

In ancient Celtic history domination meant loosing your tongue.¹ We will not be concerned with taste here but speech and how art becomes an organ of speech. Art can open out hidden relationships between people, things and the world we inhabit; how then does art realise its potential to question and open out hidden relations including the social relations of art itself?

(See fig 1 banner *Art and Class Struggle*)

In developed capitalist countries the freedom of art appears like a totem for the social freedom of criticality, but to what ends? Acknowledging the reality of class antagonism in its fullest sense, who does this 'image of freedom' serve?² Exclusion often accompanies serious critique and this negates the aim of changing the social and economic relations that determine distribution of resources and ownership of property necessary for public interaction with art. This is the wall of class antagonism that we must come up against. Far too often, in the demarcation of an autonomous 'safe' space we have the fiction that art is independent rather than interdependent. Real autonomy is a position in relation to other social relations that we are able to investigate unimpeded; it is neutralized when fetishised as an unquestioned 'image of freedom' within narrow unacknowledged constraints. Social conditions affect how many people have access to and how easy it is to gain time and resources to practice art. In many capitalist countries we are living at a cross roads: many of the daughters and sons of the proletariat³ have taken the opportunity of hard-won post-war, progressive education policies to study art practice. Despite issues of interpellation into notions of capitalist meritocracies we should acknowledge that new resistance and questioning of exploitation has emerged, the student protests and teach-ins in 2010 are one example.⁴ The tide of these reforms has been on the ebb for several decades. After 2008 we are at a point in history when rights for future generations are being removed as access to tertiary education becomes increasingly limited, with high tuition fees and the increasing prevalence of business ideology.

Unmasking the often unseen conglomerate of forces of phenomena can potentially lead to revolutionary change⁵. What if we were to truly acknowledge the interdependence of all productions of social relations and culture? Included in this

¹ See Tony Harrison's poem 'National Trust' (www.poetryarchive.org) 'Mes den hep tavas a-gollas y dyr (Cornish-) 'the tongueless man gets his land took.' I first came across this image of removal of tongues in a copy of a Victorian book I no longer possess on Irish Celtic Mythology which stated that conquered tribes had their tongues removed.

² See Alain Badiou 'Philosophy and Desire', (*Infinite Thought*) where he talks about the limitations placed on philosophy, and the importance of revolt, risk, universality and logic

³ I'd like to compare this with the condition of the proletariat described by Trotsky in 'The Communist Policy Toward Art'

⁴ "There was a free teach-in at 5 o'clock and various speakers came and talked about the consequences of the cuts on the arts and education. "When we tried to leave, we couldn't as there was a confusion over which exit to use. Some students wanted to get into the Turner prize gallery itself and they began to chant, 'break down the doors, free education for all'. A lecturer at the Tate Gallery Occupation 2010 (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/dec/06/student-protests-turner-prize>)

⁵ Much of the thinking here has been shaped by considering Delueze's Difference and Repetition,

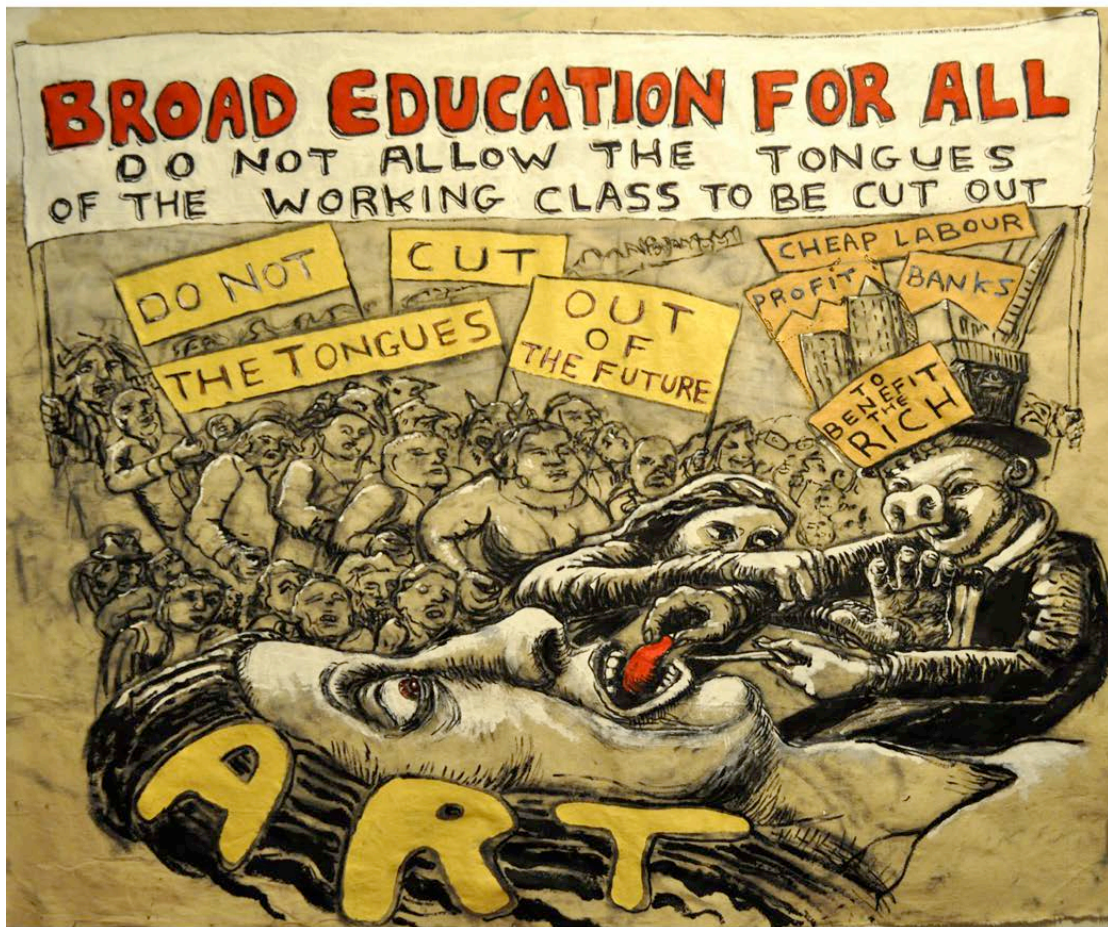


Fig 1 banner painted for 'Broad Education for All'- Start of TUC march November 2012 (photo -Lincoln Benjamin)

would be deracinating images and metaphors which art is heir to, opening up new potentials; Marx himself uses imagery as powerful tools of communication⁶, delving

in particular Chap 3 'The Image of Thought'. Also Brian Massumi, *-A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*

⁶ Marx lays bare the relations that create commodity fetishism, but he warns that we may think a commodity is a simple thing, but is in fact not so easy to understand. He describes a table which takes on a life of its own and dances as a commodity. This is a famous example but there are many other images of allegory, metaphor in volume one of Capital. Chap 1 Section 4 P163

into the symbolic structure of what appears as ‘common sense’ –the powers of the imagination should not be relinquished to capitalism. Artists must be producers⁷, shaping a culture, creating interfaces between whom and what art acts upon. How can we shape a culture as a collective act, creating soil for a new necessary art of sustained resistance and struggle?

How then can artists become producers; this requires us to ask how do class conscious artists work together to gain the necessary resources to make work, put it in a place where there is public interface and then work with others to develop a discourse where we decide what is important and why. This involves working together to create a culture, which is always collective and social where as making can take place on an individual basis.

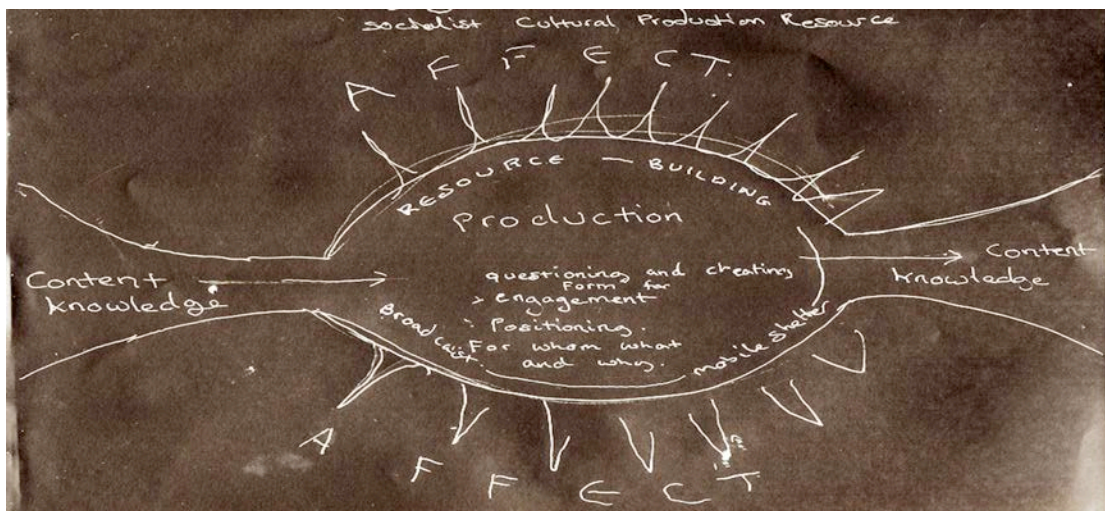


Fig 2 Socialist Art Production

The discourse that develops needs to be linked to previous knowledge so that we are forming something outside of the normal bourgeois art space or university symposium although we can make use of these resources where possible, it is important to have a body of knowledge formed through the medium of art that is not compromised by the hidden agenda of reproduction in either gallery or academic settings.

Before we consider specific ways and examples of how we can possibly move toward using resources of art production in a socialist way we need to consider exactly what the limitations are that are placed on art production and discourse in the capitalist culture we live in. Alain Badiou in his essay ‘The Desire for Philosophy and the Contemporary World’⁸, describes the limitations that capitalism places on philosophical thought which I think is very much the situation in art. Unless we want

⁷ See the ‘Author as Producer Walter’ by Walter Benjamin’ (<http://communistgallery.wordpress.com/development-2/walter-benjamin-author-as-producer/>)

⁸ Alain Badiou The Desire for Philosophy and the Contemporary World THE SYMPTOM online journal for Lacan (<http://www.lacan.com/badesire.html>)

a monoculture of capitalist autocracy and compliance we need to consider revolt, risk taking and a questioning of the prevailing notions of logic and universality.
I have summarised these –

The four aspects of the desire of philosophy we must reclaim and occupy-

REVOLT-----If you don't think beyond the rewards that the capitalist order holds out for good behavior nothing will change

LOGIC--- Without a sense of history we are easily manipulated. If we are not able to question the way we are represented in the "common sense" language and "logic" of those with power we can never question the structures of power in a way that could lead to real change.

UNIVERSALITY-----We need to form universal demands for social justice, for example the democratic control of resources and production. No one has a right to exploit other human beings: with this comes a premise that all have a right to be different without fear. What is just must be open to continual review by us all. This will form the basis of struggling values and demands.

RISK-----This translates into what Brecht describes as the courage to write the truth- 'It seems obvious that whoever writes should write the truth in the sense that he ought not to suppress or conceal truth or write something deliberately untrue. He ought not to cringe before the powerful, nor betray the weak. It is, of course, very hard not to cringe before the powerful, and it is highly advantageous to betray the weak. To displease the possessors means to become one of the dispossessed. To renounce payment for work may be the equivalent of giving up the work, and to decline fame when it is offered by the mighty may mean to decline it forever. This takes courage.'⁹ This is particularly poignant at time of economic hardship or heightened class war, for example the austerity program in the U.K at the moment, the undermining of the welfare state is not just economic: it is a way of controlling us through fear.

From a purely political perspective I think what we need to be aware of is the first response to injustice is often emotional, especially when some direct social injustice or even horror has been seen experienced. The question is how this is moved on to structural understanding. In this sense, we, who want art to have political agency are involved in a pedagogic project as well. Part of learning involves building on experience, not alienating it and art can offer a way of affirming experience which can be related to structural understanding. I think that pedagogy has to be part of any political project but a socialist pedagogy that acknowledges that roles are interchangeable and those that teach also learn from whom they teach.

Art needs to be more than a phlegmatic jelly fish limping after the tune of capital this is certain. We must decide ourselves what areas we problematise and how they are best engaged with in order for art to have agency, unlike the Grotesque Image of Culture Deleuze describes-

⁹ Brecht-The Five Difficulties of Writing the Truth
(<http://ada.evergreen.edu/~arunc/texts/theater/brecht/fiveDifficulties.pdf>)

‘Such is the origin of the grotesque image of culture that we find in examinations, government referenda as well as news paper competitions (where everyone is called upon to choose according to his or her own taste, on condition that taste coincides with everyone else). As if we would not remain slaves so long as we do not control the problems themselves, so long as we do not possess a right to a participation in and management of the problems.’¹⁰

Often what is hidden is the interconnected web of human relations. This is always present in work even if it is the shaping of something to claim the time either consciously or unconsciously as one’s own. The doodles made in a boring meeting or the carving Herman Melville describes practiced by sailors on a waling ship.

‘With the same marvellous patience, and with the same single shark’s tooth, of his one poor jack-knife, he will carve you a bit of bone sculpture, not quite as workmanlike, but as close packed in its mazes of design, as the Greek savage, Achilles’s shield; and full of barbaric spirit and suggestiveness, as the prints of that fine old Dutch savage, Albert Durer.’¹¹

I think to say this is ‘just’ to pass the time underestimates the potential of such activities which can be a way of reclaiming time as one’s own whilst under the conditions of wage labour and given the intensification of class struggle we are probably going to have to be more inventive about how we make use of pockets of time¹². When I worked on the London underground you were sometimes given the job of ‘Leading Railman’, which meant ticket collector. This meant being shut in a cramped wooden ticket box for 8 hours at a time with half hour meal break, the booth was inscribed with graffiti and with interesting drawings made by people during the course of their duties, a way of claiming time and the physical pleasure of shaping something in work time, most of us have been there I’m sure! I remember whilst I was in the box at London bridge a friend of mine walked through who was a painter, I showed him the drawings and he said these people need to be given a place to work! More recently the artist David Collins did a very interesting survey and taxonomy of the ‘carvings’ and inscriptions made into the surface of exam tables made by students whilst under exam conditions.¹³ But what often happens is we are conditioned to think of phenomena in isolation from the web of connections which go to form them be it a drawing or a table.

A table can be seen as a meeting of forces; physical and natural forces in the meeting of sunlight trees and ecosystems. But there is also the forest of human labour in all its antagonisms and conflicting interests, the economic forces

¹⁰ Deleuze ‘Difference and Repetition’ p.197

¹¹ Moby Dick I-LXVII by Herman Melville

¹² I heard Germane Greer talking about her book the Female Eunuch on BBC radio she said that she had structured the book so women would be able to take in chunks of text during a busy day unfortunately I have not been able to find out any more. This consideration of the social conditions for the people for whom the work is aimed at is very important.

¹³ David Collins repressive State, Dissolving Cube Portman Gallery , Morpeth School 2009

affecting the logger the social conditions that affect the carpenter designer and the zeitgeist and social significance that affect the design. Whether the legs are made to be exposed or covered is social like the forces of mass production.¹⁴ There is a fetishistic magic in the coming together of phenomena that holds onto 'thing' likeness. Marx lays bare the relations that create commodity fetishism but he warns that we may think a commodity is a simple thing but its not so easy to understand and he describes a table which takes on a life of its own and dances as a commodity.¹⁵ Unmasking the often unseen conglomerate of forces that make up phenomena can potentially lead to revolutionary change. What if we were to truly acknowledge the interdependence of all productions of social relations and culture?

Art doesn't just offer a form of communication it offers a way to challenge symbolic structures and language which create perception of reality, what appears to be natural can be put to question. As a 13 year old student recently said in a banner she was designing about the value of art 'art, it says what you can't'. Art as a resource provides space to process experiences and make connections that perhaps have not yet been verbalized. It is here that art may also offer a way of seeing which can uproot assumptions or deracinate what we think we know.

'Fantasy alone, today confined to the realm of the unconscious and proscribed, from knowledge as a childish injudicious rudiment can establish that relation between objects which is the irrevocable source of all judgment: should fantasy be driven out, judgment too the real act of knowledge, is exorcised. But the castration of perception by a court of control that denies it anticipatory desire, forces it thereby into a pattern of helplessly reiterating what is already known.'¹⁶ Adorno

What is significant for us here is Adorno's assertion of the importance of fantasy or imaginative leaps in building a relationship to what is real which enable us to see that reality thorough looking at things configured in a different way. This is not just to do with communication of something already known but entry into a problematic field with imagery which enables things to be perceived and felt rather than skated over in a way which has no real affect. This also enables questioning and making visible the

¹⁴ Brian Massumi this example has stayed in my memory- A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari

¹⁵ Marx Capital Vol 1 Chapter 1 The commodity contains not one atom of value it is described as a social hieroglyph for the social relations of production, what is hidden is the source of value, which is the socially necessary labour time which has been used to create the commodity. Later on in volume two we come to see the commodity as pregnant with surplus value in the circulation of industrial capital (Chap 3 Vol 2)

¹⁶ 'Fantasy alone, today confined to the realm of the unconscious and proscribed, (*isolated, ostracized*) from knowledge as a childish injudicious rudiment can establish that relation between objects which is the irrevocable source of all judgment (*if we deny our subjectivity, our ability to recreate what we see in colours of feeling, then we can't form a relation to the REAL*): should fantasy (*subjectivity*) be driven out, judgment too the real act of knowledge, is exorcised. But the castration of perception by a court of control that denies it anticipatory desire, forces it thereby into a pattern of helplessly reiterating what is already known.' From *Intellectus sacrificium intellectus* page 122 Adorno Minima Moralia. The bracketed italics are mine.

interpellation of our subjectivity which occurs in capitalism by allowing a different experience to emerge from the one we have been conditioned to see as normal or 'natural'. Art then can be important in facilitating people's sense of subjectivity, their confidence to form thoughts about the world, it can provide a material medium to think things through where psychosomatic layers are not sort circuited.¹⁷

If art has the potential to help in the production of subjectivity this also has a political dimension in a purely practical way, in the way resources are distributed. If we consider the overlap of resources for art and access that could produce this subjectivity we arrive at three overlapping interdependent fields of consideration. If we want to develop a culture that has agency in the production and questioning of subjectivity we have to think about these three overlapping areas of concern.

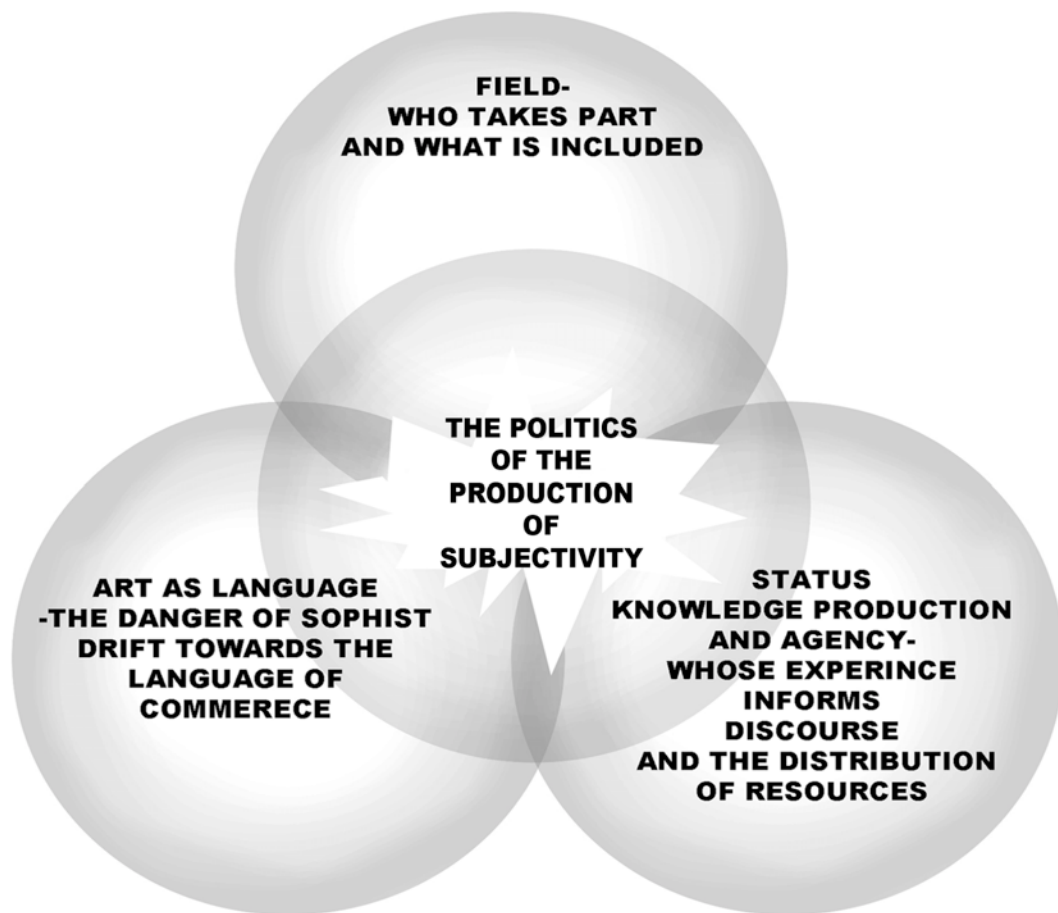


Fig 3 The Politics of the production of Art and Subjectivity

¹⁷ See Bernard Stiegler –Keynote Speaker www2012 – (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SRNjImtIA0M>)

1) FIELD-This determines who takes part, who has access and who the work is primarily for. This is also to do with taking a class position.

2) ART AS LANGUAGE- Art is capable of opening up real engagement with a particular problematic field, the agency of the work is of primary importance, in bourgeois art the language surrounding the work is often to do with promotion as the works success or value rests on its popularity in a marketing context. This gives rise to a language of promotional sophistry and persuasion akin to marketing and the language of commerce.

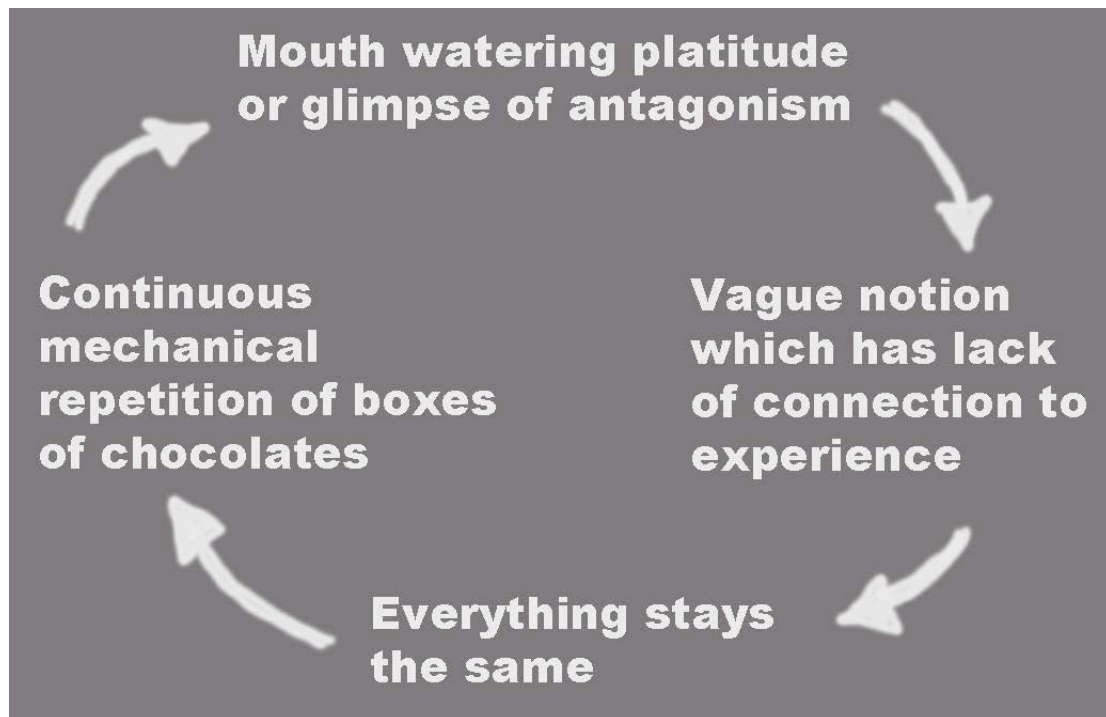


Fig 4 Sophist Discourse

3) STATUS – If the discourse is not primary then ‘who’ is speaking based on how well they are known takes the upper hand, again the natural sophist drift in a capitalist culture of promotion, in this case marketable identity, becomes the main social work and it becomes difficult to look beyond a sensual liking for particular forms. This will have a material result of how resources are distributed. The dumb level¹⁸ which it operates needs to be taken into account if we want to move toward a culture that has agency and is able to deal with things that matter. Just to clarify the following poem ‘DaFee DaDo’ looks at how a dumb level of recognition works in bourgeois art practice which centers primarily around the production of the artist as a commodity-

¹⁸ Dumb Level -I am indebted to the artist John Russel for this phrase he used in a conversation

DaFee DaDo

DaFee DaDo = Name of Artist.

Make them say DaFee DaDo.

DaFee DaDo has a show at Glah Blah; make them say DaFee DaDo has a show at Glah Blah.

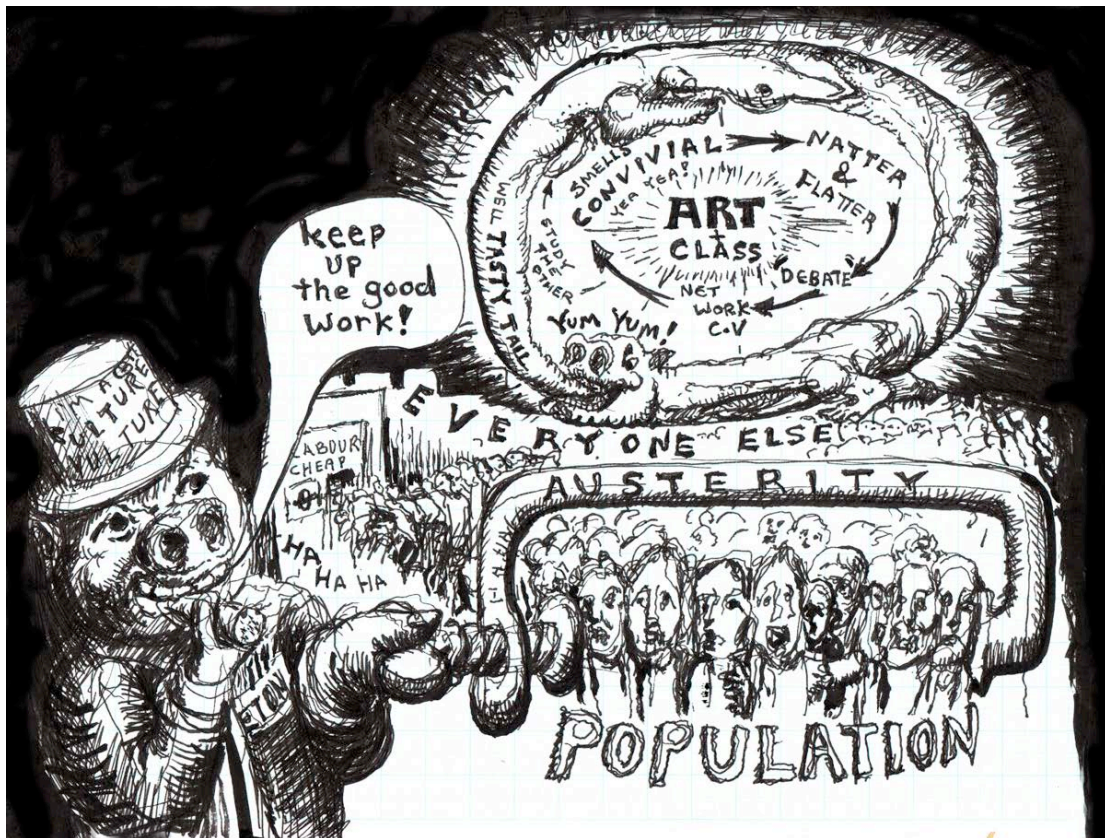
Do you know DaFee DaDo has a show at Glah Blah? (Not really?) you ought to.

DaFee DaDo makes complex layered work because its DaFee DaDo.

You can't really say what, you just know its DaFee DaDo.

What does it all do?

It gives us DaFee DaDo!



Art Sophistry in the Age of Austerity

There is an impossible double bind that contemporary art in capitalist society gets caught in which we need to try and articulate with a polemical line in the sand. On the one hand is the perceived need to make something 'radical' or 'challenging' and on the other hand is the need for this to be recognized, in many cases by the most reactionary conservative institutions and people who happen to control resources.

There are several myths that are wheeled out to make people feel better, the most pernicious is that this refined activity needs to be surrounded by groups of elite connoisseurs that 'understand' and provide the 'right' audience.

This contradiction, the degenerated form of the avant-garde, is often found in projects in parts of London for example which are marked by extreme poverty like Tower Hamlets and Hackney in East London for example. Apart from the obvious economic considerations to do with property prices rent and gentrification there are also the social exclusions which occur when enclaves and scenes form that have little to do with the local population of the areas they exist in apart from the area being an "edgy" exotic back drop and this is not to say that such locations for art projects could not, with a different will and class awareness provide a valuable resource. Far too often though, things fall into what Benjamin describes as a form of cultivated slumming- 'it has made the struggle against misery into a consumer good. Their function, seen from a political point of view, is to form not a Party, but a clique, seen from a literary point of view, not a school but a fad, from an economic point of view not to become producers but agents. Agents or hacks, who make a great show of their poverty and congratulate themselves on the yawning void. It would be impossible to carve a more comfortable position out of an uncomfortable situation.'¹⁹

Not so long ago a well-known artist went to the Heygate Council Estate in the Elephant and Castle, the work involved him acting as a shaman for people being kicked out of their flats and relocated, it reads like a comic tragedy. To deal with the distress of the residents the council had first tried 'Stress Busters' health organization offering advice about exercise, taking control, social networks, work-life balance and 'being positive' but that wasn't working so they gave the rest of the funding to the artist and an Australian assistant called 'Nomad' who camped out on the stairs of the housing block to encounter the residents before giving a shamanic performance. I went to a talk about the project where the artist spoke about the work they did with the former residents, the artist said the hardest thing was maintaining 'their neutrality' toward this displacement of people.²⁰

Perhaps it is good to go back to the historic conditions that have allowed the avant-garde to form and the possibility that art could be coupled with forces productive of social justice. Part of contemporary practice involves challenging and changing the accepted forms of praxis, which is a good thing, our inheritance from the avant-garde of the twentieth century, but when these challenges and changes become focused and evaluated on considerations which are mainly located within art itself and not the world at large, the focus needs to be changed if we want to move beyond merely affirming the 'image of freedom'.

¹⁹ Walter Benjamin The Author as producer

²⁰ Marcus Coates 'A Ritual for Elephant and Castle: Film screening and Talk by Marcus Coates in collaboration with Chrome Hoof and Wildbirds and Peace Drums' Siobhan Davis Studios, St George's Road, London SE1 6ER 16th of Oct 2009

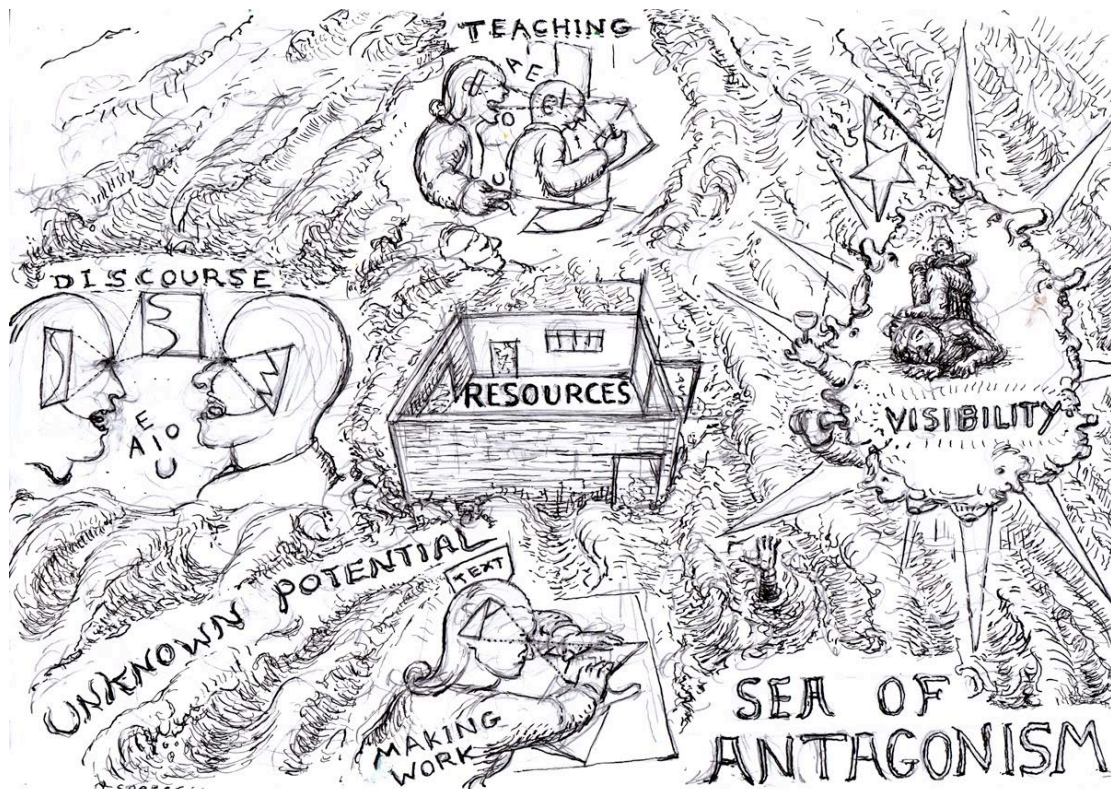


Fig 6 Sea of Antagonism

If we acknowledge as Benjamin says it is important to continue to try to alienate the means of cultural production from the bourgeoisie to benefit of the working class we must continue to examine how visual and audio work may take new forms.²¹

If we look at the factors affecting distribution of resources we can possibly work out ways to change it. One of the things people involved with art often talk about is the 'art space' which is a very abstract way of talking about resources and who has a right to them. Let us imagine all the activities and resources associated with the production of art as existing on a plane, a field of interrelation between resources to show and make work, education institutions and the resulting critical dialogue. This is normally taken for granted but even a cursory glance could reveal possibilities for interventions with new forms. (*see above fig 6 Sea of Antagonism*)

So we have the buildings used for art galleries, studios and educational facilities, the bricks and mortar component, the most basic resources. Next we have the allocations of time and resources to make work, time for it to be seen and enter into discourse and time for teaching at various levels which will be both informed by the questions the work is asking and productive of its own questioning. But these resources do not exist on a neutral plane in the diagram this plane is imagined as contested, as a sea, the Sea of Antagonism. Resources are contested in this Sea of Antagonism that is not neutral, it is a matter of in whose interest's art resources are used: do they affirm bourgeois culture or do they allow for a culture that acts in the interests of the working class. The mechanism that dictates allocation of resources in the capitalist art world is the visibility of the artist which in late capitalism is largely based on a form of reproduction of the artist that emphasises cultural capital gained from association with

²¹ Walter Benjamin The Author as producer

'prestigious' places and people. This may involve entry into competitions but often it involves professional networking, the issue is what is being reproduced and for what reason.

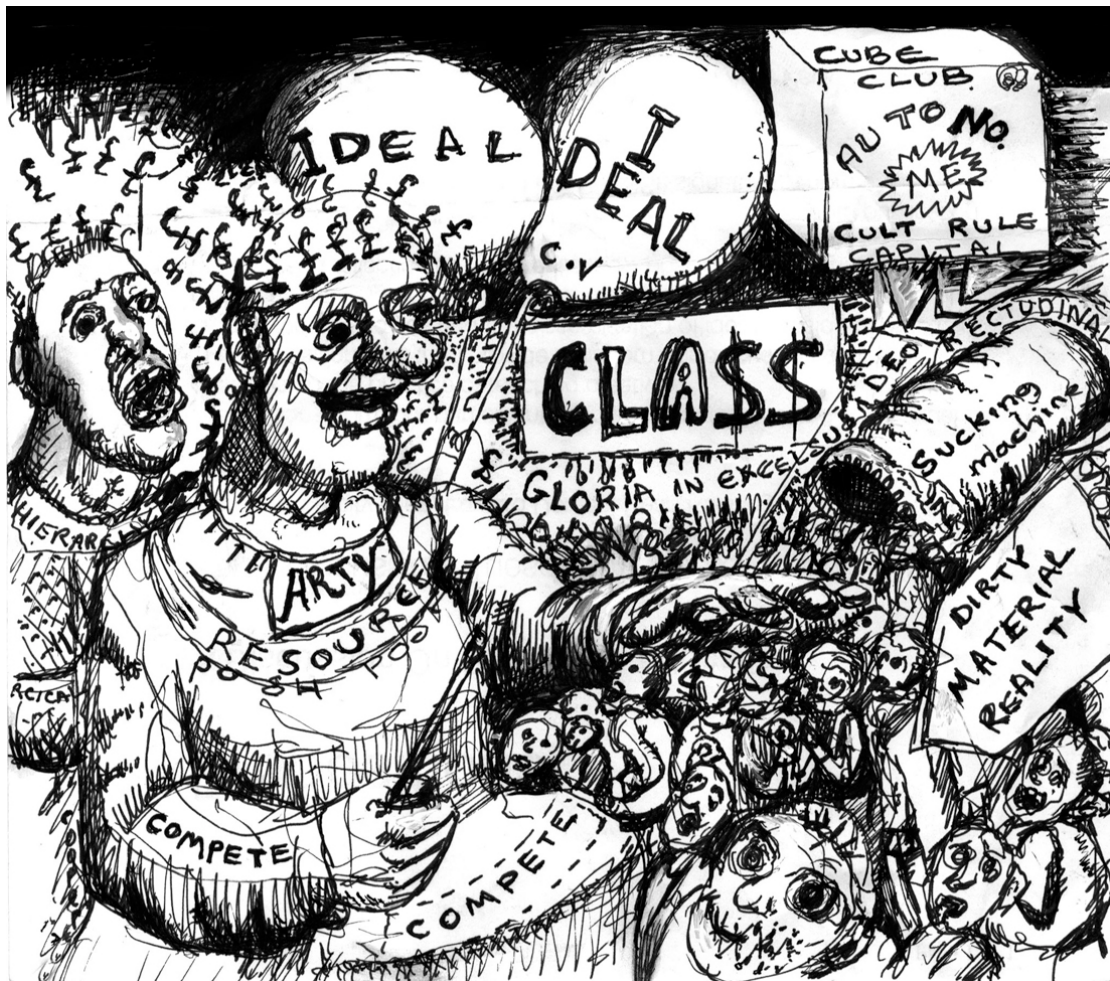


Fig7 Art and Class

There are definite circulations of cultural capital -things that give status that can be cashed in at a later date, I am in no way saying that is all that these professional relationships are about, but awareness is important and often lacking. If we want to move towards a discourse that is a serious challenge to capitalism or indeed any social critique. Could we say that the tragedy of the contemporary cultural situation is that cultural capital functions in way like exchange value and the use value is relegated to aesthetics and 'it's good for the soul', rather than thinking about how things facilitate change and questioning on different levels?

If we go back to the diagram of the Sea of Antagonism one possibility is that artists opt to take over the entire process of production occupying resources and forming their own dialogue around the work and its social significance, this would be creating culture as a socially collective conscious act which is put to the test. A class conscious position could then be adopted. What if then, we looked at the whole territory from the point of view of class struggle: a view that would value what art as a resource can offer in terms of bringing about change both on an individual and collective level,

raising awareness about our shared world.²² We should always ask for whom, what and why. If for example we are interested in art teaching which covers a wide social base then perhaps we should question the different levels of status within teaching itself which have a bearing on people who also practice as an artist and the difficulties they will face in realizing projects and gaining access to funding and support.

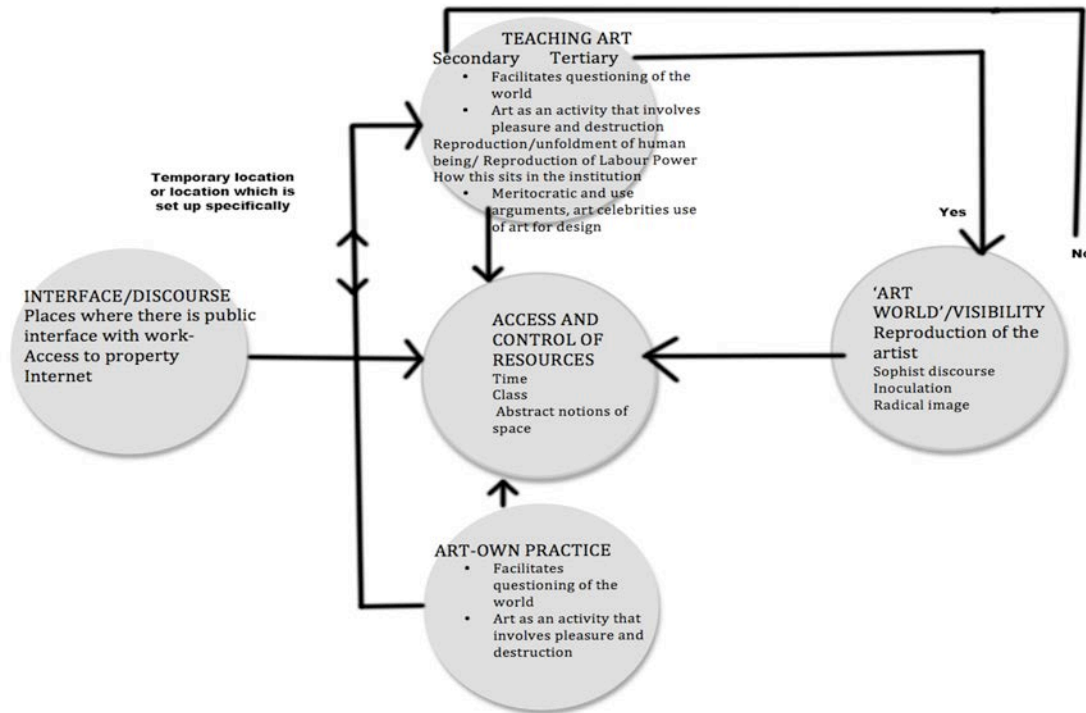


Fig 8 schema of the plane of antagonism

Teaching in a prestigious tertiary educational institution where one works normally with a mainly privileged section of the population will count for more than working in a comprehensive school where one is working with a wide selection of the population including perhaps those that are below the poverty line. The rationale for this would be that this is a ‘meritocratic’ system but I would question this as at the very least it means that potential links and insights become missed in what becomes a very narrow claustrophobic world. The question is how we get a wide range of life experience from different jobs and life situations into art and the fabric of what art deals with.²³ What tends to get privileged is the cultivation of the art professional which is the opposite of where we need to move to. In the diagram the sea which represents hidden

²² John Cussans see statement for Art Power Portman Gallery London march 2013 http://www.portman-gallery.com/exhibitions/art_power.html

²³ A positive example is ‘The Ashington Group’ an art group of founded by miners in the Northumberland town of Ashington in 1934. In the 1970’s The critic William Feaver met one of the Group’s central members, Oliver Kilbourn, this resulted in several touring exhibitions. In the 1980s, the Group’s ‘permanent collection’ formed the first western exhibition in China after the Cultural Revolution

antagonism also contains hidden potentials which could be brought to light if we could produce a different social relation of resources.



Fig 9 Class

The point that I am making here is more than a moral one; it is a point about how we could move to a more responsive and diverse culture that has more philosophical scope and relevance. It is for this reason that artists should be producers, making

decisions about how the work is made, who interacts with it, in what way this happens and importantly how a collective body of knowledge and interpretation is built up over time. We should not rely on the bourgeois art world which revolves around the reification of art manufactured by an extremely limited number of artist brand names in a culture which is anything but socially critical.

But as I have indicated there is an incredible double bind in operation, on the one hand there is an all important image of freedom and on the other is the fundamental class antagonism in capitalism and the way it manifests in social relations, and in this time of capitalist crisis it is increasingly hard to ignore. (*see fig 9 Class previous page*)

The fetish of freedom of speech permeates the mind of advanced capitalism, avant-garde practice could and should question this. During a recent symbolic pageant of distraction in England, the royal wedding, a piece of street theater was formed in response and was scheduled to take place a mile and a half from the occasion. It was entitled the 'The Zombie Wedding', it would have been a harmless gathering of people in zombie make-up with a plywood guillotine but it didn't take place as planned because the organisers were arrested the day before.²⁴

(*See Fig 10 Zombie Wedding next page*)

This was at a time when a mile away the Tate Modern had 'RELEASE AI WEIWEI' painted in huge white letters high on its front wall on London's artistic south bank, a fact which at this time highlighted the way that art is able to criticise the lack of freedom in other lands but not the contradictions here when they are politically live. Since this time we have seen a massive increase in suicides in the U.K resulting from the cuts to disabled people²⁵ and one of the most massive transfers of wealth from the poor to the rich continues at an increasing pace along with the destruction of living and working conditions.

It is also important to touch upon the extremely compromised nature of a lot of the funding for contemporary art. Apart from investment banking we actually have organizations like Bloomberg (Bloomberg Space and New Contemporaries) and Zabludowicz (Zabludowicz Collection) that actively and vocally support Zionist occupation in Palestine. Zabludowicz is heavily involved in BICOM²⁶ an organization defending the occupation and Bloomberg as Mayor of New York actually went out to Israel to show his support during 2009 during operation Cast Lead an aerial bombardment ground invasion of Gaza which used bombs containing phosphorous.

²⁴ 'On the eve of the royal wedding, two anthropologists and an actor – members of a street theatre troupe known as 'The Government of the Dead' – were arrested for conspiracy to stage a performance. We adopt a Bakhtinian perspective of carnival laughter as essential to the scientific investigation of officialdom and ceremonial power.' Chris Knight and Camilla Power Power, C. and Knight, C. (2012), ARREST FOR ATTEMPTED STREET THEATRE. *Anthropology Today*, 28: 24–26. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8322.2012.00852.x

²⁵New Statesman July 2012 'Welfare reform suicides must not be overlooked' - (<http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/politics/2012/07/welfare-reform-suicides-must-not-be-overlooked>)

²⁶ British Israel Communications

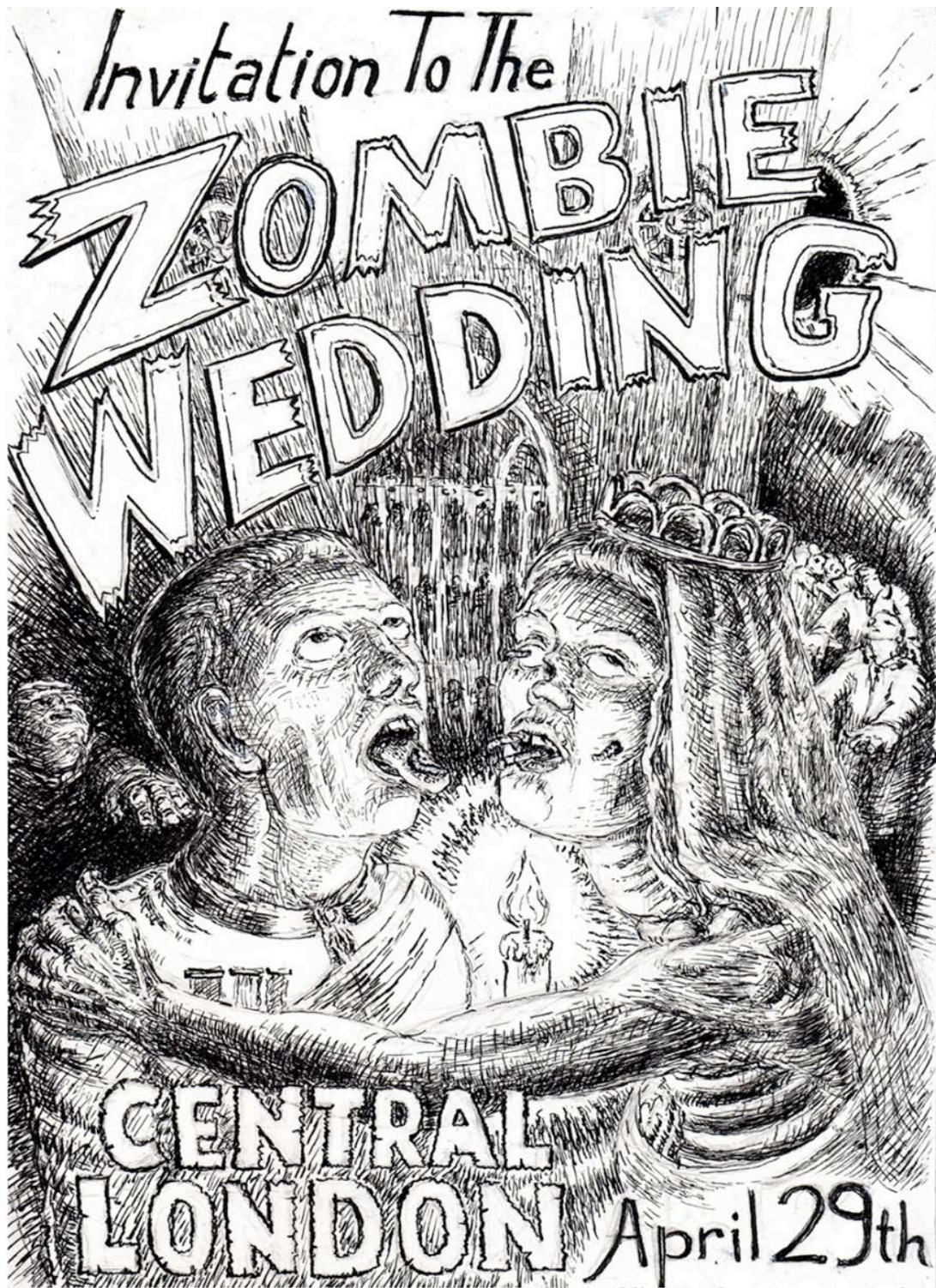


Fig 10 Zombie Wedding (Andrew Cooper-drawing and John Cussans-typography)

The image of freedom, which means we are free to look at exploitation of others perhaps with the often unconscious agenda 'to show how free we are', is one of the distorting anamorphic halls of mirrors we have to deal with. I'd like to consider an example of work considered by many to be extreme in its uncompromising

nature in dealing with difficult societal issues and show the limitations of freedom to question. Santiago Sierra is well known for his work '250 Cm Line Tattooed on 6 Paid People', which is exactly that. People mainly from Mexico were paid to have a line tattooed on their backs and then photographed in the gallery, the work of course raises all kinds of issues to do with exploitation and the way the world's poor in this context can become an object of contemplation for the rich. The workers in the context of the art work are effectively silenced, their voice in this work which their bodies are part of is absent. I would say it merely shows abuse of those who are impoverished, you could perhaps say that there may be a possibility here though that the work highlights the basic class exploitation of people but this it seems, is certainly not the intention of the gallery system as the next case shows. When Sierra proposed- 'to line up the gallery staff, bare backed in order of salary, from the director at one end to cleaners and caterers at the other it was rejected by both PS1 and the Kunsthalle Vienna, the chief curator at PS1 explaining that 'it didn't seem to reflect Sierra's paradigm of remuneration, since the workers were not being paid to participate in the piece'. What this means in effect is that those with power and money are obviously not compelled to move out of their comfort zone and risk potential humiliation. Perhaps there should have been a free, anonymous vote on the decision.'²⁷ One thing's for sure, really questioning the power and social relations in the institution in a way that might lead to a social change through giving those a chance to speak who wouldn't normally is not on the cards

Of course the exploitations that may be brought to light in art work are real but we have to acknowledge that the art production machine in late capitalism operates as a cultural machine which is careerist through compliance and neutrality in its policing and management of resources, it is capable of disseminating images of injustice which have a palliative affect in terms of social criticality and potential change. It is not capable of seriously questioning the mechanism of its own injustice, especially the fundamental class relations on which capitalism is predicated.

(See fig 11 Contained and Uncontained Cultural Systems next page)

What I think we need to think about is how we move towards a cultural system which is able to function uncontained by capitalist structures as far as possible seeking alliances from elsewhere particularly those involved in struggling against capitalist monoculture. It will be able to mutate its form in order to challenge and change and it will relate to the social body in a way that does not seek to deny the basic antagonism in society. I can't emphasise enough that this as a cultural problem, it is collective and can only be worked through by collective endeavor and experimentation.

²⁷Dean Kenning, *Art Relations and the Presence of Absence* P441 Third Text Vol.23 Issue 4 July 2009 Routledge

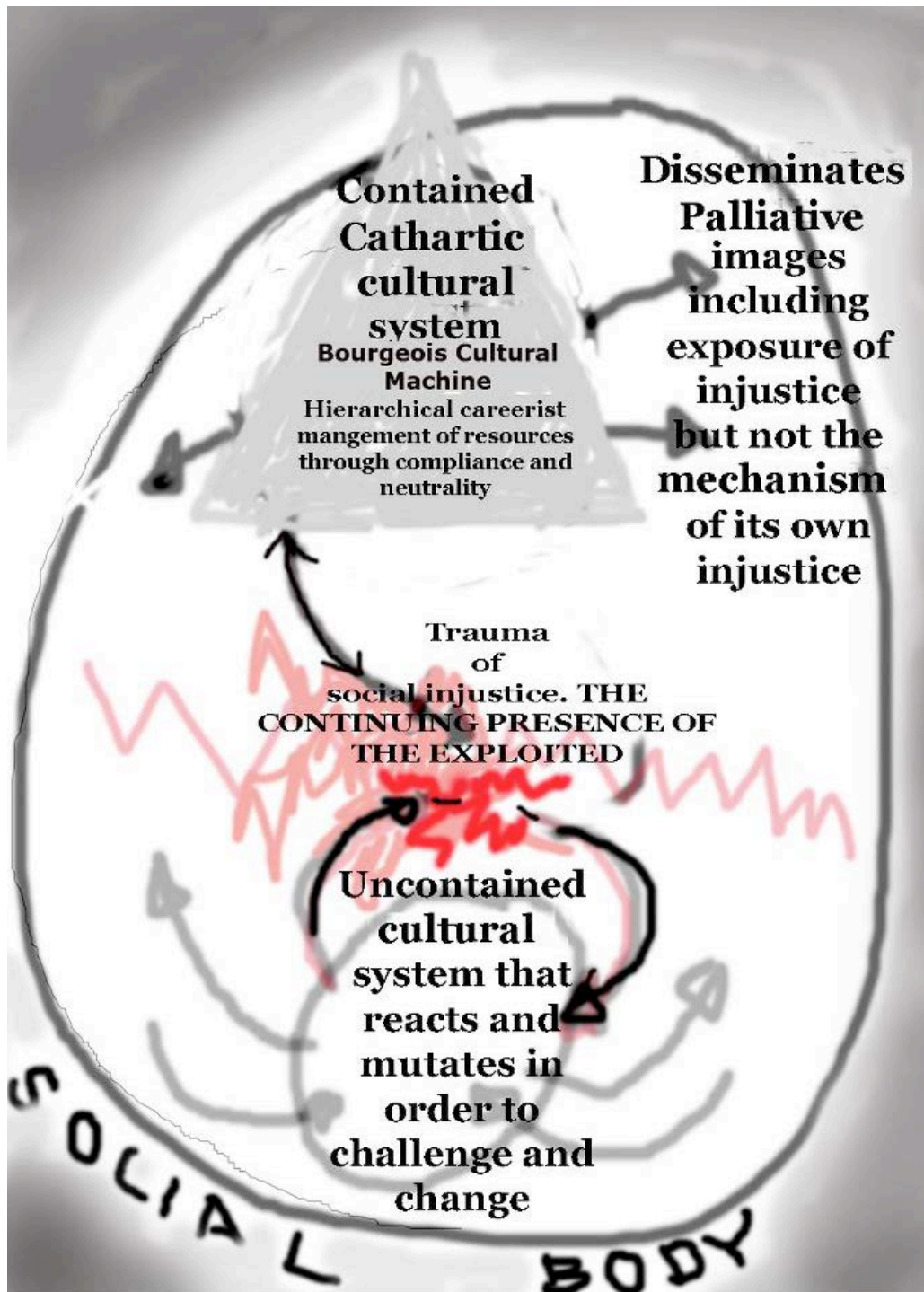


Fig 11 Contained and Uncontained Cultural Systems

I am now going to put forward three different approaches, which I have tried, to taking control of production and making use of resources in order to try and change who art acts for, making the use-value of art the primary concern.

1) Mobile space for art with politically defined agenda

The first started with a simple occupation of a disused shop to produce an artist run gallery where people were invited in to contribute to work made and to discuss how art could have more social relevance, its political orientation and provocation was

made clear in its name, the 'Communist Gallery'. We asked what would an art space look like that operated under democratic communist principles and how do we move towards it? The physical form of the project changed according to material circumstances, sometimes occupying a building for example the squatted bank of ideas recently set up by occupy London and sometimes we just set up a mobile TV with films people had made in the street or park. What people are invited to question here as well as the art is the communist hypothesis²⁸ and the possibility that elements of communism can form in practice.

2) Public location of art in a space that is already as defined educational in its ideological intent.

The second form is completely unconnected and in some ways more far reaching, it is the establishment of a gallery for contemporary art in the foyer of a state comprehensive school in Bethnal Green London. It is important in this case that every effort is made to fight for a space where there is complete freedom of criticality and it is as democratic and responsive as possible, it is this which makes it political not its label. This type of space works if it is able to make use of the symbolic leverage contained in the idealism of the institutional structure, so for example we can ask-why would such a place of questioning not exist in an institution whose stated aims are truly educational.²⁹

3) Using 'non art' forms.

The third example, and perhaps least developed due to funding restrictions was an exhibition in a high street which focused on housing issues which was presented in

²⁸See Alain Badiou the communist hypothesis both the book and the essay -Essay- It is quite sobering but important to contemplate-' In many respects we are closer today to the questions of the 19th century than to the revolutionary history of the 20th. A wide variety of 19th-century phenomena are reappearing: vast zones of poverty, widening inequalities, politics dissolved into the 'service of wealth', the nihilism of large sections of the young, the servility of much of the intelligentsia; the cramped, besieged experimentalism of a few groups seeking ways to express the communist hypothesis . . . Which is no doubt why, as in the 19th century, it is not the victory of the hypothesis which is at stake today, but the conditions of its existence. This is our task, during the reactionary interlude that now prevails: through the combination of thought processes—always global, or universal, in character—and political experience, always local or singular, yet transmissible, to renew the existence of the communist hypothesis, in our consciousness and on the ground.' (<http://newleftreview.org/11/49/alain-badiou-the-communist-hypothesis>)

²⁹ Of course the function of educational institutions in capitalism as far as the majority goes is to reproduce the work force but there is a certain amount of leverage in the ideological aims of education we might agree with. Silvia Frederici makes this point very well: -'How do you struggle over/against reproductive work? It is not the same as struggling in the traditional factory setting, against for instance the speed of an assembly line, because at the other end of your struggle there are people not things. Once we say that reproductive work is a terrain of struggle, we have to first immediately confront the question of how we struggle on this terrain without destroying the people you care for. This is a problem mothers as well as teachers and nurses, know very well. This is why it is crucial to be able to make a separation between the creation of human beings and our reproduction of them as labor-power, as future workers, who therefore have to be trained, not necessarily according to their needs and desires, to be disciplined and regimented in a particular fashion.'

Silvia Frederici Precarious Labor: A Feminist Viewpoint

(<http://inthemiddleofthewhirlwind.wordpress.com/precarious-labor-a-feminist-viewpoint/>)

the form of a fair ground ghost train, the idea being that people came into direct contact with the work in this case woodcarving painting and film without the barrier of art and class social identity associations. This is no joke I have seen situations where people feel intimidated to walk into contemporary art spaces.³⁰

There is still much to be done in thinking about the use value of art and taking practical action about how art interfaces with people and how we can experiment with the form of art production as part of class struggle. Given the often untapped pedagogic potential of art in knowledge production and its recuperative powers it needs to be enlisted in the class struggle. "We need to build a movement that puts on its agenda its own reproduction. The anti-capitalist struggle has to create forms of support and has to have the ability to collectively build forms of reproduction."³¹ It is here that art has something very real to offer along with its potential for knowledge production.³²

³⁰ More detailed information on these projects can be found in the following appendix.

³¹ Silvia Federici - Precarious Labor: A Feminist Viewpoint

³² David Harvey talks about spheres of human relationships and activity, modes of production, relation to nature, social relations, technology and mental conceptions of the world, an idea he takes and develops from footnote 4 in chapter 15 of Capital Vol 1. A revolution or change in any of the spheres will effect the others. In this way it is not inconcievable that if we achieved an art which was supported in a social culture of significance it could have profound reaching effects, not least in showing that the fertile forces of change have the spirit of communism. See David Harvey notes for Chapter 15 –A Companion to Marx’s Capital

Appendix –Web addresses for projects

Communist Gallery- <http://communistgallery.wordpress.com/>

Portman Gallery- <http://www.portman-gallery.com/>

Ghost Train to Souls Town- <http://andrewcoopers.blogspot.co.uk/>