

Valuing the Arts

HANNAH NEWELL

Hannah Newell is based in London, UK, and currently heads up the Editorial Team at independent arts publisher, Black Dog Publishing. She graduated from the Critical Writing in Art and Design MA programme at the Royal College of Art, London in 2014 where her research interests included the relationship of the arts to the concept of "work", D.I.Y culture, the development of cultural policy and the ongoing debate surrounding "cultural value" in relation to the

ethos of arts organisations and artists as organisers. Examples of her written work and ongoing research can be found at <https://newellposts.wordpress.com>. Hannah has previously been published in *JAWS: Journal of Art Writing by Students*, *T-R-E-M-O-R-S* magazine, *New Wolf* magazine and Allotrope Editions and has written for *T-R-E-M-O-R-S Live*, *Bellyflop Magazine* and *this is tomorrow*. She has BA in Fine Art from Chelsea College of Art.

1. Charles Esche's debate speech on "Politics, Economics and Culture: A different balance?" at the 4th Princess Margaret Awards, 19 March 2012, published online by the EFC YouTube channel, (updated 30 March 2012-03-30). URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0WOx12Ly2Y> (Accessed 2014-02-12).

2. *The Glory of the Garden: The Development of the Arts in England*. London: Arts Council of Great Britain. 1984. Cited in Rory Francis. *Managing Disappointment: Arts Policy, Funding and the Social Inclusion Agenda*. 2004. p. 134

3. Francois Matarasso. *Use or Ornament? The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts*. 1997.

SPEAKING IN BRUSSELS ON RECEIVING the Princess Margaret Award in 2012, Director of the Van Abbemuseum, curator and writer Charles Esche made a very ambitious claim for the importance of the arts in society today. Specifically, Esche endowed the arts with having the ability to (re)complicate and challenge, even refuse, a process of homogenisation by which all societal values are fundamentally expressed by the successful production of surplus capital. Esche argued that in the post-1989 period—a period characterised by rapid financial deregulation, the privatisation of the public sphere and the denial of alternatives, social or political, to free-market logic—economic interests alone have become the foundation upon which all else is built, and falls (it's the economy, stupid).¹ The idea that the arts can challenge capital's ability to assimilate and employ a multitude of meaning, worth and value within its own production is a bold statement when the much debated "value" of the arts is as deeply entwined with capital as it is today. Enmeshed within a distinctly contemporary idea of "culture", the arts' channels of dissemination are often just another byway for the global flow of capital.

If economics has conceptually and linguistically transformed politics via a neo-liberal ideology, redacting myriad measures of value and enveloping society, the replacement of the term patronage with "investment" within the language of arts funding clearly demonstrates this shift. In the UK, this change can be traced back to the early 1980s when The Arts Council of Great Britain, as it was called then, began to defend its legitimacy to society as economic, prompted by the implementation of a Financial Management Initiative by the Conservative government of the time, which demanded greater accountability for expenditure. The Arts Council responded with *The Glory of the Garden* report, merging state patronage with a new idea of state instrumentalism: a strategy of focused investment with accountable returns.² Those returns were defined by John Myerscouth's 1988 report, *The Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain*, introducing the idea of "cultural capital" as a national asset. This new model of the arts as economically and socially instrumental would go on to inform the cultural policy of the superseding New Labour Government, which took power in 1997. The same year a report by Francois Matarasso linked investment in the arts to the reduction of social deprivation via the "social impact" of participation.³ As a government, New Labour would infuse political rhetoric with these ideals in order to "capture the value of culture" posing culture as a driving force within a new service based knowledge economy.⁴ As such, the "creative" has come to be singularly idealised within the world of work, the figure of the artist seemingly corresponding with the romanticised

agent of entrepreneurial, creative wealth creation, thereby situating the arts within the framework of the “cultural industries” and the artist as a “cultural worker”: the idealised precariat.

Due to this blurring between culture and capital, art and work, the question of what the arts are “worth” to the state is predominately articulated in terms of economic risk and return, a risk that seems far, far greater in a time of bust. Esche’s statement arrived amongst an impassioned revival of the “cultural value debate”: a long-standing argument over the remits and limitations of quantitative and qualitative valuations of the arts, arguments which are keenly divisive in the current environment of austerity politics. The reality that, through the rhetoric of politics, economic value is allowed to outstrip and define all others has become increasingly transparent in those countries affected by the 2008 recession and the subsequent backlash of brutal cuts to state funding and services—of those things now defined as “unsustainable”. (Economic insecurity has exacerbated the doubt of more recent years that much of the so-called measurement of culture’s economic worth proved to be unfounded, badly implemented and poorly accounted for.) In the UK, this increased demand for apparently scarce resources requires the arts to advocate themselves as a good investment for society, as demonstrated by a wave of research projects and political campaigns from various institutional bodies and independent organisations in anticipation of an upcoming UK election in 2015. See the recent publication of the Warrick Commission’s 2015 report *Enriching Britain: Culture, Creativity and Growth*, the Art and Humanities Research Council’s ongoing Cultural Value Project, the Artist Information Companies’ Paying Artists Campaign, London advocacy group Common Practice and the recent formation of the Creative Industries Foundation as a parliamentary lobby for the arts, as examples. These studies and campaigns offer various opinions on to what extent artists and arts organisations should be supported and by whom, in what activities or roles and how the arts might, or should, become more independently sustainable from state support, or/and how the arts are in fact of great benefit to the economy.

Apparently trapped within a defensive position — a defence informed by the debatable concept of cultural value and a language of advocacy necessarily relating to expenditure — and curtailed by austerity and economic insecurity, can the arts become, as Esche hopes, the sector most primed to challenge to the dominance of capital over what is of value and import to society? Tellingly none of the above absolutely refute, even if they do question, the need to legitimise the support of artistic

4. Tessa Jowell in her 2003 speech “Government and the Value of Culture”, cited in John Holden. *Cultural Value and the Crisis of Legitimacy*. 2006. p. 13.

5. The three case studies are based on interviews with Jonathan Harvey (Acme), Tara Cranswick (V22) and Professor Andy Abbott (Black Dogs) conducted in 2013 and 2014.

activity as an economic return. To question how much weight Esche's idea might have in reality, I would like to turn to three case studies of arts organisations that all make similar basic claims as to why the arts and arts practice matter: Acme Studios, the art investment group V22, and the arts collective Black Dogs.⁵ The ways in which these organisations respectively support, advocate and materialise that importance is radically divergent, allowing for intersections with other contrastive value formations in relationship to politics, property and the urban landscape, community, work and the market. In particular, the way in which they articulate what is at stake in supporting the arts—primarily by supporting individual artists, a group under-represented within contemporary funding structures in comparison to large administrative organisations focused on public engagement—exposes the intriguing slippage of meaning in the use of terms such as “risk” and “investment”. Alongside this comparative analysis, these three organisations were also chosen in order to paint a picture of the contemporary art-world in the UK and how it has evolved over recent decades. Together these organisations narrate different aspects of the arts' current relationship to capital and a concomitant journey toward an austerity-provoked crisis of legitimacy, each responding to that crisis in very different ways.

Acme Studios: “Safe as Houses”

From its founding in the early 1970s to its current form today, the studio provider Acme Studios is an adaptive arts organisation that spans four decades of change in both the urban and arts-funding landscape of London. Over the years, Acme have become an advisory organisation and influential model for other studio providers, artists, funding structures and property developers alike, while its co-founders Jonathan Harvey and David Panton both received an OBE for their services to the arts in 2014.

Now the largest provider of artist studios in the UK, Acme began as a charitable housing association in 1974 set up by young arts graduates who were in need of a cheap place to work and live. By forging a relationship with local government via the then existing Greater London Council (GLC), Acme was able to utilise the wasted resource of empty housing awaiting demolition in areas pegged for redevelopment: an ongoing city-wide programme, but one that had been halted due to a lack of funds. While incredibly cheap short-term, the necessary return of buildings that were adapted and improved by the artists themselves to become homes, the studios and often the locale of productive communities consequently ended up feeling, as Harvey described it, like a severe loss of time and effort. Funds from the Arts Council, received from 1976 onwards, provided revenue funding and studio conversion grants that allowed Acme to take on longer-term leases, but still Acme was keenly aware of the inevitable loss — a pattern of gentrification and the displacement that we are now very familiar with. For Harvey, the “investment” of care made by artists and Acme were not returned, utilised by a combination of the state and private interests to regenerate areas of the city. As early as 1976, Acme noted in a newsletter their future ambition to become independent, secure permanent studio sites and “extend

what is viable as art patronage at a time when there is a shortage of public money and many demands upon it”, a sentiment that could easily have been written today. From its beginnings, Acme has striven to take control of patronage to protect an ethos of supporting artists and their work as valuable in and of itself, as opposed to interested “investment” that seeks additional returns or results from the arts. However, as an organisation Acme has not only benefited over time by this model of patronage as investment but has, in becoming independent off the back of that investment, essentially created a privatised system of patronage that relies on the property market, a system that we will see expanded upon by the younger organisation V22.

As of March 2015, Acme has not only secured permanent buildings, but has become a self-sustaining non-profit. Two conjoined accomplishments, Acme have become financially independent via the ownership of property and acting as an active (rather than passive) agent within the market. Acme’s initial acquisition of property was occasioned mainly by the advent of the National Lottery in the early 1990s. While during the previous decade public subsidy had been significantly revoked in favour of corporate sponsorship, in 1994 the newly subdivided Arts Council of Britain became the distributor of the National Lottery funds. Whittled away to half its previous size in 1987, the three arts councils of England, Scotland and Wales gained sudden momentum, like the severed head of a hydra. Where there had been none, suddenly there was unprecedented amounts of capital available, siphoned from the unwitting public purse in what has been called a “sneak tax on the poor for the patronage of the rich” and partly available to the arts.⁶ This was the decade in which culture became strategically linked to inward investment: a combination of the arts with development as a strategy to increase economic wealth and sculpt prosperous urban landscapes. While Acme’s early years belonged to a city shedding its industrial chrysalis for the steely heights of finance and commerce, in the run-up to the millennium London was positioning itself as the capital of Europe’s financial services sector and “culture” took on a new role, branding Britain as a market force and as a destination. A swathe of large “aspirational” cultural projects were fuelled by private investments, but conjoined to an arts policy that advocated the arts as socially and economically inspiring to the general populace, the most symbolic element of which was of course the Tate Modern and later the “umbilical cord of gold”—the Millennium Bridge — that connected the new museum to the City.

When I interviewed Jonathan Harvey in early 2014, he mused that Acme’s pending independence was exceedingly well-timed. As a studio provider, Harvey observed, Acme would no longer fit current criteria for support due to instrumental arts policy’s requirement to define the value of the arts in terms of a quantitative measurement of social-economic impact—a return on investment now increasingly scrutinised for accuracy and accountability. While grateful to the Arts Council for their past support, Harvey criticised current policy as overly audience-led rather than artist-led, asking “what will there be for audiences to engage with” if artists are not supported? Acme has no specific art audience for its activities as its entire focus is to provide secure, functional and affordable studios in order to maximise the amount of time artists can spend in them, developing their practice and producing their work.

6. House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee. *The Operation of the National Lottery*. Paragraph 32 cited by Paul Bickley. *The National Lottery: Is it Progressive?* 2009. p. 11

7. *Great Art and Culture for Everyone: 10 year strategic framework 2010 – 2020*. 2nd ed. 2013. p. 3.

Crucially, Acme does not see artists as entrepreneurs in need of start-up capital, but likely “poor” and consistently so, and therefore in need of long-term support. While they do argue for the greater and local benefit of artist studios, Acme refuses to be prescriptive on who is awarded a studio or on what kind of work they should produce, and makes no demands that artists be socially engaged, describing the studio as “private” and separating themselves entirely from an instrumental arts policy. Interestingly, Harvey’s passionate argument for artistic freedom is riddled with jarring speculative terms, specifically the imperative to “invest” in artists, allowing them to take creative “risks”. However, here the financial risk is made in support of artists’ own financial risk-taking, in order to maintain their presence and potential production: “Our public benefit is through the relief of poverty — helping artists who cannot afford studio space on the open market”. As such the shift from at arm’s length “patronage” to interested “investment” takes place within the discord between Acme and the Art Council, which describes itself as the “custodian of public investment ... charged with getting the maximum value” out of the arts in terms of “entertainment”, “education”, “health”, “regional regeneration”, “tourism and our standing abroad”.⁷

For Acme, a crucial form of artist support, the provision of space to work, is ignored by state funding and therefore relies on their strategic reworking of the relationship between the artist’s studio and the profitable business of property development (essentially an inflected process of privatisation). The incredible speed at which pockets of London now convulse into the throws of gentrification means that the position of low-income inhabitants such as artists is increasingly insecure. In response, Acme has developed a pioneering, truly twenty-first century model of studio provision in the form of “planning gain deals” where developers are awarded projects by London councils due to their inclusion of studio blocks. Gaining high-quality, new-build and yet still-affordable studios in mixed-use developments, Acme has cleverly found a way to secure permanent studios in areas even after they have been gentrified and preventing artists from being priced out (although primarily in regards to studios as work spaces as opposed to living spaces). While refusing the expression of artistic value as “capital”, the bloated property market has become the essential condition of their operation. Distanced from policy and state funding, studio provision becomes locked into a relationship with gentrification as an agent that operates independently within, rather than against, an aggressive and overly powerful property market.

V22: “Investing in passion”

In many ways, V22 is the millennial inheritor to Acme, being in part a London-based artist studio provider that seeks to use property investment to secure studio sites. But more than this, V22 administrates a larger relationship between art and capital, specifically through the art market and a contemporary art collection: a total mechanism to provide private patronage to artists. As such, V22 also fervently believes in the imperative of “investing” in the creative potential of artists and supporting their practice directly, something that, like Acme, V22 sees public funding to be unable to adequately provide through its instrumental, audience-led policy.

Unlike Acme, however, V22 casts artists as individual producers operating within the market and has created a structure that not only sustains itself through the capitalisation of that artistic potential via that market, but is also actively comfortable with and utilises the expression of the value of art quantitatively in terms of price: a distilled translation of art's other possible intrinsic values, whether they be symbolic, political, aesthetic etc.⁸

Founded in 2006 at the height of an art market bubble, V22 operates on the basis that financial investment in the art world fuels the art market and, in doing so, supports artists. As Director Tara Cranswick succinctly put it, V22 operates on the basis that “the market could be the best patron the arts has ever had”. This “economic symbiosis between the art market and finance” became common during the 1990s and early 2000s.⁹ Over this period, a heightened interest in the collection of contemporary art “coincided with globalisation, deregulation and financialisation of the world economy, and, more pertinently, its resultant, phenomenal wealth creation”.¹⁰ Yet another area for the speculative practices of financial investors, art became an “alternative asset class” and was accompanied by a spate of newly founded art funds in the first decade of this century, bringing art and financial experts together under one roof, much as V22 does. However, the belief that the market “could be” a perfect patron is dependent on its carefully coordinated management by the compound structure of V22.

A three-pronged organisation, V22 is a public collection of contemporary art listed on the stock market, a coordinator of an exhibition and events programme, and a provider of artist studios. The V22 collection, or V22 PLC, is the lynchpin of this networked structure and is at the heart of its ambitions. The first art collection to be listed on the stock market as part of a publicly owned company (that is, owned via stocks and shares), investment in the collection operates on a shareholder basis. “Investor-patrons” are able to buy shares in the collection at low investment thresholds, opening up the possibility of patronage to a wider support base, while collected artists also receive their chosen ratio of shares-to-cash as payment for their work. When I spoke to Cranswick in 2014, the collected artists owned almost 40 per cent of the collection, a figure she hoped to raise to over 50 per cent. Majority ownership for artists is an important goal for V22 as it strengthens artist control over the management of the collection and their influence over the life of their work. In essence, V22 seeks to counter the sway that very wealthy collectors can have over the art market, while also protecting an artist's work, and subsequently their careers, from being manhandled by the financial ambitions and individual taste of these influential players. For V22 the market “can be” a good patron if artists and a diversified group of investors (in terms of wealth at least) can gain access to the mechanisms of “patronage” and relies on a belief in the market as potentially a democratic tool. It also relies on the idea that investments are made “not only” in pursuit of profit and generally reflects the belief that privatisation can better provide for societal needs than the operations of a public sector. This is illustrated by V22's acceptance into the list of companies on the UK initiative, the Social Stock Exchange: a social finance intermediary that connects investors with social organisations.

Through a shareholder model, the patronage of the collection is seen to extend

8. See William Gramp. Pricing the Priceless: Art, Artists and Economics//1989. 2013. pp. 31-34

9. Melanie Gillan. Hedge Fund. In *The Market*. Natasha Degen (ed.). London and Cambridge: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press. 2013. p. 69

10. Natasha Degen. Introduction. In *The Market*. 2013. p. 12

11. StockMarketWire.com. V22 make sale from its contemporary art collection. 2013.

12. Collected artists include well-known names such as Phyllida Barlow, Martin Creed, Mark Titchner, Martin Westwood and Rebecca Warren alongside emerging artists.

13. Cited in William Gramp. Pricing the Priceless: Art, Artists and Economics//1989. 2013. pp. 31-34

14. Paul De Bruyne and Pascal Gielen. Introduction: Between the Individual and the Common. In *Institutional Attitudes: Instituting in a Flat World*. 2013. p. 5

financially over time. As a secure residing place for art work, V22 safe-guards and compounds the artist's "worth" within the art market and within the art world discourse via the prestige of collection and exhibition as part of that collection. Profit from sales — the very first of which was made in 2013, seven years after V22's founding for a 367% return — is then fed back into the collection in order to purchase more works (support more artists or support collected artists more), and in future, Cranswick intimated, will be used to invest in studio properties.¹¹ In conjunction with securing the sites of artistic production, the buildings are themselves important assets — part of a studio business that supports the networked structure of V22 — as is the public programme, run by the V22 Foundation, the only part of V22 that receives funding from the Arts Council England and which weaves a legitimising network of discourse and audience interaction around V22 and its artists. The collection increasingly gains in cultural posterity, for itself, the artists and, the organisation believes, for the art world and society at large, by finding a way to support the production and conservation of art that V22 believes is of "worth": a qualitative value judgement expressed quantitatively by the machinations of the art market.¹² Before instinctively shrinking from the summary packaging of art's valuation as price, it is worthwhile considering the similarity between how museums value work and how markets do: an understanding of value as located in the authorship of the individual artist. The story of the art work, its history within the narrative of the artist's career and their standing in the art world create what formidable wheeler and dealer of 1960's Neo-abstract art, Leo Castelli, called art's "myths".¹³ Consolidated by art criticism, the unique, creative expression of the individual artist is a perfect formulation of value for the liberal, beneficent, free market, which has been capitalising on art in this way for more than a century: "in other words, the myth of the individual artist is a product of the mental space of free market capitalism, with works and signature often functioning as a brand".¹⁴

V22 essentially manages this brand, specifically in the interest of supporting artists—working, like Acme, not against but within an existent structure of art's entanglement with capital. However, V22 engages with that entanglement affirmatively and not only out of necessity. This is due to a critical belief that the market can and does respond quicker to artistic innovation than the bureaucracy of funding and its need for advocacy. In this scenario, the market as patron supposedly allows for greater artistic freedom, as the product of that freedom is attractive to the market.

Harrison and Cynthia White's recognised study, *Canvases and Careers*, locates the origin of this mutual pursuit of innovation in the transition from the hierarchical power of the salons in nineteenth century France to the modern system of critics and dealers: "the new-dealer critic system had a built-in motive for encouraging innovative work: encouraging speculation ... the financial speculation in art found its cultural counterpart in the speculation of taste".¹⁵ V22 co-ordinates the "speculative" attribution of value to art works as expressed through price but reliant on an art world discourse through its combined arms of activity while the collection model allows art to operate as an asset; one that accumulates interest over time. Despite the apparent constrictions to what kind of work can be supported by the market in that it must

essentially be collectable and be seen as a “good” future investment — limitations that Acme, with its more hands off approach, does not impose — Cranswick believes that V22 still manages to (and crucially makes an effort to) collect what might be deemed “difficult” work by the standards of other collectors (such as the large scale installation work of Martin Creed and Phyllida Barlow or the film works of Elizabeth Price) because its core goal is not simply profit, but supporting the arts. Equally, Cranswick is very much aware that V22’s model of patronage is not appropriate for some forms of artistic production that will likely always require funding. But by supporting and including artists as shareholders alongside low investment thresholds, V22 sees itself as “democratising taste”: able to enrich how price houses meaning by providing a more “direct route” to patronage for both artists and the general populace. However, it can also be said that V22 more generally perpetuates an already existing and dominant narrative of value, by necessarily pandering to established discourse and financial expression as an “advisor² to its own investment in order to survive. (It is worth noting that sustainability and not profit is the goal for V22 as with Acme: reinvesting in the arts) This is how “good” art gets produced, according to Cranswick: through the semi-speculative risk taking of the market as opposed to out of touch funding structures, bogged down in bureaucracy and the need to defend spending. Whether expressed by the state or by the market, it seems as though the value of art to society is communicated via capital and in the face of the seeming failure of advocates of public subsidy to defend the inherent value of artistic production and creative potential, this “share-holder democracy” appears a pioneering alternative.

15. Harrison and Cynthia White. *Canvases and Careers: Institutional Change in the French Painting World*. 1993. p. 6

Black Dogs: “Within, Against and Beyond”

Originating from Leeds and the nearby Bradford, but now with members spread around the country, including London, the Black Dogs art collective heralds from a tradition of anarcho-punk collectivist action and alternative communities. The founding of this scene goes back to a counter-cultural movement which developed within the cleaved city infrastructure of Leeds during the 1980s — a utilisation of free, malleable space for self-determined activity that echoes Acme Studios’ early years. However, rather than turning away from the so-called “naïveté” of past practices, Black Dogs charts and revives the present possibility of these alternative histories, allowing them to “resonate” through the contemporary urban fabric by building up a set of narratives that challenge the dominant story of capitalist success.

In contrast to the organisations discussed above, Black Dogs operate on the basis of a radical refusal to define, legitimise or sustain their activities in economic terms. Organised around an ethos of “for love not money” belonging to Do-It-Yourself (D.I.Y) culture, the collective frame their social practice as counter-economic, specifically as a negation of “work”. Instead their practice is, in and of itself, the act of collective organisation done for-its-own-sake, at the heart of which is the constant critical self-reflection on why doing something, anything, for love and not money is so much more enjoyable and rewarding than the alternative. As part of this practice Black Dogs invites others to participate in, celebrate and create independent,

16. "Making Diverse Economies" was the first a series of events run by Charlotte Morgan and Julia Udall at Portland Works in December 2013 as part of Art Sheffield 2013, a festival of the arts. Referred to by Andy Abbott while in conversation with the author. See URL: <http://www.artsheffield.org/2013/events/making-diverse-economies-charlotte-morgan-julia-udall/>.

17. Recent research done by the Artists Information Company on *Paying Artists* suggests that artists prioritise the opportunity to make and exhibit work over and above anything else, including payment. The same dedication was singled out as a primary finding in the study *Career paths of visual artists* by the Arts Council of England in 1997. See S. Honey, P. Heron and C. Jackson. *Career Paths of Visual Artists*. 1997.

18. Quoted by Sven Lutticken in *Three Autonomies or More. The Autonomy Project Newspaper #1: Positioning*. 2010.

done-for-its-own-sake examples of social organisation: transient spaces setting up temporary camp sites within capitalism as exhibitions, pub quizzes, self-published zines, festivals and gigs, live music, broadcasting, panel discussions and debates, mapping of histories, celebrations of amateurs and hobbies, games and learning new tricks.

In doing so, Andy Abbott, a co-founder of the collective, believes that there is a potential to "crack capitalism": to open and expand those slivers of space and time where human endeavour is not defined by capital via an oppositional strategy of "within, against and beyond". While V22 and Acme operate "within" contemporary capitalism, the protective spaces of art production that they have created do not outwardly challenge the dominance of capital, instead finding ways to pro-actively survive as part of that system. Black Dogs refuses any such compromise. Abbott channels the writer Raoul Vaneigem, stating "we don't want to just survive, we want to live!"

Of course, this is a difficult proposition for many artists and it has been heavily critiqued by the organisations campaigning for artists' rights to reasonable pay and employment security such as the London-based Precarious Workers Brigade (PWB). In a round-table discussion with the Abbott at Portland Works in Sheffield in December 2013, the PWB argued that an ethical distancing of cultural activity from work in order to create an alternative sphere actively encourages the exploitation of artists in the context of the professional art world.¹⁶ Abbott's response is ultimately to deny that context. In many ways this refusal to engage with the structure of professionalised practice is essentially also a refusal of its potential exploitation of artists' general willingness to perform "for love and not money".¹⁷ In this regard, Abbott is keen to draw a line between the terminology of "self-organisation" and D.I.Y culture, a distancing that separates Black Dogs from the greater institution of art and critiques its uncritical construction of art practice as a career, from "the dominant narrative that, *of course*, you want to be part of the institution, that you want your art to be your living and that the ideal is to be paid".

Once descriptive of a form of political resistance, the term self-organisation was affiliated with collective art practices during the late 1990s. Formalised and increasingly de-clawed inside the art institution as part of a mild-mannered economy of critique, self-organised practice became increasingly structural within the arts rather than being about actual political impact. This emphasis on structure—a combination of networked connections and self-sufficiency—also allowed self-organisational and collective practices to be all too easily subsumed into an exploitative pay-your-dues stage of progression within an artist's career. "We are the avant-garde, but also the job slaves", as critic Jan Verwoert succinctly puts it.¹⁸ And naturally this is not confined to professionalised art practice. As Abbott put it, neither self-organisation nor D.I.Y can be seen as inherently radical as the form is taken on by late capitalism. Through the idealisation of the "creative" as the "aristocracy" of self-affirming work, the once resistant activity of self-organisation has fractured and dispersed within the language of entrepreneurial labour (and New Labour).¹⁹ An increasingly pervasive work ethic means that we no longer demand less work—for time and space outside of capital

creation—but ask for better, more fulfilling work. Work becomes occupation and so occupies the subjectivity of the worker.²⁰ Entrepreneurial self-organisation is “what makes you feel free and empowered one day, but on the next will remind you that there is no other option”, a struggle that seems to be at the heart of art practice today and which drives organisations like V22 and Acme to create the kind of support networks they do.²¹

What does make D.I.Y. radical is its ethics, which reassert a political and social ethos by asking not “how” a project, an event or even art practice itself will continue, but “why”: what alternative political futures does that activity open up? In spite of, or perhaps more accurately, because of arts entanglement with capital, Black Dog’s counter-economic refusal may have the potential for living up to Charles Esche’s ambitious claims for the arts to challenge the dominance of economic value and reclaim a sphere of life from capital creation.

The Demands of Austerity

The state of austerity is the overriding narrative currently controlling any articulation of value within the UK and placing the art sector constantly in a defensive position. Artists, arts organisations and collectives may be quite distinct and even antagonistic in how they envision and implement their role as facilitators, supporters and makers of art work, but the need to articulate that value, to defend and support that activity, is very much a shared endeavour. The language of the “cultural value debate” has directed how arts institutions and arts organisations need to articulate what value they can offer, and crucially, what worth they produce. As such, and because of the different starting points and socio-political organisational structures of these organisations, there is a confusing convergence of different language claims. Advocacy language such as “cultural value” is too broad, and necessarily too vague and empty in its attempt to encapsulate diversity and translate it into a common defence. Yet, due to an enforced environment of fear, and a belief that the necessity for austerity cannot be challenged outright (the “books” must be “balanced”), the self-defeating claim that the legitimacy of the arts should be ultimately judged in terms of economic return remains unreformed.

We should perhaps take the apparent difficulty in articulating the qualitative values inherent to the arts in quantitative terms not as a failure of the arts to claim a legitimate role in society but as the potential for perverting the summary expression of societal “good” in terms of economic success — success being always an expression of more, of expansion, of growth, rather than other ideals of a “good” society: one that we want to be a part of. The rupture in which the arts are posed as unsustainable — when the loss of the public sphere becomes blatantly visible — is perhaps also the time that an offensive becomes imaginable.²²

It seems crucial that, despite their different methodologies and reasons for organising, all three of the above organisations attempt to protect artists against the exploitation of their capacity to operate on a basis of “for love not money”, even, as in the case of Acme and V22 when it means engaging with the market in order to negotiate a

19. Writing on the political merger between the artistic field and the world of work, James Heartfield observes that “a transformation of attitudes to work” in the late 1990s had turned “creativity into the stuff of Labour” referring to the rhetoric of the New Labour government which gained power in 1997. Heartfield, James. *The Creativity Gap*. 2005. p. 3

20. Franco (Bifo) Berardi. *Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*. 2009.

21. Jan Verwoert. All the wrong examples. 2013. p. 123

22. Gerald Raunig. Flatness Rules. In *Institutional Attitudes: Instituting in a Flat World*. 2013. p. 172

23. Lars Bang Larsen. The Paradox of Art and Work. In *Work Work Work*. 2010. p. 24

certain amount of protection and agency within it. Even while advocating the market as patron, Tara Cranswick of V22 argues that the arts will never be able to totally rely on “major private sector institutional support” as arts institutions “cannot make money” adding “and they shouldn’t be, really: making money, that is. Why would you not re-invest it in the arts?”

To an extent, all three organisations, Acme, V22 and Black Dogs are working “within, against and beyond” the capitalised realms of value and value making, even if it is only by supporting the practice of artists as organisers, as makers, as a productive force and example of value making that complicates and challenges a homogenised state of “value” even as it is entwined with capital, or perhaps more correctly because it is entwined. The arts may, as the critic Lars Bang Larsen suggests, provide a critical and discursive tool for articulating a culture devoid of borders—“the articulation of things that have grown together such as art and work, state and economy, left and right, politics and media, artist and entrepreneur, citizen and consumer, affect and production”—in the fluidity of values awash with capital.²³

However, it also seems that in the defence of a semi-autonomous sphere for this activity to continue, the arts are being sequestered into a more and more privatised and separate area that is less and less likely to be able to articulate its role as part of society, and more easily seen as a luxury—as “unsustainable”. Both Acme and V22 provide support within but do not challenge those mechanisms that create the precarity they organise to alleviate. In comparison, Black Dogs’ negation of “love”, “passion” and “care” as “work” leaves artists and those who otherwise do things “for love and not money”, who do not measure the worth of their endeavours or express it to others in terms of profit, to bear the brunt of their precarious financial state, essentially “paying for” this kind of activity to exist. Care, doing something for love, thereby becomes something that cannot be valued collectively or supported by the state (there is no such thing as society) but something that must be maintained individually, and more easily afforded by the lucky, the wealthy and the few. Precarity as an essential condition of the arts, as a condition of non-capitalised value, remains cloaked by a supposition of choice, as a naturalised state of “risk” rather than as an enforced insecurity created by ideological economics and political austerity. To have the impact that Charles Esche hopes it might, rather than scrambling to sustain itself in these limited terms, to maintain its integrity as an autonomous sphere, the arts sector needs to work in conjunction with other “unsustainable” sectors of society to utilise the critical and discursive tools it has on hand and organise in favour of facilitating not just a way to survive, but a reason to live.

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