

THE PRODUCTION OF CULTURE IN THE TIME OF COGNITIVE CAPITALISM

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We decided to present a genealogy of thoughts that have been established in our cultural practice over the last fifteen years. We believe that our theoretical and political perspectives have emerged just from this critical cultural practice that is collaborative and trans-disciplinary and has been mainly articulated in project exhibitions by artists, activists and theorists. We therefore speak as two involved producers, on behalf on many others that we have worked with, or whose theories or projects have been relevant to us. Our focus for this presentation is how our reflections about the post-fordist modes of production and subjectivization came into being. We want to share some of the relevant projects with you. We created a map of references, which shows the context and development of our interests. In this presentation we will present four projects from 1998-2004 which main focus was culturalization of economy.

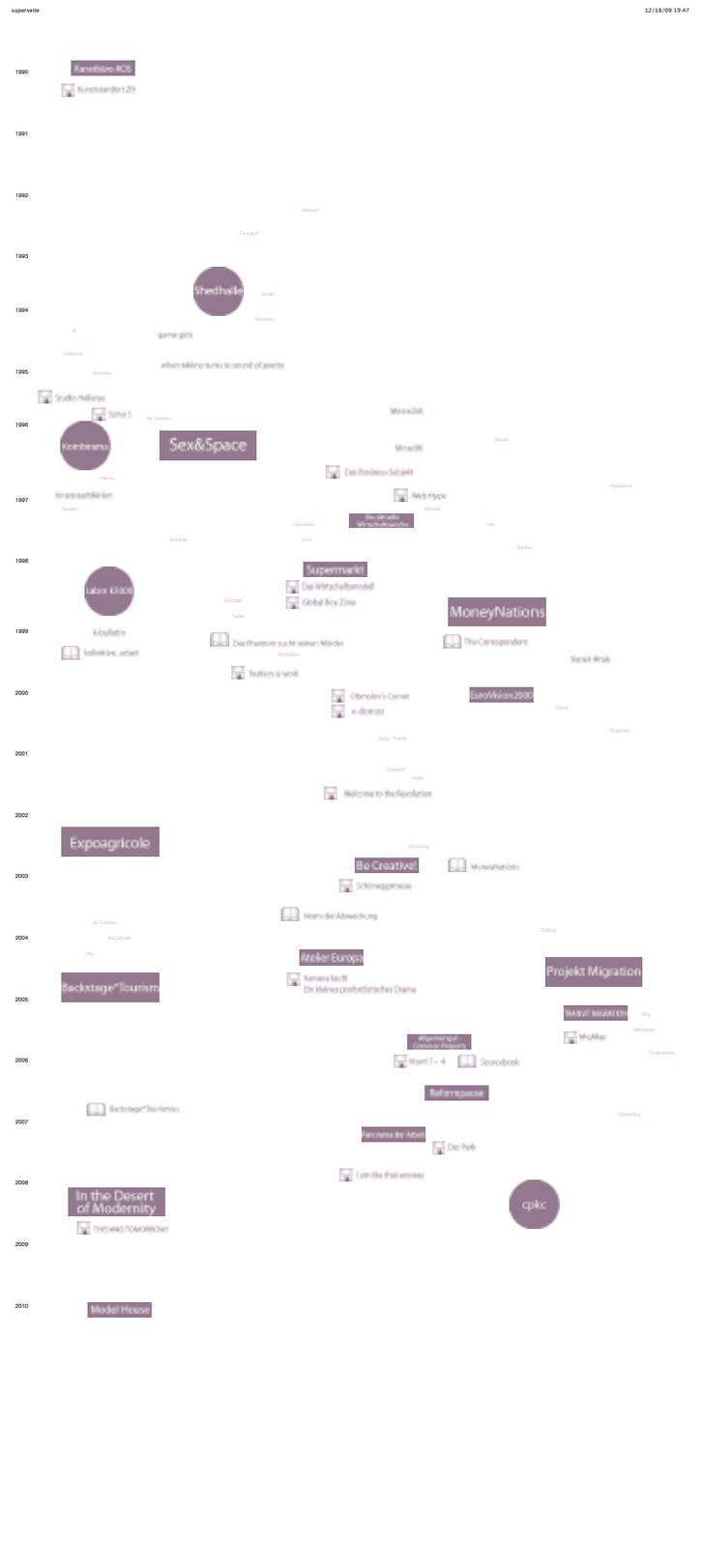
Our interest in the current economical transformation started much earlier than 1998. In Berlin and in Zurich, where we lived in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the economical changes have left their mark on the transformation of the urban space. There were a lot of signs of the neoliberal, urban transformation: the expansion of the consumption zones, the increase of real estate speculation, the gentrification processes. All of them resulting in the exclusion of non-consumers.

At the same time, when we experienced a rapid social and economical change, we took part in the formation of new networks of critical cultural production. It resulted in establishment of numerous, long-term initiatives. One of the projects was Sex&Space, which took place in the Shedhalle Zurich in 1996; it was one of the many projects that were dealing with the issues of different urban regimes and were questioning the commodification of the city. In one of the Sex&Space workshops the normative notion of labor was discussed within the theoretical frame of feminist economics. Since the 1970s, feminists scholars have been critically reading the ground works of political economy, as well as its counter-figures, such as Karl Marx. They criticized their normative concept of labor as a construct of white males, in which only wage labor (mainly industrial production) has been counted as work. All the other human (mainly female) activities, like life sustaining work or non-paid care work, have been cast out from the picture. This blind spot has grim consequences not only for women. The exclusion of non-work, as feminist economics names it, grounded the foundations of our concept of economy. It is unable to conceptualize our activities as a whole, but instead it creates hierarchies between different forms of work, which results in the devaluation of all the activities that seem to have no use for the capitalist processes of accumulation; but it also goes beyond the socialist notion of productivity. Obviously, non-work has a woman's face.

The Western capitalist concept of a money-based economy is mostly viewed as an unquestionable fact. This notion was the starting point for another exhibition project, SuperMarkt - money.market.gender politics (1998, Shedhalle, Zurich). Economy is seen as an abstract law and described as almost natural by using theoretical models and statistics to legitimate its objectivity. Political economy, and its actual adaptation in the West, has created ideals, patterns of behavior and identities that are constituted by ideologies of professionalism, efficiency and success. However, we believe that economic theories are not simply based on cause and effect, but on social constructions and the symbolic order.

Today, politicians, economists and entrepreneurs are promoting the concept of the "free market" as the only efficient regulator. The language of economics is being used for many areas of life. Society is seen as one big enterprise, in which everybody must be profitable and productive. The economic principle is applied as well to such areas as welfare, culture, education, or social relationships. The artists and theorists involved in the SuperMarkt project investigated the concept of the "self-regulatory market," its discursive traditions and projections. These investigations focused on social/financial inequality and the practices of exclusion. They lie at the foundation of the "free market" as an ideology, with all its effects on gender politics and the non-Western world. We tried to face some basic questions: what is the impact of the "new economic system" on our everyday life? What are the images, the terminology and the habitual patterns that are used to make it socially acceptable?

A few years later, economization got so close to our own fields of production (the art field, education) that another project was needed to critically challenge this process in the public discussion. That was the reason beyond "Be Creative! The Creative Imperative." (2002, Museum of Design, Zurich). Creativity used to be seen as something peculiar to artists, designers and bohemians. Now it is considered essential for survival in the current labor,



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attentiveness and relation markets. It is already the social norm to market your own "labor force" as an entrepreneur in your own right, and to use periods without work and temporary appointments efficiently. The ability to organize yourself, creativity and self-motivation have become the models for the "information workers" of the future; as well as cognitive competences that have traditionally been argued as "feminine" skills, such as: intuition, reflexivity, social competence and group responsibility, which are also seen as essential for commercial innovation. Moreover, even sub-cultural practices and non-conformist living models no longer disturb the business flow in a company either, but they are even said to increase productivity. Artists and designers are taken as the model here.

Creativity is therefore seen as a key asset by a whole range of social institutions and interest groups - but also, increasingly, as a key necessity.

Lifestyle magazines, management concepts, the New Economy, the restructured labor market, the educational policy, all these make creativity – in the form of a resource that can be individually activated – into a promise that you can – and must – make your personal success your own business. The Be Creative! exhibition took a look at these changing concepts and the social design process that goes with them. It included company mission statements, working organizations, design concepts and motivation tools that have profoundly changed everyday life in the workplace, as well as the educational system. It considered very recent town planning developments demonstrating these social changes; there have been interviews and film projects where designers, artists and employees can have their say about their everyday working lives and the situation in the world of education. At the same time the exhibition took a new look at the historical, utopian models for living, learning and working against this background. The exhibition was staged as a modern space for living and working, ranging from the loft to the open-plan office, alternating production and regeneration, and using games tables, advisory literature and chill-out zones. The exhibition was interactive, and it tried to examine the culturalization processes on a local and an international level.

This project has to be understood in the context of a wider political discussion, initiated by the authors related to the Italian operaists, shaped by the rising criticism towards neoliberalism. The European cultural scene of the 1990s shifted its perspective with respect to the relation between self-organized creative work and politically and economically defined cultural economy. Cultural producers in Paris, Barcelona, Berlin, Munich, Zurich, London, Madrid – but also from outside Europe – began to deal increasingly in their praxis with the new economically and socially conditioned mechanisms of exclusion. People started to experience these constraints in the spheres of work and private life amidst the process of conversion to a post-fordist, information and service society.

Thus the work and life relations of the cultural producers, and their relations to their social situation, have in recent years been the object of increased critical scrutiny, on both the local and the global levels. The feminist positions, which researched informal work conditions and the gendering of the new model of flexible and mobile work (e.g. affective work or work that is technologically determined, such as tele-work), have been discussed anew and applied materially and strategically to cultural production. It was aimed against the instrumental use of cultural production as the model of self-determined work in the post-fordist society. The generally unpaid or underpaid activities of cultural and creative professions – formerly assumed to be the exceptions from the world of wage labor – started to be understood as widely applicable forms of labor organization. It was an ideological construction, established in order to press ahead with the dismantling of the state's responsibility, and to promote the entrepreneurial self-optimization of the individual.

Politicians and economic policy-makers thereby assigned a forward-looking role to creative professions in an economy based on information and innovation. At the end of the 1990s, with mouths full of slogans about creative industries (a marketing concept originating in the culture industry and the broad field of creative work), they promised to establish new forms of creative work, to generate new work places and to organize the flourishing innovative markets. From today's perspective, this attempt has lost a big part of its former charm; currently the idea to capitalize on creative work, summarized in the catchy phrase "creative industries," seems to be outdated and vague. It flopped together with the bursting bubble of the "new economy" and the total failure of the "Ich-AG" (i.e. "I Inc." was a German government program to create subsidized self-employment places for the unemployed). But the process of conversion to a new society of self-reliant creative entrepreneurs is still underway, only less glamorously than before. On the one hand, this process is concentrated, above all, in the European metropolises and as such it reaffirms the Euro-centric concept of culture; on the other hand, creative work is increasingly being displaced to the countries of global South & East, where cheap creative labor could be found and exploited. The model of the culturepreneur (a conceptual mixture of culture and the entrepreneur) has become a new export good, like in the case of "Cool Britannia," one of the programs of the British Council. It was a joint venture between national interests and creative work under the sign of a soft, cultural colonialism. The target groups of the worldwide lifestyle campaign were located, among other places, in South America and Eastern Europe.

We tried to address these issues in the project "Atelier Europa" (Munich 2004, at Kunstverein Munich, www.ateliereuropa.com). It was composed of two main parts. There was scientific research conducted by the cultural theorist Angela McRobbie, who compared the conditions of production in the area of independent fashion design in the urban contexts of London and Berlin. A second approach was based on practical, esthetical and theoretical investigations conducted by Pauline Boudry, Brigitta Kuster, Isabell Lorey,

Katja Reichard and Marion von Osten. The two perspectives were merged, and the sociological analysis of creative professions was coupled with the question of the precariousness of cultural production. This part of the project was intended to take the current cultural practices into consideration, aimed at the development of not only aesthetic products, but also discourses and socio-political fields of action.

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