metronomes in Varvara & Mar's *Speed of Markets* (notably the only non-filmic work in the show, and yet essential to its aesthetic framing). As described above, the seven black metronomes that composed the installation were programmed to translate into rhythm live financial data tracking the trade volumes of the world's seven major stock markets: The New York Stock Exchange (NYSE), the Nasdaq, the Japan Exchange Group, Euronext, the London Stock Exchange, the Hong Kong Stock Exchange, and Deutsche Bourse, respectively. Their minimal installation—on a shelf against a blank white wall—encouraged visitors to focus on the sound, as a real-time, sensually palpable, translation of the activity of the stock markets. The abstractions and 'immateriality' of finance capital (which, as the artists' note, tend to mask their grounding in goods, services, labor, and materials)—invisible yet here viscerally sensed—thus framed the exhibition as a whole and, as I will argue, construct, through juxtaposition, a set of critical relations among the works included while simultaneously uniting them "in time."

Importantly, the irregular and disharmonious rhythms of immaterial production as represented by *Speed of Markets* directly overlaid the competing sounds emitted by the three films, and as such the abstractions of finance capital were reunited, in this space, with the means of production from which they are generally abstracted. Since industrial

manufacturing features heavily across these films—highlighting both automated labor and enduring craftsmanship—the repetitive rhythms of making and the variable rhythms of finance produced a cacophony of competing tempos that echoed through the exhibition space, dissonant yet aesthetically united. Further, since the speed of the metronomes in *Speed of Markets* depended on the trade volume of each market at any given time, their rhythms fluctuated greatly, ranging from chaotic, to times when no trades were posted (such as on weekends, when the metronomes were still and silent). As such, each visitor’s sonic experience would have been unique. Depending on the volume of the markets at a given time, this might have been experienced as soothing or stressful, pointing (if somewhat artificially) to the diverse ways bodies are differently impacted by both emerging and established regimes of work and production. By allowing the encroaching abstractions of finance capital to be viscerally sensed in the viewer’s body through the metronomes’ relentless beat, in a sense, *In Time* sonified the unevenness of contemporary time regimes at large as they are experienced under global capitalism.²⁸⁸

In this new form, the rhythm of the metronomes (as it moves between cacophony and accidental melody) *embodies* global capitalism by making concrete its activity into a familiar form. Through this translation, the markets can be interpreted as both competing (and sometimes compatible) patterns that set a tempo for global political, social and economic relationships. (emphasis added)

As I will discuss below, in the space of *In Time*, the chaotic and rapidly changing pace of time “marked by cycles of investment and speculation”²⁸⁹ (abstracted from

²⁸⁸ However, it is emptied of content to a certain extent, complicating matters.

²⁸⁹ David Madden, “Housing and the Crisis of Social Reproduction,” *E-flux*, June 25, 2020, <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/housing/333718/housing-and-the-crisis-of-social-reproduction/>. When viewed over time, and in relation to other market data, trade volumes are used as one important indicator to “help get a

material production), directly overlaid the dull, repetitive rhythms of manufacturing, bringing these seemingly dematerialized modes of accumulation back in touch with the (often invisible) material base they depend on, and challenging the frequent characterization of the contemporary world as one in which speed and acceleration dominate. The various contradictions at play throughout the space thus evoked, to borrow Peterson's characterization of the contemporary moment, "the changing landscape of labor and industry in the face of the unevenly technologized global economy, which people in some parts of the world experience as postindustrial but which for many others remains a world of heavy labor."²⁹⁰ By indexing the impact of economic change at the level of the body, it presented the possibility of a mode of cognitive mapping by other means, in which the experiential nature of time and rhythm potentially intervene in dominant discourses about the changing global terrain of work and labor, and the temporal and spatial dynamics of socio-economic change. As Bojana Kunst argues in *The Artist at Work*, engaging the body in this way may offer a way to "...resist the abstracted notion of work and reveal the problematic connection between the abstracted new work modes and bodies,"²⁹¹ at least in part by asserting the continued reliance on bodily labor in even the most 'immaterial' modes of production.

In the space of *In Time*, sound became an index of the temporal impact of global capitalism at the level of the body. By privileging aesthetic experience over purely intellectual understanding, according to Eisenberg, this approach "recognizes the

sense of the strength or conviction behind advances and declines in specific stocks and entire markets." They can be used to calculate the risk of an investment and are a primary means through which the capitalist (owners of the means of production, the already-wealthy, and those who can afford a high degree of risk), profit from their own existing wealth. Thus, *Speed of Markets* not only sonifies the abstractions of the stock market, but itself relies upon the very data upon which speculative capital relies.

²⁹⁰ Peterson, 2.

²⁹¹ Kunst, 119.

potential for aesthetic experience to form the basis of global engagement.”²⁹² However, in fleshing out this possible critical function, it must be noted that the emphasis on embodied time and rhythm at the point of production itself (rather than the presentation of an explicitly critical socio-political message), has a conflicted history in relation to both the representation of labor and to the development of strategies of worker management since the beginning of the industrial revolution. Through its presentation of the sensuous and somatic rhythms of production that emerge *from* working bodies (or, in the case of *Speed of Markets*, dematerialized modes of production), *In Time* resonates with the large body of recent scholarship on the choreographic in which dance theory—through its immanent focus on movement, exertion, and embodied labor—has been identified as a particularly fruitful framework for exploring the politics of work and production.²⁹³

DANCING ON THE ASSEMBLY LINE: RHYTHM AND CHOREOGRAPHY IN THE HISTORIES OF WORK

Of the works exhibited in *In Time*, Denis Côté’s film *Joy of Man’s Desiring* was the most overtly dominated by the rhythms and choreographies of factory work (in

²⁹² Daniel Eisenberg, “The Unstable Object: Part Two, *American Academy*, <https://www.americanacademy.de/person/daniel-eisenberg/>

²⁹³ See, for example: Gabriele Klein, Sandra Noeth (eds.), *Emerging Bodies: The Performance of Worldmaking in Dance and Choreography* (transcript Verlag, Bielefeld, 2011): 47-60; Mark Franko’s book *The Work of Dance: Labor, Movement, and Identity in the 1930s* (Wesleyan University Press, 2002); Bojana Kunst, “Dance and Work: The Aesthetic and Political Potential of Dance,” in Gabriele Klein, Sandra Noeth (eds.), *Emerging Bodies: The Performance of Worldmaking in Dance and Choreography* (transcript Verlag, Bielefeld, 2011): 47-60. André Lepecki, *Singularities: Dance in the Age of Performance* (Routledge: 2016); Frédérick Pouillaude, *Unworking Choreography: The Notion of the Work in Dance*, Trans. Anna Pakes (Oxford University Press, 2017); André Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* (Routledge, 2006); Ramsay Burt, *Ungoverning Dance: Contemporary European Theatre Dance and the Commons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) (including a chapter titled “Dance and Post-Fordism”).

addition to being the most self-reflexive in its consideration of the politics of contemporary work, industrial and postindustrial alike). Through the inclusion of perplexing dialogues and disruptive moments, the film punctures—just slightly—the overall politically neutral tone of the curatorial framing of the show and its predominantly affirmative presentation of industrial labor. It also shattered the seemingly documentary tone that dominates Eisenberg’s and Bunte’s films, an especially important point which I will elaborate below. In its *poetic* treatment of work (a descriptor that emerged numerous times in both the exhibition didactics and reviews of the show), a strong overriding metaphor emerges between labor and dance, evoking the choreographic as a potential key to unpacking the larger significance of the curatorial program.

Joy of Man’s Desiring opens with a woman captured in profile from behind, speaking a puzzling monologue: “*When you make it here, you should feel lucky. Because you’ll have good times. Times that will change the way you see your life. You just have to relax. Have an open mind. You’re safe with me. ...I’m your best friend....*”²⁹⁴ The woman’s gaze is averted from the camera, and yet she seems to address the viewer directly, giving a small smile now and then beneath lidded eyes (Fig. 13/14). She is framed tightly by the camera, creating a sense of intimacy, enhanced by the way she addresses the audience as a singular, familiar, person (“*Your passions and mine are negotiable. OK, sweetie?*”). Much of the monologue seems to be a plea for understanding between the viewer and herself. She finishes: “*Understand what we are building here, OK? Because I’m not a machine. I don’t have an on/off switch, OK? I’m not complicated, I’m open. Use your mind and senses to understand me, and we’ll be fine. Be polite, respectful, honest. Or I’ll destroy you, if I want to.*”

²⁹⁴ All translations from French appear as subtitles in the film.

This opening appeal to the human, to mutual understanding, and to the senses and emotions (carefully and overtly distinguished from the machine), sets the tone for the scene to come: the woman's unexpected and ominous closing threat is followed by an abrupt cut to a long, slow series of shots of factory machinery in operation, devoid of human operators (Fig. 15-19). Having been lulled by the calm, soothing tone of the opening monologue (“*you're safe with me*”), the shift in focus feels jarring and abrupt. The (at times deafening) sound of metal on metal—of automated machine parts pounding, clicking, cutting, spinning, and gyrating methodically—are viscerally sensed by the body as alternatively mesmerizing and calming, or threatening and violent. Similarly to *Speed of Markets*, the rhythms here swiftly change, ranging from slow and deep to rapid high-pitched clanging. Adding to this variety, as the film progresses, workers enter into the picture, operating a range of unknown (at least to a non-expert) equipment. Yet still, the modes of production captured by Côté are ones in which machines are dominant, and human bodies are tasked with adjusting (or failing to adjust) to the machinic rhythms. Across the film, there is an almost lyrical melodic quality as the camera meanders through the factory, capturing the joint work of humans and machines.

Both Côté's and Eisenberg's films at first blush fall neatly within a broader tradition (both historical and contemporary) of representations of factory production (especially industrial films and the ‘city symphony’ genre popular in the 1920s²⁹⁵) which

²⁹⁵ On the other hand, there is also a trend toward referencing work in recent dance that (more or less) explicitly addresses the transformation of labor processes, such as Ted Shawn's *Labor Symphony*, or BAD co's *I poor and one 0* (2008). See Harmony Jankowski's “Ted Shawn's Labor Symphony: Aesthetic Work and Productive Performance” *Women & Performance*, Vol. 26, Nos. 2–3 (2016): 146-161; Bojana Kunst, “Dance and Work: The Aesthetic and Political Potential of Dance,” in Gabriele Klein, Sandra Noeth (eds.), *Emerging Bodies: The Performance of Worldmaking in Dance and Choreography* (transcript Verlag, Bielefeld, 2011): 47-60. The city symphony genre is highly relevant as a means of cognitive mapping – many of them used highly aestheticized representations of labor and leisure, juxtaposed to emphasize systemic inequalities and the conditions of production for the lifestyles of the elite.

rely on the aestheticization of the “perfectly choreographed synergy between body and machine.”²⁹⁶ Eisenberg himself notes that:

Since its very beginning, cinema has been closely linked with the images and sounds of mass production. From the important films of the Westinghouse and Ford factories in the 1910s and 1920s, to the poetic work of Joris Ivens and Dziga Vertov in visually describing the promise of technology for redemption of the masses, cinema has defined the image of the factory and the worker.²⁹⁷

This statement is notably at odds with the arguments cited at the outset of this chapter that trace the recurrent *expulsion* of the camera from the factory, however these early industrial films might be distinguished by their functional purpose, primarily (though not entirely) consisting of government or corporate-sponsored pieces of advertising and propaganda. *Philips Radio* for example, a film by the Dutch filmmaker Joris Ivens (mentioned by Eisenberg above), is one of many industrial films that are strikingly similar to *Joy of Man's Desiring* in many respects. Ivens was commissioned in 1931 by the Dutch electronics company Philips to make a promotional film with sound (a

²⁹⁶ Most work at the transparent factory is by hand, but robots handle five operations (it is often lauded as representing the “perfectly choreographed synergy between body and machine”). See Frank Markus, “VW’s Transparent Factory,” *Car and Driver*, September 1, 2003, <https://www.caranddriver.com/features/a15134438/vws-transparent-factory/>

²⁹⁷ Daniel Eisenberg, “The Unstable Object,” *Video Data Bank*, <http://www.vdb.org/titles/unstable-object>. Vertov went so far as to try to develop a notation system for sound (especially industrial sounds). He recalled: “On vacation, near Lake Ilmen. There was a lumber-mill which belonged to a landowner called Slavjaninov. At this lumber-mill I arranged a rendezvous with my girlfriend... I had to wait hours for her. These hours were devoted to listening to the lumber-mill. I tried to describe the audio impression of the lumber-mill in the way a blind person would perceive it. In the beginning I wrote down words, but then I attempted to write down all of these noises with letters. Firstly, the weakness of this system was that the existing alphabet was not sufficient to be able to write down all of the sounds that you hear in a lumber-mill. Secondly, except for sounding vowels and consonants, different melodies, motifs, could still be heard. They needed to be written down as musical signs. But corresponding musical signs did not exist. I came to the conviction that by existing means I could only achieve onomatopoeia, but I couldn’t really analyze the heard factory or a waterfall... The inconvenience was in the absence of a device by means of which I could record and analyze these sounds. Therefore I temporarily left aside these attempts and switched back to work on the organization of words.” For further discussion on the topic, see also, Lilya Kaganovsky, *The Voice of Technology: Soviet Cinema's Transition to Sound, 1928–1935* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2018).

relatively new invention at the time). The film traced the production process of electronics such as radios and speakers, registering, as noted by the Rijksmuseum's description, "the rhythm of the machines' interaction with the activities of the factory workers."²⁹⁸ As such, like *Joy of Man's Desiring*, it is strongly dominated by the rhythmic sounds of manufacture (in fact several close-up scenes of machinery in operation are almost identical to those in the latter film, pointing to a possible direct influence on the artist).²⁹⁹ Heightening even further the aestheticization of the 'dance' between worker and machine, Ivens's film featured an intermittent orchestral soundtrack. Again, this is merely one example of many similar productions where the modern factory's alienating repetitions are reframed as the soundtrack of an elaborate ballet of work.³⁰⁰

Notably, *Joy of Man's Desiring* (and Stratton's interpretation of it) includes many references to dance, song, and rhythm, accentuating the exhibition's guiding conceptual approach, fittingly subtitled "The Rhythm of the Workshop." Indeed, the exhibition text emphasizes that, "[t]hroughout all 3 films the complex interdependencies of the workshop, that are required between humans and tools, tools and objects, objects and humans, build a shared, ambient 'melody' that emerges across the soundtracks and

²⁹⁸ Notably in relation to the argument about the factory and museum traced below, this film is now permanently on view at the Rijksmuseum.

²⁹⁹ "Philips Radio, Joris Ivens, 1931," *Rijksmuseum*, <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/NG-C-2013-4-2>.

³⁰⁰ The metaphor between (often automated) factory work and dance/choreography persists in corporate marketing today. For example, the Spanish automobile manufacturer SEAT produced a marketing video which, the description states, "...has given a glimpse into the fascinating role its 'dancing' robots play to ensure a new car body is manufactured to precision every 68 seconds." The Martorell production facility near Barcelona also showcases its "robots in action as they 'dance' to classical music." See "Dancing Robots assemble cars in just 68 seconds to classical music," promotional video for SEAT, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gw57O6xldbs>. Mercedes-Benz has been described in similar terms, see Rob Margeit, "The dance of the machines: Inside Mercedes-Benz's Düsseldorf factory," *Car and Driver*, February 16, 2018, <https://www.caradvice.com.au/622227/the-dance-of-the-machines-inside-mercedes-benzs-dusseldorf-factory/>

alongside the metronomes.”³⁰¹ With this ‘melody’ as backdrop, Stratton has noted the intimate and romantic way in which many of the workers in Côté’s film speak about their relationship with ‘their’ machines, going so far as to describe them as dance partners.³⁰² In one scene, two workers—framed by an open door to what appears to be a shipping entrance—discuss the quality of their products, internal and external competition, and their relationship with their work. The first explains:

When I got here, they put me on a certain machine. I like it, but nobody likes working on that machine! It’s very fast. Some say I’m the one that’s fast... I don’t even notice time. I work, I have fun, and honestly, I don’t notice. When I work, I sing, I follow the machine’s rhythm, I’m happy.

This sort of evocation of a romantic harmony between the worker and the machine, and the aestheticization of the rationalized synchronicity of work processes, has been traced to larger historical changes in both time sensibility and modes of production since the industrial revolution, as examined by E.P. Thompson in the essay “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism” (and the now large body of scholarship responding to this seminal work). At the core of Thompson’s essay is an attempt to think about the ways in which a general shift in ‘time-sense’ from the beginning of the industrial revolution affected both labor discipline and ‘the inward apprehension of time by working people.’³⁰³ He asks, “If the transition to mature industrial society entailed a severe restructuring of working habits—new disciplines, new incentives, and a new

³⁰¹ Exhibition text, *In Time*, MAD.

³⁰² Interview with Shannon Stratton, see Kirsty Robertson, Stephanie Grace Anderson, Shannon Stratton, “Time and Time Again: A Conversation,” Paper presented at *Running With Concepts: The Choreographic*, Blackwood Gallery, Mississauga, September 16-18, 2016.

³⁰³ E. P. Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism,” *Past and Present*, Vol. 1, No. 38 (Dec. 1967): 57.

human nature upon which these incentives could bite effectively—how far is this related to the inward notation of time?”³⁰⁴

The new forms of work-discipline that Thompson observed were indeed reliant on a transformed sensibility toward time that was facilitated, at least in part, by new modes of *measuring* time—besides the increasing importance of the clock itself, the emergence of film and photography as technologies able to dissect and record time and motion in unprecedented ways had direct effects on the imposition of ever more precise disciplinary choreographies of work processes (under the label ‘scientific management’). Most famously, developing on the formative ‘Time Studies’ of Frederick Winslow Taylor from the late 19th century (in which Taylor introduced a series of stop-watch studies into factories in the US in order to establish ‘standard times’ for various production processes³⁰⁵), the early 20th century ‘Motion Studies’ of Frank and Lillian Gilbreth employed film as a means of registering workers’ ‘work motions’ in time, in the interest of increasing efficiency and minimizing worker fatigue (and thereby maximizing profit) by creating standardized choreographies for a wide variety of tasks. In this regard, film and photography had a direct role in transforming the conditions of work, through their newfound ability to capture the minutiae of motion ‘in time,’ beyond what is observable by the human eye. The optimization of labor processes required that both time and the

³⁰⁴ Thompson, 57. In particular, Thompson traces the transition from ‘task orientation,’ for example in farming communities (where he argues the distinction between ‘work’ and ‘life’ is relatively blurred), to labor measured by clock-time, and the concomitant production of a perceived distinction between the worker’s ‘own’ time, and the employer’s time. In wage labor, according to Thompson, ‘not the task but the value of time when reduced to money is dominant. Time is now currency: it is not passed but spent.’ (Thompson, 61). Interestingly, it seems we have now entered a new stage in time-sense, one that has seen the expansion of this form of ‘time as currency’ into all crevices of daily life, returning the blurring of work and life that Thompson observed to be a component of agricultural communities, but subsumed within a newly all-encompassing productive apparatus.

³⁰⁵ See Kijne H.J., “Time and Motion Study: Beyond the Taylor — Gilbreth Controversy,” in: Spender J.C., Kijne H.J. (eds), *Scientific Management* (Springer, Boston, MA, 1996).

processes of production be broken down into small, discrete segments, with every bodily posture and gesture—down to the stroke of a typewriter key—recorded and subjected to the scrutiny of efficiency experts. Henceforth, factory workers were subjected to a new level of bodily discipline (whose productivity could now be registered, monitored, and regulated down to the unit of the second). The imposition of synchronic forms of time and increasingly rationalized rhythms on the labor process (the development of an instrumentalized choreography and ‘kinaesthetic experience’³⁰⁶) was thus part and parcel of the capitalist demand for increased efficiency—to be out of rhythm or ‘off-beat’ would mean to interrupt the maximum accumulation of surplus labor by the capitalist.³⁰⁷

Based as they are in ‘kinaesthetic experience,’ as Bojana Kunst notes, in the early 20th century the image of a body that had so deeply interiorized the movements of production that the body became a “kinetic machine” or “smoothly operating cog” on the assembly line had great aesthetic appeal, and was glorified not only in government-sponsored propaganda (especially among Soviet communists and the Russian avant-garde,³⁰⁸ for whom production was often pictured as a mode of dancing together³⁰⁹), but also in the realm of dance itself.³¹⁰ The reverse relationship between dance and factory production was discussed most iconically by the German writer Siegfried Kracauer.³¹¹ In

³⁰⁶ Kunst, “Dance and Work.”

³⁰⁷ Importantly, the rhythmic nature of labor was of course not solely *produced* by these new forms of time-discipline – there is much work on the ways in which a sense of embodied rhythm was tied to experiential time in task-work, determined by a given process of making (ie. shots on a loom). However, these materially determined modes of rhythmic sensibility are of a quite different nature than those imposed by efficiency experts in the factory, in that they parcel time and motion based on the profit motive, and their strict regulation based on ‘clock time’ rather than emerging from the process itself.

³⁰⁸ Kunst, *Artist at Work*, 106.

³⁰⁹ See Kunst, *Artist at Work*, 111.

³¹⁰ Kunst, *Artist at Work*, 113.

³¹¹ This trajectory of thought was followed up by Mark Franko in his book *The Work of Dance: Labor, Movement, and Identity in the 1930s*, which explores the radical politics of dance—from ‘proletarian mass dance’ and the chorus line to experimental modern and avant-garde dance movements—in this tumultuous decade, especially its relationship to Fordist and unionist organizational structures, the Federal Dance and

his 1927 essay “The Mass Ornament,” Kracauer emphasized the intrinsic relationship between (then) contemporary modes of popular dance and choreographed spectacle—such as the chorus line and so-called ‘stadium images’—that aestheticized the perfectly synchronized and mechanical movement of bodies moving in unison. Kracauer saw similarities between these dances and the factory assembly line, in which the alienated worker is subsumed within a larger productive “machine.”³¹² He argued that chorus line dancers like the Tiller Girls embodied the same rational principles that characterised the Taylor system: “The hands in the factory correspond to the legs of the Tiller Girls.”³¹³ For him, in both the assembly line and the chorus line, “...production becomes the work of an anonymous mass whose individual members each perform specialized tasks; but these tasks take on meaning only within the abstract, rationalized totality that transcends the individuals.”³¹⁴ Thus he argued that the Tiller Girls were “no longer individual girls, but indissoluble girl clusters whose movements are demonstrations of mathematics.”³¹⁵ Interestingly enough, in the US the development of the Fordist assembly line had much in common with dance (and in fact Ford fancied himself a dance aficionado).³¹⁶ Indeed,

Theatre Project, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, and the Communist Party. This historical relationship between work and dance is also traced by Felicia M. McCarren *Dancing Machines: Choreographies of the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (Stanford University Press, 2003).

³¹² According to Franco, “The thermodynamic motor idea, based on Anson Rabinbach’s study of the body as a thermodynamic machine, thus does not function well as the book’s organizing trope. Through it, maintains Rabinbach, “work became a universal concept” (1990:46). The universalizing of work behind this image of energy conversion does not yield the critical leverage one would expect from such a counterintuitive construction of dance history.” Mark Franco, “Dancing Machines: Choreographies of the Age of Mechanical Reproduction by Felicia McCarren,” *TDR*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (Spring 2005): 165-168. See also Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California press, 1992.).

³¹³ Siegfried Kracauer, “The Mass Ornament,” in Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, Trans./Ed. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press, 1995): 79.

³¹⁴ Thomas Y. Levin, “Introduction,” in Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, Trans./Ed. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press, 1995): 17-18.

³¹⁵ Siegfried Kracauer, “The Mass Ornament,” in Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, Trans./Ed. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press, 1995): 76.

³¹⁶ See Katherine Brucher, “Assembly Lines and Contra Dance Lines: The Ford Motor Company Music Department and Leisure Reform,” *Journal of the Society for American Music*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (November

Katherine Brucher argues that for Ford, “music and dance served as an object lesson in the physical discipline necessary for assembly line labor.”³¹⁷

Importantly, however, the relation Kracauer observed between the mass ornament and the assembly line was not one of mimicry or mere similitude. Rather, he argued that the mass ornament is “the aesthetic reflex of the rationality to which the prevailing economic system aspires.”³¹⁸ For him, cultural phenomena like the Tiller Girls and stadium images represented—indeed emerged out of—the embodiment of the mathematical rationality that enabled new forms of capitalist production and working methods—the Tiller Girls were, to some extent, the aesthetic expression of *homo economicus*, where the movement of the body in leisure is determined by the same driving instrumental rationality that organizes capitalist accumulation.³¹⁹ As such, for Kracauer, “[t]he structure of the mass ornament reflects that of the entire contemporary situation. Since the principle of the *capitalist production process* does not arise purely out of nature, it must destroy the natural organisms that it regards either as means or as resistance.”³²⁰ Hence the individual, for Kracauer, was subsumed within the mass

2016): 470-495. Interesting, several works have taken place recently in which former or current factory workers “mime” work motions and present these as dance. See Jesse Sugarmann’s, *We Build Excitement (Assembly Dance)* (2013) and Richard Ibghy & Marilou Lemmens’, *Meatpacking* from *Theatre from the Jungle*, 2018. For a brief discussion of the former see Genevieve Quick, “Mechanized Bodies: Anxiety and Healing in a Global Economy,” *Art Practical*, August 18, 2015, <https://www.artpractical.com/column/mechanized-bodies/>.

³¹⁷ See Katherine Brucher, “Assembly Lines and Contra Dance Lines: The Ford Motor Company Music Department and Leisure Reform,” *Journal of the Society for American Music*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (November 2016): 470-495.

³¹⁸ Siegfried Kracauer, “The Mass Ornament,” in Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, Trans./Ed. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press, 1995): 79.

³¹⁹ That this spectacle is oriented toward ‘entertainment’ rather than the profit motive is not at odds with this argument for Kracauer, since he views the mass ornament as a mode of ‘distraction’ for the working class masses, as well as mode of reproducing the general logic of capitalism.

³²⁰ Siegfried Kracauer, “The Mass Ornament,” in Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, Trans./Ed. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press, 1995): 78.

ornament, which in turn encouraged (in part through mere distraction), the conformism of the working class.³²¹

Although aesthetically similar, however, the relationship between time, rhythm, and choreography in the space of *In Time* is unlike both of the discourses traced above; it is unlike the Mass Ornament because it does not mask its relationship to capitalist *ratio* through its aestheticization, through the decorativization of the mass of human bodies as parts of a spectacular whole. It subverts both these directions by becoming a descriptive sensory experience, with at most highly ambiguous and indirect symbolic content.³²² Whereas in the historical references to factory work as dance (or vice versa) cited above, the analogies between industrial labor and dance served to de-emphasize individual agency and subjectivity in the interest of the image of a unified productive machine, in Côté's film the workers' relationships with their machines are presented as highly

³²¹ Much organicist/late dance forms were a form of resistance to this, through focus on the individual, spontaneity, etc. As such the history of dance is closely tied up with the history of labor and work. See Mark Franco's book, and the others noted above. At the same time, in the West, expressive and organic dance came to be seen as a potent site of resistance against the rationalisation of labor in the factory and beyond. As such, Kunst argues that the "political and aesthetic potential of twentieth century dance was strongly intertwined with the exit from the factory." Kunst, "Dance and Work," 11.

³²² Given the above historical interest in the relationship between work and dance, it is perhaps not surprising that dance has also emerged as a common site of reflection on changing conditions of labor in artistic work in recent decades. Potential works for consideration in relation to this theme include Revital Cohen and Tuur van Balen's piece *75 Watt* (2013). For this work, an object was designed whose only purpose is to choreograph a series of movements on the assembly line. Produced in a factory in Zhongshan, China, and based on the motion-efficiency studies (chronocyclegraphs) of Frank Gilbreth, *75 Watt* stages a reversal of the relationship between labor and product. As stated by the project creators: "Engineering logic has reduced the factory labourer to a man-machine, through scientific management of every single movement. By shifting the purpose of the labourer's actions from the efficient production of objects to the performance of choreographed acts, mechanical movement is reinterpreted into the most human form of motion: dance." Several copies of this amorphous final 'object' are exhibited alongside a film documenting the dance as it took place on the factory floor, asking viewers to consider: "What is the value of this artefact that only exists to support the performance of its own creation? And as the product dictates the movement, does it become the subject, rendering the worker the object?" Although this work was not included in *In Time* and cannot be unpacked fully here, I mention it briefly because it points toward what I believe is one of the central gesture that *In Time* performs in relation to the works on display, which is precisely this reversal of the relationship between labor and product. Notably the work exhibited in one of the exhibitions cited at the outset of this chapter (*Time & Motion*). The title derives from the calculation that "A labourer over the course of an 8-hour day can sustain an average output of about 75 watts," put forth in Marks' Standard Handbook for Mechanical Engineers first published in 1916.

individualized. For Stratton, the film represents a rethinking of the idea that machines “dictate a kind of automatism for the body.”³²³ As one pair of workers chuckle about their work, one jests about his ability to out-produce his machine (“*But you can’t go faster than the machine,*” to which his companion replies, “*I think it’s possible with that machine.*”). Secondly (and to my mind more importantly), it is unlike industrial film because the labor presented is removed from the direct instrumental concern for capital and the ideological purpose of the aesthetic depiction of the factory (by a company, for example). As such *In Time* begs the question of the relationship between the labor *depicted* and what is purportedly *produced*, both within the films and the exhibition itself.

IN PROCESS: THE NEVER-ENDING TASK

Speaking about her interest in making and material engagement for an earlier (unaffiliated, but thematically related) project, Stratton once said that she is ‘not interested in product,’ and that her interests tend more toward facilitating and sustaining a state of being ‘in process.’³²⁴ A focus on process over product forms the heart of *In Time*, and is perhaps most explicitly embodied in Côté’s film. Central to each of the works exhibited in *In Time*, and to the curatorial vision for the show, is the way in which an emphasis on the choreographies and rhythms of production serves to break down the means-ends rationality of capitalist production by centering production as an end in itself, divorced from the final product (I would argue even where one is identified). The urgent

³²³ Interview with Shannon Stratton, see Kirsty Robertson, Stephanie Grace Anderson, Shannon Stratton, “Time and Time Again: A Conversation,” Paper presented at *Running With Concepts: The Choreographic*, Blackwood Gallery, Mississauga, September 16-18, 2016.

³²⁴ Shannon Stratton, “Interview for Ox-Bow,” 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EkU19jNG-Es&t=258s>.

plea that opened *Joy of Man's Desiring*, to “Understand what we are building here, OK?” was in fact difficult, if not impossible, for viewers to fulfill. In fact, the film is specifically contrived so that the question of exactly what is being built in the amorphous factory space (in fact seeming to be an amalgam of several factories and workshops) is a difficult one to answer. This was not accidental: In a comment about the making of *Joy of Man's Desiring*, Côté has said that he “made sure that the audience never clearly knows what these workers are doing [or] building exactly, so we stay close to the ‘act of working’ ...The satisfaction or the result is never apparent; it’s a never ending task.”³²⁵

Given Stratton’s earlier remarks, it is clear that the quality of the “never-ending-task” was activated throughout *In Time*, creating the sense of a prolonged or suspended state of being “in process.” Alongside the exhibition itself, a compendium film program titled *Slow Looking* was organized, including works such as Daniel Eisenberg’s *Unstable Object I* (to be discussed below), which in the words of Linda Norden, “reinforced an emphasis on process over product.”³²⁶ Additionally, during *In Time*’s run the front atrium of the museum was transformed into a living assembly line with Liz Collins' time-based performance *Knitting Nation Phase 15: Weaving Walls* (March 6, 2013) (Fig. 28), advertised by MAD as a “knitting factory”³²⁷ in which Collins used a knitting machine to produce large swaths of woollen material that was affixed to the architecture of the

³²⁵ Aisha Jamal, “Interview with Denis Côté,” *Schema Magazine*, May 1, 2014, [http://schema mag.ca/2014/05/01/hot-docs-2014-interview-with-denis-Côté/#.XdA99tXwbR0](http://schema.mag.ca/2014/05/01/hot-docs-2014-interview-with-denis-Côté/#.XdA99tXwbR0).

³²⁶ Norden, “Time and Time Again,” n.p.

³²⁷ The press release for the performance specifically likens the work to factory production: “Collins and a “factory crew” of six professional weaving artists and designers will transform the Museum's atrium and lobby into a knitting and weaving factory, creating a continuous soft wall that will climb the Museum stairwell as the day progresses. The performance explores the dynamic relationship between textile and architecture, performance and collectivity, and considers apparel manufacturing and human labor. ...Both the performance and the exhibition comment on workers' interaction with machines and explore the interwoven themes of global manufacturing and trade.” “MAD Presents Liz Collins' Knitting Nation Phase 15, In Conjunction with the New Exhibition In Time (The Rhythm of the Workshop)” *Museum of Arts and Design*, February 3, 2016, <https://madmuseum.org/press/releases/mad-presents-liz-collins-knitting-nation-phase-15-conjunction-new-exhibition-time>.

atrium. Here, visitors could witness making in process, unmediated through the screen, facilitating a simultaneously tactile and durational engagement in which the end product was less important than the opportunity to witness the making ‘in process’ (indeed, what was produced—long strips of red knitted material draped throughout the museum’s atrium to produce a “a continuous soft wall”³²⁸—had its value purely as an aesthetic object, and is subordinated to the performance of its production). This method of making typically-‘productive’ labor (as evoked in the MAD’s relating of Collins’ work to the global textile market) ‘useless,’ is also evident in *Speed of Markets*, in which the very act of translating market data purely as rhythm, rendered the data itself illegible—useless for financial speculation, and therefore nonproductive.

In one sense, as a conceptual gesture, the seemingly purposeless performance of labor serves as an index of the true nature of capitalism itself. As Levin argues: “Like the mass ornament, the capitalist production process is an end in itself. The commodities it spews forth are not actually produced to be possessed; rather, they are made for the sake of a profit that knows no limit. ...The activities subsumed by that process have divested themselves of their substantial contents.”³²⁹ By likewise ‘divesting themselves of their substantial contents,’ by dislocating labor from its circulation in the production process (and in the reproduction of capital), the works in *In Time* seem to be an inversion of the instrumental mentality of economic rationality and perhaps serve as a mimetic site of critique. They resonate with Kunst’s suggestion that, “...the working gesture can be separated from the experience of work,” in this case re-oriented toward a critique of work itself. However, while the focus on the choreography of labor—its motions, rhythms,

³²⁸ “Knitting Nation,” *MAD*, <https://madmuseum.org/events/liz-collins%E2%80%99-knitting-nation-15>

³²⁹ Siegfried Kracauer, “The Mass Ornament,” in Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, Trans./Ed. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press, 1995): 78.

sounds—is dependent on its *removal* from the circuits of production, captured on film and dislocated in order to become an object for aesthetic contemplation, central to my analysis of *In Time* and similar exhibitions is the space *into* which this labor is *relocated*.

While many similarly oriented exhibitions seem highly focused on posing a set of *critical* relations, commenting about the geopolitics of time and its relation to labor, *In Time* shied away from making an overt socio-political or economic statement. Within the stated mission of the exhibition the relationship between bodies and industry, the choreography of manufacturing, and the ways in which time-based labor captures duration are what it sought to depict. The curatorial mandate was careful to elide valuation of the global situation, whether celebratory or critical, and focused instead on immersing the viewer in a “meditative” contemplation of manufacturing. Different from documentary works surrounding the factory that trace the supply chain in order to encourage ethical awareness of the global inequalities that shape the production of commodities under globalized capitalism, *In Time* presents a putatively ‘neutral’, descriptive picture of labor that ranges over various practices and only occasionally glimpsed through a critical eye, primarily in the characters of Côté’s film (although as I will discuss below, Côté himself envisioned his work as intentionally ambivalent). As a whole, then, in the space of the exhibition, (mostly) industrial labor is an object for aesthetic contemplation, sensed viscerally in the body, rather than discursive nexus within which explicitly cognitive evaluations of complex social relations are sensibly demonstrated. However, despite withholding from overt political judgment along the terms described, I argue that the critical potential of the exhibition lies less in the content of any individual work than in the very form of the exhibition itself—the sort of space it

creates and the way it transforms the reception of the labor pictured. In particular, as discussed above, the end product never emerges, and what is given pride of place is the visual, sonorous and choregraphical dimensions of the performance of production itself.

The final scene of *Joy of Man's Desiring* is perhaps the most perplexing (and potentially the most fruitful) for the analysis at hand. While all of the characters in the film take a seat in folding chairs in a nondescript factory space, a young boy mounts a small platform and begins to play a violin. Not only does this scene suggest an equivalence between the workers in the film (now seated to watch a performance, as the viewer watches them watching a performance), but the young boy's makeshift concert explicitly introduces a mode of production only gestured toward in the rest of the exhibition: that of performance itself.

It has been shown that performance is of particular importance for the transformed regimes of labor in post-Fordism. As Paolo Virno argues in *Grammar of the Multitude*, with Post-Fordist conditions labor, "becomes increasingly *performative*, in the sense that what is produced is more the productive activities themselves than the reified end products."³³⁰ He goes on to claim that we live "in an epoch in which all wage labor has something in common with the 'performing artist.'"³³¹ As Jan Verwoert elaborates in the essay "Exuberance and Exhaustion," "One thing seems certain: after the disappearance of manual labour from the lives of most people in the Western world, we have entered into a culture where we no longer just work, we perform."³³² In this final scene of *Joy of Man's Desiring*, the film's worker-protagonists are now viewers' of a

³³⁰ Paolo Virno, *The Grammar of the Multitude*, trans. I. Bertolotti et al. (Cambridge, Mass.: Semiotext(e), 2004), 68.

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² See also Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

virtuosic performance, in Virno's sense. But the performance reflexively positions the exhibition as such: in the space of *In Time*, all of the labor performed has become virtuosic, performed as an end in itself. This is an aesthetic, as well as a potentially political transformation: According to Arendt: "The performing arts [...] have indeed a strong affinity with politics. Performing artists [...] need an audience to show their virtuosity, just as acting men need the presence of others before whom they can appear; both need a publicly organized space for their 'work,' and both depend on others for the performance itself."³³³ This reflexive position of the performativity of production, for its own sake, then surreptitiously begs the question of public as viewer, both in terms of the political spectator (say in the saturation of performative politics in the media) and that of the role of the museum viewer in relation to process-oriented institutional programming.

MUSEUM-FACTORIES AND FACTORY-MUSEUMS: VIEWING (AS) LABOR

The museum is not a neutral space. This is by now not a radical or extraordinary observation, and yet it demands continual reiteration. For the analysis at hand, I am interested in how *In Time* both challenges and relies upon the mythos of the white cube as a space outside of the relations of production and modes of value that organize the world outside.³³⁴ In the aforementioned compendium film series an additional film from Eisenberg's *The Unstable Object* series was shown that serves to poignantly underscore the museum's significance as the site for 'representing' the material and immaterial networks of global capitalism and the changing nature of contemporary production. This

³³³ Hannah Arendt: *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (Penguin Classics: 1977):153-54. Cited in Virno, 42.

³³⁴ See Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Lapis Press, 1986).

three-parted film is described by the artist as an “experimental essay about contemporary models of production...that examines “things” and “objects” precisely at the moment when our understanding of material culture is at its most unstable.”³³⁵ Drawing a direct comparison between the production of three types of commodity—a luxury automobile, a cymbal, and a wall clock—Eisenberg asks what these all have in common: “what exchanges take place through the object itself—sensually, esthetically, abstractly?”³³⁶

In seeking such commonalities and nodes of exchange, the film re-emphasizes the exhibition’s focus on time, rhythm, and sensation: One section focuses closely on Chicago Lighthouse Industries, where wall clocks for Federal government offices are produced by visually impaired workers.³³⁷ While the clocks themselves index the historical production of time-discipline and tie these manual workers to the service sector employees whose offices the clocks are bound for, Eisenberg also emphasizes that by de-emphasizing *sight* at the site of production, in both the film and the factory the tactile becomes central; The second part of *The Unstable Object* takes place at Bosphorus

³³⁵ Daniel Eisenberg, “The Unstable Object,” *Video Data Bank*, <http://www.vdb.org/titles/unstable-object>.

³³⁶ Ibid. He expands: “We often forget that most of the things we use are made by the labor of others, often in distant places, living dramatically different, diverse lives. What do these objects mean to them? How does their labor, their aspirations, their sense of alienation or satisfaction connect to ours?...In the fall of 2008, as the world economic order began to implode, people began to question their relationships to the most fundamental aspects of daily life—to work and labor, to value and necessity, to the minimal requirements for sustenance, satisfaction, and happiness. Nobody was sure what things were worth, or whether their own self-defined states of happiness and security were still obtainable. Long before then, a subtle sequence of transitions and exchanges took place over the course of decades, taking the sources of labor and resources further and further apart from the sites of consumption. Yet global culture has yet to produce something essentially necessary for this moment: a consciousness of the subtle and deep connections that a global economy produces between individuals, all over the world.”

³³⁷ Ibid. Eisenberg “produced a sequence in a factory of blind workers in Chicago, where the visual dimension of production is virtually non-existent. Chicago Lighthouse Industries produces wall clocks for all federal government offices, an object that can neither be seen nor used by the workers who are producing them. What other senses are compensating for the lack of the visual? How do the workers maintain their own sense of accomplishment, pride, and precision? What different issues concerning the use of tools and space are present? In the clock factory, what’s visible is completely unimportant; instead the complete dependence on the tactile is evident. Close-ups of faces, hands, and factory spaces are central to this sequence, making more tactile the entire field of the image. Unlike the car factory, where workers remain silent and focused on their work, in the clock factory conversation is ubiquitous, as this workspace is an essential social space for the workers.”

Cymbals, a small cymbal factory in Habiblar (just outside Istanbul), where the modern cymbal was invented and where highly coveted cymbals continue to be produced—entirely by hand—for musicians worldwide.³³⁸ In the film, a conceptual link emerges between the cymbal’s final role in producing music, and the primacy of sound at the point of their production. Particularly striking are the extended scenes that capture the ‘hammering room,’ immersing viewers in the deafening rhythmic sound of worker’s repeatedly pounding the instruments over the many hours that it takes to produce a single cymbal.

However, the most illuminating section of the film for the argument I wish to make here about *In Time* itself takes place in the VW Phaeton Factory in Dresden, called “*Die Gläserne Manufaktur*” (The Transparent Factory) (Fig. 23-27).³³⁹ The ‘transparency’ of the title opens up to two related interpretations: it refers most directly to the almost fully glass-and-steel construction of the building itself (which as such is literally transparent), but it also points to the radical transparency of the production process that it claims to put on display. In the VW factory, which is open to the public, buyers (and other visitors) can watch their vehicles being assembled in real time. Here, manufacture becomes ‘cultural spectacle,’ catering to the paradoxical market demand for ‘individualized’ mass production and integrating the factory itself into the ‘experience economy.’³⁴⁰ Unlike the explosion of industrial museums that have appeared in the wake

³³⁸ Eisenberg emphasizes that these cymbals are still produced in the same way as they were 400 years ago, using ‘primitive smelters’ and hand-pounding, which is then directly juxtaposed with the high-tech production featured in the VW factory. Daniel Eisenberg, “The Unstable Object,” *Video Data Bank*, <http://www.vdb.org/titles/unstable-object>.

³³⁹ Daniel Eisenberg, “The Unstable Object,” *Video Data Bank*, <http://www.vdb.org/titles/unstable-object>.

³⁴⁰ Daniel Eisenberg, “The Unstable Object,” *Video Data Bank*, <http://www.vdb.org/titles/unstable-object>. Notable a trip to the VW factory is a full tourist experience: “Factory delivery customers are treated to lunch and a tour.” A large sphere houses an interactive video experience for learning about VW. There is a customer commissioning center, inside which Phaeton buyers can choose colors, leathers, woods, etc., for

of deindustrialization in many places around the globe, the Transparent Factory stands apart in its museumification of a factory *in operation*. Normally the commodity masks its conditions of production—labor is reified in objects, and thus becomes invisible. In the case of the VW Phaeton Factory, alongside the manufacture of the commodity, the performance of the production is also being made. The question here regards what is at stake in the factory as experience of its own process, especially in connection with its analogue in the orientation of time- and process-based practices of the museum in the era of deindustrialization. More specifically, it also begs an important question that is highly relevant to all of the films featured in *In Time*: How does the manufacturing process change when it is packaged for public consumption? And to what ends? What transformations of meaning and value occur between the performance of labor and its consumption as spectacle?

In beginning to answer these questions, a telling commonality emerges between VW's Transparent Factory and the films exhibited in *In Time*, one that might be generalized as their shared *slowness* as an index of their repackaging for visual (and aesthetic) consumption. It is not without significance that the supplementary film program for *In Time* was titled *Slow Looking*, and was described as “a poetic opportunity for reflection” (falling neatly within a growing trend in museums in Europe and North America to host ‘slow looking days’ and similarly marketed events intended to advocate the contemplative consumption of art³⁴¹). Besides echoing the analogy between manufacturing and music/dance that underscores *In Time* (one reviewer asks: “Does this

their cars. “The ground floor houses a restaurant, and on the lower level there is a simulator that provides visitors a virtual test drive of the Phaeton.” Frank Markus, “VW’s Transparent Factory,” *Car and Driver*, September 1, 2003, <https://www.caranddriver.com/features/a15134438/vws-transparent-factory/>

³⁴¹ ie. International ‘slow art day’

look like the lobby of an opera house, or a factory?”³⁴² Another refers to the “delicate robotic dance” that takes place between workers and machines³⁴³), the Transparent Factory itself notably slows down the manufacturing process to facilitate viewing, arguably also to make the experience of its viewing more aesthetically contemplative and pleasing. When operating at full speed the company has the capacity to produce 150 cars per day. However, according to one report the current production rate is “a leisurely 40 cars per day over two shifts.”³⁴⁴

Further, the production process presented at the VW factory is one that is highly sanitized—since the factory only handles final assembly, the messiest, least ‘aestheticizable’ parts of the production process (such as stamping, welding and painting the steel bodies) remain out of view, and many of the over 1000 automobile parts come to the factory mostly pre-assembled.³⁴⁵ Contributing to this deliberately cultivated environment, the workers wear spotless white jumpsuits as they perform alongside a mesmerizing cast of elegant machines. The sanitized picture of manufacturing is described outright in the factory brochure, which states: “The factory’s walls are made almost entirely of over 290,000 square feet of glass. Its floors are covered entirely in

³⁴² The quote continues, “Actually, during the European floods of 2002, when Dresden's opera house was inundated, the “transparent factory” did play host to the opera *Carmen*, but ordinarily it is tourists, customers, and prospects who are welcomed in this space.” Frank Markus, “VW’s Transparent Factory,” *Car and Driver*, September 1, 2003, <https://www.caranddriver.com/features/a15134438/vws-transparent-factory/>

³⁴³ Basem Wasef, “21 Cool Facts About the Transparent Volkswagen Factory,” *Popular Mechanics*, December 7, 2011, “<https://www.popularmechanics.com/cars/g705/21-cool-facts-about-the-transparent-volkswagen-factory/>

³⁴⁴ Frank Markus, “VW’s Transparent Factory,” *Car and Driver*, September 1, 2003, <https://www.caranddriver.com/features/a15134438/vws-transparent-factory/>

³⁴⁵ The hand, as in much contemporary marketing, thus comes to signify authenticity and individuality. According to Eisenberg, “In the car factory, visibility and visibility are two of the primary products, as the factory itself is a site where customers come to watch their cars being hand-made. This slowing down of the manufacturing process produces value and scarcity, through the unnecessary but highly valued touch of the human hand.” Daniel Eisenberg, “The Unstable Object,” *Video Data Bank*, <http://www.vdb.org/titles/unstable-object>.

Canadian maple. There are no smokestacks, no loud noises, and no toxic byproducts. Parts arrive, and luxury cars depart.... All the smelly, noisy operations...take place in Zwickau.”³⁴⁶ Indeed, one reviewer explicitly wrote: “[t]he dark Canadian maple floors...make the factory look like a museum more than a work environment.”³⁴⁷ As such, despite opening up the ‘production process’ to public inspection, what is accessible to viewers is a partial and highly manipulated picture of production, temporally and aesthetically enhanced for the public (not unlike the picture of labor presented in *In Time*).

Importantly, Eisenberg accentuates even further this temporal and aesthetic experience—through the use of long-takes and wide compositions, *The Unstable Object* enhances the durational experience of the VW factory, and emphasizes the striking “architecture and light” that dominates the space (indeed it could nearly be confused for a Frank Gehry-designed museum).³⁴⁸ *The Unstable Object* is thus twice removed from the ‘reality’ of VW’s manufacturing process. As such what is *produced*, in both contexts (the factory and the film) according to Eisenberg, is visuality and visibility as much as the final products themselves.

Côté too, as note above, is transparent about the manipulation of his subjects (fittingly, since his is the sole film in the exhibition which features scripted material and actors, rather than strictly real workers). In an interview with Wheeler Winston Dixon, the artist said:

³⁴⁶ Frank Markus, “VW’s Transparent Factory,” *Car and Driver*, September 1, 2003, <https://www.caranddriver.com/features/a15134438/vws-transparent-factory/>

³⁴⁷ “The Volkswagen Transparent Factory is an Engineering Marvel in More Ways than One,” *South Centre Volkswagen*, March 18, 2013, <https://southcentrefinecars.wordpress.com/2013/03/18/the-volkswagen-transparent-factory-is-an-engineering-marvel-in-more-ways-than-one/>

³⁴⁸ Daniel Eisenberg, “The Unstable Object,” *Video Data Bank*, <http://www.vdb.org/titles/unstable-object>.

[*Joy of Man's Desiring*] is a big lie, and you won't catch me using the word documentary often. I am not a fan of social realism, and I like to be playful with the so-called realities I am filming. ... *Joy of Man's Desiring* is not a humanist documentary. It's a re-appropriation of reality by someone who wants to impose his own will on the sounds and images he records.³⁴⁹

Côté emphasizes sound in particular as a site of inauthenticity in the film—he worked with a sound engineer who had carte blanche to, “exaggerate, delete or transform sounds” in ways that would increase the stimulation of the senses. According to him, “maximum expressivity” was the guiding principle behind *Joy of Man's Desiring*.³⁵⁰

With ‘slow looking’ and ‘maximum expressivity’ as driving impulses behind *In Time*, the focus shifted from the modes and spaces of labor captured on film, to the experiential environment of the viewer (in this case the museum visitor). Indeed, while a documentary impulse seems central throughout the films in *In Time*, in each of them, cinematic effects such as the slow pan, still frames, enhanced sound effects, and other forms of post-production, transform the labor captured in a way that facilitates slow looking and sensual engagement, transforming the labor of the factory into an object for contemplation, or what I have come to call poeticised labor.³⁵¹ In this, the act of *witnessing* labor (at least in part as a leisure activity) thus gains special significance, heightened by the context of the gallery space (which of course carries its own set of gestures, temporalities, politics, and modes of production and consumption). Through the

³⁴⁹ Côté quoted in Wheeler Winston Dixon, “Interview with Denis Cote,” *Senses of Cinema*, Vol. 1, No. 75 (June 2015), <http://sensesofcinema.com/2015/feature-articles/an-interview-with-denis-cote/>

³⁵⁰ Côté quoted in Dixon, “Interview with Denis Cote,” n.p.

³⁵¹ A quick search on YouTube for any traditional hand-skill bears out this trend (ie. scissors-making, pencil making, pottery, almost any product you can think of there is a highly aestheticized, ‘slow’ video documenting the production process)

use of effects associated with the genre of slow film (itself identified as a particularly demanding genre), the films, then, engage with contemporary labor beyond the literal representation of working bodies and machines, creating images which themselves labor—or rather, that demand a laboring spectator—and opening a space for reflection on the interrelation of these seemingly distinct spheres and modes of production (those performed on film and those performed by the museum visitor). In other words, in the films included in *In Time*, the camera not only *enters* the factory, but dislocates it—once captured, the gestures, movements, and rhythms of manufacturing are transposed into a space which proposes a new set of (potentially critical) relations among the body, movement, labor, and agency, implicating the viewer’s own labor in relation to that pictured.³⁵² But what sort of labor is this? Where does labor begin and end in the space of *In Time*?

In a culture where attention itself is monetized (one characteristic of Post-Fordist production), the relation between viewing and labor—the museum and the factory—is not merely metaphorical. The question of the museum’s relationship to the factory has been a matter of sustained debate in recent decades, perhaps as an index of the rapidly changing landscape of work and production both within the realm of art and the world at large. Hito Steyerl’s essay fittingly titled, “Is the Museum a Factory?” directly addresses the structural relationship between these spheres and the political import of the museum’s

³⁵² Schoonover argues that slow film demands a more active viewer (this is something that could be said of art film generally), a greater degree of intensity, and thus creates a mode of spectatorship in which, “seeing becomes a form of labor.” I would amend this statement, as in the contemporary immaterial economy, seeing is already a mode of production. However in making the viewing of something *feel* laborious, slow cinema highlights this already existing condition. Slow film in effect produces a kind of laborious spectatorship which, in *In Time*, folds back on itself as manual labor becomes the very object of this effortful consumption. Karl Schoonover, “Wastrels of Time: Slow Cinema’s Laboring Body, the Political Spectator, and the Queer.” *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (2012): 66.

shifting role as a space of contemporary production.³⁵³ Her premise begins with the oft-noted observation of the increasing frequency with which abandoned factories—generally those left in the wake of deindustrialization—have been converted into contemporary art galleries and museums. Rather than simply practical, Steyerl argues that the transition in use of these spaces (from factories to museums) reflects broader shifts in labor, production, and value that have occurred since the mid-twentieth century, and has much to say about the roles (both material and symbolic) played by these seemingly diametrically opposed institutions in the cultural imaginaries and socio-economic realities in post-industrial centers. As Thomas Elsaesser notes:

The fact that this ‘factory/museum’ repurposing is noticeable above all in Northern, Western, and Central Europe points to the larger socioeconomic context. On the one hand, the catastrophic decline of industrial production in Europe in favor of low-wage countries in Asia, Latin America, and Southern and Eastern Europe is a development due to the fickleness of global capital and the aggressiveness of the financial markets. On the other hand, it reflects the supposed necessity of nearly all large and medium cities in Europe to improve its income from tourism and make ‘administered culture’ (in the form of museums, festivals, and exhibitions) into one of their primary industries.³⁵⁴

³⁵³ Central in Steyerl’s discussion is also the role and function of political film—once, she argues, shown predominantly in factories (to the workers whose interests were represented in them), and now often gracing the walls of museums and galleries, frequently fragmented into three-channel videos or serving as backdrop in a larger ‘installation’ (“The sound is almost always awful,” Steyerl jokes). Hito Steyerl, “Is the Museum a Factory?” *E-flux*, No. 7 (June 2009), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/07/61390/is-a-museum-a-factory/>.

³⁵⁴ Elsaesser notes: “...the process is not limited to Europe: in Shanghai, Chengdu, Singapore, Abu Dhabi, and Dubai, giant new museum complexes are also being built, usually based on plans by Western architects, with the difference that they are being built on new terrain or on razed working-class suburbs. These fantastic computer-generated structures—in the manner of Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim in Bilbao—are monuments to themselves; the building itself becomes the museum’s most important “work of art.””

Importantly, it also indexes the shift in production underlying these economic changes, from one based predominantly in the production of material goods, to services and the production of ‘immaterial’ commodities (including ‘experience’). In particular, in the digital economy, as gestured toward, *attention* itself becomes a primary site of production. To quote Elsaesser once more, while “[a]t one time people did physical labor in factories and sought to relax with viewing pleasures and feasts for the eyes. Today, ‘to look is to labor’—whether at a monitor in the office, on a screen or at home, in the cinema, or at the museum. ...[A]t leisure we are still subjects of the ‘societies of control’”³⁵⁵ The museum is indeed a space of production that is emblematic of the hegemonic mode of production of late capitalism, where production has extended beyond the defined structure of the ‘working day’ (whether in an office or a factory), and has infiltrated all aspects of everyday life—hence Jonathan Beller describes the cinema as a deterritorialized factory, and human attention as deterritorialized labor.³⁵⁶

Because slow film produces a mode of consumption that is *felt* as laborious, it points to the already-productive labor of the museum visitor, blurring the boundary between labor and leisure. Through the combination of the visual and the sensorial, a heightened awareness of one’s own body was a condition of entering into the space of *In Time*—dwelling on the laboring bodies and rhythms of production on screen and echoing through the space, the question begged in the opening monologue of *Joy of Man’s Desiring*, “What are we producing here?” thus extended beyond the interior world of the

Thomas Elsaesser, “Is a Factory a Museum,” *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (Spring 2019): 42-52.

³⁵⁵ Thomas Elsaesser, “Is a Factory a Museum,” *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (Spring 2019): 42-52.

³⁵⁶ Jonathan Beller, “Cinema, Capital Of The Twentieth Century,” *Postmodern Culture*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (May, 1994), <http://pmc.iath.virginia.edu/text-only/issue.594/beller.594>.

film, and was directed toward the museum visitor: What are *we* producing, here? By extending this question from the diegetic quasi-narrative of *Joy of Man's Desiring* to the museum as a whole, the factory-museum analogy so often evoked in discussion of arts engagement with labor and work is directly enacted in the space of *In Time*. Not only in the films themselves, but in the entire space of the exhibition as a space where labor has no end. In a sense the gallery exemplifies the space of real subsumption, and *In Time* created a microcosm of global temporal frames in which the viewer's productive body-at-leisure is revealed as such in relation to other (some distant) zones of production.

It is significant that, given the primary demographics of visitors to MAD, *In Time* likely addressed, in most cases (though of course not exclusively), the post-Fordist worker. It has been noted that witnessing labor has gained increasing appeal mostly in highly deindustrialized locations where an increasing proportion of the population are distanced from making 'things,' as it were.³⁵⁷ Barbara Ehrenreich notes that:

In an ever more economically unequal culture, where so many of the affluent devote their lives to such ghostly pursuits as stock-trading, image-making, and opinion polling, real work—in the old-fashioned sense of labor that engages the hand as well as the eye, that tires the body and directly alters the physical world—tends to vanish from sight.”³⁵⁸

Côté's own motivations that framed the making of *Joy of Man's Desiring* drew heavily on this experience. He observed:

Sometimes work is not a concrete thing. You go to bed at night not knowing what your day was made of. The idea of work is an abstract one because you can't

³⁵⁷ See Peterson.

³⁵⁸ Barbara Ehrenreich, "Maid to Order," *Harpers* (April, 2000): 70. Quoted in Robbins, 91-92.

quantify it. So I decided to make a film about that abstract idea, about that gap between my situation and a world I don't know anything about — shops, industries, factories — about what we consider 'concrete.'³⁵⁹

This observation is of course determined by a particular subject position. Alongside emerging modes of flexible, 'immaterial' labor, the hyper-exploitation of low-paid (highly 'material') factory work persists (and, it should be noted, is also more frequently brought into view in films and artworks). And yet a certain romanticization of industrial labor has become common, in part (I believe) as an expression of the widespread social and cultural anxieties about deindustrialization that have taken root in places which have seen the evacuation or automation of industrial production. By bringing these spheres into (aesthetic) relation, *In Time* opens up a space of (self-)critical engagement with the complex and deeply invested dynamic between material realities and cultural imaginaries, with choreography, time, and rhythm serving to mediate between different modes of production and their economic and geopolitical stakes. Indeed, for the viewer who lingered at length in the exhibition, a subtle and uncomfortable sense of crisis was evoked, showing that aesthetic pleasure and critical attention are not necessarily at odds with one another.

WORK STOPPAGES AND STILL DANCE

Recalibration and the 'Biopolitical Economy of Time'

³⁵⁹ Aisha Jamal, "Interview with Denis Côté," *Schema Magazine*, May 1, 2014, <http://schema mag.ca/2014/05/01/hot-docs-2014-interview-with-denis-Côté/#.XdA99tXwbR0>.

Sarah Sharma argues that within the destabilizing temporal frameworks that constitute the emergent terrain(s) of work and production, good subjects today are expected to constantly recalibrate, to find “ways to keep up.”³⁶⁰ For her:

Recalibration accounts for the multiple ways individuals and social groups synchronize their body clocks, their sense of the future or the present, to an exterior relation, be it another person, a chronometer, an institution, or ideology. That you will synch up is a demand of economic encounters and most of the productive and institutional arrangements in which we live.

In some ways this demand is not unlike those that accompanied older iterations of capitalist production since the industrial revolution which, as noted above, demanded an ever more precise control over the gestures of the worker’s body, and in which time and motion were identified as key sites of disciplinary control: Sharma evokes Foucault’s remarks in *Discipline and Punish* where he observed, “In the correct use of the body, which makes possible a correct use of time, nothing must remain idle or useless.”³⁶¹ However, the temporal demands of post-Fordism replace the stable, regular rhythms of the factory with flexible, mobile, and precarious modes of labor that make ‘recalibration’ increasingly difficult.

For the most part, the labouring characters in each of the films featured in *In Time* are *not* pictured as the comically maladjusted bodies of *Modern Times* or *I Love Lucy*’s famous chocolate scene,³⁶² but are smoothly integrated into the production process, their

³⁶⁰ Sarah Sharma, “The Biopolitical Economy of Time,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (2011): 442.

³⁶¹ Cited in Sharma, “The Biopolitical Economy of Time,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (2011): 440.

³⁶² Discussed at length in Alex Pittman, “Dis-Assembly Lines: gestures, situations, and surveillances,” *Women & Performance*, January 14, 2014, <https://www.womenandperformance.org/ampersand/ampersand-articles/dis-assembly-lines-gestures-situations-and-surveillances.html>.

bodies fully in synch with their tools and machines, almost as extensions of themselves.³⁶³ In *Joy of Man's Desiring*, several of the workers speak specifically about adapting to the rhythm of the machine (“*Watch, I don't go too slow or too fast....You need this flux.*”) and, as noted above, describe the sense of happiness derived from their working process. The frequent use of the birds-eye view in Eisenberg's film enhances this impression—like the mass ornament, these scenes subsume the individual workers within a smoothly operating whole. They are, at first take, effectively ‘synching up,’ modeling the ‘good subject’ recalibrating in line with the demands of the productive apparatus.

However, throughout the exhibition, viewers also encountered sporadic moments where this seamless integration faltered. In the same breath as the above comment made in *Joy of Man's Desiring*, the man offers a qualification: “*But I don't like petty little jobs. You know that old man in the corner, if I sat at his machine I'd fall asleep. It bores me. I can't do it.*” The workers' affection for their machines is qualified by expressions of apathy and dissatisfaction (“*No ones dreams of spending three years on the same machine.*”). These sentiments are mirrored in moments of narrative rupture in the film. Besides the general disharmony that was at times produced by the unpredictable rhythms of *Speed of Markets* overlaying the other works on show (including the metronomes complete stillness/silence in the evenings and on weekends), *Joy of Man's Desiring* features many scenes in which its cast of workers disengage from their productive tasks in various ways, captured in extended moments of seeming non-work—periods of sanctioned break-time are interspersed with out-of-place—at times awkward—moments

³⁶³ The frequent use of the birds-eye view in Eisenberg's film enhances this impression—like the mass ornament, it subsumes the individual workers within a smoothly operating whole.

of stillness or boredom, including extended scenes where workers are captured sitting, staring into space, lounging, daydreaming and lingering in other forms of (in)activity which disrupt the careful choreography and relentless productivity of the Fordist factory with its characteristic speed and efficiency (Fig. 36-43).³⁶⁴ While Daniel Eisenberg's film pictures the smooth functioning of material production and a sense of celebration for the highly skilled labor that characterizes industrial manufacture, Cote's characters seem to exist in a moment of crisis. The intimacy Shannon describes between the workers and their machines at times registers as affectionate, hostile, or nostalgic—amidst the overworked, a single unemployed woman wanders through the factory yearning for work as if lamenting a lost love. She pleads for someone to notice her, offers to get coffee, and constantly reiterates her 'availability' for work as she lingers in the margins of the factory.

These wandering, lounging, and daydreaming characters embody what Karl Schoonover describes as slow film's "unproductive episodic meandering,"³⁶⁵ a particularly fitting description given the focus on both duration and de-functionalized labor in *In Time*. Schoonover proposes that slow film realizes "the possibility that cinema

³⁶⁴ Sharon Lockhart's *Lunch Break*, provides a nice complement to this aspect of the work, featuring "42 workers as they take their midday break in a corridor stretching nearly the entire shipyard. Contrary to her previous films, the camera is untethered and, as it slowly moves down the corridor, we experience what was a brief interval in the workday schedule expanded into a sustained gaze. Lined with lockers, the hallway seems not only an industrial nexus but also a social one, its surfaces containing a history of self-expression and customization. Over the course of the lunch break we see workers engaged in a wide range of activities--reading, sleeping, talking--in addition to actually eating their midday meal. The soundtrack is a composition designed in collaboration with composer Becky Allen and filmmaker James Benning, in which industrial sounds, music, and voices slowly merge and intertwine. Together, picture and sound provide an extended meditation on a moment of respite from productive labor." "Lunch Break," <https://www.lockhartstudio.com/lunch-break>

³⁶⁵ Karl Schoonover, "Wastrels of Time: Slow Cinema's Laboring Body, the Political Spectator, and the Queer," *Framework*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (Spring 2012): 65.

can capture excess as temporality,”³⁶⁶ an argument that seems to apply to *In Time* as a whole. In *Joy of Man’s Desiring*, this excess is quite literally one of surplus labor—the wandering characters in Côté’s film, redundant within late capitalism’s productive economies, are perhaps destined to the fate of Schoonovers, ‘wastrels of time,’ those who find themselves ‘useless’ to capitalism’s uncompromising drive to extract value from every corner of life. What is at stake for each character in the quest for steady employment is proven to be more than the necessity for subsistence alone, but extends to their sense of personal and social identity, reflecting Richard Sennett’s argument that “The undertow connotation of uselessness, deskilling, and task labor is a dispensable self.”³⁶⁷ In the words of Kathleen Miler:

Modernist narratives of time as linear progress toward an incrementally better future are becoming unsettled. The present is increasingly felt as ongoing or suspended, as if one were simply treading water. Indeed, the very concept of precarity is often expressed as a relationship to time—caught between a nostalgic attachment to (Fordist) norms of the past and anxiety over uncertain futures.³⁶⁸

Bojana Kunst comments that, “In capitalist societies, clumsy, still, expressive, lazy, dreamy, everyday and marginal movement is understood as an intervention of liberated

³⁶⁶ Schoonover, “Wastrels of Time: Slow Cinema’s Laboring Body, the Political Spectator, and the Queer,” 65.

³⁶⁷ Richard Sennett, “The New Capitalism,” *Social Research*, Vol, 64, No. 2 (Summer 1997):167. Sennett counterposes ‘durable time’ with the fragmented, transient nature of experiential time in the contemporary world of work. For him, “durable time’ is a political imperative to counteract the increasing groundedness of contemporary life, where work fails to provide a “point of reference for defining durable personal purposes and a sense of self-worth: sociologically, work serves ever less as a forum for stable, sociable relations.”

³⁶⁸ Kathleen Millar, “The tempo of wageless work: E. P. Thompson’s time-sense at the edges of Rio De Janeiro,” *Focaal*, No. 73 (2015) 28-40.

singularity...”³⁶⁹ Interestingly given the references to dance that permeate several levels of the programming surrounding *In Time*, recently a number of choreographers have expressed similar views, turning away from movement as the driving expressional force of dance, and experimenting instead with stillness and various forms of non-action as a subversive gesture within the realm of dance, and often explicitly framed in relation to contemporary labor politics. In “Choreography that Resists: Stillness, Dance, and the Tactics of Occupy,” for example, Owen David and Tara Willis (who hosted “Dance and the Occupy Movement,” an on-going forum hosted by Movement Research), argue that “the sustained presence of bodies not ‘going anywhere’ or ‘doing anything’ ruptures imperatives of hypermobile capitalism through a kinaesthesia of stillness.”³⁷⁰ Such a take draws on what André Lepecki refers to as the ‘slower ontology’ of dance, which mobilizes moments of stalled movement, stumbling, or non-action to produce an alternative mode of perception through non-passive stillness, withdrawal, or silence.³⁷¹ Subverting the notion of dance as a realm of bodily exertion, movement, vitality, strength, and commitment amounts, for Lepecki, to an act of resistance which undermines “the general economy of mobility that informs, supports, and reproduces the ideological formations of late capitalist modernity.”³⁷² Because dance is, necessarily, embodied, in response to the perceived redundancy of the body in the productive process

³⁶⁹ Kunst, *Artist at Work*, 109.

³⁷⁰ Owen David and Tara Willis, “Choreography that Resists: Stillness, Dance, and the Tactics of Occupy” presented at the *UC Dance Studies Graduate Student Conference, Dance Under Construction (DUC)*, University of California, Los Angeles, April 19-21, 2013.

³⁷¹ Choreographers such as Xavier le Roy and Jerome Bel, for example, participate in a dismantling of dance through a disruption of ‘flow’, taking the form of ‘kinaesthetic stuttering’, ‘hiccupping’, the ‘deflation of movement’ or, at the extreme, total stillness, the dance of non-dance. It is relevant and interesting here, however, that this disavowal of movement in dance (the ‘act’ of *not* dancing), has symbolic power in this instance only when performed by one who *can* dance. See André Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* (London: Routledge, 2006).

³⁷² Lepecki, 16.

(ie. in the factory), dance itself is enacted as a site of loss. Interpreting Cote's non-working workers as engaged in just this sort of 'still dance' opens up a wider critique of modern subjectivity and the current state of labor under late capitalism.

Real Subsumption and the Idle Viewer

These moments of stillness and non-work are perhaps the most poignant in the show. And yet they are far from empty, containing a tension that forces viewers to recalibrate their own sense of time in relation to these stoppages and suspensions. When asked how she interprets these scenes of seeming non-productivity which break the regular rhythm of fabrication so carefully cultivated in the exhibition, Stratton described the intermittent moments of repose as productively disruptive ones. In their out-of-placeness, she suggests, they work against the documentary tone of the films as a whole, situating the viewer more clearly in a fictional *poetic* space.³⁷³ She describes these "reflections on the down times" as the "necessary negative space required to fully understand the time of labor."³⁷⁴ They also heightened viewers' attention to the diverse temporalities and rhythms featured throughout *In Time* in relation to their own temporal orientation. Indeed, these idle characters would have reflected the experience of the museum visitor, who by all appearances would have also been simply sitting or standing still for extended durations, consuming leisure while 'producing nothing:' in the space of the exhibition they would be a seeming mirror image of the lounging and wandering characters in Côté's film. As such, *In Time* reflected the complexities of these various relationships—between the (absent) laboring body in the factory and its (slow)

³⁷³ Interview with Shannon Stratton, see Kirsty Robertson, Stephanie Grace Anderson, Shannon Stratton, "Time and Time Again: A Conversation," Paper presented at *Running With Concepts: The Choreographic*, Blackwood Gallery, Mississauga, September 16-18, 2016.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

consumption by visitors in the space of the museum, between material and immaterial labor, action and inaction, labor and agency, and leisure and work (or leisure *as* labor). The viewer was incited to ask: Where does production begin and end in the space of *In Time*? If for Roberts the cinema (and, by extension in this case, the museum) is the 'imaginary opposite to the factory as a condition of the audience's liberation from waged labour,' how might this relation be complicated in a time when capitalist relations are tending toward the subsumption of "all aspects of social production and reproduction, the entire realm of life"?³⁷⁵

Importantly, in these interludes the characters in *Joy of Man's Desiring* not only rest and wander, but *actively* reflect on their relationship to work, discussing (either out loud to themselves or with one another) the time relationship between body, labor, materials, objects, and value, their fears, anxieties, and desires. In other words, in these 'down times' the workers *speak*, embodying Roberts' argument that, "Labour has to stop before it can be represented, that is, before workers are able to establish the conditions for their own autonomous speech."³⁷⁶ During an extended monologue with distinct religious overtones, the 'unemployed woman' prays for work that gives her 'strength and courage,' that provides her with purpose, and that allows her to feed her daughter. She covets the job of a 'depressed worker' who feels trapped and unfulfilled by his own role in the

³⁷⁵ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000): 275.

³⁷⁶ Roberts writes: "Workers speak – as workers – insofar as they are *not* working, namely striking. That is, the strike at the factory allows Godard to abandon naturalism, inviting the workers (who are played by unemployed actors in the film) to direct their demands and grievances directly to camera, in neo-Brechtian style. If he had staged this at the point of production itself, with workers stopping their labour to speak directly to the camera it would have likely turned the action into the equivalent of a revue, familiar from the comedic anti-naturalistic break in action in a musical, in which the actor switches, with light-hearted and implausible dexterity, from one activity to the next. So, in *Tout Va Bien* the representation of labour – of the capital-labour relation – begins precisely when the labour of the factory has stopped. Consequently, we might say, the representation of the factory begins, or can begin, once we no longer see the factory working, when the production of value is interrupted." John Roberts, "The Missing Factory," n.p.

workforce. Through their reflections on different experiences of work and non-work, Côté's characters epitomize a highly ambiguous relation to work under conditions in which their internalized desire and practical need for employment are paired with a disillusionment about the nature of their positions, or, for many, their complete redundancy in the workplace. They embody the contemporary tension between the liberatory potential of automation proposed by thinkers like Nick Srnicek and Helen Hester,³⁷⁷ and the subjective experience of ungroundedness and lack of purpose that Richard Sennett notes has accompanied the changing terrain of work in 'the new capitalism,' in which "large numbers of people are set free of routine tasks only to find themselves useless or underused economically, especially in the context of the global labor supply"³⁷⁸ Between slow making and slow viewing, the dominant frame of acceleration as a means of understanding the temporalities of late capitalism is challenged.

Through foregrounding ambiguity—communicated especially by Côté's characters' intense and unwavering commitment to what becomes clear is an untenable set of aspirations—I argue that *In Time* participates in what I will call an 'undoing' and 'exhausting' of the ideology of work itself, using temporal frameworks to reveal the contradictions and structural paradoxes in which it is imbricated. If the mass ornament represented, for Kracauer, the embodiment of the "entire contemporary situation,"³⁷⁹ and functioned at least in part as aesthetic distraction for the exploited blue-collar masses (as

³⁷⁷ See Nick Srnicek and Helen Hester, *After Work: The Politics of Free Time* (Verso, publication pending) and Nick Srnicek, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work* (Verso, 2015).

³⁷⁸ Sennett, "The New Capitalism," 167. He argues, "The first is that the new capitalism is impoverishing the value of work. Becoming more flexible and short-term, work is ceasing to serve as a point of reference for defining durable personal purposes and a sense of self-worth: sociologically, work serves ever less as a forum for stable, sociable relations." Sennett, 162.

³⁷⁹ Interestingly enough, dance competition shows have absolutely exploded in number over the past decade, as crises in capitalism intensify. Coincidence?

he argues), the aesthetic impulse that has dominated the representation of work and labor in the last several decades features a contemporary productive machinery which for many fails to provide a sustainable ground for meaningful life—or a stable soundtrack, to follow the musical metaphor played out in this chapter and throughout *In Time*. Perhaps these moments, then, featuring bodies that are off-beat or out-of-sync, mirrored in the visitors’ own bodies, represent a faltering of the ideology of work as a structure for individual and collective meaning and subjectivity.

Failing to Recalibrate

I feel like we never talk anymore, you and me

~ Denis Côté, *Joy of Man’s Desiring*

The concept of recalibration, for Sharma, extends the reach of contemporary disciplinary regimes into what she calls the “biopolitical economy of time,” a concept she uses to refer to the diffuse modes of power that operate within these expanded terrains of production. However, she qualifies the term, specifying that its use as a concept must specify that the biopolitical economy of time is a *differential* one in which, “[e]xperiences of time are tied to inequitable horizons of political possibility,” both in order to overcome the generalities that pervade much theoretical inquiry into precarious labor conditions in the ‘new capitalism,’ (such as the privileging of the post-Fordist worker as the subject of contemporary struggles in much autonomist thought), and as a potential ground for a new form of common struggle.³⁸⁰ what she refers to as the “differential temporal struggles of the multitude” (drawing on Hardt and Negri’s use of the term to describe the new class

³⁸⁰ The endpoint of which is a demand for a social wage for all.

composition). Sharma writes:

the social factory is based on a multiplicity of speeds. However, where we locate the possibility for solidarity must come with recognition of the interdependent and relational politics of time, not just the inherent multiplicity of time immanent to the multitude. In a sense of time beyond measure or value, the new temporalities of biopolitical production are produced at the intersection of a range of social differences, some of which are old. Yet the social experience of time is not discrete. It is completely bound together in a rhythm of power.³⁸¹

With this multiplicity in mind, Sharma argues that, “[t]he new temporalities of biopolitical production that Hardt and Negri refer to cannot be reduced to a shared experience of time based on this sense of a 24/7 life, a tired global citizenry now made precarious,” but rather that they must “account more directly for time and, specifically, how the time of life is biopolitical, differentially managed, regulated, and experienced.”³⁸² To borrow one more term used by Sharma, *In Time* (and many of the other exhibitions referenced briefly at the outset of this chapter), layer and overlap different ‘time frames,’ showing up the ways in which they “devalue certain time practices and temporalities over others.”³⁸³ Bringing together what Sharma refers to as

³⁸¹ Sharma, “The Biopolitical Economy of Time,” 443.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 440.

³⁸³ Sharma argues: “The 24/7 time frame of Empire exceeds the office hours of 9 to 5 and the three shifts of the factory. However, time frames are not epochs, they occur simultaneously. Time frames are constructs that make claims upon time, which devalue certain time practices and temporalities over others. Time frames are materially produced and ideological. The 24/7 world depends upon its own set of factory hours, including sweatshops and call centers, flexible labor, immaterial labor, desk jockeys, and a host of other service staff and manual labor. As Bifo (2009) argues in *The Soul of Work*, the social factory is based on a multiplicity of speeds. However, where we locate the possibility for solidarity must come with recognition of the interdependent and relational politics of time, not just the inherent multiplicity of time immanent to the multitude. In a sense of time beyond measure or value, the new temporalities of biopolitical production are produced at the intersection of a range of social differences, some of which are old. Yet the social experience of time is not discrete. It is completely bound together in a rhythm of power.” Sharma, 442-443.

‘invested bodies and divested bodies’ within a disharmonious yet aesthetically united spatio-temporal environment, *In Time* created a space that embodied the differential economy of time.³⁸⁴ In a time when the glorification of work, ambition, and 24/7 hyper-productivity rubs uncomfortably (often painfully) against the prevalence of precarious labor conditions and general instability under late capitalism, the perspectives presented throughout *In Time* thus presented a picture of the contradictory expectations, opportunities, and experiences that underlie the increasing generalization of precarity, even as vast systemic inequalities persist.

³⁸⁴ Although questions remain for me here about the dynamic between a political commentary and its aesthetic experience.

CHAPTER THREE

UNDEAD POTTERY: DEATH AND REVIVAL IN THE SELF-REFLEXIVE PRACTICES OF CONTEMPORARY BRITISH CERAMICS

*No empire lasts forever. The world turns, and new ones take its place. And if, in the revolutions of time and events, a country should be found whose Porcelain and Earthenware are vended on cheaper terms than those of the Potteries of Britain ... thither will flock all the Earthenware Dealers; and neither fleets, nor armies, nor any other human power, would prevent the present flourishing Borough of Stoke-upon-Trent sharing the fate of its once proud predecessors in Phoenicia, in Greece, and in Italy.*³⁸⁵

~ Simeon Shaw, *The Chemistry of Pottery* (1837)

I open this chapter with a work that in many ways falls neatly within the previous one, consisting of the performative enactment of the repetitive gestures of factory work. In a secluded corner of the 2017 British Ceramics Biennial (Stoke-On-Trent, England, 2017), a lone woman sat at an elevated table repeatedly crafting small, precisely rendered, porcelain flowers. Somewhat perplexingly, however, after each one was meticulously completed, flower after flower was thrown into a series of scrap piles arranged in a row at her feet. By the end of the performance, several large mounds of

³⁸⁵ Simeon Shaw, *The Chemistry of the Several Natural and Artificial Heterogeneous Compounds Used in Manufacturing Porcelain, Glass, and Pottery* (1837): 535. Quoted in the film *Ceramics: A Fragile History* (David Vincent, BBC, 2012).

now crumbling clay blooms had accumulated on the low platforms, where they would remain throughout the festival.

The work, fittingly titled simply *FACTORY* (Fig.1), was a collaboration between ceramic artist Neil Brownsword and Rita Floyd, a former china flower maker for the iconic Spode ceramics factory in Stoke-On-Trent.³⁸⁶ As the didactics in the space conveyed, china flower making is “one of the few methods of mass production that relies completely upon the dexterity of the hand,” and, like many of the works discussed in the previous chapter, the speed and dexterity with which Rita accomplished her task is a testament to generations of specialized embodied skills and knowledge central to ceramics production. Unlike the works discussed in the previous chapter, however, *FACTORY* is site-specific in a way that tinged the work with both an emotional layer and a contextual specificity quite different from *In Time*'s dislocation of the labor of the factory into the gallery space. For, as I will discuss below, the BCB itself is located within the former Spode factory—disused since its closure in 2008 as a result of global

³⁸⁶ The full work includes collaborations with four former factory workers who were at one time employed by Spode. As described in the didactic text: “James Adams was employed as a modeller and mould-maker at numerous factories including Wedgwood. Plaster moulds revolutionized the industrialisation of ceramics in Britain in the 18th century, and to this day continue to be the ‘tools’ for mass production. As a regenerative gesture, Adams re-moulds and repairs materials and objects found discarded at the former Spode factory, using methods which digital technology has largely replaced.” Paul Holdway worked as a master engraver for over 40 years at the former Spode factory until its closure. “Copper plate engraving for ceramic print remains a process which is very rarely used today in the industry, and Holdway’s knowledge of its history and practice is unsurpassed. He has researched and successfully reproduced methods developed by early 18th century pioneers of ceramic print for mass production, such as ‘glue bat printing’ and ‘pluck and dust’. During *FACTORY*, Holdway tissue transferred print from a copper plate specially commissioned by Brownsword which cites historic precedents developed through this early technology.” Anthony Challiner worked, since the age of 15, as a china painter at factories including Royal Doulton and Spode. “He is amongst the last of a generation of china painters in Stoke-on-Trent, whose profession has gradually been displaced by the changing tide of fashion, and by ceramic print technologies for mass production. Throughout *FACTORY* Challiner continued the tradition of portraying picturesque decay, evident in many examples of 18th century English ceramics. Yet the ruins that grace the back of discarded plates salvaged from Challiner’s former place of work, are not the archetypal scenes from the Grand Tour, but those which document aspects of industrial transition in North Staffordshire.” See didactic materials from the presentation of *FACTORY* at the Gyeonggi International Ceramic Biennial (GICB), Icheon, South Korea, May 2017, https://www.britishcouncil.kr/sites/default/files/neil_brownsword-pren-compressed.pdf

economic forces that have similarly impacted many traditional manufacturing industries across the UK, and since transformed into a multi-purpose arts venue. In this space, Rita's performance gains new resonance. As Brownsword describes it, the enactment of her former working practices are framed, here, as a 're-orchestration' of now endangered skills of which she may very well be the last generation to hold, and as a 'reclamation' of the obsolete space of the Spode factory as a site of ceramic production once again, "providing an intimate space for the audience to witness the rhythmic intricacies of touch evident in her craft."³⁸⁷ In this sense, *FACTORY* could be interpreted as a sort of resurrection of redundant working gestures, and Rita's act of making as a stubbornly defiant one. However, as the exhibition text pointed out, "this point of passive spectatorial consumption is immediately disrupted by Brownsword's simple instruction for Rita to discard whatever she makes. The linear deposit of waste forms that gradually accrues in the gallery space, becomes a provocative metaphor for the failure to protect an important aspect of intangible heritage."³⁸⁸

I begin with this work (to which I will return) because it encapsulates a set of attitudes and preoccupations that have emerged with increasing frequency in contemporary British ceramic art, dominated by heavily melancholic reflections on the decline of industry across the UK. Like *FACTORY*, the majority of these artistic responses are centered around the industrial pottery district of Stoke-On-Trent, England, which has historically been the epicenter of British ceramic production and is thus the site where its decline is most materially and symbolically significant. In its didactic framing, *FACTORY* mirrors the swift oscillation(s) between optimism and defeat that

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

characterize the recent representation of Stoke, while also reflecting on the ways that these dual narratives are mediated through the language of preservation and revival, and transformed through creative practice.

With these themes in mind, this chapter explores the memories, histories, and contradictions underlying the pervasive nostalgia that frames Stoke-On-Trent, through analysis of works by a selection of contemporary ceramic artists responding to its decline. Through their use of a shared (and officially encouraged) method of ‘industrial archaeology,’ I propose that these examples of recent artistic production represent a model of ‘self-reflexive craft’ which, by directly incorporating or otherwise referencing historical modes of production and their objects—either as subject, content or form—constitute a meta-archive of the cultural, aesthetic, and socio-economic transition which frames the medium of ceramics, both locally and on a broader international scale, pointing most significantly to the complex relationship between nostalgia and economic regeneration in a context of (post)industrial restructuring. How do visceral and poetic discourses about hauntings, spectres, traces and ruins—the ‘felt’ and embodied experiences of place, identity, and memory—intersect with the ‘cold’ analysis of broad economic restructuring, nation branding, and globalisation? Through mournful expressions of loss, fragmentation, and death, the artists discussed here facilitate analysis of the ways in which social anxieties about globalisation, deindustrialisation, labor, skill, art, and identity (both personal and national) are played out through the medium of ceramics, showing the way contemporary artists participate in the local reimagining of an industry in transition. At the same time, their functioning within the official strategies for post-industrial economic regeneration in Stoke, and its paradoxical incorporation of

nostalgia for a ‘lost’ culture of industrial ceramic production, points to the often contradictory positioning of arts-based approaches to community revitalization, even where critical perspectives are presented. Particularly when considered in relation to the historical tension between studio and industrial production, these recent developments in ceramic practice highlight the messy web of interrelations which have long structured this relationship and continue to impact the cultural positioning of the medium.

THE ‘LOST CITY’ OF STOKE-ON-TRENT: BRITISH CERAMICS, DEINDUSTRIALIZATION AND COLLECTIVE MOURNING

In a 1931 treatise entitled “The Meaning of Art,” the English art critic Herbert Read argued that the art of pottery is “so fundamental, so bound up with the elementary needs of civilisation, that a national ethos must find its expression in the medium,” further urging that one should “Judge the art of a country, judge the fineness of its sensibility, by its pottery...”³⁸⁹ There are few places in the contemporary world where this lofty nationalistic investment in the medium rings more true than in Britain’s industrial pottery district of Stoke-On-Trent, Staffordshire (Fig. 3-5). So intrinsically tied to the ceramic industry that it has become known simply as “The Potteries,”³⁹⁰ Stoke-On-Trent was historically the centre of British ceramic production and innovation, world renowned as the home of such iconic manufactories as Wedgwood, Royal Doulton, Minton, Carleton Ware, and Spode, producers of wares that have become deeply associated with the very

³⁸⁹ Herbert Read, *The Meaning of Art* (England: Clays Ltd, 1972), 42.

³⁹⁰ Incidentally, the reverse is also true – “Staffordshire” is a metonym for British pottery generally.

heart of English national identity.³⁹¹ Indeed, the political, socio-economic, and symbolic importance of ceramics to the history of Britain at large is synthesized in a 2010 episode of the BBC radio series “The History of the World in 100 Objects,” in which an early Victorian stoneware tea set made by Wedgwood (perhaps the most internationally recognized of the above-mentioned brands), currently held in the collection of the British Museum, is used to evoke a complex narrative of global trade and imperial history.³⁹² The broadcast traces the seemingly innocent domestic vessels through a network of relations that extended far beyond the home, factory, and even Britain itself, setting them in relation to the politics of nineteenth-century empire, the growth of mass production and consumption, the re-shaping of agriculture across continents, and the movement of goods within a world-wide shipping industry.³⁹³

Although I cannot outline in detail the centuries-long colonial history underlying the ceramic (and closely related tea) trades from the 17th century to the present day, an understanding of the local and national importance of ceramic production (and in particular the brands centered in Stoke) is vital for any analysis of the contemporary artistic practices and perspectives explored in this chapter. Importantly, wares such as Spode’s historical Blue Italian line and Wedgwood’s iconic blue-and-white jasperware (often featuring classical motifs or countryside scenes) have long had a strong association with elite British identity. Originally quite expensive and labor-intensive to produce,

³⁹¹ Most people will recognize the iconic blue and white motifs of Spode and Wedgwood ceramics, which became incredibly popular in the nineteenth century, and have been widely collected, reproduced and appropriated as national symbols, both domestically and internationally.

³⁹² *The History of the World in 100 Objects*, Episode 92, Neil MacGregor, BBC/The British Museum, 2010. Notably, the episode calls into question the very Britishness of the iconic sign of British identity by de-centering the narrative of the British Empire and the history of innovation in British ceramics, a point which will be important to the concluding arguments made in this chapter. See also the British Museum’s teaching guide based on the episode: http://www.teachinghistory100.org/objects/about_the_object/wedgwood_tea_set.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*

since their emergence in the 18th century they were widely marketed to the elite (including being popular among royalty), and were given frequently as diplomatic gifts to foreign leaders and diplomats due in part to their ideological power as a symbol of British national superiority over competing ceramic wares, most notably those made in China (which had dominated the global market for ceramics until the 18th century and whose much coveted porcelain led to a race throughout Europe to reproduce the recipe). The inextricability of the history of ceramics and the history of tea complicates this story even further, and implicates British pottery in, for example the Opium Wars between China's Qing dynasty and Western powers in the mid-nineteenth century which, among their many consequences, effectively guaranteed Britain's monopoly of the global market for ceramics (the BBC notes that it was exactly at the conclusion of the Opium Wars that their Wedgwood tea set was produced, juxtaposing, not accidentally, the symbol of British luxury with China's defeat).³⁹⁴

Besides their role in Britain's geopolitical manoeuvring, British ceramics were also powerful ideological forces domestically—beginning in the 18th century luxury tableware and decorative ceramics by the big names were marketed widely to an emerging Bourgeoisie aspiring to elite social status. Later, due largely to pioneering technologies by Josiah Wedgwood which facilitated more efficient and less expensive

³⁹⁴ The BBC episode contextualizes this relationship in some depth: “Since China did not offer a market for manufactured goods from Europe, Britain could only meet the demand for tea by exporting silver bullion to China, which resulted in a trade deficit. At the same time, the demand for opium by the Chinese was also on the rise. The British seized the opportunity and promoted the opium trade in order to pay for the import of Chinese tea, at the same time rendering India, where opium was produced, an even more highly profitable colony. In 1839, concerned at the growing numbers addicted to the drug, the Chinese imperial government began to impose a bond on foreign suppliers banning all import of opium. This led to the outbreak of the First Opium War, which lasted until 1842. The British victory resulted in the resumption of the opium trade, the opening up of China to British and European commercial interests and the acquisition of Hong Kong as a British colony. It was precisely in this period that the Wedgwood tea set was manufactured.” “Teaching History With 100 Objects,” *The British Museum*, http://www.teachinghistory100.org/objects/about_the_object/wedgwood_tea_set

production—combined with a drop in the price of tea between the 1760s and the 1830s—serving wares and tea sets were increasingly marketed to the working class. The drinking of tea was considered by the ruling elite as a form of ‘training’ in the ways of polite society, and as a mode of reigning in the working masses, among whom alcohol consumption was increasingly seen as a public and moral ill that required intervention. According to the BBC program:

By 1900 every person in Britain was, on average, getting through a staggering three kilos of tea a year. The ruling classes had an interest in promoting tea-drinking among the industrial urban population, who were poor, vulnerable to disease, and thought to be given to disorderly drunkenness. Beer, port and gin had all become a significant part of the diet of men, women and even children, largely because alcohol as a mild antiseptic was much safer to drink than the unpurified city water. Religious leaders and temperance movements joined together to proclaim the merits of tea. A cup of sweet, milky tea made with boiled water was healthy, cheap, energy-giving—and it didn't make you drunk. So in that way it was also a powerful instrument of social control.³⁹⁵

With the ubiquity of tea-drinking came a dramatically broadened market for pottery, and by the 19th century it is often said that there was barely a home in England that would not have had a piece of Stoke-made pottery.

The emphasis in the narrative of British ceramics told by the BBC’s Wedgwood tea set, however, remains largely on the sites of consumption and circulation. Within this

³⁹⁵ *The History of the World in 100 Objects*, Episode 92, Neil MacGregor, BBC/The British Museum, 2010.

grand global narrative, there is a surprising absence of the object of inquiry itself – the tea set as a material thing with its own personal history of material interactions. As such, the production process itself escapes attention. Looking at this history from the site of production, and with a focus on the recent history of Stoke-on-Trent itself, colors it somewhat differently. Stoke-On-Trent is in fact composed of six adjoining, once separate towns (Stoke-upon-Trent, Tunstall, Burslem, Hanley, Fenton and Longton), which were linked as a federation in 1910. The region as a whole has been long dominated by two primary industries: The North Staffordshire coalfield emerged as a key driver of the local economy in the thirteenth century, to be superseded by pottery as the heart of local production in the eighteenth century.³⁹⁶ At the height of production in the 19th century, the potteries of Stoke-On-Trent were at the epicenter of the world’s ceramic production, with upwards of 2,000 operational kilns producing millions of products a year, dominating not only British pottery (90% of which came from the town), but also the global market, producing 70% of exported ceramics worldwide.³⁹⁷

Since the 1970s, however, the once thriving industrial centre has been in steady decline, impacted heavily by broad economic shifts in the post-Thatcher era, some of which will be discussed in greater detail below. In the past 30 years alone, the UK's manufacturing sector has shrunk by two-thirds,³⁹⁸ coinciding with the deindustrialization and ‘dematerialization’ of broad swathes of the economy, orienting production away

³⁹⁶ Mark Jayne, “Culture That Works? Creative Industries Development in a Working Class City,” *Capital & Class* (Winter 2014): 200. See also Gordon MacLeod and Martin Jones, “Explaining ‘Brexit Capital’: Uneven Development and the Austerity State,” *Space and Polity*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (2018): 122.

³⁹⁷ David Nicholls, “All fired up: the future of pottery,” *The Telegraph*, 26 January 2011, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/lifestyle/interiors/8281433/All-fired-up-the-future-of-pottery.html>. See also Gordon MacLeod and Martin Jones, “Explaining ‘Brexit Capital’: Uneven Development and the Austerity State,” 122.

³⁹⁸ According to *The Guardian*, the UK has faced ‘the greatest deindustrialisation of any major nation.’ Aditya Chakraborty, “Why Britain doesn’t Make Things Anymore,” *The Guardian*, November 16, 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/business/2011/nov/16/why-britain-doesnt-make-things-manufacturing>.

from manufacturing and toward the service industries, digital technology, finance, and various ‘creativity-led’ industries in the shift to the ‘knowledge economy.’ Stoke has been hit hard by these developments. In the early 2000s a number of major pottery firms, including Wedgwood itself, lapsed into administration,³⁹⁹ largely due to the increasing necessity of outsourcing labour to Indonesia and China where production costs are lower, in addition to the displacement by advanced production technology of many of the traditional hand skills central to the industry.⁴⁰⁰ As a result, thousands of factory employees have been laid off and countless once bustling factories have been swiftly abandoned and left to stagnate, leaving behind a conspicuous landscape of decline. In 1948 around 79,000 people were employed in the North Staffordshire industry. By 2003 that number had dropped to 11,000, while the number of factories in the area has plummeted from 200 to roughly 30 since the 1970s.⁴⁰¹

The widespread anxiety caused by these developments cannot be overstated, and is exemplified by the public response to Stoke’s decline in the 90s and early 00s.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁹ According to the Guardian, “In 2009 the Irish-owned Waterford Wedgwood went into administration and the buildings looked destined for the wrecker’s ball. Then an American private equity company, KPS Capital Partners, stepped in and invested in contemporary designs. Waterford Wedgwood Royal Doulton has since been sold again for £280m to Fiskars, a Finnish heritage brand.” Vanessa Thorpe, “Now Bake Off is ending, the next hot craze is about to come out of the oven...” *The Guardian*, October 3, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/oct/03/great-british-pottery-throw-down-television>.

⁴⁰⁰ On 23 April 2009, Portmeirion Potteries Ltd purchased (the brands) Royal Worcester and Spode brands, after they had been placed into administration the previous November. See the *Stoke Sentinel*, <http://www.stokesentinel.co.uk/Stoke-kilns-fired-Spode/story-12520079-detail/story.html>. Waterford Wedgwood went into administration in 2009, but was subsequently revived by a US-based private equity company, KPS Capital Partners, who updated designs, catering to new sectors such as more accessible home décor, and advertised the brand internationally, “particularly Asia, where the quintessential English design resonates strongly.” In 2015, Waterford Wedgwood Royal Doulton (WWRD) was sold again, going for £280million to Finnish heritage brand Fiskars. See Bethan Ryder, “For the Love of Crocks...the British Ceramics Revival,” *The Telegraph*, July 16, 2015, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/11743826/For-the-love-of-crocks...-the-British-ceramics-revival.html>.

⁴⁰¹ David Nicholls, “All fired up: the future of pottery,” *The Telegraph*, January 26, 2011, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/lifestyle/interiors/8281433/All-fired-up-the-future-of-pottery.html>.

⁴⁰² See for example the 2011 four-part BBC series “Ceramics: A Fragile History,” part of the larger series *Handmade in Britain*, a year-long season exploring the history of British decorative arts, reflecting the preoccupation with hand-skill in a transitional post-industrial climate.

Books such as Matthew Rice's, *The Lost City of Stoke-On-Trent* (2010) and A.N. Wilson's article "Why I Weep for Wedgwood," (2009) are characteristic of the highly sentimental and emotional rhetoric that has permeated popular accounts of the 'death' of the iconic industry, going so far as to liken its demise to the death of England itself,⁴⁰³ and its landscape to the "ruined empire" of Pompeii.⁴⁰⁴ In spite of a lean toward the hyperbolic, these accounts make evident the profound social, cultural and psychological impact of the disappearance of the indigenous industry, especially for those whose personal, familial and community identities are intrinsically tied to the potteries. For unlike Pompeii, Stoke's heyday of ceramics production is still within living memory. Wilson writes: "They used to say that people had slip in their veins instead of blood. That's what we were, we were potters."⁴⁰⁵ As such, in the early years of this century an aura of pessimism seemed to have settled over Stoke, described with a sense of inevitability as a "wonderland of post-industrial dereliction."⁴⁰⁶

Indeed, the physical constitution of Stoke lends itself to such a characterization, exacerbating the tendency toward the melancholic. The industrial heritage is built into its very fabric, evident not only in the distinctive industrial buildings and now impotent smokestacks which define the Staffordshire skyline, but, it has been noted, permeates the very grounds of the six towns, visible in the gaping holes left by the extraction of local

⁴⁰³ The local newspaper *The Sentinel* led with the headline 'Wedgwood: Worldwide pottery icon can't just disappear', echoing the words of Mark Meredith, elected mayor of Stoke-on-Trent in 2009, who issued the following statement: 'Wedgwood is a worldwide symbol of the design and manufacturing skills of our people, and we must not allow that to disappear.' Charlotte Higgins, "British Ceramics Biennial brings signs of a Potteries revival" *The Guardian*, October 2, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2011/oct/02/british-ceramics-biennial-potteries-stoke>.

⁴⁰⁴ "City Left in Ruins Like Pompeii," *Stoke Sentinel*, <http://www.stokesentinel.co.uk/City-left-ruins-like-Pompeii/story-13580653-detail/story.html>.

⁴⁰⁵ A.N. Wilson, "Why I Weep for Wedgwood," *Daily Mail*, January 9, 2009, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1111164/Why-I-weep-Wedgwood.html>.

⁴⁰⁶ Margaret Drabble, "Absurdly Grandiose...and Splendid," *The Spectator*, October 9, 2010, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/absurdly-grandiose-and-splendid->.

clay, in heaps of discarded wares, and in the shraff-ridden earth which the city is literally built upon.⁴⁰⁷ These material traces of past activity have generated, for many, a palpable sense that the “...once-great industrial heartland lives with the ghosts of its former glories,”⁴⁰⁸ and in a sense it is these ghosts who are the primary protagonists of the intricate and sometimes contradictory narratives that have been woven around Stoke. For, rather than being laid to rest and forgotten, Stoke’s ghosts have been conjured in various circumstances and with diverse interests over the past decade, reanimated by an increasing number of contemporary artists who, amidst the pervasive atmosphere of loss and decline, have begun to actively engage with the deteriorating urban landscape and physical by-products (abandoned buildings, redundant factory equipment, ceramic shards, and other obsolete material) of the renowned ceramic district, incorporating these into new works. Focusing on these remains and discards offers an entirely different perspective on the ceramic industry from the finished products themselves as exemplified by the BBC’s Wedgwood tea set and many others like it featured in museums across England and beyond – a perspective from the point of production through objects denied lives as commodities. They speak more intimately of local and individual narratives, and present a counter-narrative to the celebratory ‘high style’ pieces, emitting instead an atmosphere of melancholy, death, and decline. However, they also do more than this, as the impulse to compulsively eulogize and resuscitate the traditional potteries and their constitutive histories and skills is itself a symbolic, ideological, and productive force in contemporary Stoke.

⁴⁰⁷ Grant Gibson, “The Kilning Fields,” *Crafts Magazine*, no. 211 (2008), 26.

⁴⁰⁸ “City Left in Ruins Like Pompeii,” *Stoke Sentinel*, <http://www.stokesentinel.co.uk/City-left-ruins-like-Pompeii/story-13580653-detail/story.html>.

RE-ANIMATING DEAD THINGS: AN ANXIOUS META-ARCHIVE

Ceramic artist Neil Brownsword has, since the early 2000s, been at the forefront of the trends in ceramic practices traced throughout this chapter, in large part, I believe, because his own biography is co-extensive with the changes that have taken place in Stoke since the 1970s. As a native of North Staffordshire his work is underwritten by a keen awareness of the omnipresence of ceramic manufacture in and around his hometown, and as such he approaches the area and its history as a local, through the lens of embodied memory and experience.⁴⁰⁹ As a result, his personal biography features heavily in the discursive framing of his work in a way that exemplifies the sentimental, memory-heavy practices that have become central in the rhetorical framing of the town's potteries generally (to be discussed below). Indeed, interviews with, and profiles of, the artist often 'set the scene' for the interpretation of his work with his personal remembrances of playing in the area as a child, surrounded by the landscape of hundreds of years of industrial activity in which vestiges and remnants of ceramic history could be (and often were) unearthed in one's own garden.⁴¹⁰ In this, Brownsword's work helps to set up the atmosphere and impression of Stoke as a place where the industrial history and subsequent transformations of production have a real material presence in the intimate personal lives of Stoke's inhabitants. For Brownsword, as for many residents of North Staffordshire and surrounding areas, the ubiquity of ceramic manufacture is tied to much more than the material remains that characterize the landscape of Stoke, and is enhanced by deep-rooted personal and familial memories encoded in their fabric. As such, the

⁴⁰⁹ Brownsword quoted in Grant Gibson, "The Kilning Fields," in *Crafts Magazine*, no. 211 (2008), 26.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

sharing of personal narratives, Brownsword's among them, is a primary component of the artist's practice.

Beyond growing up in the area, Brownsword's own family has a long history of being employed by the ceramic industry. As he remembers growing up: "It was the key employer in the area. The mining industry had just died a death. The steel industry was dying but ceramics was surviving."⁴¹¹ Brownsword's's grandmother worked as a lithographer and hand-painter at factories such as Spode and Carleton Ware, and his uncles, cousins, and brother are still involved in the business to this day. His most direct experience of the potteries, however, derived from his own apprenticeship for Wedgwood as a sixteen-year-old boy working as a model-maker in the infamous factory. Here, he gained intimate knowledge of the working processes employed there, and his subsequent descriptions of the experience invariably emphasize the hand-skills, material consciousness, and embodied knowledge required by the pottery worker, even in an 'industrial' setting. As he recalls in an interview with Grant Gibson: "It was all hand-crafted, you know, turning objects. Pans on a lathe. Pan-modelling stuff...More than often you made a lot of mistakes but it's that repetition, day in, day out, that knowledge of materials, that knowledge of skill..."⁴¹² Indeed, Brownsword emphasizes that the industrialisation of ceramics and the attendant segregation of labour, often lamented by defenders of pre-industrial artisanal labour, in fact brought about a remarkable level of specialist skills and knowledge specific to the regions of North Staffordshire, passed down through generations of potters.⁴¹³

⁴¹¹ Brownsword quoted in Gibson, "The Kilning Fields," 26.

⁴¹² Ibid.

⁴¹³ Ibid.

These personal perspectives offer a counterpoint to the oft-cited viewpoints presented, for example, by those involved with the Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain from the 1880s and their (often highly moralizing) concern about the effects of industrialization on design and traditional craft. Brownsword's demystification of industrial ceramic manufacture in Stoke-on-Trent challenges the binary distinction between artisanal and industrial production, emphasizing instead hybrid practices of making which combined the efficiency of mass production techniques with the 'personal touch' of the hand, and in which deeply embodied knowledge and skills remained central. In doing so, they also serve to underscore the contemporary anxiety—as expressed in the opinions cited above—about the loss of these centuries of accumulated expertise represented here by Stoke, endangered by the relocation of production and investment in advanced production technology, both of which threaten to make such intergenerational hand-skills in the UK largely redundant.⁴¹⁴ As such, Brownsword has devoted a substantial part of his practice to *preserving* the fast disappearing landscape of Stoke and its attendant skills and methods, ironically attempting to foster appreciation for the cultural heritage of the potteries through the very remnants of their demise by 'mining' Stoke's industrial heritage for (physical) traces of 'the hand.'

An archaeological impulse is at the heart of much of Brownsword's practice, appropriate to the work of salvage and preservation in which he is invested.⁴¹⁵ As noted, the physical constitution of Stoke lends itself to this type of endeavour, containing layers

⁴¹⁴ In 1948 there were approximately 79,000 people working in the North Staffordshire pottery industry, a number which declined to around 11,000 by 2003. Gibson, "The Kilning Fields," 30.

⁴¹⁵ Richard Moss, "Neil Brownsword gets Re-Apprenticed at the British Ceramics Biennial," *Culture24*, October 5, 2015, <http://www.culture24.org.uk/art/ceramics-and-craft/art538547-neil-brownsword-gets-re-apprenticed-at-the-british-ceramics-biennial>

of meaning ripe for interpretation by an attuned scavenger.⁴¹⁶ Indeed ceramics themselves have long been viewed from an archaeological standpoint, tying the medium closely to memory work and the reconstruction of the past, both real and imagined. As Paul Mathieu asserts:

...due to specific material properties, ceramics is not just a physical material or even a cultural material, but it remains, as it has always been, an archival material. The ceramics we now make will last a long, long time. They will be witness to and evidence of our time. Ceramics contains and preserves time itself and as such it is the memory of humankind.⁴¹⁷

In Stoke-on-Trent, the material excesses of historical production—the medium-specific tools left in disuse and the architectural spaces left empty by the mass exodus of ceramic manufacture from the area—can all be read as an index of historical transition. However as these objects are accumulated and combined into new objects, their archival function shifts. For some of his early works, Brownsword gathered ‘artefacts’ from redundant factories – turnings, saddles, sponges, block bands, thimbles, plugs, saggars, wasters, unfired scraps of clay, props and spurs made to support objects in the kiln, and other remnants of the labour process, as well as obsolete manufacturing technologies exhumed from building foundations in Stoke.⁴¹⁸ Some of these he then directly combined or bonded together, collage-style, into fused sculpture-like objects. Others he (over-)fired in ways that transformed and reinvigorated these ‘dead’ materials into new and creative

⁴¹⁶ Glenn Adamson, “Neil Brownsword: Up From the Ashes,” in *Ceramics, Art and Perception*, Vol. 73, No. 1 (2004), 68.

⁴¹⁷ Paul Mathieu, “How to Write Critically about Ceramics,” *Ceramics Monthly*, Vol. 58, No. 7 (2010), 80.

⁴¹⁸ Brownsword quoted in Gibson, “The Kilning Fields,” 28.

amalgams.⁴¹⁹ Sometimes too, spaces left empty through the labour process, such as emptied ware boxes or plate packages, were cast and fired, giving permanence to the voids left by various working processes.⁴²⁰ Combining physically and symbolically charged traces of generations of makers, the resultant objects resonate with memory and experience, enhanced by their pairing with video interviews with former pottery workers from Stoke. With titles such as “Relic,” “Elegy,” and “Salvage Series,” (Fig. 6-15) these works serve a dual function of rescuing and preserving for posterity the discarded and fragmented relics of an endangered culture of labour, while simultaneously eulogizing their collapse into redundancy.

It is notable that Brownsword’s emphasis on the discarded, damaged, or instrumental objects of production is concomitant with a rejection of the types of sanitized, ‘high style,’ and technically perfect objects displayed in the growing number of museums devoted to products of the potteries, objects in which any evidence of human contact was considered imperfection.⁴²¹ Such objects as showcased in museum contexts generally consist of the ‘best’ examples representing the rise and peak of British ceramic manufacture under standards of technical perfection—true to the ideal imagined by Josiah Wedgwood himself when he grandly stated that he would “make machines out of men.”⁴²² According to Brownsword, in these showpieces the origins of the object as a thing that has been moulded, handled, shaped, and manipulated at various stages by human hands is obscured by the veneer of ‘finish.’ As such, the official history of British

⁴¹⁹ See also Whiting, *Poet of Residue*, 1.

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

⁴²¹ Brownsword quoted in Gibson, “The Kilning Fields,” 30.

⁴²² Wedgwood is known for having made radical advancements in assembly line production that foreshadowed Ford’s own developments in the US. Llewellynn Frederick William Jewitt, *The Wedgwoods: being a life of Josiah Wedgwood: with notices of his works and their productions, memoirs of the Wedgwood and other families, and a history of the early potteries of Staffordshire* (London: Virtue Brothers, 1865), 22.

pottery as generally represented in the museum is as bereft of signs of the labour process as the final objects themselves.

Rather ironically, however, the same high standards that produced such exquisite models of dehumanized technical perfection, also resulted in spades of their opposite—tons of waste, castoffs, and rejected wares deemed ‘not-good-enough’ for circulation by industrial standards which sought erasure of the human hand. By highlighting the beauty in these unique, individual pieces, Brownsword’s work contains an immanent critique of the systems of value which structure both cultural institutions and commodity culture.⁴²³ The broken shards and other inadvertent products of Wedgwood’s demand for perfection thus offer a counter-history of the ceramic industry—a perspective from the point of production through objects denied lives as commodities. They speak more intimately of local and individual narratives, and emit an atmosphere of melancholy, death, and decline. For Brownsword, the trace of a fingerprint impressed in clay remains an evocative trace of the hand, a lingering vestige of an individual and their labour. The remnants of production speak of the “haste of repetition” and provide traces of specific actions and processes of individual judgment, improvisation, material command and timing vital to the success of a piece.⁴²⁴ Broken shards and imperfect, rejected objects tossed away speak of the accidental, imperfection and fallibility – human attributes the likes of which are often invisible in the final commodity. These are the truly unique products of standardised mass production, omitting an aura of direct contact with the past. In this, they resonate with Tim Edenser’s writings about the power of ruins and

⁴²³ Brownsword quoted in Gibson, “The Kilning Fields,” 30.

⁴²⁴ Whiting, *Poet of Residue*, 1

remains as potent sites where the visible and invisible intersect, full of signs that they are haunted. He writes:

Following the ghosts enables us to identify the traces of the forgotten people and places, and in so doing we are able to form alternative stories and memories about neglected areas of history. We can construct different accounts to the official and academic descriptions of Historians and the Heritage industry, accounts that are far from seamless but connect the sensuous, evocative traces that we stumble across.⁴²⁵

For Brownsword, appropriating these objects considered “trivial by-products of production”⁴²⁶ provides a way of excavating the “anonymous human agency and tacit and inherited knowledge”⁴²⁷ that they encode. Incidentally, as technology improves and production is outsourced, even these discarded shards are bound for extinction.⁴²⁸

Although seemingly intensely personal, in many ways the type of sentimental rhetoric that frames these works and their repeated invocation of ‘the hand’ as a site of authenticity and personal encounter falls very much within a larger history of nostalgic and melancholic responses to encroaching social, cultural and economic change. The impulse toward emphasizing human labour and skill is merely one instantiation of a larger cultural preoccupation in the post-industrial world with issues relating to deskilling, dematerialisation, and the ‘decline of the hand,’ concerns which have particular relevance within the realm of contemporary craft. The current climate of

⁴²⁵ Tim Edensor, “Traces,” *British Industrial Ruins* (Manchester Metropolitan University, 2002), http://www.sci-eng.mmu.ac.uk/british_industrial_ruins/traces.asp, December 5, 2011. See also Edensor, “Haunting in the Ruins: Matter and Immateriality,” *Space and Culture* 11, no. 12 (2002).

⁴²⁶ Whiting, *Poet of Residue*, 2.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁸ Brownsword quoted in Gibson, “The Kilning Field,” 30.

nostalgia for the hand is particularly prominent in the UK, as exemplified by exhibitions such as *The Power of Making: The Importance of Being Skilled* (Victoria & Albert Museum, 2011), and articles with titles like “Why Britain Doesn’t Make Things Anymore,” (incidentally published in *The Guardian* in the same year).⁴²⁹ These preoccupations seem to reflect observations such as those made by Walter Benjamin in the early 20th century about the tendency in modernity to see “a new beauty in what is vanishing”—in an age characterised by speed, an “aesthetics of disappearance” emerges.⁴³⁰ Ruins have long played a role in such romantic reflections on an (at least partially imagined) time before, often coming to stand in for a lost mythical past pictured as more true and authentic than the alienated modern world. In climates of industrialism and post-industrialism, a time when “the loss of skill is threatening cultural practice and impacting on commercial industries,”⁴³¹ the handmade has acquired a venerated, almost fetishistic quality and anxieties about labour, skill, and hand-making have become highly symbolic, enmeshed in social, moral, and cultural discourses. In this way, works like Brownsword’s rehearse the earlier tenets of the Arts and Crafts Movement, banking on the touch of the ‘hand’ to revive a sense of authenticity and connectedness.

Indeed, a veneration of productive labour has been recognized as an important thread in the work of Benjamin, whose earlier reflections on making are a precursor to contemporary anxieties about the loss of skill in the post-industrial world. Esther Leslie offers a particularly fitting analysis of Benjamin’s work on craft, highlighting the potent

⁴²⁹ Aditya Chakraborty, “Why Britain doesn’t Make Things Anymore,” *The Guardian*, November 16, 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/business/2011/nov/16/why-britain-doesnt-make-things-manufacturing>

⁴³⁰ Scott Lash, *Another Modernity, A Different Rationality* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1999), 320.

⁴³¹ Exhibition text, “Power of Making,” Victoria and Albert Museum, <http://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/about-us/press-room/view/2011/power-of-making/>, December 6, 2011. “Power of Making: The importance of being skilled” is one of many recent exhibitions which express a particular anxiety about the fate of craft and hand-skills in the industrial/post-industrial world.

force that traces of hand labor play in signifying authenticity in both maker and object. As she notes, Benjamin returned again and again to the notion of craft and to the figure of the artisan throughout his theoretical writings regarding aura – pottery, weaving, and storytelling come to the foreground.⁴³² His 1936 essay, “The Storyteller,” for example, while describing narrative rather than craft per se, nonetheless maintains an analogy between the act of making and the act of storytelling, foregrounding the vital importance of a dynamic relationship between ‘crafter’ and ‘crafted,’ producer and product, in either case. In the essay, Benjamin describes storytelling as an artisan (*handwerk*) craft in its own right, using the German word *Erfahrung* to mean experience that is handed down, practical knowledge much like the inherited skills of the displaced workers of Britain’s potteries.⁴³³ In the subsequent discussion, the ‘hand’ of the craftsman (or voice of the storyteller)—evidence of the subjectivity of the maker, is vital. In modernity, as Benjamin argues, print technologies have divorced narrative from the active process of storytelling and thus severed the subjectivity of the storyteller from the story itself: “Unlike the novel, which is separable from the novelist, the story is not separable from the story teller.”⁴³⁴ Here Benjamin continues the analogy of storytelling as craft: “the traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the hand prints of a potter cling to the clay vessel’.⁴³⁵ Only in making does Benjamin perceive that the hand, soul, and eye work in harmony.⁴³⁶

⁴³² Esther Leslie, “Walter Benjamin: Traces of Craft,” in *The Craft Reader*, edited by Glenn Adamson, 386-394 (New York: Berg, 2010), 387.

⁴³³ Esther Leslie, “Walter Benjamin: Traces of Craft,” in *The Craft Reader*, edited by Glenn Adamson, 386-394 (New York: Berg, 2010), 387.

⁴³⁴ Lash, *Another Modernity, A Different Rationality*, 314.

⁴³⁵ Lash, *Another Modernity, A Different Rationality*, 314.

⁴³⁶ For Benjamin, aura itself is associated with creation: “the hand marks out an authentic experience.” Lash, *Another Modernity, A Different Rationality*, 216; Leslie, “Walter Benjamin: Traces of Craft,” 387. According to Esther Leslie, this places Benjamin within a tradition of humanist anatomical thought which

In Brownsword's work, one can see echoes of Benjamin's idea that objects are inseparable from their makers, they reveal the hand, and point back to them at every turn. A fingerprint or sign of human error are tangible links to the ghosts that haunt things made by human agency, an imprint of the maker on the object. Importantly for the argument at hand, Benjamin also discusses making as intrinsically tied to memory work, allowing us, according to Leslie, to contemplate the pot itself as a story, as a thing that holds experience, knowledge, and memory within itself. Making gives an object a "voice."⁴³⁷ However, vital for my interpretation is her qualification that, "At issue are things endowed with powers of speech: but they are talking things that *at the same time are empty and dead*" (emphasis added)⁴³⁸ In this qualification lies a vital component of the way material artefacts such as those used by Brownsword function in the present. The objects he incorporates into his assemblages are simultaneously suggestive (and undeniably real), yet in many ways unreadable. Leslie notes that, "Fingerprints and the handprints of the potter are not signatures; such traces differ from the individuating, authenticating autograph... Their virtue lies in their hinge with actuality..."⁴³⁹ I would argue that Brownsword's found objects from the past speak less of individuals or specific moments than they do of a culture of labor of great concern in contemporary Britain (on which I will expand toward the conclusion of this chapter). Ironically it is their very unreadability that facilitates the projection of contemporary desires, anxieties, and narratives upon them, allowing them to serve as objects for nostalgic reflection on the

"sees the faculty of stereognosis as reliant on touch, a touch that finger's the world's textures, and hands on knowledge of those textures." In an age increasingly characterized by the digital and immaterial, the hand, and tactile experience, has come to be viewed by many as man's route to recovering modes of experience under threat: as Benjamin would say, "the hand is a political organ." Leslie, "Walter Benjamin: Traces of Craft," 387

⁴³⁷ Leslie, "Walter Benjamin: Traces of Craft," 387.

⁴³⁸ Lash, *Another Modernity, A Different Rationality*, 330.

⁴³⁹ Leslie, "Walter Benjamin: Traces of Craft," 392.

past. This, for Laura Marks, is in fact an essential component of aura: “Aura is the sense an object gives that it can speak to us of the past, without ever letting us completely decipher it....it can never completely satisfy our desire to recover that memory. Hence the sense that an auratic object...is distant from us in time even as it is present in space.”⁴⁴⁰

In Brownsword’s work, the auratic effect of distance is enhanced even further through aestheticization. According to the artist, his “Material improvisations transform and reinvigorate a once commonplace dialect of buller rings, cranks, saddles, saggars, spurs and wasters, into an abstract series of amorphous accretions that emerge through making’s own vocabulary and syntax.”⁴⁴¹ Transformed through aestheticisation and abstraction to facilitate contemplation, the resultant melted, glazed, and fused, ceramic collages are transformed into something highly visceral and evocative. For Rose Macaulay, author of “The Pleasure of Ruins,” the ‘softening’ of the immediacy of ruins, achieved by either “distance or art” is a necessary component of the way ruins and relics are appreciated by modern viewers.⁴⁴² Dormant in the shraff-lined streets, factories, and backyards of the potteries, the remnants deployed by Brownsword merely blend with contemporary waste and rubble, merging into the landscape and overlooked.⁴⁴³ By recontextualising, combining, and aestheticizing these factory rejects, their narrative properties become activated—here art performs the function usually delegated to distance in time. The fragments Brownsword salvages have been rescued from a state of

⁴⁴⁰ Laura U Marks, “The Memory of Things,” in *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses* (London, Duke University Press, 2000), 81.

⁴⁴¹ Whiting, *Poet of Residue*, 2.

⁴⁴² Rose Macaulay, *Pleasure of Ruins* (New York: Walker and Company, 1953), 454.

⁴⁴³ Norman Bryson employs the term *rhography* (from *rhops*, trivial objects, small wares, trifles) to describe those things which lack importance - the unassuming material base of life that ‘importance constantly overlooks.’ See Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 60.

transience and become newly durable, elevated in value and opened to an entirely new realm of significations, ripe for appropriation into contemporary narratives of memory, loss, and identity.⁴⁴⁴

Interestingly, the ceramic shard has featured prominently in a number of works by other artists responding to the fate of Stoke's potteries, including British ceramic artist Clare Twomey from around the same time as Brownsword was producing his fragment-based works. In fact much of Twomey's practice, too, engages with ideas of transience, loss, and haunting. Most notably here, a large-scale work titled *Monument* from 2009 (Fig. 16) utilized off-casts of the British ceramic industry to make a statement about the medium itself. The mountain of ceramic waste of which it was composed—over eight feet of broken plates, cups, jugs, and other ceramic shards—were collected from a 'pitcher pile,' a vast heap consisting of imperfect or damaged objects from factories across the potteries, this one at the Johnson Ceramic Tiles factory in Stoke-On-Trent. Johnson Tiles acts as a recycling centre for the whole of the Potteries area, where the by-products gleaned are subsequently ground down and used to create new tiles.⁴⁴⁵ Thus these broken pots, once denied their intended lifecycle as commodities by being deemed not good enough for circulation, are given a second chance at life through being recycled into new products.⁴⁴⁶ However, the objects appropriated in *Monument* were twice denied their utilitarian function. Twomey pulled them out of the cycle of use-value and appropriated them within her own practice, simultaneously stalling their movement and offering them an alternative life. However, the viewer was led to mourn the loss of

⁴⁴⁴ See Michael Thompson, *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

⁴⁴⁵ "Monument," *Clare Twomey*, accessed December 2, 2011, http://www.claretwomey.com/monument_info.html.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

function represented by the towering pile of factory discards, evoking images of “wastage and death.”⁴⁴⁷ Much in line with Brownsword’s poetics of fragmentation and loss, *Monument* has been described as a monument to a dying industry and lost skills, while making these thinkable and visible on a grand scale through dislocation and mass accumulation.⁴⁴⁸

While *Monument* speaks less of the intimate moments of material interaction evoked by Brownsword’s series, the sense of loss is nonetheless pervasive through the work’s carefully cultivated emotional effect. As an extension of an earlier thread, it again calls into question what museums typically deem as valuable, and exemplifies the expanded possibilities of the fragment as an evocative strategy. Natasha Daintry comments:

We take ceramics for granted....There’s this assumption that a piece of china is a calm and quiet object, ordinary, inert and fixed. We know what to do with it. The plastic, fluid qualities of the clay and the movement involved in its making are now stilled. The well-behaved cup or saucer is now suitably compliant and ordered to carry out its duties.⁴⁴⁹

The broken pot, however, subverts these expectations and makes the object volatile. Broken, the vessel is exposed and confrontational, bringing its unpredictable contents into the present. According to Camelia Elias, what defines the fragment is “ultimately its own dynamics, its own ability to mediate between its state of being and its state of

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ “Monument.”

⁴⁴⁹ Natasha Daintry, “The Essential Vessel,” in *Breaking the Mould: New Approaches to Ceramics*, edited by Barnard, Rob, Natasha Daintry and Clare Twomey (London: Black Dog Publishing Ltd., 2007), 7.

becoming.”⁴⁵⁰ The ceramics fragment in Brownsword and Twomey’s work is unstable, resists closure, and thus represents that the medium of ceramics itself is in a transitional moment. I argue that these latest instantiations of ceramic production themselves constitute the latest additions to the archive of Stoke, indexing a particular moment where the instability and uncertainty of the present manifests itself as a strange amalgam of nostalgia for the past and optimism about the future, cemented into actual material objects which are themselves implicit in this shift from the old to the new.

I have focused initially on the history and recent (between roughly 2000 and 2012) socio-economic climate in Stoke as filtered through Brownsword and Twomey’s works because they emphasize the personal and community investment in the ceramic industry there, and underscore the highly sentimental and melancholic responses to change in the area which is central to the staunch resistance to encroaching economic restructuring which will be central to the following discussion. Since 2009 however, the tactic of appropriation and intervention in the material remains of the potteries’ past has become an officially encouraged strategy, leading to a plethora of new ceramic works which explicitly reference local historical manufacture (and its decline) in a way very similar to the works discussed above. Further, the cultural climate, including media representation, of Stoke has undergone a significant shift since this time. To provide context for these developments, and the important reorientation of meaning they entail, it is necessary to outline the implementation of arts and culture-based strategies for regeneration in Stoke, the primary instantiation of which is the British Ceramic Biennial (BCB).

⁴⁵⁰ Camelia Elias, *The Fragment: Towards a History and Poetics of a Performative Genre* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004): 356.

CONJURING STOKE'S GHOSTS AT THE BRITISH CERAMICS BIENNIAL

Inaugurated in 2009 (incidentally the same year Wedgwood and several other firms initially shut down and went into administration), the BCB (Fig. 17) is considered a site to showcase the innovative work of Britain's contemporary studio ceramic artists. For strategic reasons to be addressed below, Stoke-On-Trent itself was chosen as the site for the Biennial, beginning a tradition of holding future BCBs in the industrial district.⁴⁵¹ The festival utilized both official institutional spaces and non-traditional sites,⁴⁵² central among them the abandoned Spode factory, left in disuse since having been shut down in 2008. In this space, remaining traces of the culture of labour proclaimed to have 'disappeared' were left deliberately untouched. As one critic recounted, a viewer would encounter crumbling plaster, old machines, and wall signs still indicating the location of the "machine-banding shop" or warning that "ear protection must be worn when tapping ware."⁴⁵³ In a 2011 article printed in *The Guardian*, Julian Teed, creative director of Portmeirion, recalled the suddenness with which the Spode factory was abandoned when it went bust, saying: "There was still a half-drunk cup of tea and the local paper open on someone's desk."⁴⁵⁴ One can imagine an affinity with the poetic description offered by Tim Edensor of traces present in industrial ruins:

⁴⁵¹ The Biennial was part of the Regeneration Initiative for Staffordshire, which included transforming once thriving factories into tourist destinations, with the addition of shops and cafes to the area, as well as transforming many local industrial buildings into affordable middle class housing.

⁴⁵² Including a "Guerilla Ceramics" initiative around town.

⁴⁵³ Charlotte Higgins, "British Ceramics Biennial brings signs of a Potteries revival" *The Guardian*, October 2, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2011/oct/02/british-ceramics-biennial-potteries-stoke>.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

The ghosts which flit through derelict buildings are present in the traces of manufactured things, the techniques that required skilled eyes and hands, and in the vernacular descriptions and technical terms present in the inscriptions and instructions. The people who worked are ghostly presences signified by overalls, hob-nail boots, gloves, hardhats and the vestiges of the things that passed between them, the material exchanges of their relationships. These shreds and silent things that remain can only be half known and recognised, subject to the conjectures of our imaginations. They signal the absent presence of the unheralded people who make the manufactures and the wealth for industry.⁴⁵⁵

These “absent presences” have been actively mobilized in the service of creative practice throughout the BCB since the time of its establishment. Rather than treating the venue as a neutral exhibition space, a section of the Biennial each year is devoted to artists who are encouraged to respond directly to the industrial environment and heritage. The inaugural event featured solemn works such as Clare Twomey’s “Epoch,” a “ghostly” and highly evocative piece featuring a table laid with cutlery, crockery and glasses.⁴⁵⁶ All in a powdery white, the disordered table setting appeared to have been left in haste, much as the factory sites themselves, a chair still waiting for the diner’s return. As in Twomey’s *Monument*, there is an inescapable connection between the sombre array of objects left in disuse and the decline of Stoke’s once thriving industry.⁴⁵⁷

Also exhibited in 2009 was a work by Stephen Dixon titled *Monopoly*, installed in the courtyard off the Gladstone Pottery Museum. Composed of 30,000 industrially

⁴⁵⁵ Edensor, “Traces.”

⁴⁵⁶ Stewart, Michael C., “The first British ceramics Biennial 2009,” *Ceramics Art & Perception* (December 17, 2011), <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-229556488.html>.

⁴⁵⁷ Stewart, Michael C., “The first British ceramics Biennial 2009,” *Ceramics Art & Perception* (December 17, 2011), <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-229556488.html>.

produced ceramic flowers covering the form of a battleship, the piece stood out in its potentially critical take on the changes currently taking place in Stoke and elsewhere. According to the artist, the sculpture references the battleship token from the board game *Monopoly*, commenting on the game's own origin as a critical commentary on "the evils of land monopolism, only later to be reinterpreted as a celebration of capitalist values."⁴⁵⁸ As such, the "wreath-like quality" of the floral sculpture is described as both a memorial to "a discredited capitalist ideology following the banking crisis of September 2008 and subsequent global economic downturn,"⁴⁵⁹ and, in the context of Stoke's then downward spiral, "to the loss of the Potteries' own monopoly of a global ceramic market."⁴⁶⁰ Similar to Brownsword's concerns, for Dixon the hand-made bone china flowers of *Monopoly* represent the endangerment of a very specific skill-set. As such, he initiated an archival project of his own, exhibited in a supplementary showcase at Rosslyn Works, titled *The Floralists*, consisting of video footage and portraiture of Staffordshire's remaining bone china flower makers, documented for posterity to capture their techniques and working methods.⁴⁶¹ In a deconstructed approach to the same issue, a 2015 experiment by Brownsword for his project *Re-Apprenticed* echoed this very concern, featuring an en-masse display of individual porcelain flower petals, each preserving the imprint of the

⁴⁵⁸ According to the project description, the originated in 'The Landlord's Game' developed by the American social activist Elizabeth Magie in 1904. "Monopoly," *Manchester School of Art*, <http://www.art.mmu.ac.uk/profile/sdixon/projectdetails/412>

⁴⁵⁹ "Monopoly," *Manchester School of Art*, <http://www.art.mmu.ac.uk/profile/sdixon/projectdetails/412>

⁴⁶⁰ Similar to Brownsword's concerns, for Dixon the hand-made bone china flowers of *Monopoly* represent the endangerment of a very specific skill-set. As such, he initiated an archival project of his own, exhibited in a supplementary showcase at Rosslyn Works, titled 'The Floralists,' consisting of video footage and portraiture of Staffordshire's remaining bone china flower makers, documented for posterity to capture their techniques and working methods. See "Monopoly," *Manchester School of Art*, <http://www.art.mmu.ac.uk/profile/sdixon/projectdetails/412>. In a deconstructed approach to the same issue, a 2015 experiment by Brownsword for his project *Re-Apprenticed* echoed this very concern, featuring an en-masse display of individual porcelain flower petals, each preserving the imprint of the maker's fingers. While this work takes the hand as subject it is different from his previous works in that the maker herself is present.

⁴⁶¹ "Monopoly," *Manchester School of Art*, <http://www.art.mmu.ac.uk/profile/sdixon/projectdetails/412>.

maker's fingers. While the work takes the hand as subject it is different from his previous works in that the maker herself is present.

Subsequent BCBs have continued the tradition of self-reflexive production, with varying degrees of critical intention. The show *Emerging Line* (2013) consisted of the collective work of nine ceramists who were asked to engage in site-specific interventions responding directly to the Spode factory space, preoccupied with the narratives of loss and decline which frame Brownsword and others' works. For example, Miche Follano created a series of 367 miniature vessels which were installed in a line spanning the length of the starkly vacant room in which it was installed. Into each cup was placed a found item from the Spode factory site, cumulatively representing the number of workers laid off at the time of the factory's closure (Fig. 18). For the same project, Keith Varney created a bone china installation referencing now absent bottle kilns that occupied the site until the 1960s.⁴⁶² In these material yet abstract works, a culture of loss is memorialized without direct reference to specific workers impacted by Spode's closure. In addition to these solicited interventions, the international artistic/research project *Topologies of the Obsolete: Vociferous Void*, initiated in 2012 by Neil Brownsword and Anne Helen Mydland, resulted in direct interventions by 31 makers in various areas in and around the Spode site. These included a fictional interview with the Spode factory building itself, compounding the sense that it is indeed a living, breathing entity with stores of memory lying in wait to be activated.

⁴⁶² Jill Read, "Made in Stoke," *Apollo Magazine*, October 10, 2013, <http://www.apollo-magazine.com/made-stoke/>. For a project called *Excavate*, Stephen Dixon set up a performative archaeological dig which, as described by the artist, "combined factual archaeology with fictional 'findings', culminating in the excavation, restoration and display of an imagined historical object, Josiah Spode's violin."

Not far away at the same time, Airspace (a small artist-run centre in Stoke-On-Trent), featured an exhibition spearheaded by Corinne Felgate titled *Totem: Trajectories in Tragedy And Triumph* (27 September - 26 October, 2013) (Fig. 19-20). For the show large sections of the floor of the space were covered in dried, cracking raw clay, out of which rose tall pillars of stacked biscuit ware, among which one could just recognize the unglazed forms of plates, bowls, teapots, and other functional wares. All in white, the delicate, unfinished forms (the ‘totems’ of the title), evoked the dusty architectural ruins of some past age, which the viewer was invited to tread amongst, seeming to beg a sort of hushed reverence. Viewers (many of whom would have come directly from the BCB, or vice versa) were informed by texts provided that the monuments were created from discarded biscuit and hand cast pieces of china collected from the former Spode factory site, intended to explore, “notions of power, success and failure embodied in the rise & fall and ultimate resurrection of the British ceramic industry.”⁴⁶³ As Felgate explained, “Many of the pieces were on the Spode production line when it shut down. ...They were the last things that were produced there and not finished, so they’ve not got their glaze. And they’re combined with things that [were] hand-cast using old moulds, some of them 250 years old. So there’s this intertwining of resurrection and death.”⁴⁶⁴

Theodor Adorno once described the museum as a place where objects go to die. In his essay “Valéry Proust Museum,” he comments that the German term *museal* (“museum-like), “has unpleasant overtones.” It describes, he writes:

⁴⁶³ Corinne Felgate, “Totem: Trajectories in Tragedy and Triumph,” *Airspace*, September 27-October 16, 2013, https://www.airspacegallery.org/index.php/2020/project_entry/totemtrajectories_in_tragedy_and_triumph

⁴⁶⁴ “British Ceramics Biennial: history and contemporary practice collide,” *a.n.*, October 1, 213, <https://www.a-n.co.uk/news/british-ceramics-biennial>.

[O]bjects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the process of dying. They owe their preservation more to historical respect than to the needs of the present. Museum and mausoleum are connected by more than phonetic association. Museums are like the family sepulchres of works of art. They testify to the neutralization of culture.”⁴⁶⁵

Felgate herself referred to the environment of *Totem* as “A mausoleum to ceramics” (a particularly fitting comparison given the constitutive elements of bone china), and she has certainly not been the only to compare the events surrounding the BCB to a sort of gravesite. For Adorno, this envisioning of the museum testifies to, “...the fatal situation of what is called the ‘cultural tradition.’ Once tradition is no longer animated by a comprehensive, substantial force but has to be conjured up by means of citations because ‘It’s important to have a tradition’, then whatever happens to be left of it is dissolved into a means to an end.”⁴⁶⁶ The impulse to preserve is highlighted by even more recent projects like Brownsword’s “Externalizing the Archive” (2019) (Fig. 21), a hybrid project which combined a site-specific installation with an initiative to digitize a selection of the over 70,000 plaster moulds currently on site at Spode, the ‘negative voids’ of which have “facilitated the mass production of ceramics for centuries.”⁴⁶⁷ He likens these moulds to the “skeletal” remains of many of the factory building themselves and, by bringing the ‘inside out,’ the artist hoped to bring these historical objects back into contemporary consciousness.⁴⁶⁸ However, as I will discuss below, the interpretation

⁴⁶⁵ Theodor Adorno, “Valéry Proust Museum,” in Theodor Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Sherry Weber (London: Neville Spearman, 1967): 175.

⁴⁶⁶ Theodor Adorno, “Valéry Proust Museum,” in Theodor Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Sherry Weber (London: Neville Spearman, 1967): 175.

⁴⁶⁷ Annie Le Santo, “The Home of Ceramic Heritage,” *Ceramic Review* (September/October 2019): 1.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

of ‘preservation’ as a medium of mummification (apt in many cases) is one that the BCB and artists like Brownsword actively attempt to resist, often by engaging the local community and visitors alike in activating the space, and through repeated calls to ‘re-animate,’ re-orchestrate’ ‘reinvigorate,’ and otherwise engage the site as a performative space of memory and transformation (albeit one that is far from neutral). In this Nikolai Fedorov’s description of the museum comes to mind: “If a repository may be compared to a grave, then ... an exhibition is, as it were, a resurrection.”⁴⁶⁹

Both the title and the didactic material of Felgate’s show exemplify the interplay between optimism and defeat (or “tragedy and triumph”) that has framed both the official narrative of the BCB and related initiatives. While it would be implausible to address all of the works included in the past 10 years of BCB programming that exemplify this interplay (and there are many indeed), these examples give a sense of the evocative and probing engagements with the site that have taken place at the Spode factory and beyond, and the overall atmosphere of death, nostalgia, and haunting that have predominated. Through these various interventions, Stoke’s unpeopled sites of labour have been symbolically populated by the phantoms of absent makers, both real and imagined, and (re)animated by the influx of a new cohort of ceramic artists who bridge the gap between historical and contemporary, industrial and studio production.

⁴⁶⁹ The middle of this quotes reads: “reading, or more precisely research, is a kind of exhumation.” Nikolai Fedorov, *The Museum, its Meaning and Mission*, originally published in 1906. Quoted in “The Institute of the Cosmos: Museum and Timeline,” *e-flux*, September 19, 2020, <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/349531/the-institute-of-the-cosmos-museum-and-timeline/>

Nostalgia and Economic Regeneration

As noted above, in the early years of the BCB its atmosphere was viewed as somewhat ‘bittersweet,’⁴⁷⁰ with a visceral sense of deterioration and a feeling that “many of the works struggle[d] to compete with the atmosphere of the setting.”⁴⁷¹ However, I argue that this wistful atmosphere covertly carried a message at odds with its outward appearance, in large part due to the broader framing of the event as a whole. In fact, amid the varied responses of artists to the industrial heritage, the Biennial overall has, from the start, emphasized regeneration, continued creativity, and innovation above all else. The rhetoric surrounding even the most melancholy of works is infused with an air of hope and expectation. In response to some of Brownsword’s work displayed in 2009 one critic wrote that the piece “induced an emotional response from the viewer, which...combined nostalgia for things past and lost with a sense of pleasure at what the future may hold.”⁴⁷² The dual function of the melancholic was also noted by Benjamin who wrote that “[t]he attitude of contemplation is obsessed...with things. It wants to redeem disused things through contemplation,”⁴⁷³ adding that, “the melancholic, through language, through the gaze of these very objects, can, at the same time, allegorically, retrieve memory and redeem aura.”⁴⁷⁴ Indeed Brownsword’s poetic collages, creatively warped, fused, and transformed, have an incredible sense of regeneration. As the exhibition text for *Poet of Residue* stated, “These vestigial landscapes of meltdown and wastage are also about salvage and retrieval. They have an energy, a powerful frisson...Rarely has the oozing,

⁴⁷⁰ Adele Davison, “Bittersweet British Ceramics Biennial,” *Ambient Ceramics*, October 30, 2011, <http://ambientceramics.blogspot.ca/2011/10/bittersweet-british-ceramics-biennial.html>.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Stewart, Michael C., “The first British ceramics Biennial 2009,” in *Ceramics Art & Perception*. 2010. HighBeam Research. (December 17, 2011). <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-229556488.html>.

⁴⁷³ Lash, *Another Modernity, A Different Rationality*, 333.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

coagulating, brittle detritus of clay, re-formed and re-fired into another state of permanence, been so intelligently and eloquently expressed.”⁴⁷⁵

The paradoxical nature of nostalgia, its ability to be both backward and forward looking, is central to the direction that Stoke has taken since 2010. Other works which have responded to the obsolete architecture and materials of the potteries over the years have included the works *Something Borrowed*, *Something Blue* and *Mould Store* (2011) (Fig. 22) by Philip Eglin, which saw the artist re-use redundant factory moulds from the Spode site to create playful new works with a more light-hearted atmosphere than the quiet memorials cited above, while nonetheless referring to the past. Here the dual meaning of ‘mould’ appears quite interesting – a frame used for casting also refers to the process of decay and decomposition, yet Eglin’s plates allude to the creative potential of the industry’s discards rather than their disappearance. Other examples of radically innovative works which overtly appropriate, intervene in, or otherwise reference historical production featured at the BCB have included Michael Eden’s digitally fabricated vessels modelled after Wedgwood vases (2015) (Fig. 23), celebrating new techniques while maintaining the reference to the history of the medium which continues to shape its current identity, and in which the emphasis on reskilling is simultaneous with excitement for technologically-mediated craft design, heralding in possible future directions for ceramic practice. In 2015 these backwards-looking works had their counterpoint in a showcase titled FRESH, featuring work by recent graduates emphasizing the influx of energy, creativity, and innovation represented by these emerging artists.

⁴⁷⁵ Whiting. *Poet of Residue*, 1.

In their focus on regeneration, the contemporary artists making new work out of now redundant objects from the (albeit recent) past, have gained something of a hero-status in the rhetoric surrounding the BCB. Ruth King, a council member of the Craft Potters Association, noted that, “Studio ceramics offer the perfect antidote to big business, globalisation and poorly made mass-produced goods transported across the world.”⁴⁷⁶ In what follows, however, I hope to show that studio ceramics, and their mobilization in Stoke in particular, fit perfectly well in the shaping of “big business” at the macro level, and yet fail to fully acknowledge the ways in which the reformulated models for marketing ceramics in Stoke and elsewhere are imbricated in the processes of economic restructuring for which they are deemed the antidote. These latter examples of works yoked to the BCB’s project of recuperation speak to the biennial’s overall goal as indicated by its 2009 by-line, “a model for regeneration through contemporary practice.” The BCB’s co-director Barney Hare Duke has made explicit that the event is not “about celebrating the past, but about being a catalyst,”⁴⁷⁷ further stating that “...the city is aiming to present itself as the guardian of creativity for British ceramics in all its forms – art, craft, design, and industry – and to remind visitors that the city still has a pottery industry, even if it employs a fraction of the people it did 30 years ago.”⁴⁷⁸ How then, can we reconcile the pervasive nostalgia, regret, and orientation towards the past that frames many of the works made and/or exhibited in Stoke over the past ten years with this highly optimistic, future-oriented attitude?

⁴⁷⁶ Vanessa Thorpe, “Now Bake Off is ending, the next hot craze is about to come out of the oven...” *The Guardian*, October 3, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/oct/03/great-british-pottery-throw-down-television>.

⁴⁷⁷ Charlotte Higgins, “British Ceramics Biennial brings signs of a Potteries revival” *The Guardian*, October 2, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2011/oct/02/british-ceramics-biennial-potteries-stoke>.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

One might begin to address this question by first looking beyond Stoke itself, to trends in post-industrial restructuring that have gained traction globally. The BCB and the growing catalogue of initiatives related to redefining the pottery tradition in Stoke (to be discussed) can be viewed in relation to a larger tendency in post-industrial societies to transform disused industrial areas and buildings into museums and heritage sights integrated into the tourist economy, and the increasing mobilisation of creativity and experience-based initiatives as a generator of economic wealth under post-Fordism. Commenting on a joint promotional effort staged in the 1980s to enhance the tourist trade in a number of “ailing industrial cities” in Britain (including Leeds, Bradford, Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle and Stoke-on-Trent), David Harvey cites a grocery list of benefits that these sorts of endeavours can yield. According to Harvey (citing the *Guardian*), one of the noteworthy payoffs of transforming declining industries into tourist commodities (effectively commoditizing the traditional working class as a boon to consumption⁴⁷⁹) is that cities are “...able to offer a host of structural reminders of just what made them great in the first place. They share, in other words, a marketable ingredient called industrial...heritage.”⁴⁸⁰ This benefit is particularly relevant to Stoke, given the incredible marketing power of Stoke-made ceramics as a brand. Other purported benefits include the ways in which festivals and cultural events encourage investment, create a feeling of ‘optimism’ and the type of ‘can do’ attitude central to the entrepreneurial spirit (increasingly necessary with the decrease of stable employment structures and state assistance), and encouraging community solidarity, all while

⁴⁷⁹ Jayne, 13.

⁴⁸⁰ David Harvey, “From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation in Urban Governance in Late Capitalism,” *Geografiska Annaler*, Series B, Human Geography, Vol. 71, No. 1, The Roots of Geographical Change: 1973 to the Present (1989): 3-17

“exploring the option of exploiting conspicuous consumption in a sea of spreading recession.”⁴⁸¹ Above all, the increasing transformation of spaces of production into spaces of consumption (including through arts and culture based ‘experiences’ like the BCB), mobilises the symbolic and cultural capital of a place to represent them as attractive places to live, work, visit, and invest in.⁴⁸² All of these strategies harken back to the now infamous writings of Richard Florida advocating ‘Creative Cities’ policies which seek to mobilize the ‘Creative Class,’ aligning artists with businesspeople, engineers, medical professionals, and computer engineers under the aegis of the entrepreneurial spirit—writings which incidentally had a strong influence on Tony Blair in the early 00s and have thus been mobilized throughout the UK with some hype.

Stoke-On-Trent, however, initially posed a unique set of obstacles to the successful implementation of these sorts of strategies. Not long ago, the prevailing diagnosis was that attempts to implement creative cities strategies in Stoke-On-Trent had been woefully unsuccessful. Mark Jayne, one of the few scholars to give sustained critical attention to economic stagnation in Stoke in the 1990s credited this to “a seeming inability to compete or innovate in the symbolic economy.”⁴⁸³ His argument at the time was, besides the under-investment in the arts and cultural industries, that despite industrial decline and the loss of many blue collar jobs, working class labour, imagery, and identities continued to define the area, writing that, “[u]nlike many other Western cities, Stoke-on-Trent remains overly dominated by working-class production and consumption cultures. The city is thus, in a sense, rendered illegible to post-industrial

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

⁴⁸² Jayne, 12.

⁴⁸³ Mark Jayne, *Cities and Consumption* (Routledge, 2006): 167. See also Mark Jayne, “Imag(in)ing a post-industrial Potteries,” In *City Visions*, David Bell and Azzedine Haddour, eds. (Routledge, 2000).

businesses, tourists, and to the many young people who leave the city in search of the more dynamic economic and cultural opportunities offered in other cities,”⁴⁸⁴ further noting that, “...the continued stubbornness of local vernacular associations ensures that there is currently a no-go area of representation in which the promotion of identities and lifestyles associated with the post-industrial economy is considered pretentious, yuppyish or a threat to political, economic or social continuity.”⁴⁸⁵ Thus Stoke officials struggled to find a way to bridge the gap between the resistant blue-collar culture and mono-industrial base and efforts to market, package, and re-brand the city in line with the values, attitudes, and infrastructure needed for the success of post-Fordist restructuring.^{486 487} Hence the fact that narratives of inevitable decline, as we have seen, became in the late 90s/early 00s, quite stubbornly affixed to Stoke’s image.

Given this background, the route taken by recent manifestations of cultural programming in Stoke come into better focus. In line with Harvey’s observations above, it came to be recognized that, somewhat paradoxically, the dire predictions and narratives

⁴⁸⁴ Mark Jayne, “Culture That Works? Creative Industries Development in a Working Class City,” *Capital & Class* (Winter 2014): 200. See also Gordon MacLeod and Martin Jones, “Explaining ‘Brexit Capital’: Uneven Development and the Austerity State,” *Space and Polity*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (2018): 208.

⁴⁸⁵ Jayne, “Culture That Works?” See Wynne and O’Connor.

⁴⁸⁶ Incidentally, recent arts strategies have attempted to address just these issues. For example, *Appetite* is part of the “Creative People and Places” programme supported by National Lottery funding via Arts Council England. The programme focuses on areas of the UK where engagement levels in the arts are significantly below the national average - uses the food analogy in an attempt to make art accessible to those who feel art is ‘not for them’. “We are currently exploring how best to bring the arts to people who believe that art is not for them. We want to show there are as many ways to serve up and enjoy the arts as there are to eat a meal, hence our name. Art, like food, can be enjoyed al fresco, on the street, as pub grub – everywhere, anywhere. It’s for everyone. Culture isn’t just fine dining for the rich, and we want to prove this by putting the arts on a platter for the people of Stoke-on-Trent.” Karl Greenwood, “Creating a taste for art, by serving up courses in culture,” *The Guardian*, February 10, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/culture-professionals-network/culture-professionals-blog/2014/feb/10/art-courses-culture-appetite-stoke-on-trent>.

⁴⁸⁷ In Stoke this was manifested in the plan for a Cultural Quarter, initiated in 1990 with the report *A Cultural Strategy for Stoke-on-Trent*, which advocated for the creation of ‘cultural quarter’ in Stoke based on its diagnosis of dramatic under-investment in the arts and media sector. Funding for the Cultural Quarter was secured in 1999 (£20 million from the National Lottery and European Regional Development Fund.). See Mark Jayne, *Cities and Consumption* (Routledge, 2006).

of loss that largely defined popular representations of Stoke could in fact be mobilized to advance the area's revival in a way that maintains a *sense* of continuity (and at least the impression of a particular working class identity) despite economic change—drawing on the past has become an official strategy framing Stoke's regeneration as a way to highlight “the historical strengths of the past in championing new future directions for the city.”⁴⁸⁸ Through the self-reflexivity of many of the works on display, the BCB constructed narratives legible to local individuals and communities by speaking directly to/about the emotional investment, values, and memories attached to the potteries, both in terms of material subsistence and as a symbolic generator of personal and collective value and identity, and would simultaneously serve as a tourism draw, banking on the popular fascination with nostalgia and the tragic (especially sites of industrial decline). As such, despite the preoccupation with the fate of the industry, its alignment with the postindustrial economy is signified through the framing of these initiatives. Backed by the North Staffordshire Regeneration Partnership (to which I will return), the BCB is viewed as a central hub to bring together scholars, institutions, consumers, and potential investors. Outlining the success of the event, the BCB website recounts:

Through its programme of artist's residencies and fellowships, educational projects, conferences, major exhibitions (that showcased work by established artists and the best of the UK's graduate talent across museums, galleries and factories) the Biennial is a recognised international platform that has significantly contributed to the expanded field of ceramic practice. The 2011 biennial event extended this legacy and established significant European partnerships with other

⁴⁸⁸ BCB Press release, May 13, 2009, <http://www.britishceramicsbiennial.com/sites/default/files/BCB%202015%20programme%20announcement%20release%20%20Local%20Embargoed%20until%20Tue%2019%20May%206am-1.pdf>

major festivals and centres for ceramic research such as the renowned European Ceramic Work Centre in the Netherlands (EKWC). It attracted 32,700 visitors and generated £2.08m worth of economic activity in the city; developed strong partnerships with the ceramics industry in North Staffordshire, and yielded over £1m worth of media coverage (media equivalent advertising value) in local, regional, national print and online media.

Despite the decline of the manufacturing sector, Stoke officials have no intention of letting its ‘brand advantage’ go to waste. Mimicking the language of Florida, Stoke MP Tristram Hunt (2010-1017), stated that the “urban economy is now about much more than tiles, hotelware, bone china and Bridgewater mugs. Today it is also about engineering, biomedicine, higher education, tourism, and retail.”⁴⁸⁹ By this logic, the regeneration scheme for Stoke-On-Trent has been reoriented, with the perception that if pottery is to continue to be at the forefront of Stoke’s regeneration, it must be on different terms than those of the past. As Hunt continues: “Stoke’s urban renewal is about building up human capital rather than relying on physical resources” and should focus on “entrepreneurialism, innovation, design, marketing...and brand development” as well as “ensuring that Stoke continues to be a creative and exciting place for artists and designers to live and work.”⁴⁹⁰ Elsewhere Hunt writes that, “Beyond the ceramics industry, just by holding the Biennial – together with our museums, galleries, art schools, and colleges – we are making an important statement for potential investors and talent to come into the city. An exciting urban environment, with artists and entrepreneurs, is an essential

⁴⁸⁹ Tristram Hunt, “Pride and the Potteries” *Crafts* (September/October 2011), 54.

⁴⁹⁰ Tristram Hunt, “Pride and the Potteries” *Crafts* (September/October 2011), 56.

prerequisite for long-term regeneration.”⁴⁹¹ The Biennial certainly participates in this endeavor, as artists and designers, many of them students, are called upon to bring an ‘infusion of energy’, innovation, and attention to the area, while simultaneously participating in the reorientation of Stoke’s ceramics “hub” away from traditional manufacturing and toward the production of symbolic capital, entertainment, tourism, and individualized, entrepreneurial models of ‘innovative’ ceramic practice advocated in new educational programs designed to keep students in the area, while simultaneously participating in a resignification of the medium of ceramics itself that is implicated in the larger socio-political trends traced above.⁴⁹² This brings to the fore a complex and somewhat contradictory relationship between industrial mass production and contemporary studio practice, which sits uneasily alongside the mobilization of other forms of creativity in negotiating the post-industrial economy.

And there has certainly been a definitive shift in Stoke’s *image* since 2013 as a result of the implementation of these strategies. In less than ten years from the aforementioned gloomy premonitions about Stoke’s inevitable demise, the tone of both scholarly and media coverage of the six towns has dramatically changed, overtaken by powerful narratives of endurance and revival. By 2015, *The Guardian* and countless other sources reported a national pottery ‘mania’ indicative of Stoke’s revival.⁴⁹³ In fact some

⁴⁹¹ See *Stoke Sentinel*, <http://www.stokesentinel.co.uk/Tristram-Hunt-Ceramics-Biennial-symbol/story-19832275-detail/story.html#ixzz3s3QuRHN6>

⁴⁹² In recent years Staffordshire University has developed a number of ‘spin-out’ firms designed to keep students in the area after graduation and to attract the attention of the media, buyers, and “online trend-spotters” such as, for example, the 2012 establishment of “Flux,” which is marketed as a way to “reinvigorate traditional ceramic shapes with transfers that are a little eclectic in design — but which still have a quintessential Englishness.”

⁴⁹³ A quick google search reveals numerous equally positive reports of a pottery revival from 2013 onward. Vanessa Thorpe, “Now Bake Off is ending, the next hot craze is about to come out of the oven...” *The Guardian*, October 3, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/>. See also Bethan Ryder, “For the Love of Crocks...the British Ceramics Revival,” *The Telegraph*, July 16, 2015, <https://www.telegraph>.

brands—small boutique pottery firms like Emma Bridgewater, as well as Portmeirion (which bought Spode and Royal Worcester out of administration in 2009 and moved some of its production back to Stoke from China⁴⁹⁴)—do indeed seem to be facing a modest revival. In 2015 the ‘Ceramic Valley’ was granted Enterprise Zone status, the benefits of which included investment in North Staffordshire's advanced manufacturing sector, specifically high-technology ceramics, which will, according to predictions, “result in Stoke-on-Trent becoming a UK hub for advanced ceramics, enabling businesses to compete with the growing technical ceramics sectors in the U.S., Germany and Italy.”⁴⁹⁵ For example, at Lucideon, a materials development, testing and assurance company in Stoke, “they are developing ways of using sodium-based batteries instead of lithium to reduce environmental damage, looking at the use of ceramics within painkillers to reduce potential dependency on opioids and looking at new ways of applying heat management to engines - again to be more environmentally friendly - in the aerospace

co.uk/culture/art/11743826/For-the-love-of-crocks...-the-British-ceramicsrevival.html, and *The Stoke Sentinel*, <http://www.stokesentinel.co.uk/Tristram-Hunt-Ceramics-Biennial-symbol/story-19832275-detail/story.html#ixzz3tHhseos4>.

⁴⁹⁴ Brian Groom, “Queen’s Awards: Portmeirion fights back in ceramic sales battle,” *Financial Times*, April 20, 2016, <https://www.ft.com/content/d930344e-0095-11e6-99cb-83242733f755>

⁴⁹⁵ See *Stoke Sentinel*, <http://www.stokesentinel.co.uk/Enterprise-Zone-status-granted-Stoke-Trent/story-28241809-detail/story.html>. For example, at Lucideon, a materials development, testing and assurance company in Stoke, “they are developing ways of using sodium-based batteries instead of lithium to reduce environmental damage, looking at the use of ceramics within painkillers to reduce potential dependency on opioids and looking at new ways of applying heat management to engines - again to be more environmentally friendly - in the aerospace industry.” Emphasizing the ceramic components used in cellphones and cars is used as a way to connect the industry to the younger generation, and to encourage students to work in the industry, to bring the ‘traditional industry’ into the future, as they put it, and to shake off some of the old associations to appeal to younger generations. “The next step could be the creation of an advanced ceramic campus where, it is hoped, some of the best universities will be attracted to help develop ever newer uses and techniques. ‘We have a possible site, some investors but we need money from the government - about £40m,’ Mr Kinsella said. ‘If we can get the support I think we are three years away from making a significant impact in the city.’” Sarah Portlock, “We Are Stoke-on-Trent: How ceramics power your car and phone,” *BBC News*, September 24, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-stoke-staffordshire-49641133>.

industry.”⁴⁹⁶ It was recently reported by the BBC that emphasizing the ceramic components used in cellphones and cars is used as a way to connect the industry in Stoke to the younger generation, and to encourage students to work in the industry, to bring the ‘traditional industry’ into the future, as they put it, and to shake off some of the old associations to appeal to younger generations, and plans are now in place to create an ‘advanced ceramics campus’ to attract new students. However most of the developments at the centre of the ‘ceramic craze’⁴⁹⁷ are due not to the revitalization of Stoke’s traditional manufacturing sector, but to other types of pottery events and attractions, which are one component of a concerted effort to market Stoke as a tourist destination.⁴⁹⁸

Between 2012 and 2015, the Arts Council has invested more than £9 million in Stoke-on-Trent.⁴⁹⁹ Middleport Pottery has been renovated and transformed into a new “visitor centre,” and 2015 also saw the opening of the £34 million visitor attraction “World of Wedgwood.”⁵⁰⁰ Other recent initiatives included the allotment of a £500,000 grant from the notably independent grant foundation Esmée Fairbairn to arts organisations in Stoke to develop a five-year programme named Artcity,⁵⁰¹ which will turn vacant buildings and disused spaces in the city into theatres, galleries, studios and

⁴⁹⁶ Sarah Portlock, “We Are Stoke-on-Trent: How ceramics power your car and phone,” *BBC News*, September 24, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-stoke-staffordshire-49641133>.

⁴⁹⁷ Vanessa Thorpe, “Now Bake Off is ending, the next hot craze is about to come out of the oven...” *The Guardian*, October 3, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/>

⁴⁹⁸ As noted in the most recent city planning agendas.

⁴⁹⁹ For more on the *Appetite* program see the *Stoke Sentinel*, <http://www.stokesentinel.co.uk/s-buzz-Stoke-Trent-Darren-Henley-chief-executive/story-28080480-detail/story.html>

⁵⁰⁰ Significantly for the discussion at hand, these new museums focus not only on showcasing exquisite wares, but open the production process itself to visitors through factory tours that allow you to witness various stages of manufacture from firing to handpainting, and can even participate in the making process yourself. At *World of Wedgwood*, you can sip, “Darjeeling First Flush from a Parkland teaset,” and youth oriented play areas and retail outlets round out the ‘experience’ The focus on experience-based activities is in line with historically recent shifts in place-branding.

⁵⁰¹ Developed by Stoke-based charity B Arts in partnership with arts companies such as Airspace Gallery, Letting in the Light, The Cultural Sisters, and Partners In Creative Learning and Restoke.

cinemas.⁵⁰² Echoing the BCB's own objectives, the programme's goals are to "...encourage more graduates from Staffordshire University to live and work in the city after their course has finished; to get more arts events happening in Stoke; and to help improve the creative profile of Stoke outside the city,"⁵⁰³ as well as to "develop Stoke as an arts destination and illustrate the power of the arts sector as a vehicle for social and economic regeneration."⁵⁰⁴ In recent years Staffordshire University itself has also developed a number of 'spin-out' firms designed to keep students in the area after graduation and to attract the attention of the media, buyers, and "online trend-spotters."⁵⁰⁵ There are plans in place for portions of Spode itself to be rented out as office space, and recent strategic plans for the city has placed emphasis on expanding its offering for overnight accommodations to cash in on the growing market for shorter vacations.⁵⁰⁶ In perhaps the most explicit effort to cash-in on the ceramics heritage as a branding endeavor we can look to BBC2's reality television series *The Great British Pottery Showdown* set in Stoke, exemplifying the transformation of the labour of ceramics into a commodity spectacle. According to the marketing materials, "Making is the New Baking," and the media hype around The Potteries does not simply represent, but actively produces their regeneration, importantly on different grounds than in the past, just one instance of the replacement of traditional manufacturing with experience and entertainment-based generators of cultural capital. Such endeavors represent the need for

⁵⁰² "Scene Report: Stoke-on-Trent – a malleable city with creative potential," *a.n.*, September 19, 2017, <https://www.a-n.co.uk/news/scene-report-stoke-trent-malleable-city-creative-potential/>

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁵ In 2012 the University created the spin-out ceramics firm Flux. Flux now serves to reinvigorate traditional ceramic shapes with transfers that are a little eclectic in design — but which still have a quintessential Englishness."

⁵⁰⁶ As noted in the most recent city planning agendas.

something to ‘hold up’ the brand, to deal with the problem of how to brand something that is disappearing.⁵⁰⁷

In spite of this upswing, talk of specters and hauntings, of loss and decay remain central to the symbolic mobilization of nostalgia, which is central to the regenerative strategies underlying the shift in Stoke’s image and economy. The most recent BCB continued the tradition of re-animating the fallen spaces of Stoke’s mighty industrial past, but the competing narratives cited above highlight the delicate and finely balanced relationship between the emphasis on innovation and renewal, and the preservation of the historical heritage that physically and symbolically marks Stoke—between urban regeneration, and the narrative of decline which is the source of much of the Potteries’ ‘aura.’ It seems as if, in the context of the Biennial, new production must negotiate with the historical legacy of the medium, which serves as something of a ‘point of passage’ through which new work is continually filtered, even if only by proximity. Within a potentially utopian and future-oriented critical practice, the factory is what Kevin Hetherington refers to as an obligatory point of passage, “the established site in ordering the production process” through which new conceptions of labor and production are necessarily filtered.⁵⁰⁸ The perpetual performance and re-performance of decline, absence, loss, and resurrection is at the heart of the potteries’ creative regeneration—the past is foraged and re-combined, celebrated and problematized, laid to rest, eulogized, and reinvigorated in perpetuity. For, it should be noted, works like Brownsword’s and the

⁵⁰⁷ These are only a small number of examples, but to give a sense of the success of these endeavors, Stoke-on-Trent bid to become the UK’s City of Culture 2021 (it did not win, but the bid has been described as energizing for the community).

⁵⁰⁸ Kevin Hetherington, “Moderns as Ancients: Time, Space, and the Discourse of Improvement,” in *Timespace: Geographies of Temporality*, edited by Jon May and Nigel Thrift (London and New York: Routledge, 2003): 52.

others discussed in this chapter, specifically those who make efforts to record and revive working class memory, nonetheless have a limit point in terms of restoring what has been lost.⁵⁰⁹ Their symbolic capital has been used to boost the image (and potentially the economy) of Stoke, but can do little to restore the hundreds of factory jobs that have been lost, and the dramatic shift in local culture that is being heralded in by the very structure which frames the artworks themselves. One is left to wonder what the status of these working class struggles in the city will be once the expected influx of creative class entrepreneurs settle in and ‘revive’ the area.

This contradiction is encapsulated by the debates that occurred around an art project by Anna Francis initiated in 2017 titled *Estate Agency* (Fig. 24). For the project, Francis staged Campbell Works, a contemporary art space in the region of Stoke Newington, London, UK, as a high street real estate agency. According to the press release for the show, “[i]nstead of showing properties and development opportunities local to Stoke Newington, all of the properties for sale or to let [were] in Stoke-on-Trent...with abundant empty spaces and vacant properties and relatively low sale and rental values. Each property advertised [was] real life and real time and include[d] residential, commercial and artist studio provision.” In other words, the show in effect marketed cheap real estate in Stoke-On-Trent to artists who are increasingly priced out of the London borough. Although the project intended to ask critical questions about the complexities of culture-led regeneration and artists’ (not at all black-and-white) position within so-called artist-led gentrification (or ‘artwashing’ as it is often called), the irony used in the show’s description was lost on many viewers, leading to a widespread critique

⁵⁰⁹ I owe this insight to Dr. Kirsty Robertson, whose thoughtful comments on this paper led to a significant reorientation of its primary arguments.

of the artist's complicity in just such processes. Many of the responses to the exhibition reflected a deep animosity towards artists and arts institutions 'working in regeneration contexts' in the UK.⁵¹⁰ Some of this animosity may have been leftover from a controversial 2013 initiative in which the Council offered 33 vacated houses in Cobridge (an area of Stoke-on-Trent) for sale for £1, causing some understandable resentment among some residents "who had not received such help."⁵¹¹ Anna Francis was one of the new residents who took advantage of the program, and has since been extremely active in advocating arts-based strategies for community regeneration, including buying a disused (once much-loved) local pub for £1 as the base for an arts-based community space called *The Portland Inn Project* (Fig. 25-27), perhaps lending another reason why locals were primed against such initiatives (which, it should be noted, seems to have been increasingly embraced by many).

The highly charged, often negative, dynamic between workers and artists is one that has been under-examined in literature on artist-led regeneration. Although focusing on the context of post-1960s artistic practices spearheaded by American artists, Julia Bryan-Wilson's book *Art Workers* nonetheless provides an important precedent for discussing just this sort of tension between artists making work about—or in response to—blue-collar labor, and the workers whose livelihoods are purportedly the subject (or counterpart) of their work. Bryan-Wilson specifically looks at the emergence of a group

⁵¹⁰ See Anna Francis, "Artwashing' gentrification is a problem – but vilifying the artists involved is not the answer," *The Conversation*, October 5, 2017, <https://theconversation.com/artwashing-gentrification-is-a-problem-but-vilifying-the-artists-involved-is-not-the-answer-83739>. Interestingly, the rhetoric of *Estate Agency* is mirrored by a Stoke-based project initiated by artist Anna Francis in conjunction with the artist-run-centre Airspace. Titled the *Portland Inn Project*, it seems to have been quite successful in engaging the community. Nonetheless, Francis recounts facing resistance by locals. See "The Portland Inn Project," *A Restless Art*, <https://arestlessart.com/case-studies/the-portland-inn-project/>

⁵¹¹ Anna Francis was one of the residents who took advantage of the program, perhaps adding to the local animosity towards the Portland Inn Project among some Stoke residents.

of leftist artists in the US— primary among them Hans Haacke, Lucy Lippard, Robert Morris, and Carl Andre—who sought to re-signify the nature and value of artistic labor by identifying themselves as ‘art workers.’ Although they were invested in flattening, to a certain degree, the distinction between art-making and wage labor as a way to insist on the fair compensation of artists for their work, often relying on material and symbolic references to so-called ‘non-artistic’ labor (such as bricklaying, construction work, or office work) in order to conceptually link these two spheres, Bryan-Wilson notes that they were notably not committed to populism: as she puts it, they were “not primarily concerned with making [their] images accessible to the very people with whom these artists asserted a fragile solidarity.”⁵¹² The often contentious relationship between the blue-collar worker and the artists in this context, is exemplified by the refusal, by unionized print shop in NYC, to print Art Workers Coalition anti-Vietnam war posters.⁵¹³ In the UK, similar clashes occurred. The purchase by the Tate Gallery of Carl Andre’s *Equivalent VIII*, an arrangement of 120 stacked firebricks positioned in a rectangle on the gallery floor, spurred a wave of mocking responses in the popular press—Bryan Wilson references a particularly scathing ad published in the Luton *Evening Press* in 1967, that featured an image of bricklayer Bob Breed leaning against a stack of bricks, with the caption “What a load of . . . art work, Bob.”⁵¹⁴ The caption ironically referenced the time it took Bob to create his ‘masterpiece’ (all of five minutes), as an implicit critique of the value of Andre’s work (which was notably purchased with public funds).⁵¹⁵

⁵¹² Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009): 3.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, 20

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 41

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 41-42

Although differently oriented in both content and form, a similar sort of tension can be identified between the influx of ceramic artists making work about traditional industry in Stoke (and the official use of cultural regeneration strategies to rebuild the area's economy), and those who had been previously employed in the industry itself (those who have remained, that is, as many have had to leave the city in search of better fortunes elsewhere). Some of the resentment traced above can be observed in comments by some locals in Stoke, especially those who used to be employed in the Potteries. In an interview with journalist John Lichfield, Sam, a 60-year-old café-owner said: "They tell me that I'm in the cultural quarter of The Potteries. The bloody cultural quarter. Where do they think we are, bloody France?"⁵¹⁶ Another interviewee, Dave, 55-year-old former potter, now a part-time mechanic, lamented the shift in the economic make-up of the Potteries, saying: "Stoke on Trent is a shit-hole. Once everyone knew someone in the pits or the pots. Now all we've got is students and care-workers."⁵¹⁷

Brownsword's work does attempt to engage with some specificity (and, according to the artist, 'without nostalgia') with these problems. In an interview to accompany his work *National Treasure* (2014), he acknowledges that:

Those displaced from the industry find it difficult to transfer their unique skills and knowledge to any other area of work. I have come to know some incredibly skilled people - hand painters, mould makers and modellers who now work in supermarkets, or other minimum wage enterprises. So from a personal perspective, it has been the under valuing of such people and the loss of

⁵¹⁶ He continues: If I want to put tables outside and be continental, I have to pay bloody council £500 a year or summat. £500 a year? Might be worth it if we had summer all year but in Hanley it lasts only three weeks at most..." Quoted in John Lichfield, "Stoke, the city that Britain forgot," *UnHerd*, November 20, 2019, <https://unherd.com/2019/11/stoke-the-city-that-britain-forgot/>.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid.

indigenous skills that I continue to address. Through the work I aim to raise a greater awareness, not in a sentimental or nostalgic way, of the extent of what has disappeared.⁵¹⁸

However, through an accompanying choreographed performance of “remembering and re-enactment in the derelict Josiah Spode factory,”⁵¹⁹ the artist’s work almost cannot help but be tinged with the sentimental hue of nostalgia, especially given the above-noted limitations of art practice generally to restore what has been lost, and the overall atmosphere produced by the BCB and related endeavors.

I would like to devote what follows here to unpacking the ways in which nostalgia and a sense of mourning are mobilized in Stoke as a way to illuminate an interesting nexus between traditional manufacturing and the creative economy in the practices discussed in this chapter, with nostalgia itself functioning, paradoxically, as a mode of mediating this transition. Tim Strangleman cautions against dismissing ‘smokestack nostalgia’ as uncritical, arguing that “we need a more nuanced account which asks questions about the continuing desire to reflect back and find value in the industrial past.”⁵²⁰ Similarly, scholar Andreas Huyssen, in the book *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, discusses the dual function of nostalgia and the memory of the past “to legitimize and give meaning to the present and to envision the future, culturally politically, socially.”⁵²¹ Both suggest that the work that material

⁵¹⁸ “National Treasure,” *The Broadcaster*, 2014, http://www.the-broadcaster.co.uk/The_Broadcaster/national_treasure.html.

⁵¹⁹ “National Treasure,” *Meadow Arts*, <https://www.meadowarts.org/Installations/neil-brownswordnational-treasure>.

⁵²⁰ Tim Strangleman, “‘Smokestack Nostalgia,’ ‘Ruin Porn’ or Working-Class Obituary: The Role and Meaning of Deindustrial Representation,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, Vol. 84 (Fall 2013): 23-37.

⁵²¹ Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003)

remains, and our imagining of them, do in the present (and for whom) is as important as the historical content they appear to encode. While works by the artists discussed in this chapter (and the focus of the BCB generally) certainly express a desire to preserve, or at least eulogize, the disappearing skill-base, human experience, and material output of the potteries, they sit at the centre of a complex set of issues and concerns that exceed this backwards reflection. It may be argued that performing the demise of the historic ceramics industry in fact facilitates the transference of the detritus of the potteries district from transient to durable, allowing cast-off waste to acquire re-awakened artistic merit and allowing them to work in the present, offering the impression that they can speak of the lives and sociocultural values which have lain dormant until looked upon with new eyes by today's conceptual ceramists. Even as the demise of the pottery industry is lamented, an atmosphere of celebration has emerged to trumpet in the new and experimental turns rising out of its wake, 'out of the ashes,'⁵²² as it were. Concomitant with the pervasive atmosphere of regret at the BCB and elsewhere in Stoke is the frequent assertion that 'change is inevitably at the expense of that which came before.'⁵²³ As such, the memorialisation of the past can be seen as instrumental, indeed immanent, to a process of change. Certainly within a larger discourse of experimental ceramics which increasingly interrogates and challenges the continued tie of the medium to the utilitarian model, the symbolic death of 'the vessel' enacted by works such as 'monument' carry certain expanded implications for experimental practice. As such, post-industrial ceramics have carved out a space of freedom to move in new conceptual directions,

⁵²² Adamson, "Neil Brownsword: Up From the Ashes." *Ceramics, Art and Perception*, Vol. 73, No.1 (2004): 67-70.

⁵²³ "Monument," *Clare Twomey*, accessed December 2, 2011, http://www.claretwomey.com/monument_info.html.

breaking in many ways from the shackles of tradition while never completely forgetting the heritage of their medium. I argue, however, that this functions as much for the sake of creating a sense of continuity *in spite of* transformation. The perpetual performance of death and revival continually refreshes the legacy itself, giving permanence to a state of transition. Stoke exists perpetually in the temporal in-between, a feedback loop of self-reflexivity, and a cycle of perpetual identity crisis, leading to the sense that, “there is no ‘there’ there in Stoke-on-Trent,” but where the oscillation between crisis and renewal comes to define the place itself.⁵²⁴

In this context, studio ceramists making work *about* the decline of industrial production incorporating its material remains participate in a process of what Daintry describes as “re-defining the cultural positioning of ceramics.”⁵²⁵ The resultant objects are in themselves archival documents of this material and cultural re-definition. What I wish to highlight here is the way these recent artistic works themselves embody, in concentrated form, an extremely complex intersection of individual, local, national, and global forces and relations. If ceramics are above all, as argued by Paul Mathieu, archival materials, then the recent works such as those discussed in this chapter are to some extent an anxious archive, incorporating within their very form both indices of the (longed-for) past and an orientation toward an (imagined) future. They highlight the medium of clay itself as a politicised material by, “adopting frameworks which seek to detail ‘localized responses to global processes...related to structural and socio-economic changes associated with the new global economy.’”⁵²⁶

⁵²⁴ John Lichfield, “Stoke, the city that Britain forgot,” *UnHerd*, November 20, 2019, <https://unherd.com/2019/11/stoke-the-city-that-britain-forgot/>.

⁵²⁵ Daintry, “the Essential Vessel,” 5.

⁵²⁶ Jayne, 13.

A discussion of one final work may help to illuminate these broad connections between the local and the global as filtered through the Stoke potteries. When visitors entered the China Hall of the Spode Factory during the 2013 instalment of the BCB, they encountered what looked like 80 identical large red vessels decorated with elaborate floral patterns in gold and pink. What one wouldn't immediately realize, however, is that the vases were not in fact identical, despite appearances to the contrary. Rather, the installation, a work by Twomey titled *Made in China* (Fig. 28), consisted of 79 vessels manufactured using transfers in Jingdezhen, China, among which was hidden a single hand-painted piece in 18-carat gold from nearby Royal Crown Derby. According to the exhibition text, the single UK-produced object took longer to complete than the 21 days it took to produce all of the 79 produced in China combined.⁵²⁷ One review elaborated:

The installation showed the one plaintive vase set among the sea of cheap Chinese imports. For Twomey, what distinguished the English vase was that its decoration sat under the surface, compared to the Chinese vases whose designs were more imposed on the surface. The installation seemed to demonstrate that despite miraculous productive capacity of Chinese industry, it was still no match for the subtle craftsmanship of English labour.⁵²⁸

In many ways this work speaks to the issue taken up in a number of the artworks discussed above, marking out a zone of loss and mourning for the hand-labour associated with the ornamentation of industrial pottery. However, Twomey's work (intentionally or

⁵²⁷ Clare Twomey, "Made in China," http://www.claretwomey.com/made_in_china.html.

⁵²⁸ Kevin Murray, "Unmaking The Future—The Aesthetics Of Post-Industrial Ceramics," *Craft Unbound*, November 4, 2011, <https://www.craftunbound.net/report/unmaking-the-futurethe-aesthetics-of-post-industrial-ceramics>.

not) vastly broadens the scope of reflection implicit in the nostalgic-as-position, situating local decline in direct relation to nationalistic ideas about British identity—implicitly relying upon the denigration of Chinese imports⁵²⁹ (somewhat humorously given that transfers were in fact a British invention⁵³⁰)—as well as presenting a global perspective on the consequences associated with deindustrialisation, outsourcing, and technological advancement in ceramics. By singling out the hand-painted vase, the work sets up a dynamic couched in nationalistic ideas about place of production that, it has been noted, have historically had particular importance to the ceramics industry compared to other products, and which have recently been ‘reignited’ by the sale of key firms in Stoke-On-Trent.⁵³¹ As observed by a reviewer of the show, *Made in China* constructed an environment at the BCB in which “Within moments of entering you are seeking out UK production.”⁵³²

However, unlike the majority of the other works discussed in this chapter, *Made in China* stands apart by acknowledging the broader economic and political context in

⁵²⁹ Particularly interesting since China had a monopoly on porcelain production until the 17th century, a history that has been widely debated and very contentious. See Stuart Heaver, “The great tea robbery: how the British stole China’s secrets and seeds – and broke its monopoly on the brew,” *Post Magazine*, May 27, 2017, <https://www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/long-reads/article/2095707/great-tea-robbery-how-british-stole-chinas>; Andrew Leonard, “A twisted tale of Chinese porcelain,” *Salon*, January 26, 2006, <https://www.salon.com/2006/01/25/porcelain/>.

⁵³⁰ The transfer printing process was developed by John Sadler and Guy Green of Liverpool in 1756 but is often attributed to Josiah Spode, who in 1784 figured out how to produce décor in the style of popular Chinese imports through transfer printing.

⁵³¹ More emphasis is now placed on the brand ownership, or location of design, rather than place of production: “The acquisition of Waterford Wedgwood Royal Doulton by a Finnish group has reignited the debate over false and misleading claims over where UK ceramics are manufactured.” “But some competitors contend the ceramics group is stamping its product “Wedgwood England”, even when it is manufactured at its Indonesian factory. Critics say this gives the company a misleading competitive advantage in a sector where consumers lay great emphasis on provenance and heritage.” Harry Hockaday of Unity, which represents the 4,000 workers in Stoke’s potteries, says country of origin marking is “the hottest issue facing the industry”. John Murray Brown, “UK Ceramics Industry in Battle Over Heritage,” *Financial Times*, May 17, 2015, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/b0383b1a-fafe-11e4-84f3-00144feab7de.html#axzz3zsKY4PNj>

⁵³² Jill Read, “Made in Stoke,” *Apollo Magazine*, October 10, 2013, <http://www.apollo-magazine.com/made-stoke/>.

which local processes are embedded. Rather than focusing purely on the local consequences of outsourcing to a vague ‘elsewhere’ of production rarely directly represented, in *Made in China*, the unnamed Chinese makers gain a symbolic presence, even if only abstractly, and the work thereby calls into question the broader politics of offshoring manufacture and widespread perceptions of China as a place of low-quality mass production. In fact, Jingdezhen, often referred to as “the porcelain capital of china,” mirrors England’s own ‘Potteries’ as a globally recognized ceramics center, here overshadowed by the emphasis on England’s superior craft skills (interesting in itself given that porcelain was in fact a result of espionage from a Chinese recipe which Josiah Spode himself acquired in the 1790s).⁵³³ Indeed, the history of competition between Britain and China in the production of ceramics is a fraught one – given the inseparable relationship of pottery from the history of tea (it’s production, circulation and consumption), it must be acknowledged that the success of the British trade in both was based in a long history of colonial manoeuvrings, violence, and conquest, including two Opium Wars, the acquisition of Hong Kong as a British Colony, and the imposition of British trade policies on China, all of which had detrimental effects on, among many things, the market for Chinese ceramic exports.

Today it is little recognized that Jingdezhen is facing many of the same problems as Stoke, having to selectively adapt to the post-industrial economy through ‘ceramic tourism’ and other creative cities initiatives as resources are stretched and manufacturing jobs are migrating from there too, to Vietnam and Cambodia where labor is cheaper still,

⁵³³ Andrew Leonard, “A twisted tale of Chinese porcelain,” *Salon*, January 26, 2006, <https://www.salon.com/2006/01/25/porcelain/>.

and as labor and energy costs in China rise steadily.⁵³⁴ And, further complicating the relationship, a recent development has seen an increasing taste for pottery marked “Made in England”⁵³⁵ in China, as part of a taste for traditional Victorian tea served in ‘authentic’ fine bone china wares.⁵³⁶ Apparently, the symbolic value of this deal was not lost on Tristram Hunt, who boasted: “Finally, Stoke-on-Trent is back in the business of exporting china to China,”⁵³⁷ adding, “[t]his is just the kind of high-quality, brand-conscious business model we need to see more of. It is a powerful reminder of how valuable the ‘made in England’ brand remains abroad and what alluring cultural associations remain embedded within UK manufacturing.”⁵³⁸ In an interesting turn of events, during the 2015 BCB, Stoke hosted the Chinese ambassador Liu Xiaoming and other ceramics business leaders from China at the date BCB to discuss bringing investment to Stoke-on-Trent and strengthening tourist ties between the two countries.⁵³⁹

⁵³⁴ See the *Stoke Sentinel*, <http://www.stokesentinel.co.uk/Tristram-Hunt-seeing-revival-Stoke-Trent-pottery/story-20547877-detail/story.html>. See also Li Songjie and Li Xinghua, “The Role of Cultural Creative Industry in the Process of the City Development: The Case of Jingdezhen,” *Studies in Sociology of Science*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2011): 74-78; And Yimin He, “Prosperity and Decline: A Comparison of the Fate of Jingdezhen, Zhuxianzhen, Foshan and Hankou in Modern Times,” *Front. Hist. China*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2010): 52–85.

⁵³⁵ British pottery is also travelling abroad with great frequency, as agents to broker relations with other countries. In 2014 a large-scale exhibition of Wedgwood pottery travelled to the Russian Decorative Art Museum as part of the 2014 UK-Russia year of culture intended to strengthen diplomatic ties between the two countries and to overcome perceptions that the relationship is ‘frozen.’ “The ‘Passion for Porcelain: Masterpieces of Ceramics from the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum’ is the first time that outstanding Chinese and European ceramics from the British Museum and the V&A’s have been displayed together in China.” “The British Museum and Victoria and Albert Museum brought to the National Museum of China 146 selected masterpieces of ancient Chinese ceramic art for an exhibition entitled “Passion for Porcelain”. It also celebrated the 40th anniversary of diplomatic ties between China and the UK.” Such initiatives project a particular convergence of diplomatic, economic, and social goals: “In many ways, this signals the next step in British manufacturing’s evolving relationship with the emerging economic powers of the so-called BRIC nations of Brazil, Russia, India and China.” See the *Stoke Sentinel*, <http://www.stokesentinel.co.uk/Tristram-Hunt-seeing-revival-Stoke-Trent-pottery/story-20547877-detail/story.html>

⁵³⁶ In fact, recently Hudson’s Pottery in Longton received a boost, needing to double its workforce after teaming up with Annvita English Tea Company to supply a chain of tea rooms in China.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*

What is just under the surface of Twomey's *Made in China*, and extremely overt in Hunt's comments above, is the patriotic investment in local Stoke production—as visitors encountered the Chinese imports amidst the now derelict site of the Spode factory, surely many would have perceived an accusatory aura cast over the imposing red vessels. Although the work was presented in 2013, this aspect of the work gains new resonance when viewed in hindsight from the present, bringing to light an unlikely connection between the contemporary ceramic art practices discussed in this chapter and the recent (as I write in 2020) political climate in the UK. Interestingly, Stoke has come to be understood by many as exemplary of the economic, socio-political, ideological and emotional rifts that led, on June 23, 2016, to a 51.9 percent majority vote in favor of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union (now ubiquitously known as Brexit), for reasons that have much to do with the fate of the potteries. In fact, in the media Stoke-on-Trent has come to be called 'Capital of Brexit,' as the city which voted the highest proportion in favor of leaving the EU. In their essay, "Explaining 'Brexit capital': uneven development and the austerity state," Gordon MacLeod and Martin Jones provide a detailed and astute account of the 'socio-economic fissures' underlying support for Brexit in the UK, and the reasons why Stoke-On-Trent is so exemplary of them. Specifically, they trace the Brexit result to a long-brewing sense of economic abandonment felt by (especially white) working class citizens in large swathes of Great Britain since the Thatcher era. Referring to former Labour Prime Minister Gordon Brown's 2016 description of the Brexit vote as a "revolt of the regions,"⁵⁴⁰ they point out that Brexit was, to a large extent, led by communities like Stoke that have endured "sustained

⁵⁴⁰ Anoosh Chakelian, "'A revolt of the regions': Could Gordon Brown's federal UK plan become Labour Brexit policy?" *New Statesman*, November 3, 2016, <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/devolution/2016/11/revolt-regions-could-gordon-brown-s-federal-uk-plan-become-labour-brexit>

economic dispossession of public goods and services further exacerbated by the steadfast commitment by Conservative-led governments to a politics of austerity,⁵⁴¹ and was the result of a “neoliberal accumulation regime that privileges interest-bearing financial capital at the expense of capital in the production of tradeable commodities.”⁵⁴²

As workers in traditional manufacturing regions watched their industries collapse and their quality of life rapidly diminish, rising inequality (a result of uneven development across the UK) generated a general feeling of resentment and disconnect between many working class citizens and the government, a strong sense of mistrust for the democratic process, and the feeling of a “rift” between London and the industrial regions of Britain as described above.⁵⁴³ As MacLeod and Jones note, “it was little wonder the community began drawing unfavourable comparisons with the UK state’s earlier willingness to bail out the banking sector following the 2008–2009 financial crisis.”⁵⁴⁴ Despite the Conservative government paying lip service to “rebalancing” the economy through renewed investment in manufacturing as signified in 2011 by finance minister George Osborne’s call for a Britain “carried aloft by the march of the makers,” the effects of recession, deregulation, financialization, and the growth of the service industries have continued to prioritize the interests of the one percent at the expense of workers in traditional manufacturing industries, leading Larry Elliot of *The Guardian* to

⁵⁴¹ Gordon MacLeod and Martin Jones, “Explaining ‘Brexit Capital’: Uneven Development and the Austerity State,” *Space and Polity*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (2018): 111.

⁵⁴² *Ibid.*, 121.

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁴ MacLeod and Jones further note that “[i]n pursuing restrictive monetary policies, the Thatcher governments also further squeezed investment in manufacturing-dependent regions while stimulating the financial and banking sectors located primarily in the southeast, especially following the 1986 ‘big bang’ deregulation of the City. Thatcherism therefore intensified economic, geographical, social, and indeed political divisions between the south and the rest of the UK.” MacLeod and Jones, 118.

observe in 2016 that, “[f]ive years on, the latest industrial production figures suggest that the makers have yet to put their boots on, let alone start marching.”⁵⁴⁵

Stoke, while not unique, is certainly a representative example of the detrimental impact of national economic restructuring at the local level for traditional industrial regions across the UK.⁵⁴⁶ In 2011, the Department of Health estimated that over 50 percent of the population of the city were classed as living in the ‘most deprived quintile’ in the country.⁵⁴⁷ Stoke has one of the highest unemployment rates in England, encompassing approximately one fifth of working-age adults and, as noted above, of those who are employed around one in five now work in the service sector in increasingly precarious (often short-term seasonal contract) positions.⁵⁴⁸ It also has an average income much lower than the national average (at approximately three quarters). The impact of widespread poverty, inequality, underemployment, and insufficient investment in social services and local infrastructure resulting from austerity measures is made visible in the increasing numbers of uninhabited dwellings (constituting about one out of every five houses in the city⁵⁴⁹) and, as discussed above, derelict factories, as large parts of the area stagnate. Like many northern industrial towns, this is a matter not only of lost jobs, but a full-scale transformation in the nature and quality of community life. As Reverend Geoff Eze described: “The pubs, the labour clubs and the mutual societies that tethered these

⁵⁴⁵ Larry Elliott, “March of the makers remains a figment of Osborne's imagination,” *The Guardian*, January 12, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2016/jan/12/march-of-the-makers-osbornes-economy-manufacturing-output>. See also, Andrew Walker, “UK manufacturing: Whatever happened to the ‘march of the makers?’” *BBC News*, January 28, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-35414075>.

⁵⁴⁶ MacLeod and Jones: “Given how 80 per cent of Stoke’s pottery was exported overseas, the high exchange rates that emerged between 1979 and 1980 – a consequence of the 1979 Thatcher government’s unbending commitment to monetarism, deflation, and expenditure cuts – were effectively a death warrant.”

⁵⁴⁷ Jon Burnett, “New Geographies of Racism: Stoke-on-Trent,” *Institute of Race Relations* (2011): 4, https://irr.org.uk/app/uploads/2016/12/New_geographies_racism_Stoke.pdf

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

working communities together – that’s gone too. For decade, after decade, after decade, the working men and women of Stoke-on-Trent felt forgotten.”⁵⁵⁰

Despite these effects, little to no regional assistance has been provided to Stoke to offset these changes, and in fact the types of initiatives that have taken place to revive the area, including the BCB, are a direct result of economic policies favoring deregulation. As Macleod and Jones summarize, “...Thatcher’s ideological antipathy to state intervention saw regional policy ‘stream-lined’ to become part of a new ‘enterprise initiative’”⁵⁵¹ Rather than state intervention, economic regeneration has been largely left to the likes of agencies like Enterprise Trusts, Business Links, and Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs), agencies (like the Staffordshire TEC) driven by local business interests rather than the interests of the local community and workforce, and invested in an economic model oriented away from manufacturing and toward a ‘low value added’ services economy heavily reliant on low-paid and contingent ‘flexible’ labor. Additionally, as the authors point out, Stoke has seen a “revolving door of ‘regeneration; agencies,’ among them Advantage West Midlands and the North Staffordshire Regeneration Partnership (referenced above as a key financier of the BCB), which were backed by New Labor and replaced under the Coalition Government by the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).⁵⁵² Such initiatives, according to Toynbee and Walker, highlight the government’s “subsidizing [of] private firms who return the favour with lower wages and little enhancement in training and

⁵⁵⁰ Quoted in MacLeod and Jones, 121.

⁵⁵¹ Quoted in MacLeod and Jones, 123.

⁵⁵² MacLeod and Jones, 123.

skills.”⁵⁵³ Of course the feeling of abandonment by local workers was compounded by the increasing turn to offshoring by local companies, exemplifying a broader trend across the northern industrial towns in which “long embedded local corporations sought profit maximization via alternative spatial divisions of labour.”⁵⁵⁴ It was an especially harsh blow when Wedgwood—so emblematically tied to British identity—began outsourcing to China (2003), and then Indonesia (2009).

It is perhaps not surprising in this light that “Brexit has been portrayed as a British backlash against globalisation and a desire for a reassertion of sovereignty by the UK as a nation-state.”⁵⁵⁵ Citing a 2016 article in the *Economist*, MacLeod and Jones note the common conception that the, “division between London, which voted strongly for Remain, and the north, which did the reverse, reveals a sharply polarised country, with a metropolitan elite that likes globalisation on one side and an angry working class that does not on the other.”⁵⁵⁶ Descriptions of Brexit as a ‘working class revolt’⁵⁵⁷ against the ruling elite (“not to mention its intelligentsia and much of its youth,” Susan Watkins notably adds⁵⁵⁸), and as an expression of “the resentment of globalization’s losers,” have come to characterize analyses of the referendum result. That the effects of globalization (and it’s creation of ‘winners and losers’⁵⁵⁹) are one primary cause of these

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁵ Gomez, Arana A, Rowe J, de Ruyter A, Semmens-Wheeler R, Hill K., “Brexit: ‘Revolt’ against the ‘elites’ or Trojan horse for more deregulation?” *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (2019): 498-512.

⁵⁵⁶ MacLeod and Jones.

⁵⁵⁷ Geoffrey Wheatcroft, “Europhobia: a very British problem,” *The Guardian*, June 21, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/21/brexit-eurosepticism-history>. See also Jon Harris, “Britain is in the midst of a working-class revolt,” *The Guardian*, June 17, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/17/britain-working-class-revolt-eu-referendum>.

⁵⁵⁸ Susan Watkins, “Casting Off,” *New Left Review* 100 (July/August 2016), <https://newleftreview.org/issues/III100/articles/susan-watkins-casting-off.pdf>.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid.

rifts is a common diagnosis, especially given that immigration was a key point of contention between the stay and leave camps.⁵⁶⁰ According to MacLeod and Jones, against the feeling of powerlessness created by the declining fortunes of Britain’s “industrial heartlands” and the government’s disinterest in intervening or offering aid, “the EU referendum seemed to offer an opportunity to reclaim lost power – over our laws, over our rulers, over our borders – that was eagerly taken, despite the authoritative warnings about the dire economic consequences of doing so.”⁵⁶¹

The displacement of blame has notably also led to growing racial tensions in Stoke, including the growing influence of far right political parties such as the British National Party (BNP) (which apparently has referred to Stoke as the ‘jewel in the crown’⁵⁶²), resulting from Labour Party’s “failure to revive Stoke’s economic fortunes.”⁵⁶³ According to Jon Burnett, Bentilee, a suburb of Stoke situated between Hanley and Longton particularly exemplifies how racial divisions have been exacerbated by the economic decline of the city—when the local authority fails to provide the predominantly white residents with housing, “rumours abound that the small number of local BME residents are responsible.”⁵⁶⁴

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁶¹ MacLeod and Jones, 111-112.

⁵⁶² As outlined by Burnett, “the BNP began systematically campaigning in the locality in the late 1990s. In 2001, the organisation distributed leaflets to families around two schools in the city, one of them with a large number of Asian pupils, claiming that within them was a ‘low-intensity race war’. The following year the city elected its first BNP councillor and by 2003 the organisation had established itself as the main opposition to the Labour Party, averaging between 25-30 per cent of the votes in the wards that it was contesting. By 2008, the BNP was the joint-second largest party, with nine councillors, and Stoke faced a real possibility of becoming the first city controlled by the far Right.”

⁵⁶³ Macleod and Jones, 123. See also Nick Clark, “Broken potteries? What’s really going on in Stoke,” *Socialist Worker*, February 7, 2017, <https://socialistworker.co.uk/art/44056/Broken+potteries+Whats+really+going+on+in+Stoke>.

⁵⁶⁴ Burnett notes: “one person interviewed for this research who stated that: There has been an undercurrent of anger against migrant workers,” by ‘locals’ out of employment. As such, “At the beginning of the 21st century there was an upsurge of racial violence in the city” against asylum seekers, migrant workers and

In his paper, “The New Geographies of Racism: Stoke-on-Trent,” Burnett argues that “[t]he rise of the BNP in Stoke...indicates how a particular set of political conditions have been opportunistically exploited in an area which, previously, has not had such a historical connection with far-right movements.”⁵⁶⁵ MacLeod and Jones also suggest that the growing indifference of Stoke residents may have been exacerbated by the ‘parachuting in,’ as they put it, of “author, academic, telegenic face, and New Labour apparatchik”⁵⁶⁶ Tristram Hunt (a key spokesperson for the BCB, cited at length above) as MP for Stoke Central in 2010.⁵⁶⁷ As they write, “Either way, in the aftermath of the Brexit result, Hunt resigned his seat to become Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum, which many interpreted as a return to his elite metropolitan sanctuary.”⁵⁶⁸

MacLeod and Jones, however, consider this to be a simplification of a complex set of socio-political and economic factors that have contributed to the economic stagnation of towns like Stoke, arguing that it underestimates the impact of the Westminster government’s political commitment to a ‘neoliberal accumulation regime increasingly dependent upon predatory dispossession of public goods and services; and further, in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis an unyielding adherence to a merciless state project of enduring austerity.’⁵⁶⁹ Watkins, too, argues that the ‘globalisation thesis’

students. Burnett describes a “petition signed by local residents stating that asylum seekers were not welcome, bluntly indicated the level of enmity. In 2010, a swastika and a series of racist messages were sprayed on several Staffordshire University buildings.”

⁵⁶⁵ According to Burnett: “Stoke had historically been a ‘safe’ Labour seat until the early 21st century, when there was an exodus of local support. According to this narrative what had underpinned this turn away from the party was a centrist set of strategies by Blair and Brown, resulting in the neglect of white working-class voters and their interests and, as such, a sense of betrayal amongst large sections of the population. This, combined with a failure of local politicians to address these anxieties and set against the collapse of the potteries, made for a potent reactionary mix: creating a vacuum which the BNP had been able to fill through a facade of community based politics.”

⁵⁶⁶ MacLeod and Jones, 124.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁹ MacLeod and Jones, 113.

is an inadequate explanation for Brexit, stating that it not only ‘bleaches out the crisis-ridden turbulence of contemporary capitalism,’⁵⁷⁰ but also (self-servingly for the those in power) removes the necessity of accountability by the EU’s political leaders. They also highlight the anomaly that, “at the same time [as anti-globalization rhetoric abounds], the Stoke-based British Ceramic Confederation pleads for tariff-free access to the single market,” adding that, “[l]ike everywhere throughout the UK, the intricate anomalies of Brexit become increasingly evident with each passing day.”⁵⁷¹ Nonetheless, the rhetoric of political leaders and the media alike position globalization as a key motivating factor behind the Brexit result, and as such has framed much of the debate and interpretation around the referendum and its results. Thus John Harris opined:

The referendum is a form of displacement activity. It’s about something other – or much more – than what it is supposed to be about. Those forces, for which Euroscepticism is a wholly inadequate word, range from crude racism and nativist dislike of immigrants, to humble patriotism and yearning for a maybe imaginary lost age. The referendum turns not so much on the national interest as on a national idea.⁵⁷²

⁵⁷⁰ Watkins notes (in an argument that is more in-depth than I can cover here,) that “a vote held during the equally ‘open’ bubble years could have had a different outcome.” Susan Watkins, “Casting Off,” *New Left Review* 100 (July/August 2016), <https://newleftreview.org/issues/II100/articles/susan-watkins-casting-off.pdf>.

⁵⁷¹ According to MacLeod and Jones: “Among numerous anomalies or paradoxical characteristics of the Brexit result was the revelation that many less prosperous localities in the UK whose communities voted to leave the EU are precisely those most dependent upon its single market for trade while also being beneficiaries of EU Cohesion Policy support over several decades.”

⁵⁷² Geoffrey Wheatcroft, “Europhobia: a very British problem,” *The Guardian*, June 21, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/21/brexit-euroscepticism-history>. See also Jon Harris, “Britain is in the midst of a working-class revolt,” *The Guardian*, June 17, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/17/britain-working-class-revolt-eu-referendum>. See also Jon Harris, “Britain is in the midst of a working-class revolt,” *The Guardian*, June 17, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/17/britain-working-class-revolt-eu-referendum>.

Exhibited in the lead-up to the Brexit vote, whether Twomey's work fed into or challenged the 'melancholic racialized nationalism',⁵⁷³ that seems to have been one response to economic decline in Stoke and other industrial towns and cities across the UK was likely highly variable depending on the visitor in question. The work does speak, however, to a kind of local positioning of Stoke-made ceramics as a site of loss and mourning, positioned against an external culprit (in this case China). As quoted above, both the dominant frame of the BCB and the rhetoric underlying Brexit are based in a nostalgia for an at least partially imagined past, one that is often sanitized to remove the negative associations of imperial violence that had a major role to play in Stoke's global monopoly on ceramic production.⁵⁷⁴ As such, analyzing them in tandem points to the politics and selectivity of 'preservation' as they engage with contested histories. From these myriad perspectives, the frameworks that have emerged in both contemporary ceramic practices and the official framing of traditional industry in Stoke, point to the ways in which social anxieties about globalisation, deindustrialisation, labor, skill, art,

⁵⁷³ Shilliam, Quoted in MacLeod and Jones, 116-117.

⁵⁷⁴ Tony Barber rightfully points out that "nostalgia is not only a state of mind. In the hands of ideologues it is a political weapon." Tony Barber, Nostalgia and the promise of Brexit," *Financial Times*, July 19, 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/bf70b80e-8b39-11e8-bf9e-8771d5404543>. For the many discussions of the role of nostalgia (and it's relation to romanticized ideas about empire) in the Brexit result see also: Sarah Franklin, "Nostalgic Nationalism: How a Discourse of Sacrificial Reproduction Helped Fuel Brexit Britain," *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (2019): 41-00; Samuel Earle, "The Toxic Nostalgia of Brexit: Leaving the EU will not make Britain great again," *The Atlantic*, October 5, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/10/brexit-britain-may-johnson-eu/542079/>; Isaac Silesbarcena, 'Whiteness' and imperial nostalgia in brexit Britain, The University of Manchester, May 21, 2019, <https://sites.manchester.ac.uk/global-social-challenges/2019/05/21/whiteness-and-imperial-nostalgia-in-brexit-britain/>; Sam Byers, "Britain Is Drowning Itself in Nostalgia," *The New York Times*, March 23, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/23/opinion/sunday/britain-brexit.html>; Roch Dunin-Wasowicz, "Brexit is not only an expression of nostalgia for empire, it is also the fruit of empire," *LSE*, May 11, 2017, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2017/05/11/brexit-is-not-only-an-expression-of-nostalgia-for-empire-it-is-also-the-fruit-of-empire/>; "Sir Vince: Brexit voters driven by nostalgia for a 'white' Britain," *BBC News*, March 11, 2018, and <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/uk-politics-43367293>; and Michael Goldfarb, "Brexit has been driven by England's nostalgia for an imagined past," *The National*, February 4, 2019, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/brexit/brexit-has-been-driven-by-england-s-nostalgia-for-an-imagined-past-1.821625>.

and identity (individual, communal, and national) are played out through the medium of ceramics, and the ways in which they participate in the local reimagining of an industry in transition—here one oriented largely around tourism and the service industry, but in which ceramic history is cultivated as a key draw.⁵⁷⁵

While often represented primarily as a way to ‘excavate’ or preserve the fast-vanishing history and knowledge that lies dormant within the remnants of post-industry—an engagement with the past that is equal parts eulogy and celebration—I argue that the works discussed in this chapter serve as a mode of working-through the relationship between emerging and endangered modes of production, as a way of resituating and re-signifying both contemporary and historical practice, and as powerful nodes of contact and negotiation which make visible—in concentrated form—the intersections of global forces at the local level. Through obsessive re-enactment and physical recovery they create an atypical (at times embodied) archive of medium-specific gestures, methods, and materials. But their potency, I believe, derives in part from their paradoxical relationship to the content they encode, in that they both reflect on (and incorporate within themselves) the very matter of Stoke’s declining pottery industry, and are themselves operational in the post-industrial restructuring which is currently being ushered in to take its place. As such, the works discussed here point to the politics inherent in the integration of post-industrial nostalgia into local economic regeneration initiatives, while nonetheless pointing to the critical potential of creative engagement with the materials of (post)industry, particularly as they function as an archival endeavour. As more and more artists are invited to ‘scavenge’ the area, it will be

⁵⁷⁵ For a discussion of ceramics as an index of historical change see also, David Whiting, *Poet of Residue* (Stoke-On-Trent: The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, 2008), 1.

interesting to see whether there is a limit point to the cycle of death, mourning, and rebirth that has come to define the self-positioning of Stoke's Potteries.

CONCLUSION:

EXHAUSTED FUTURES AND POST-WORK IMAGINARIES

Chen Chieh-jen's 2003 film *Factory* opens with a series of slow pans across several interior spaces of a derelict factory (Fig. 1-3). Devoid of human presence, the space that comes into view through a haze of stagnant air is filled with an array of disused objects and equipment—large piles of garbage, boxes, old machinery, mountains of stools, chairs, papers, and so on, covered in what seems like years of dust and grime. Indeed, long shots of particular objects, such as an old cup filled with moldy tea and cigarette butts, appear to serve solely to index the passage of time in this seemingly long-since-abandoned place.

On the second pass of the camera, two women appear, standing still and silent amid the 'ruins,' joined by several others as the film progresses (Fig. 4-13). Through supplementary text, viewers can learn that the women captured here had once worked daily in the space which forms the setting for the film, identified as the Lien Fu Garment Factory in Taiwan. These women were laid-off six years earlier, part of a large abandoned workforce who (in a way perhaps forecasted by the effects of deindustrialization in the UK and North America, including Stoke-On-Trent), were left behind when many manufacturing industries were moved offshore in the 90s to reduce labor costs, one effect of the spread of neoliberal economic policies in Taiwan after several decades as a thriving, labor-intensive, export-oriented economy. For *Factory*, Chen asked the former workers to return to the site of their past employment and to perform the tasks they had previously been responsible for—in a sense to *work* in the building as if they had never left its employ. As such, the duration of the (silent) film

follows these women as they navigate the derelict space, performing the bodily gestures which once occupied their daily lives—at times they are shown sitting at rows of sewing machines, meticulously assembling denim work-shirts (Fig. 6), or (almost ceremoniously) washing the chairs and other surfaces in the building (Fig. 11-12). At others, however, the women cease to work altogether—captured sleeping at their sewing stations or simply wandering aimlessly around the building for much of the film (Fig. 7-8). During these charged scenes of non-action, time seems to slow to a crawl. Juxtaposed with images and footage of Taiwan’s textile and garment industry at a time when it was thriving, the workers’ return appears almost as a haunting—their once productive labor aesthetically transformed into a poetically empty gesture.

Although this is not the place to engage in a deep analysis of Chen’s sophisticated work, *Factory* nicely encompasses many of the themes that I have tried to draw out in this dissertation, while also pointing to future directions for my research. Like the previous two chapters, it highlights the importance of the factory as both a symbol and nostalgic touchstone for artists commenting on (and/or working within) the post-Fordist economy, while simultaneously engaging with the local circumstances of some of the real workers upon whom the negative consequences of economic globalization weigh most heavily. Divorced from their productive status within the formal economy, the gestures performed by the women in *Factory* register as futile yet powerful—their staging of redundant or seemingly nonproductive labor-as-protest resonates with the practices I have discussed in each section of this dissertation, in which labor is re-framed, at times emptied-out, in the interest of critique. Chen himself references the juxtaposition between mobility and immobility as a vital aspect of his work—here it becomes clear that the

hyper-mobility of global capital is directly related to the immobility of the unemployed left behind in the wake of relocated production.

This dissertation has explored the ways in which an increasing number of contemporary artists internationally have sought to render the globalized relations of capitalist production (aesthetically) visible, and explored the potential ends to which these strategies are mobilized. A less direct outcome, however, has been the appearance of a recurrent thread across recent work engaging the politics of time and labor in diverse geopolitical contexts, one in which a preoccupation with labour, duration, repetition, and slowness registers as an expression of individual and collective *exhaustion*.⁵⁷⁶ While contemporary culture abounds with representations, discourses, and symbols celebrating the virtues of youth, energy, creativity, and unrelenting growth, it is becoming increasingly evident that the fantasy of equal opportunity is difficult to sustain for those marginalized within current economies of precarious and semi-employment, and that the celebration of endurance and tireless ambition is taking its toll on both an economic and human level. As put by Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi: “Capitalism is based on the exploitation of

⁵⁷⁶ Besides the examples discussed specifically in this dissertation, the seeming ubiquity of exhaustion in film addressing post-Fordism, labor precarity and unemployment in different geographical contexts is witnessed all the way from Haile Gerima’s *Bush Mama* (1975), to Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne’s, *Two Days, One Night* (2014) and *Rosetta* (1999), Kelly Reichardt’s *Wendy and Lucy* (2008), Joel Schumacher’s *Falling Down* (1993), and I, Daniel Blake (Ken Loach, 2016), among others. Further, these films find their counterpoint in an increasing number of exhibitions and films focusing on the contemporary terrain of *industrial labor* itself through a similar aesthetic. For example, Rahul Jain’s 2016 documentary *Machines* consisting of a wandering tour of a textile factory in India’s Gujarat region, and the workers who “spend 12-hour shifts earning the equivalent of \$3 a day there.”⁵⁷⁶ Similarly, one could look at Wang Bing’s, *15 Hours*, “a single, 15-hour take in a garment factory in China that captures the daily labor of its 300,000 migrant workers,” workers, it must be said, whose fates are linked to the women in Chen’s *Factory* by the broader structures of neoliberal globalization. These films not only explicitly address issues of economic decline, wage stagnation, income inequality, and general instability under emerging precarious economies, but also, to different degrees, challenge cinematic conventions of action, forward drive, and narrative development through their formal elements, employing many of the cinematic effects associated with the genre of ‘slow cinema.’ Further, they resonate on an ideological level with the normative values and aspirations which frame contemporary life in the West—values which Lauren Berlant collects under the umbrella term of ‘the good life’—upward mobility, job security, political and social equality, and durable intimacy. See Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Duke University Press, 2011).

physical energy, and semiocapitalism has subjugated the nervous energy of society to the point of collapse.”⁵⁷⁷

In the introduction to this dissertation I noted the frequency with which labor has been a topic in contemporary art and scholarship. I believe the hyper-saturation of the discourses around art and labor is vital to the interpretive framing for this work, not only because capitalism and its related ideologies are constantly morphing, incorporating new arenas of activity (and thus require an unceasingly vigilant and equally responsive analysis), but because this proliferation mirrors the ideological inundation and overstimulation characteristic of late capitalism itself. By demystifying the contemporary ‘work ethic’ and its basis in an increasingly untenable set of aspirations, it is my argument that these artworks, films, and exhibitions as a group participate in what I call an “undoing” and ‘exhausting” of the ideology of work itself through revealing the contradictions and structural paradoxes in which it is imbricated under contemporary capitalism. In this, I follow upon John Roberts reformulation of the question of representation as it relates to labor, in which he advocates a deconstructive approach. According to his analysis, the factory is:

...not waiting to be *represented* at all, (in order to reinstate the worker within the symbolic), but, rather, in a more properly transformative and emancipatory way waiting to be *dismantled*. Hence, the representation of the factory, will occur precisely in the process of this dismantling, when its abstract identity as the disciplinary home of the value-form is dissolved.⁵⁷⁸

⁵⁷⁷ Franco “Bifo” Berardi, “Exhaustion and Senile Utopia of the Coming European Insurrection,” *e-flux* 21 (December 2010): n.p.

⁵⁷⁸ John Roberts, “The Missing Factory,” *Mute Magazine* (July 11, 2012), <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/missing-factory>, n.p.

In attempting to imagine a politics of work in a time of its massive expansion as an organizer of everyday life, Kathi Weeks and others have drawn on the autonomist Marxist tradition, advocating the ‘refusal of work’ as a way to “make time and open spaces” to invent and construct alternative worlds. She writes:

...the refusal of work is not in fact a rejection of activity and creativity in general or of production in particular. It is not a renunciation of labor tout court, but rather a refusal of the ideology of work as highest calling and moral duty, a refusal of work as the necessary center of social life and means of access to the rights and claims of citizenship, and a refusal of the necessity of capitalist control of production.”⁵⁷⁹

As opposed to the classical Marxist position, which has the liberation of labor as its goal, Weeks here distinguishes her approach as not the liberation *of* work, but liberation *from* work. Moishe Postone, too, distinguishes between two fundamentally different modes of critical analysis: a critique of capitalism from the standpoint of labor, on the one hand, and a critique of labor in capitalism, on the other.⁵⁸⁰ For Weeks, this opens up to “a model of immanent critique. ...[A] critique of the work society from the perspective of the emergent possibility of a social form in which work does not serve as the primary force of social mediation.”⁵⁸¹ Thus, refusal in the sense used here is not strictly negative, but has productive power, intended to open the way to building new futures.

Exhaustion seems like an unlikely place from which a transformative social project might emerge. However, with the context of immanent breakdown in mind, a

⁵⁷⁹ Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Duke University Press, 2011): 204.

⁵⁸⁰ Quoted in Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 5.

⁵⁸¹ Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 204.

growing numbers of scholars, including Berardi, have explored ways in which the zone of affective strain at the edge of collapse—including the space of exhaustion itself—might be mobilized as a mode of critique. In a high performance culture complicated by new forms of labor, the state of exhaustion has the potential to function as a site of social solidarity, highlighting the human dimension, and cost, of processes generally considered in pragmatic economic terms. As Berardi argues, “[e]ven if the general intellect is infinitely productive, the limits to growth are inscribed in the affective body...: limits of attention, of psychic energy, of sensibility.”⁵⁸² As such, for Berardi activism today requires “...a reversal of the energetic subjectivation that animated the revolutionary theories of the twentieth century...,”⁵⁸³ demanding:

A radical passivity [that] would dispel the ethos of relentless productivity that neoliberal politics has imposed. The mother of all the bubbles, the bubble of work, would finally deflate. ...If a creative consciousness of exhaustion could arise, the current depression may mark the beginning of a massive abandonment of competition, consumerist drive, and dependence on work.”⁵⁸⁴

Each of the case studies I have discussed in this dissertation push back against the glorification of energy, productivity, and ambition fostered under high capitalism, through a focus on (slow) time and non-instrumentalized activity, while highlighting some of the blind-spots inherent in the turn to non-productivity as a mode of refusal, both in terms of the exclusivity of such strategies (after all, refusal is only an option for some),

⁵⁸² Bifo Berardi, *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance* (Los Angeles: Semiotexte, 2012): 77.

⁵⁸³ Franco “Bifo” Berardi, “Exhaustion and Senile Utopia of the Coming European Insurrection,” *e-flux* 21 (December 2010): n.p.

⁵⁸⁴ Franco “Bifo” Berardi, “Exhaustion and Senile Utopia of the Coming European Insurrection,” *e-flux* 21 (December 2010): n.p.

and in view of the increasing subsumption of even seemingly resistant or exceptional activities. That said, by highlighting issues, struggles, and failures that neoliberalism insists on framing in merely psychological, individual, and solitary terms as, instead, both public and systemic problems, I believe these practices have the potential to create a space in which to bolster social consciousness and collective action through creating a sense of shared affective experience across diverse zones of precarious life. At the same time, they open up spaces of potential affective and political resistance through an immanent denial of cognitive capitalism's drive to extract a surplus from life at all costs. As argued by Jan Verwoert: "...the deliberate exhibition of exhaustion in art or writing de-privatises exhaustion by exposing it as an experience that may be shared. The exhibition of exhaustion produces public bodies."⁵⁸⁵ Verwoert's words open up a consideration of exhaustion as a potential point of departure for the formation of a particular form of solidarity. To use his words again: "A solidarity that would not lay the foundations for the assertion of a potent operative community, but which would, on the contrary, lead us to acknowledge the one thing we share—exhaustion—makes us an inoperative community, or a community of the exhausted..."⁵⁸⁶ while recognizing that time itself, as Sarah Sharma emphasizes, is "lived at the intersection of a range of social differences that include class, gender, race, immigration status, and labor."⁵⁸⁷

As I have been completing this dissertation in the midst of the convergence of a global COVID-19 pandemic; waves of resistance in support of Black Lives Matter in the wake of seemingly unceasing intensified police violence against Black people in the

⁵⁸⁵ Jan Verwoert, "Exhaustion & Exuberance: Ways to Defy the Pressure to Perform," A pamphlet for the exhibition *Art Sheffield 08: Yes, No, and Other Options* (Sheffield Contemporary Art Forum, 2008).

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁷ Sharma, "Checked Baggage: An Afterward," 194.

United States, Canada, and beyond; and on the heels of the most important US election in my lifetime, this moment has been one of deep sadness, anger, and indeed, exhaustion. It is a moment that has revealed, in an undeniable fashion, the systemic inequalities along the lines of race, class, gender, age, and ability that have long defined our social and economic infrastructures—the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the disproportionate death rates among Black, Indigenous, and other racialized people across North America and beyond (including populations in the prison system), the unequal impact on low-income and unemployed individuals and families, and the uneven burden placed on women due to gender imbalances in the composition of care work, informal work, and global supply chains (especially impacting migrant and undocumented women workers).⁵⁸⁸ However, it is also a time in which previously marginalized progressive political demands such as defunding the police, the abolition of prisons, and the necessity of a Universal Basic Income (or one of its variants)⁵⁸⁹ are becoming ever more visible in mainstream media and public discourse. The pandemic has required society and government to think about what constitutes ‘essential labor,’ and has shown up its complete reliance on persistently undervalued workers. These *may* be transformative realizations, but it is certainly not a given that they will be (especially in the face of powerful resistance in favor of the status quo). I believe that art practice can have an important role to play in ensuring that the force of this moment does not simply fade, to keep these issues at the center of public discourse, and to provide environments based

⁵⁸⁸Liane Schalatek, “The invisible coronavirus makes systemic gender inequalities and injustices visible,” *Heinrich Boll Stiftung*, April 30, 2020, <https://us.boell.org/en/2020/04/30/invisible-coronavirus-makes-systemic-gender-inequalities-and-injustices-visible>.

⁵⁸⁹ See Nick Srnicek and Helen Hester, *After Work: The Politics of Free Time* (Verso, publication pending) and Nick Srnicek, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work* (Verso, 2015).

around care and collectivity to counter the individualistic and profit-driven ideologies that drive global capitalism.

It was recently said by Thomas Piketty that, in the wake of increasing automation and financialization, ‘capitalism is no longer about labor.’⁵⁹⁰ To the extent that this is partially true, this moment requires a radical rethinking about what the future of work will look like, and what kinds of activities and values will drive a potential post-work world. If it indeed comes to pass, we will certainly need post-work imaginaries to both confront and cope with the reformulated meaning of increasingly technologically mediated human life on earth. These are required, I would argue, even for something as fundamental as the future of our very planetary existence. However, this work also makes manifest the continued centrality of labor to the global economy, in its industrial and immaterial valences, showing that the varied politics and experiences of labor remain vital in addressing fundamental questions about human experience, meaning, and value, both within and beyond the arts.

⁵⁹⁰ Quoted in the film *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, directed by Justin Pemberton, 2019, based on Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, Arthur Goldhammer, trans. (Harvard University Press, 2014).

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