

Economic Value, Equivalence and the Nonidentical: Contemporary Art Practices in the Grey Zone of Human and Commercial Economies

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HOW CAN WE THINK OF DIFFERENT WAYS to evidence values attached to contemporary art? What follows is a mostly theoretical answer to this question. I propose to elaborate on two apparently disconnected ideas: namely, Theodor W. Adorno's notion of the nonidentical and David Graeber's conception of human economies to show that one form of "value" at work in certain practices of contemporary art lies in their capacity to prompt unexpected social relations that are hardly relevant to the preponderant notion of economic value. Yet, I will stress that contemporary art engages in this prompting of social relations from within the very productive conditions deployed by contemporary capitalism.

A central concept in Theodor W. Adorno's *Negative Dialectic* is the nonidentical – an experience that lies beyond the grasp of conceptual thinking and that, through its very contrast with conceptual thinking, makes the latter possible. According to Adorno, there is no way of having "direct access" to the nonidentical. At most, it can be revealed by conceptual resonances or constellations and, indeed, paradigmatically, by art. Against the abstract principle of conceptualisation, Adorno thinks that art can manifest in its concreteness the heterogeneous nature of the nonidentical.

On the other hand, in *Debt. The first 5,000 years*, anthropologist David Graeber distinguishes between "commercial economies" and "human economies". The former are primarily focussed on producing and accumulating wealth; the latter are oriented towards creating, maintaining or severing relations between people. Commercial economies operate through the principle of abstract exchange that allows measuring objects and experiences that otherwise would be incommensurable; human economies operate through the concreteness and singularity of transactions qua social relations.

In this text, I want to re-read Adorno's highly speculative notion of the nonidentical in the light of Graeber's anthropological idea of human economies so as to figure out what sort of "value" can be mobilised by contemporary artistic practices in order to challenge the hegemonic notion of value defined for it by the capitalist market. Before doing this, I want to introduce Immanuel Wallerstein's concept of "world-system" to highlight how profit-driven economic exchange has come to globally articulate cultural differences and social inequalities. I will note also that none of the frequent crises of capitalism have managed to challenge its core notion of economic value as an abstract form of exchange. Following the insights of John Roberts and Gregory Sholette, I will call attention to the ways in which most contemporary artistic practices barely fit within this profit-oriented framework. If it is not just economic value, what are artists producing? Intertwined with my argument, I will comment on three artistic projects which answer this question and exemplify alternative or complementary modes of non-economic value creation. In all three cases, I will stress that they are located within that world-system of economic exchange while, at the same time, they do not primarily endeavour to produce monetary value.

I

The idea of the world as an integrated totality took hold in modern European thinking during the 18th and 19th centuries, when just one path was imagined for universal

progress, whether it was political, economic or artistic. G. W. F. Hegel was categorical about this, stating that “[t]he History of the World travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of History, Asia the beginning”.² Immanuel Wallerstein has forcefully argued that such totalising ideas were made possible by the configuration of what he terms a “world-system”.³ According to Wallerstein, this system has unified the whole world in economic terms since the 16th century through the availability of free labour and the production of an excess that was traded in the market. Unequal relationships have since been held together by a common economic system whose core value is the production of economic benefit. Wallerstein’s most important point is in fact that the configuration of the global economy as a “world-system” was intrinsically imbalanced. During the second half of the 20th century, developmentalist discourse held with modernist confidence that all nations could advance in the same path via industrialisation, yet Wallerstein makes clear that such a development was only possible for some nations that profited earlier from the economic exploitation and subordination of ample regions of the world. It is telling, in this regard, that Wallerstein defines a world-system quite simply “as a unit with a single division of labour and multiple cultural systems”.⁴ Through the market logic of capitalism, these different cultural systems are articulated and tamed not to confront the inequalities provoked by that unequal division of labour. This is the basic principle of the capitalist world-system –the articulation of its different cultures by the single value of profit-driven economic exchange.

In the history of capitalism, economic crises have marked periods of revolt against its world-system. The financial crisis of 2008, which erupted with the fall of key investment companies and banks, will be most remembered perhaps for the dubious role of different states in holding together the financial and market machinery against the interest of their own people. The phenomenon reinvigorated debates around “value-measurement that is throwing up intense struggles between the capitalist value form and popular life-values”.⁵ One frequent topic in this debate has been the distinction between financial capital and “real” economic assets.⁶ Often conceived as fictitious, finance would result from sheer speculation, while the real economy would derive directly from concrete forms of labour. Yet, a stark distinction such as this would miss the point regarding how the production of economic value has evolved in recent decades. Moreover, regardless of its critical usefulness, the distinction does not call into question the very conception of value that prevails in the capitalist world-system. This would be “a form of social wealth constituted by a spatially and temporally generalising social relation of equivalence and substitutability”.⁷ The point made by Mann here is that it does not matter how profound the 2008 crisis was, since such a hegemonic notion of value was not shaken. There has then been a crucial aspect of the crisis that has not been thrown into crisis: the category of value.⁸ In this sense, the problem would not be so much that under capitalism labour is expropriated or not properly rewarded but that “labour is condemned to the production of value”.⁹ It fundamentally keeps operating in terms of “equivalence and substitutability”.

2. Georg W. F. Hegel. *The Philosophy of History*. 1956. p. 103

3. Immanuel Wallerstein. *The Rise and Future Demise of the World Capitalist System: Concepts for Comparative Analysis*. 2000.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 75

5. David McNally. *From Financial Crisis to World-Slump: Accumulation, Financialisation, and the Global Slowdown*. 2009. p. 35

6. See, for instance, Christian Marazzi. *The Violence of Financial Capitalism*. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e). 2010.

7. Geoff Mann. *Value after Lehman*. 2010. p. 177

8. *Ibid.*, p. 183

9. *Ibid.*, p. 175

10. Theodor W. Adorno. *Negative Dialectics*. 2007. p. 163

11. *Ibid.*, p. 146

12. *Ibid.*, p. 170

13. *Ibid.*, p. 155

14. *Ibid.*, p. 149

15. *Ibid.*, p. 53

16. *Ibid.*, p. 162

17. Theodor W. Adorno. *Aesthetic Theory*. 1997. p. 133

18. *Ibid.* p. 2.

19. Stewart Martin. *The Absolute Artwork Meets the Absolute Commodity*. 2007. See also, Stewart Martin. *Artistic Communism – A Sketch*. 2009.

In the frequent crises that capitalism has undergone, its value system may have been questioned and put under pressure. A crisis, however, only makes more evident what is plain to see. Despite being hegemonic in its world-system, profit-driven production is not the only economic value operating in the world. In other words, capitalism has not managed to incorporate all social practices into its logic of equivalence and substitutability.

This has been noted by different authors, most notably by Theodor W. Adorno. In *Negative Dialectics*, he was especially concerned with the status of what he termed the nonidentical – that which lies beyond the grasp of conceptual thinking. Elaborating on Hegel's dialectic and the role of negativity in the constitution of identity, Adorno stresses that nonidentity communicates with that from which it was separated by the concept. "It is opaque", he writes, "only for identity's claim to be total; it resists the pressure of that claim. But as such it seeks to be audible".¹⁰ The rule of identification imposes itself over the heterogeneity of the nonidentical. This move is crucial for capitalism since identification underlies the principle of exchange. Only that which has a stabilised identity can be measured and then exchanged. The nonidentical has to be either integrated or repressed. In this sense, the principle of identification "imposes on the whole world an obligation to become identical, to become total". In a key passage, Adorno relates identity and exchange:

*The barter principle, the reduction of human labor to the abstract universal concept of average working hours, is fundamentally akin to the principle of identification. Barter is the social model of the principle, and without the principle there would be no barter; it is through barter that nonidentical individuals and performances become commensurable and identical. The spread of the principle imposes on the whole world an obligation to become identical, to become total.*¹¹

Against the abstraction presiding the principle of identity, the nonidentical is sided with the particular.¹² This particularity makes the nonidentical intractable and thus labelled and neutralised as absurd: "The mere attempt to turn philosophical thought towards the nonidentical, away from identity, was called absurd. By such attempts the nonidentical was said to be a priori reduced to its concept, and thus identified".¹³ That is, the urge to identify and nullify the excess of the nonidentical seeks to defuse any form of antagonism. In this sense Adorno claims: "The supposition of identity is indeed the ideological element of pure thought, all the way down to formal logic; but hidden in it is also the truth moment of ideology, the pledge that there should be no contradiction, no antagonism."¹⁴

Still, even though they pretend to be definitive, concepts can be revealed as incomplete. Against the will of hegemonic discourse, no concept can attain an absolute identity. In Adorno's words: "the determinable flaw in every concept makes it necessary to cite others".¹⁵ This would be the reason why the working of constellations can defy the principle of identity. Constellations illuminate the irreducibility of concepts and experiences. They don't subsume them in an explanation but show how they are interconnected. As Adorno explains, "[b]y themselves, constellations represent from

without what the concept has cut away within: the 'more' which the concept is equally desirous and incapable of being".¹⁶

For Adorno, art was a paradigmatic materialisation of the working of constellations: "Artworks say what is more than the existing, and they do this exclusively by making a constellation of how it is...".¹⁷ Moreover art does not merely illustrate the nonidentical through the construction of constellations. Its manifestation can actually embody the nonidentical, since the very concept of "art" is itself located within a historically changing constellation and thus "it refuses definition".¹⁸

The perception of the world as an integrated totality has been especially strengthened by the pervasiveness of television's images and the Internet. Nothing seems to be left outside its reach. Sometimes, however, instead of integrating itself into the wholeness, the production of images seems to disintegrate it.

II

Following in the footsteps of Adorno, Stewart Martin has insistently stressed that we must not lose sight of the fact that modern and contemporary art are cultural forms developed under the capitalist conditions set since the 18th century.¹⁹ This much seems obvious: art is practiced within specific material conditions, and these have been the ones fixed almost indisputably by capitalism. It, however, does not mean that all artistic practices have been economically

CANAL*MOTOBOY was a project orchestrated by Catalanian artist Antoni Abad in which a group of motorcycle delivery boys or "motoboys" in the Brazilian city of São Paulo organised themselves as a temporary community through the use of new media. In 2007, 12 motoboys were provided with last generation mobile phones to photograph, videorecord and tag their everyday encounters and street experiences and upload them into a webpage (www.megafone.net). The project was sponsored by the Spanish Public Agency for Cultural Action, public cultural institutions in Brazil and a private mobile phone company. The easiest interpretation would be to reckon these motoboys as producing their own images of their city and their lives. However, they were not just producing an alternative representation of themselves to be added to that of mainstream media. Beyond representing, they were enacting, through the use of new media, unexpected social relations. They held weekly meetings to discuss the group's strategy and define new tags to classify their data; they organised to have a meeting with representatives from the transit administration from São Paulo's town hall to discuss their group's status; and, most revealingly, they continued gathering and working together up to today once the "artistic project" was over. Even though canal*MOTOBY was made possible by cell phones and private communicational networks, it can hardly be said that the primary or sole implication of such a project was to implement the media logic of image equivalence and substitutability.

In a previous work along the same line that took place in 2005 in the Spanish city of Lleida, Abad gathered a group of gypsy teenagers in canal*GITANO. In this work, the call to have boys and girls meeting without relatives being present was already a challenge for the community's habits and imaginary. Around the use of cell phones, new approaches to the gypsy everyday life were developed. The participants held quite uncomfortable interviews with the male heads of their community (patriarchs) in which they would ask them to explain what it meant to be a "gypsy" or a "patriarch". Identitarian notions that were normally assumed had now to be explained and supported. "Internet's the Devil", one of the patriarchs told Abad.

It is specially revealing the use of cell phones in these projects. Technology is a key element in the spread of capitalism and its profit oriented productivism. Although cell phones are programmed to be nodes of abstract exchange in a communicational network, in these cases we find that they enact singularly heterogeneous social practices. By means of a device that is expected to produce and circulate exchangeable signs, the unexpected is brought into existence. Both projects disrupt the motoboy's and the gypsy's hegemonic representation by making present displaced and excluded practices. In this sense, a technology of equivalence is made to produce non-equivalent social relations through the specific practice of their users.

20. I have developed this argument in more detail in *Artistic Labour, Enclosure and the New Economy. Afterall. A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*. 30. 2012.

21. David Graeber points to this paradox in *The Sadness of Post-workerism*. 2011. p. 97

22. John Roberts. *Art, 'Enclave Theory' and the Communist Imaginary*. 2009. p. 355

23. Gregory Sholette. *Swampwalls Darkmatter and the Lumpen Army of Art*. 2008. p. 39

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*, 44

27. David Graeber. *Debt. The First 5,000 years*. 2011. p. 127

28. Régine Debatty. 2007. Interview with the BijaRi Group. 2007-05-10.

productive. It suffices to have a quick look at modern art history in order to notice that producing profit has been quite a marginal function for art.²⁰ Art was unique because it was immeasurable. Paradoxically, the high prices paid for works of art in the market depends on the perception that art is not made primarily to produce economic value.²¹ It is crucial to note that art has not been economically marginal because it operated outside the market logic of capitalism. It has been marginal precisely because it operated within this logic. This is why it makes sense to ask how art can bring the nonidentical into the logic of “equivalence and substitutability”.

In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno argues that works of art can develop their inner contradiction –i.e., being produced within the logic of capitalism and, at the same time, not being reduced to a standard commodity– and thereby unveil the principle of identification that underlies the workings of profit-driven exchange. While Adorno thought of modern art primarily as an object, the rise of performance, installation and so-called collaborative art since the 1960s points to social interaction as the lieu where contemporary art has been taking place. The contemporary shift from object to practice makes it possible to raise a critical point that did not have much relevance before, namely, to understand the nonidentical not as a manifestation of works of art but rather as the social process that artistic practices can unravel. That is, the focus should be, not on what contemporary artists produce but, on how they engage with the logic of production at large. This is cogent since the rise of finance economy has made experience, circulation and social relations new sources for the extraction of economic value. It should be in the practices of contemporary art rather than its objects that the constellations of the nonidentical should be taking place. Are artists producing for the art market? If not, what are they doing and how?

According to John Roberts, there is a growing mass of socialised art activity (by non-professional as well as professional artists) that remains hidden to the art market and yet now defines the terrain on which art is practiced.²² In the same vein, Gregory Sholette has made a persuasive argument for the role of what he calls the lumpen army of art, “a legion of professionally-trained artists occupying a limbo-like space that is simultaneously necessary and superfluous to both the fiscal and symbolic economy of high culture”.²³ According to Sholette, the vast majority of professional artists make up a “reserve army of unemployed”.²⁴ This reserve works as the background “against which the small percentages of artists who succeed appear sharply focused”.²⁵ By contrast with the successful artists, what sort of social relations are these “lumpen2 artists facilitating? If they are not about economic profit, what kind of values are they creating and mobilising? The conclusion reached by Sholette would explain the source from where the nonidentical in contemporary art may sprout. He terms it “dark matter” and argues that

*Dark matter presents a problem to mainstream market valorization because it embodies the overlooked, the discarded, and the superfluous as an actual excess of labor that, even under ideal economic conditions, would be impossible to openly and productively integrate under global capitalism.*²⁶

This lumpen that does not join the ranks of the profit producers must then be producing something else. As we have already noted, whatever it is they are doing they are doing it within the material conditions set up by capitalism. This does not mean, however, that capitalism can absorb and transform into profit all that creative power force. These practices and the value they produce are difficult to track. The unconventional anthropologist David Graeber has been calling attention on the panoply of value formation from a social perspective overshadowed by capitalism. He writes:

When we return to an examination of conventional economic history, one thing that jumps out is how much has been made to disappear. Reducing all human life to exchange means not only shunting aside all other forms of economic experience (hierarchy, communism), but also ensuring that the vast majority of the human race who are not adult males, and therefore whose day-to-day existence is relatively difficult to reduce to a matter of swapping things in such a way as to seek mutual advantage, melt away into the background.²⁷

Graeber is warning that we have lost sight of the sort of relationships that other forms of social practices create alongside the reigning exchange principle of market economies.

III

Taking into account the culturally broad comparisons that anthropological narratives make possible, it seems easier to put into perspective the actual reach of the principle of equivalence and substitutability that characterises capitalism. Hegemonic as this principle may be, it is limited. Graeber goes on to stress that in certain social practices even money can work not as a medium to facilitate abstract exchanges but to “create, maintain and reorganize relations between people”:

In fact, the term “primitive money” is deceptive for this very reason, since it suggests that we are dealing with a crude version of the kind of currencies we use today. But this is precisely what we don’t find. Often, such currencies are never used to buy and sell anything at all. Instead, they are used to create, maintain, and otherwise reorganize relations between people: to arrange marriages, establish the paternity of children, head off feuds, console mourners at funerals, seek

“AMBIGUOUS” is probably the term that better describes the relationship of artistic practice to market capitalism. As I have noted earlier, under capitalism labour seems to be condemned to the production of economic benefit. Even though late capitalism seems to have managed better than any other period in recent history to make art a business force, it keeps being notoriously unproductive. Or, to be more precise, it produces other sort of values beyond the monetary. Such is the case of a clearly ambiguous Brazilian collective which characterises itself under the slogan “Art-Design-Attitude” (BijaRi). Founded in 1997, BijaRi was originally made up by architects and urban planners. Since the beginning of their activities, they have moved comfortably between the official and underground art scenes and also developing openly commercial projects.

Diversity and elasticity always were our priorities, and we are constantly researching and linking diverse knowledge areas, in order to create more possibilities of transformation in our works as well as to extend the number of potential clients, something very inconstant in this market.²⁸

They devised Garage Project in 2011, an interactive installation of 26 G-LEC panels on the stage of a music event hosted by the French car company Citroën in São Paulo. They have produced all sort of projects (video, graphic design, on stage performances) for companies and organisations such as Motorola, Absolut Vodka, MTV, Green Peace or Philip Morris. At the same time, they have presented their artistic projects in mainstream venues such as the Havana Biennial (2003), the Architecture Biennial at Graz in Austria (2010) or the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (2011). Still, they argue that they are genuinely interested in challenging the power structure in late capitalist cities.

[W]e conceived projects that question the functions of public place, revealing relations of power hidden in everyday settings. We did and do this by using artistic artifices that serve to crop and amplify some aspects of the city. In an inverted process of architecture that builds solid structures, we create almost ephemeral works that guide themselves by rupture of standards in each individual, allowing a reflection on the approached themes.²⁹

And so they did when DJs and VJs performed in downtown São Paulo to denounce the aggressive process of gentrification and to support local residents. Images of the conflicted city centre were projected on an impressive seven-metre-high white cube while music blasted and people hang around and dance. Cubo (2005) was meant to call attention to the struggle for the access and use of the recently renovated downtown area. In the same vein, BijaRi had undertaken "Our Air Space is For Sale" (2004) as an intervention to denounce gentrification in Largo do Batata, a mostly working class neighborhood located in a very wealthy section of São Paulo. Denouncing the process of homogenisation in the gentrified zones of the city, the project vindicated the local population, its habits and culture. As the collective itself claims: "The numerous interventions undertaken were intended towards establishing a dialogue with the local community as to create a shared sense of understanding such a 'top-down' process."³⁰ By means of posters, postcards, inflatables, interviews and multimedia projections, BijaRi managed the situation in Largo do Batata so as to have ample media coverage and so as to solicit a political response to the situation.

*forgiveness in the case of crimes, negotiate treaties, acquire followers almost anything but trade in yams, shovels, pigs, or jewelry. Often, these currencies were extremely important, so much so that social life itself might be said to revolve around getting and disposing of the stuff. Clearly, though, they mark a totally different conception of what money, or indeed an economy, is actually about. I've decided therefore to refer to them as 'social currencies', and the economies that employ them as "human economies". By this I mean not that these societies are necessarily in any way more humane (some are quite humane; others extraordinarily brutal), but only that they are economic systems primarily concerned not with the accumulation of wealth, but with the creation, destruction, and rearranging of human beings.*³¹

"The creation, destruction, and rearranging of human beings" is the point worth noticing here. For Graeber, to make something exchangeable "one needs first to rip it from its context³² That is, to abstract it from its context of use. This is the first step to make something calculable. Considering the case of slavery, Graeber asks how this calculability is effectuated, how it becomes possible "to treat people as if they are identical".³³ His answer invokes an anthropological example:

*The Lele example gave us a hint: to make a human being an object of exchange, one woman equivalent to another for example, requires first of all ripping her from her context; that is, tearing her away from that web of relations that makes her the unique conflux of relations that she is, and thus, into a generic value capable of being added and subtracted and used as a means to measure debt.*³⁴

As I showed earlier, what Adorno termed the nonidentical, which he linked to the concrete and singular – be it experiences, relations or objects – was working against the backbone of bartering and its principle of abstract exchange.³⁵ The cases of artistic practices that we are relating to the nonidentical point in this direction. Instead of subtracting objects or experiences that can then be measured and exchanged, they add to the social complexity in which they are located. Again, it is important to stress that these artistic projects do not operate from some sort of privileged "outside" beyond capitalism. They are mingled with it. From the perspective opened up by Adorno's notion of constellation, contradiction is not a burden

but the very condition of possibility to effectively intervene in the situation within which artistic practices are embedded. Actually, Graeber stresses this when he holds that all important economic and moral possibilities are present in any human society. Quoting Marcel Mauss' *Manual of Ethnography*, he observes that:

*[i]n any relatively large and complex system of human relations—as he puts it, “almost everywhere”—all major social possibilities are already present, simultaneously—at least in embryonic form. There will always be individualism and communism too; something like money and the calculation it makes possible, but also every sort of gift. The question then is which dominant institutions shape our basic perceptions of humanity.*³⁶

In their 2013 editorial to a special issue of *Performance Research*, Joslin McKinney and Mick Wallis called attention to the fact that over the last three decades “the aspects of cultural value that have become central to the rhetoric of cultural policy are those such as economic impact and cultural vibrancy, health and well-being, urban regeneration and community cohesion”.³⁷ They consider that other more “intrinsic” aspects of culture such as ethics were left out from serious policy evaluation due to the “ephemeral, shifting, incoherent and even irrational properties of cultural value” that make ‘any economic valuation of culture far from straightforward’.³⁸ Ethics would speak “not just of our personal experience, but also of our inter-subjective and social experience, exceed value measured in terms of an individual’s stated preference and willingness to pay”.³⁹

There have been, however, numerous projects publicly and privately sponsored that have attempted to measure this “irrational dimension of cultural value”.⁴⁰ In fact, the urge to harness artistic practice to statistics and measurable standards is manifold. In his now classic *The Expediency of Culture. Uses of Culture in the Global Era*, George Yúdice named a series of social tasks that art and culture has had to undertake since the neoliberal turn during the 1980s: the artist as educator, activist and collaborator.⁴¹ As neoliberalism took root, the welfare of the population was shifted onto civil society and it was defended that, if properly managed, the arts could solve almost any problem.⁴² A recurring strategy in public policy has

29. *Ibid.*

30. URL: <http://www.bijari.com.br/?portfolio=the-selling-of-our-air-space>. (Accessed 2015-21-04).

31. Graeber. *Debt*. p. 130

32. *Ibid.*, p. 146

33. *Ibid.*, p. 159

34. *Ibid.*

35. Actually, for Graeber bartering is far from being rooted in abstract exchange. Bartering can work as the fabric of social relations beyond mere exchange. Chapter 2 of *Debt. The first 5,000 Years*, “The Myth of Barter”, is devoted to a criticism of bartering as an abstract practice of exchange. From an ample array of cases, Graeber demonstrates that bartering is always a situated and complex process of social bonding rather than a calculated exchange of goods.

36. David Graeber. *On the Moral Grounds of Economic Relations. A Maussian Approach*. 2010. p. 3

37. Joslin McKinney and Mick Wallis. *On Value*. 2013. p. 1

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Ibid.*

40. McKinney and Wallis mention the Arts & Humanities Research Council’s Cultural Value Project, 2012. URL: <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/funded-research/Funded-themes-and-programmes/Cultural-Value-Project/Pages/default.aspx>. (Accessed 2015-13-03). But there are many other examples by governments, universities and non-governmental organisations including: the European Commission, *European Cultural Values*, 2007. URL: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_278_en.pdf. (Accessed 2015-13-03); UNESCO/ONU. *Creative Economy World Report 2013. Widening Local Development Pathways*. URL: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/creativity/creative-economy-report-2013-special-edition>. (Accessed 2015-13-03); The Warwick Commission on the Future of Cultural Value. 2015. URL: http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/research/warwickcommission/futureculture/finalreport/warwick_commission_report_2015.pdf. (Accessed 2015-13-03).

41. George Yúdice. *The Expediency of Culture. Uses of Culture in the Global Era*. Durham and London: Duke University Press. 2003. p. 300

42. *Ibid.*

THE CURRENT IMMENSE reserve army of professional and non-professional artists is not just waiting to be called up to join the exclusive ranks of the art market or submit individual career-oriented projects to be measured and sponsored by public agencies. Even though they may wish to do so, the most common situation is for them to organise and get involved in practices that are productively irrelevant to the art system. It is then more frequent that they engage with some other social actors and that they do so driven by other than economic values. This is the case of *Tranvía Cero*, an artistic collective from Southern Quito, capital city of Ecuador. They started working together since 2002 setting as their goal to “intervene and democratise public space” and doing so by joining ranks with the residents of the working class and mostly deprived neighbourhoods of the city South.⁴³ Among the different projects they have set in motion, the most ambitious is surely *al zurich* (a play on words with the city name of Zurich and “to the South” in Spanish) devoted to produce critical links between “art and community”. *al zurich* ran for the twelfth time in 2014, calling for interventions in public space between artists and dwellers. It is openly urban, mixed and popular. Even though the project is “independent and autonomous” and decisions are all made by artists and neighbours alike, since its inception it has received public funding from the city and national government.

Among the more than a hundred public interventions undertaken since 2002, one of them has been *Cartografía de la memoria* (Cartography of memory, 2011). It was developed in *La Argelia alta*, a neighbourhood made up mostly by settlers from inner rural areas in Ecuador. It sought to recount the migrant history of different families collected and written by their members in workshops. Once memory was recalled and recorded in a collective process, all of the information was gathered and made available in a Community Library run by neighbours. From the first call to participate in *al zurich*, the organisers made clear that artists and non-artists alike could submit proposals –sociologists, very young self-taught urban artists or even an association of blind people have joined *al zurich* at different times.⁴⁴ Even though all members of *Tranvía Cero* have received formal academic training in Fine Arts, the work of the collective seems oriented towards producing something that is neither art nor social activism. They may just be creating a constellation of different unrelated practices that make possible other nonidentical forms of social relations.

been to reduce the social value of art to those cases in which a proper administration of resources and outcomes could be measured. The logic of equivalence and substitutability has aggressively spread to the field of the arts and culture since the 1980s. The managerial turn has been crucial in the public policies regarding the social function of art, accompanying the expansion of the art market, commercial galleries, auction houses and professionalisation of art education and commodification of artistic venues. However, I have argued that most artistic practices do not yet circulate through these channels. Although they are inextricably intertwined with this managerial and commercial turn, they are not systematically meant to be commodities or consumed.

As we have seen, Wallerstein defined a world-system “as a unit with a single division of labour and multiple cultural systems”. I have been trying to stress that within the capitalist world-system of exchange and substitutability there are artistic practices that dissipate the reach of that straightforward division of labour. Pace Adorno, we now have an overlapping of productive and unproductive social practices that has made it more difficult to generate contradictions and thus antagonistic forms of social relations. Rather than antagonism, it is ambiguity that is the thread in all of the cases I have presented in this text. They are not (actually, they can’t be) clear-cut examples of the deployment of the nonidentical by means of artistic practice. The nonidentical just can be invoked in a context in which the principle of exchange and substitutability rules.

43. OKR. Colectivo *Tranvía Cero* desde Ecuador. 2012. URL: <http://pazquinsur.blogspot.mx/2012/06/colectivo-tranvia-cero-desde-ecuador.html>. (Accessed 2015-03-13).

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