

Exodus: Aesthetic Practice beyond the Art Institution

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Once, the task of the artist was to make good art; now it is to avoid making art of any kind.

—Allan Kaprow, 1966

In 1975, the Conceptual artist Raivo Puusemp ran for the office of mayor in Rosendale, New York. The village suffered from problems that called for its dissolution and incorporation into a larger municipality; the majority of citizens, however, rejected this loss of identity. Puusemp thought he could help: "He would apply to Rosendale what he had been doing as an artist in group dynamics and predictive behavior. He would consider the project an artwork in the form of a political problem."¹ His skills as an artist indeed proved to be helpful: Puusemp not only became mayor of the village, but gave the people new confidence in taking the necessary measures. After fulfilling his task, he resigned from his office and moved to Utah where he ran a travel agency. Following his stint as

¹ Allan Kaprow, "The Real Experiment," in *Allan Kaprow: Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 209. Paul McCarthy made Puusemp write down his story; "Beyond Art: Dissolution of Rosendale, NY," published in 1980 and untraceable today, found its way to Kaprow, who preserved the memory of the story in his writings. It seems to be symptomatic for the kind of artistic practice thematized here that all discourse on it ends with leaving the art institution.



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mayor, he said "that he hardly ever thinks of art anymore but that the Rosendale project was significant for everything he did subsequently."²

This anecdote, which Allan Kaprow draws on to illustrate his theory of "un-art," is interesting in several ways: Puusemp produced no "works" in the traditional sense; he did not even produce documents that might tie in his project with the art scene. Though he initially conceived his venture as a variation of political Conceptual art, the word "art" did not crop up in his campaign and his later activities as a mayor. Yet, he used knowledge, sensibilities, and strategies directly connected with art—which is to say that there might be some kind of artistic practice beyond the art institution. It is actually the dissolution of art in the everyday sphere that qualifies Puusemp as an example for Kaprow.

Another reason is that this artistic practice differs from other forms of practice. It allowed Puusemp to do a better job than all his predecessors who had not been familiar with such methods of work. Kaprow describes these methods as characterized by an intuition for "group dynamics" and "predictive behavior." He also recognizes "a Conceptual artist's theory of social behavior . . . applied . . . in day-by-day terms."³ Kaprow's remarks by no means provide us with an exhaustive description of the features of this artistic practice. If one includes other artists' writings or art theoretical texts, even different levels of typification become manifest: purely syntactic ones ("serial," "montage"); others that would have to be attributed to a semantic level ("appropriation," "allegory"); and, finally, those of a pragmatic dimension ("discursive," "cross-linked," "interactive"). What becomes visible at this point already is the necessity to understand art not as a phenomenon of knowledge and action that cannot be differentiated further—as is often the case—but to regard it, primarily relating to its own historical differentiations, as a complex and yet volatile order that can be elucidated by a specific form of further research.

Lastly, Kaprow does not affiliate Puusemp's success as an artistically trained mayor with individual talents, but finds competences applied that he connects with the tradition of Conceptual art. This practice is not, as

² Kaprow, "The Real Experiment," 210.

³ *Ibid.*

is often assumed for art and artworks, individual: it is the practice of a collective and has its rules as such.

Puusemp's story stands for an understanding of "artistic work beyond the art market" that has only rarely become a subject of inquiry so far. This practice is not a matter of artistic forms of production evading the art market, as aimed at by the Conceptual artists with the "dematerialization" of their works. Nor is it a matter of interventionist practices that have no market value themselves, yet grant their protagonists visibility and a "symbolic" market value within the art institution. And it is not a matter of such forms of almost entrepreneurial behavior that go beyond the dimensions of the gallery business. What is the point here is that the artistic practice breaks away from the artist—which constitutes a specific type of action to which an increasing number of non-artists outside the art market and the art institution have become responsive and which has come to have a decisive influence on the world of employment. With the spreading of such an aesthetic form of action, art as an institution seems to lose its function and, thus, its legitimization in the knowledge society and to gradually implode, while a practice adopted within this institution throughout centuries survives as public property in society as a whole, as a register of knowledge production parallel to academic forms of thinking. The lack of avant-garde artists, the transformation of museums into spectacles, and the commodification of works and artists strike us as symptoms of a growing social functionlessness of fine art within the old traditional framework. Aesthetic modes of acting and producing knowledge localize art within society in a completely different manner: no longer in the sense of an institution manifest in specific roles and spaces, but as a significant variant of social action.

Frances Whitehead, a contemporary successor of Puusemp, describes herself as an "embedded artist," which relates to a practice in which artists, as elements of municipal administration, exercise influence on the development of certain issues.⁴ In 2006, Whitehead listed eleven features characterizing artists' activities in their social environment under

⁴ Claudine Isé, "Frances Whitehead, Embedded Artist," *Art:21 Blog*, posted August 24, 2010, <http://blog.art21.org/2010/08/24/frances-whitehead-embedded-artist/>.

the title "What Do Artists Know?" Since Whitehead has made the social problems of American cities, especially issues of sustainability, her central concern, some of these competences refer to the ethics of action, as for example when she regards artists as endowed with a special sense of responsibility toward society or when she observes an increased sensitivity in their response to foreign behavior. She understands these characteristics as springing from artists' ability to question and reorganize their own doings again and again. Similar to Kaprow, Whitehead maintains that artists have a special capacity for navigating through systems of thought and society. She emphasizes their ability to recognize patterns and systems in an intuitive way: "proficiency in evaluation and analysis along multiple criteria . . . skilled in pattern and system recognition, especially with asymmetrical data." She associates the process of artistic innovation—still a top criterion for her—with three specific characteristics: "laterality," because facts, goals, and relationships are, as she says, always dealt with integratively; the "simultaneity of conception and execution" (artists "compose and perform, design and execute"); and, finally, "in process problem solving."⁵

This is both interesting and convincing. Likely everybody would come up with similar aspects of artistic practice after some reflection. All of us imagine artists to be innovative, sensitive in social issues, careful. This is exactly why the impression conveyed is that the description depends on the individual case and remains anecdotal. Are these the qualities under discussion when sociologists, philosophers, or cultural scientists make art the model of a new service-oriented society's practice?⁶ The features described by Kaprow and Whitehead are understood as qualities artists have, yet they do not appear as characteristics of an institutionalized practice, as characteristics of an institution that is itself subject to change after all. The interest in art developing today relates to forms of action that have only become important through the change of art as an

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ See, among others, Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliot (London: Verso, 2005); Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labour," in *Radiical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, eds. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 133–46; and Joseph Vogl, *Das Geistes der Kapitalen* (Zürich: diaphanes, 2010).

institution. Looking for qualities of this artistic practice, one has to consider the entire art institution and capture those changes in the relationship between author, work, and public that have only come about through the change of this institution's appearance and function within society.

Exodus—New Forms of Artistic Practice and the Self-Destruction of the Art Institution

The social role of art is essentially defined by the relationship between author, work, and recipient. When Auguste Rodin made up his mind not to present his *Burgbers of Calais* (1884–89) on a pedestal, he was working on the relationship between the work and its recipients. When Andy Warhol came to produce his works mechanically and no longer by hand, he was looking for his new role as an author within the relationship between himself and his work. The tradition of autonomous art had defined these relationships between author, work, and public for many centuries. Its central objective was to suggest that the meaning of every painting and every sculpture was something independent of all historical circumstances. The artwork was understood as participating in an ideal world of meaning that also became accessible to the viewer this way—a very ideological measure from today's point of view, which will be assessed later on. This "idealistic" positioning of the artwork immediately informed the understanding of the role of the author who had to be free from any interest alien to his work. Indifference and purposelessness of art production and reception were essentially a hygienic measure to prevent any contamination of ideal meanings with the lifeworld.

Artists have always resisted this autonomy of the art institution. Francisco Goya and Eugène Delacroix probably already did so when lamenting the war or evoking the future of a free society in their paintings. Pablo Picasso definitely did so when gluing part of a newspaper onto a Cubist drawing instead of rendering it with the means of painting. The longing for a more real reality beyond art becomes obvious in Marcel Duchamp's readymades, agents of reality in the world of artistic languages. Here one should not forget the painters who, like Peter Behrens, responded to industrialization by developing things that were to make a

wider public sensitive to art. The years after the Russian Revolution saw the Constructivists participate in the development of a new, better society with their designs.

However, it was only after World War II that the attempts to transform the balance between work, author, and public turned systematic. These endeavors were also connected with a new focus of critical analysis, which dealt with the structures of the institution rather than with matters of form.

After the radical self-doubt characteristic of modernism had thoroughly examined all formal elements of painting and sculpture for half a century and left only a few legitimate means of creation such as the (black) square, the right angle, or almost creatively untouched instruments of use (i.e., readymades), the key figures of the autonomous institution—work, authorship, reception—were subjected to deconstruction. The first forms of artistic practice that emerged were those that would become models for the production of the knowledge society.

The serial order to which Minimalist sculptors and Conceptual photographers submitted their works gradually did away with concentration on the individual work. What had begun as mere accumulation in Donald Judd's series of boxes or Bernd and Hilla Becher's documentary photographs by and by turned into a complex context of effects involving various media. This was particularly obvious in many Land artists' photographic documentations: the actual work—Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970), for example—remained unreachable for the majority of viewers and was exposed to fast, or not so fast, decay in the wilderness. It obtained a medial and mediate existence in photographs that merely gave an account of it, apparently "outside" of all claims to being art. Where was the "work" now? It was completely evident that none of the individual elements of this discourse could be identified as a "work." The work rather existed in the numerous forms of its communication, which included the reproduction of photographs in art magazines, oral statements by the artist, and the experiences of firsthand recipients. For Smithson, *Spiral Jetty* served as a kind of start for circulating his motif in photographs, texts, and film. Though one might still misleadingly refer to the earthwork sculpture as Smithson's work, the artist himself saw this work

as constituted by his discursive practice. The autonomous work dissolves into a discourse in which a wide variety of media may be involved; or, better: the work becomes a differentiated entity circulating in these discourses.⁷ The individual artistic product was less important than the practice that could unfold around it. Its discursive character was defined by the hybridity of the media used and the fragmentary trait retained by each of its elements, whose meaningfulness only resulted from each element's relationship to other fragments of the discourse—whereas in traditional art the individual work was always identified with an unrecoverable sum of meanings. The relational work is essentially tied up with acting, with what the authors do in order to establish the respective relationships—but also with what the recipients who are no longer confronted with a totality of meaning do: they are called on to reconstruct the relationships between the individual elements. Considering this discursive constitution of art, reception ceases to be a repetition of the meaning the producer encoded, but rather appears to be the continuation of a production of meaning in which reception always has to be production, too. The process does not come to a standstill. A work only exists by being permanently performed by the author or the recipient.

This story of the dematerialization of the artwork may also be told from the perspective of artistic authorship. The author of the discourse not only becomes a performer, he or she also loses contours as an individual in the course of this communication; that is, this social process. The puppets Dennis Oppenheim used as his doubles show both the crisis of legitimization of artist-authors and the tricks they employ to lure the visitors of their installations to those positions that would have been assigned to them by virtue of the institution. Here, the positions in the play of producers and recipients are materially recast for the time being. The more abstract this process of negotiation becomes, the more the social constitution of all communication, including within the field of art, becomes evident. The paradigm of autonomous art regards the avant-garde author not only as a source of completely new ideas but also as the

⁷ David Joselit uses the term "currency of images" to describe a similar structure. See David Joselit, *After Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

inventor of a private language that society only comes to understand over several decades. Now, the conventionality of communication begins to undermine the old divide between "knowing author" and "learning recipient." Artists such as Jeff Koons or Richard Prince and even Warhol already accepted these new conditions of work by not inventing their own motifs any longer but by instead diverting the great stream of pictures into their own studios. "Appropriation" is not a style, but a form of artistic practice in the media society.

Summing up artistic development in 1980, the American art theorist Craig Owens listed the then prevailing practices: "Appropriation, site specificity, impermanence, accumulation, discursivity, hybridization—these diverse strategies characterize much of the art of the present and distinguish it from its modernist predecessors."⁸ What is missing in the list, though, is materiality, to which all the practices quoted always remain related to—a mistake rooted in that era's styles of thinking. In the 1990s, Bruno Latour, for example, criticized the obsession with language he regarded as characteristic of the poststructuralists and their intellectual heirs.⁹ His actor-network theory, however, clearly reveals its structuralist provenance, even if objects are also admitted as agents within the structures in question. This "language of things" has given decisive impulses to the theory of design and architecture at the beginning of the new millennium. That materiality plays an important role in the objectification of artistic ideas is an old topos of art theory. The painter Willi Baumeister reduced it to the convincing formula of the "creative angle" the material introduces between creative intent and work.¹⁰ What matters now is understanding oil, for example, as part of a more comprehensive *dispositif* in which the history of a certain practice has become manifest and now provides a framework for action as an objectified competence. As "knowledge takes on the form of instruments, devices, and apparatuses," a material order can be seen "as a measure for producing events impossible

⁸ Craig Owens, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture* (Berkeley: University Press Group, 1992), 58.

⁹ Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 61ff.

¹⁰ See Willi Baumeister, *Das Unbekannte in der Kunst* (Cologne: DuMont, 1988).

to anticipate."¹¹ Because of this role of materially articulated *dispositifs*, Christoph Schenker, reflecting on the role of materiality for research in the arts in his essay "Value Judgments," arrives at a specific artistic form of action for which thinking is immediately embedded in doing. He programmatically draws on various artists, writers, and philosophers; following Gertrude Stein, for example, he observes "that the things we know flow down into our arm and that we, even a short time before we write them, actually did not know that we know them."¹² This emergence of artistic knowledge is directly connected with its "superficiality"—that is, with the fact that materiality is the as-significant "temporary store" of artistic intent and that form brings forth a similar role of the suspension of meaning, which immediately presents itself as a reinterpretation, a translation.

Three years after his 1980 assessment, however, Owens felt bound to correct himself and pointed out a blind spot of postmodern argumentations: "our failure to address the issue of sexual difference."¹³ Owens had taken the works of artists like Cindy Sherman or Sherrie Levine as examples for methods of appropriation because they quoted female stereotypes from the postwar cinema or copied works by other artists. The theoretician had, however, missed the point that it was a woman who duplicated exclusively works by men in the case of Levine, for instance. Appropriation becomes part of a more comprehensive strategy here, which, even if only in a model-like manner, is aimed at changing the female author's social position. Based on an analysis of Alfred Hitchcock's film *Vertigo* (1958), Laura Mulvey demonstrates in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" how active (male) and passive (female) forms of perception are created in the medium of film—forms of perception that contribute to the political constitution of gender roles.¹⁴ Mulvey's observations focus on social practices that are far more complex than those Owens listed as specific

¹¹ Christoph Schenker, "Value Judgments," in *Art and Artistic Research*, eds. Corinna Caduff, Fiona Siegenthaler, and Jan Wächli (Zürich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2010), 155. In his presentation of the text, Schenker relates the statements quoted here to Hans-Jörg Rheinberger's context of thinking.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Owens, *Beyond Recognition*, 170.

¹⁴ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 6–18.

features of postmodern art. Mulvey refers to psychoanalytic models of dispositions motivated by fear and desire and operating with identifications, projections, narcissism, and power.

Owens's observations also mark a methodological boundary. Appropriation, discursiveness, contextuality, and other practices that artists used to position themselves outside the model of autonomous artistic production in the 1960s and 1970s revealed themselves as mechanisms the post-Fordian society relied on to control the construction of its subjects in the late 1980s. In a certain way, this seemed to strike a balance between artistic techniques aimed at a sphere beyond autonomous art and those aesthetic practices with which twenty-first century society organizes productivity. Claire Bishop speaks of the "fine line of a dual horizon" in this context: not only do artistic practices take on the form of social practices—it also becomes increasingly difficult to make out the function of art in the doubling of horizons.¹⁵

Post-Representation and the Era of Networks

It is a lesson to be learned by its citizens that marks the beginnings of the modern state: they have to come to terms with postponing the immediate fulfillment of many of their individual needs and objectives and leave it to the new state. The state can only lend plausibility to its claim of representing the interests of its individual citizens by presenting itself as the embodiment of a universal identity of man. Citizens can practice this new process of representation in the sphere of culture. While in court society artworks had the function to wing conversations, in the modern state silence came to prevail in front of paintings. The work ceased to be an instrument for controlling court ritual and instead became the vessel of an absolute meaning to which its viewers had to open up to in lonely contemplation. The museum became one of the places where the imagination of the many was generalized, where the new "representative" subject was forged. The artist was the paradigm of this new subject in a

way, because the private feelings and ambitions in the narrative of the autonomous artist were turned into an expression of a universal human "nature": "The process is analogous to that of political representation, wherein the representative, standing in the first instance for the private and particular interests of civil society, ideally transcends those interests in the ethical sphere of the state. By way of this analogy, poetry acquires a double function as an agency of cultivation."¹⁶ In "post-representational society," this process of abstraction loses its social function. The developments within the art institution as outlined above may be summarily described as processes in which ideal values turn functional.¹⁷ "Technical evolution has made transcendence obsolete," the media theorist Pierre Lévy tersely remarks.¹⁸

The ground for "post-representation" was primarily prepared by digitalization. It brought forth mechanisms of knowledge production corresponding to the mechanisms of aesthetic practice sketched here. The transformations of the institution of art can ultimately be put down to the cultural techniques originating in the use of media and digitalization. In his *L'Intelligence collective: Pour une anthropologie du cyberspace*, Pierre Lévy distinguishes between molecular and molar technologies. The latter comprise mechanisms with tools, weapons, devices, and their combination of simple materials. They also include the "hot" technologies for heating ores or the synthesis of medicines. In the late eighteenth century, the Industrial Revolution was programmed with this thermodynamic "grammar." Molecular technology, on the other hand, use the "cold" processes of emulsion technology, surface chemistry, crystallography, and intelligent materials.

While molar technologies manage objects in bulk, entropically, molecular technologies permit a more differentiated approach to individual objects and singular processes. Lévy associates a fundamental movement toward the "subtle" with the molecular approach and observes a parallel change in politics.¹⁹ With politics relating to the population as a mass in

¹⁶ David Lloyd and Paul Thomas, *Culture and the State* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 78.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁸ Pierre Lévy, *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace*, trans. Robert Bononno (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 55.

¹⁹ Lévy, *Collective Intelligence*, 40–41.

¹⁵ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012), 274.

former times, the behavior within a "kind of human thermodynamics" had to be regulated under abstraction from the individual.²⁰ The molar-hierarchical order is oriented toward the overriding authority of the king, leader, boss who is legitimized by an ideal world of ideas. Lévy also classifies mass communication as a molar technology that only informs messages from outside and in the mass. Molecular technologies allow the constitution of collectives in a completely different manner: "In a system organized around molecular politics, groups are no longer considered as sources of energy to be exploited for their labor but as collective intelligences that develop and redevelop their projects and resources, continuously refine their skills, and attempt to enhance their individual qualities indefinitely."²¹ "Subtle politics" thematizes an immanently social bond that originates in the individual's relationship to all others and is no longer geared to molding the collective according to a preconceived plan.

Basing his argument on the structure of the hypertext, Lévy sets about to demonstrate how completely different the digital is in terms of its social mode of operation: the hypertext is a dynamic reservoir, a matrix from which the reader or "user" navigating through a text may put together his specific text in accordance with his momentary needs. The digital provides potential texts, pictures, and sounds in the form of data banks, expert systems, or hyperdocuments, which, depending on the specific situation, may be actualized in a thousand different ways. Contrary to the text that is apparently committed to a message that every recipient has to embrace in a hermeneutic endeavor, the hypertext creates a virtual space of meaning in which readers/users may lay their tracks. The hypertextual space is characterized by divergent readings, with similar ones developing a potential for change. The phenomenon of the hypertext implies a new relationship between the individual and the collective: cultural production becomes relevant only if "neighborhoods" are taken into account, if the collective is considered in the individual production. Thus, Lévy, without forfeiting the characteristic of recording and reproduction so important in the mass media, is able to forge a bridge to the premodern

²⁰ Ibid., 52.

²¹ Ibid., 53.

era of older body-bound technologies for which contextuality remained relevant. He states, "In a way, cyberspace reconstructs the unbroken plane on a large scale, the *continuum indivisus*, the living and changing bath that united signs with living beings, as it did signs with signs, before the media isolated and set down the messages." This has nothing to do with an entropic management of the masses, but is about interlinking single individuals who are dealt with according to their specific characteristics. They are connected to organizations that, "in their entirety, are intelligent." The opening of cyberspace allows new forms of economic and social organization to emerge that are "based on collective intelligence and the enhancement of humanity in all its variety."²²

This brief excursion into media theory has at least shown that some fundamental changes occurred in the field of cultural techniques. Processor capacities first provided the foundation for a social technology of the molar through which processes of abstraction, as part of a hierarchic technology of power, were rendered superfluous. Since the organization of art under the leitmotif of autonomy essentially served these abstractions, this bourgeois institution has inevitably gotten itself into a state of crisis. The aesthetic practices that gained in importance in the 1960s—contextuality, appropriation, discursiveness, intermediality—appeared to be significant instruments that artists could rely on for redefining their place in society. Today, the hierarchic order is gradually being superseded by processes of spontaneous linkage. Contingent orders emerge and vanish in a continuing process of production, with the relationship between individual and collective becoming a crucial driving force.

While "truth" is the decisive conceptual regulative principle of the molar order, molecular structures are characterized by emergence. On the one hand, meaning is engendered by the materiality of pictures, objects, and languages circulating in the discourses and continuously calling for new interpretations. Meaning is dealt with rather than constituted in new contextualizations and translations. On the other hand, it is a new "collective" subject that brings about emergence. Meaning is only attributed to the things worthwhile in terms of the collective's thinking.

This potential attribution of meaning is inscribed into the individual's statements as a kind of virtual cartography. The "aesthetic" quality of this practice is based on the phenomenon of emergence that had—mainly in the context of materiality—been reserved to art. Further, it is the surfaces of things, pictures, and languages that permanently interrupt the production of meaning and prompt the constitution of new meaning that lends the practice its "aesthetic" quality.

Warning against the delineation of a *general* concept of aesthetic practice, Martin Seel distinguishes between three specific dimensions he understands as inherent in it. Pursuing a mainly additive approach, he focuses on model situations of the reception of art. When he diagnoses a *contemplative* variant of aesthetic practice, we visualize him, as it were, in front of an enormous painting by Barnett Newman, whose reception is accompanied by standard literature of the sublime. The *aesthetic of the imagination*, however—which brings forth "possible views" and, thus, "horizons of possible meaning"—recalls models and discourses such as those launched by Conceptual art. For Seel, these two aspects, in conjunction with an *aesthetic of correspondence*, establish the "constitutive difference" crucial for the concept of aesthetic practice. The third dimension thematizes aesthetic perception and production as a "graphic formation of everyday reality"—which spans from all "issues of clothing and domestic furnishings and the lay-out of public spaces and venues to the typeface you choose on your computer and the stylistic decisions you make when you organize a funeral."²³

However, based on the "correspondences," which Seel neglects to specify, there evolve "designs" engendering possibilities or visions of life. Seel's argument suffers from an understanding that still identifies the artwork as the crystallization point of all production and reception. Though he warns against totalizing his third dimension of aesthetic practice into "an aesthetics of existence," this is exactly what I would like to highlight as the central development with my remarks here. As regards this "aesthetics of correspondence," the contemplative and

²³ See Martin Seel, "Zur ästhetischen Praxis der Kunst," in *Eibisch-ästhetische Studien* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996), 130.

imaginative aspects of aesthetic practice would have to be assessed as follows: Pure contemplation corresponds to a concept of the artwork and a time regime on which the autonomous model of fine art is pivoted. Contemplation is not a variant of aesthetic practice, but a historical form of late modernism that hundreds of artists tried to reduce to the absurd through their practices. The "aesthetics of imagination," however, actually defines an "indispensable basis," as Seel also emphasizes. Yet, it is not in juxtaposition to the aesthetics of correspondences, unrelated to it, but rather proves to be its critical driving force: only as aesthetic practices unfold worlds of possibilities can alternative correspondences be realized.

Not every aesthetic practice is immaterial work, but immaterial work is evidently directly connected with aesthetic practice, as Maurizio Lazzarato—who sees a close relationship between new forms of work and art—maintains.²⁴ The creative impulse is directly aimed at the subject without any tasks and procedures (as familiar from Fordian days) in between. Like many other authors, Lazzarato leaves no doubt that this form of work is dominated by precarious employment, hyperexploitation, a high degree of mobility, and hierarchical dependence. Nevertheless, it seems impossible to fight against this development of general forms of production. Yet, the analysis of immaterial work, including its relationship to art and culture, may, according to Lazzarato, allow "us to define, at a territorial level, a space for a radical autonomy of the productive synergies of immaterial labor."²⁵

Learning Aesthetic Practice?

It is to be expected that the increasing infiltration of everyday life and the sphere of production with digital techniques will go hand in hand with a growth of the sensibility for related forms of knowledge production and management. This is a collective process that can be influenced by the individual's interests only to a very limited degree. Though it is already

²⁴ Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," 143ff.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 139.

foreseeable that education will change in the context of this development, one may ask whether it is possible to provide information on, or sensitize to, this alternative form of aesthetic knowledge production in the context of a university program, for example.

The recently established Laboratory for Implicit and Artistic Knowledge at the Zeppelin University in Friedrichshafen has developed a course on the subject of "aesthetical performance," which is compulsory for all bachelor students. The special challenge here is not to reduce the forms of knowledge production thematized in the context to a theoretical discussion once again. The teaching artists have been asked to develop situations offering paradigmatic experiences of aesthetic production. Drawing, musical improvisation, theater, and writing are the media within which the experience-related exploration of "figures" of aesthetic production may unfold. The laboratory is not centered on "works," but aimed at different processes of artistic production that disclose essential specifics of aesthetic practices, such as an inevitable innovation regarding reproductions and quotations, the productivity of translating, and the possibility of achieving a superindividual result in a common production. The laboratory provides the framework for this architecture of situations and offers a context for practice-oriented artistic research, which, in its examination of theoretical positions, records what is going on and, in pursuance of the identified objectives, advances its concerns.

Conclusion

Giorgio Agamben's book *The Man without Content* represents an anti-aesthetics. For the Venetian philosopher, the age of art came to an end when the figure of the man of taste made its appearance in European society in the mid-seventeenth century. Artwork began to be regarded as the exclusive competence of the artist, while the non-artist was reduced to a mere viewer, converted into a less and less necessary and more and more passive partner, considering the artwork simply as an opportunity to practice his good taste. By becoming autonomous, art forfeited what is essential to it. Agamben's archaology of art's lost function leads him back to Aristotle and the concept of *poiesis*, which describes the process

of bringing something into presence—that is, the fact that something passes from nonbeing to being, from concealment into full light. The essence of *poiesis* has nothing to do with will; it is a mode of truth becoming apparent in man's doing: "The essence of production, conceived in the Greek way, is to bring something into presence (this is why Aristotle says 'every art is concerned with giving birth'). Consequently, it necessarily has both its end and its limit outside itself. . . . end and limit are not identified with the act of production itself."²⁶ In the poetic era, man experienced his being in the world and opened up a world for his doing and existence. Only because he has the power of "production"—only because he is capable of bringing something into presence—is he also capable of free and willed activity. It is no divine logos that appears in everybody's aesthetic practice today. Rather, today's practice reveals a form of production that articulates itself in a dialogue with what others do. What seems to emerge again in these articulations' cautious reference to an always potential collective intelligence is an "art" that brings to light reality, if not truth. For Agamben there is nothing more urgent than "a *destruction* of aesthetics," though he asks himself "whether the time is ripe for such a *destruction*."²⁷ It would seem so.

Translated from German by Wolfgang Astelbauer.

²⁶ Giorgio Agamben, *The Man without Content*, trans. Georgia Albert (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 73.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.