

Abstract

When considering how relations are handled in social media applications, these technologies can further alienate people as their relations become commodified, but they can also bring about the possibility of reducing alienation in certain areas by connecting multiple intersecting self-managed networks of people. This “Multitude” has led Marxist scholars to claim that the network-based creative economy can be seen as a form of communism.

The purpose with this article is to explore how a process of alienation and disalienation takes place in practice, taking young artists’ online communication as a case, drawing from comprehensive sources on the internet such as blogs, web pages, networking sites and digital magazines, as well as interview data. The results shows different strategies for handling the tension between communication technologies used as tools to strengthen relations and destabilise hegemonic identities, or as a tool that commodify relations, enabling self-exploitation and user surveillance. The article contributes to critical internet studies by conceptualising Marx’s theory of alienation into a framework for describing communication practices as relational modes of production; from using communication technologies for becoming visible and accessible on an open market, to performing a trustworthy persona online, to using it for maintaining bonds with a community.

The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life Online: Between Alienation and Belonging

KARIN HANSSON

Karin Hansson is an artist and media researcher based in Stockholm. She currently works as a researcher at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm and at the Department of Computer & Systems Sciences at Stockholm University. Her research focus is on participatory processes online and the social production of data. She is also interested in artistic methodologies and participatory research methods. Her current research project "Work a work", in collaboration with artists and union activists, explores the ongoing transformation of work relations from an interdisciplinary perspective. Her work is published in international

journals and at conferences such as CHI, CSCW, HICSS, ISEA, *Leonardo Electronic Almanac*, *First Monday* and *Footprint*, among others. She was one of the founders of the Association for Temporary Art, an experimental platform for art in Stockholm, and of the media lab CRAC – Creative Room For Computing.

Introduction

Today I seldom answer my mobile with my name. I just assume the person calling knows who they are calling and I might expect that they already checked my online profile. My identity is not only something I have learned to constantly pitch, but also to manage online, disseminated on several platforms and in multiple modes of communication. My persona has become a commodity on display and something that I am constantly developing, managing, and remaking, as a work of art.

For the so-called precariat, for whom work is something temporary, flexible, and unpredictable, it is important to uphold a credible, easily identified self in order not to get lost in an ever-changing market.¹ Visual artists can be seen as role models for this type of identity-management, as they have been managing their identities in an insecure job market for a long time.² On the other hand, art and artists can also be seen as challenging the logic of capitalism, “advancing a different logic”.³

Self-management means to have the full responsibil-

ity for career-making activities like promoting oneself and networking. It also means to have both an understanding of one’s own professional self and how to position it in the field. Research in art sociology shows how important it can be to balance reputation in the field of art with economic capital, and how the rules change from one field of art to another.⁴ The rules also change from one period to another, as the elements of culture are shaped by the systems within which they are produced and preserved.⁵

In the visual arts, the communication systems have always constrained the work of art.⁶ Since modernism, due to changes in how art is produced, reproduced and distributed, the artist has increasingly become the artwork and it is no longer the work of art which mainly has cult status but the artist,⁷ famously exemplified by Marcel Duchamp’s readymade *The Bottle Rack* (1914) that was turned into a piece of art without any actual modifications by the artist. Today, being an artist is not something one does, but something one is.⁸ It is not something that you sell like an egg, but rather a long-term investment that you milk like a cow. The art sociologist Olav Velthuis’ study of gallery owners

1. The cultural theorist Angela McRobbie describes how it is not only artists of various types who operate in an uncertain and ever-changing labour market, or who are constantly forced to transform and express their identity to be recognized. Promoting a personal brand is central to every career in an insecure and flexible labour market, not just in the creative sector. McRobbie, Angela. “Clubs To Companies: Notes on the Decline of Political Culture in Speeded Up Creative Worlds”. *Cultural Studies*. Vol. 16. No. 4. 2002. pp. 516–531. DOI <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09502380210139098>; McRobbie, Angela. “Everyone Is Creative: Artists as Pioneers of the New Economy”. In *Contemporary Culture and Everyday Life*. Elizabeth Bortolaia Silva and Tony Bennett (eds.). Vol. 53. Durham: Sociology Press. 2004. pp. 1689–1699.

2. According to Chris Mathieu, the editor of an anthology of research on the creative industries, particular features of the art field make for distinct conditions for artistic production. First, there are no real permanent jobs, but a life-long competition in which the rules are constantly changed. Moreover, it is not a competition in an open market: instead, participation is determined by the relationships you have, and how close or far there are work opportunities in the production network of relationships. Mathieu, Chris (ed.). *Careers in Creative Industries*. New York: Routledge. 2012.

3. Fuchs, Christian. “Towards Marxian Internet studies”. In *Marx in the Age of Digital Capitalism*. Christian Fuchs and Vincent Mosco (eds.). Leiden: Brill. 2015. p. 58. See also the discussion about the distinction between artists and workers in Beech, Dave. *Art and Value: Art’s Economic Exceptionalism in Classical, Neoclassical and Marxist Economics*. Leiden: Brill. 2015.

4. Eikhof, Doris Ruth and Haunschild, Axel. “For Art’s Sake! Artistic and Economic Logics in Creative Production”. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*. No. 28. 2007. pp. 523–538. DOI: 10.1002/job.462; Grugulis, Irena and Stoyanova, Dimitrinka. “I Don’t Know Where You Learn Them’: Skills in Film and TV”. In *Creative Labour: Working in the Creative Industries*. Alan McKinlay and Chris Smith (eds.). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 2009; Randle, Keith and Culkin, Nigel. “Getting in and Getting out in Hollywood: Freelance Careers in an Uncertain Industry” in *Talking Prices: Symbolic Meanings of Prices on the Market for Contemporary Art*. Olav Velthuis (ed.). Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2013; Aspers, Patrik. *Markets in Fashion: A Phenomenological Approach*. Stockholm: City University Press. 2001; Craig, Ailsa and Dubois, Sébastien. “Between Art and Money: The Social Space of Public Readings in Contemporary Poetry Economics and Careers”. *Poetics*. Vol. 38. No. 5. 2010. pp. 441–460. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2010.07.003>; Taylor, Stephanie and Littleton, Karen. “Art Work or Money: Conflicts in the Construction of a Creative Identity”. *The Sociological Review*. Vol. 56. No. 2. 2008. pp. 275–292. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-954X.2008.00788.x.

and art dealers shows how maintaining the value of the artist on a stable level becomes an important function of the actors in the art world.⁹ Current research on the Swedish art world also shows that social and cultural capital is more important than economic capital for the long-term survival of an artist.¹⁰ Today, this process of making and maintaining the artist's identity is a work that takes place and is monitored online. Art critic Boris Groys suggests that the role of today's artist therefore is that of the blogger, which together with all other actors in the arts such as gallery owners, museums and academia, is collaborating in networks of actors, producing the information that confirms that the artist is the artist.¹¹

The idea of identity as managed or relationally performed is not new and has been thoroughly described in sociology, from Irving Goffman's impression management, emphasising actor's agency, to Judith Butler's post-structural approach to identity as constrained by language and norms and developed arbitrarily.¹² It is therefore interesting to look at how this production is organised and enabled through different technologies and in collaborative

networks between producers and consumers of this identity production.

From a political science perspective, when considering how relations are handled in social media applications, these technologies can further alienate people as their relations become commodified.¹³ On the other hand they can also bring about the possibility of reducing the alienation between producer and consumer in certain areas of production, by establishing direct links without any tangible intermediary and thus providing tools that destabilise capitalism as these relations undermine the market mechanisms.¹⁴ This relational aspect of the network-based creative economy has led Marxist scholars such as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri to claim that this can be seen as a form of communism, in the way Marx defined communism in his theory of alienation.¹⁵ This "Multitude" can be described as a networked model for resistance against global capitalism, consisting of collectives of individuals working together in multiple networks rather than sharing single identities.¹⁶ On the other hand, this could also be seen as a liberal manifesto. Sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello demonstrate

5. Peterson, Richard A. and Anand, Narasimhan. "The Production of Culture Perspective". *Annual Review of Sociology*. Vol. 30. No. 1. 2004. pp. 900-907.

6. Alexander, Victoria D. *Sociology of the Arts: Exploring Fine and Popular Forms*. Wiley-Blackwell. 2003.

7. Thompson, Donald N. *The \$12 Million Stuffed Shark: The Curious Economics of Contemporary Art and Auction Houses*. London: Aurum, 2008; Thornton, Sarah. *Seven Days in the Art World*. 1st ed. New York: W.W. Norton. 2008; Heinich, Natalie. *The Glory of Van Gogh: An Anthropology of Admiration*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 1997.

8. Lindström, Sofia. "Constructions of Professional Subjectivity at the Fine Arts College". *Professions and Professionalism*. Vol. 5. No. 2. 2015. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7577/pp.869>.

9. Velthuis, *op.cit.*

10. Gustavsson, Martin *et al.* "Utbildnings- Och Kultursociologiska Studier Av Konstnärer Och Konstutbildningar I Sverige 1945-2007" [Educational and Cultural Sociological Studies of Artists and Arts Education in Sweden 1945-2007]. *Praktiske Grunde 1*. 2008.

11. Groys, Boris. "Art Workers: Between Utopia and the Archive". *e-flux Journal*. #45. May 2013.

12. Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Anchor Books. 1959; Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Kim Atkins (ed.). 2nd edition. New York: Routledge. 1999 [1990].

13. See for instance the discussion about communicative capitalism in Dean, Jodi. "Communicative Capitalism: Circulation and the Foreclosure of Politics". *Cultural Politics*. Vol. 1. No. 1. 2005. pp. 51-74. DOI: [10.2752/174321905778054845](https://doi.org/10.2752/174321905778054845).

14. Stacey, Paul. "'Wikivism': From Communicative Capitalism to Organized Networks". *Cultural Politics: an International Journal*. Vol. 4. No. 1. 2008. pp. 73-99. DOI: [10.2752/175174308X266406](https://doi.org/10.2752/175174308X266406).

15. Hardt, Michael and Negri, Antonio. *Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 2000.

16. Virno, Paolo. *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. 2004; Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. London: Hamish Hamilton. 2005.

how this relational communism can just as well turn into a “new spirit of capitalism”, where the workers are commodifying their relations and self-managing their affective labour.¹⁷ Despite what management literature proclaims, creative labour is still underpaid and part of a fast growing precariat.¹⁸

The Marxist theorist Franco Berardi claims that this changing nature of labour requires a shift in our thinking about alienation.¹⁹ The divisions between the owner of the means of production and the workers remain, but because labour is increasingly mental, the concept of alienation needs to be reinterpreted.²⁰ In industrial capitalism, the work is contained in physical objects controlled by the owner of the factory. But in the semi-capitalist economy, it is according to Berardi instead one’s ideas, one’s “soul”, which are controlled by the capitalist economy.

However, in the creative collaborative data production online participants are not forced to labour and the activity can take the form of an expression of their interest and subjectivity. This self-exploitation can be seen as a weaker form of exploitation. On the other hand, the labour is thanks to market monitoring exploited twice, which is why the media theorist Mark Andrejevic claims social media practices require a new way of looking at exploitation and alienation, as it on the one hand facilitates online commons and creativity, while on the other hand the data it generates (e.g. online surveillance of user behaviour) is mined and alienated from the users.²¹

The concept of hegemony is also important when interpreting online communication practices, which complicates Marx’s dichotomy between objectification and subjectification; as long as human subjectivities confirm hegemonic practices, they are not autonomous.²² In line with this, the media theorist Christian Fuchs suggests that social media platforms can be seen as expressions of a liberal ideology celebrating free speech, creativity and

individuality, which is, however, mostly powerless and leading to a form of alienation that he calls “the total commodification of human creativity”.²³

Obviously the changing conditions for capitalism and its transformation due to new production conditions demands new strategies from a leftist activist perspective. However, the distinction that is often being made here between body and soul, physical and mental, creates a dangerous dichotomy between different types of work and workers. Instead I argue that Marx’s theory of alienation is still useful as a way of reflecting on power and control over work, both physical and mental. We just have to be open-minded in our definition of what is considered “work”, regardless of whether this is something we do, something we desire, or something we are. In this paper I have therefore used Marx’s original theory of alienation to explore how a process of alienation and dis-alienation takes place in practice, in artists’ self-management online.

I build on my previous research of art students’ communication practices, where I studied young artists’ identity management at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm.²⁴ In this article I go deeper into these interviews and online material, revisiting the cases, exploring some examples of how artists are using different platforms online to manage their work, balancing the need to maintain a broad network of people with the need to control their work.

Theory, Methods and Data

Marx formulated his theories in a society that was changing rapidly due to an unregulated industrial capitalism that was able to control and exploit labour in a wholly new way. The difference between the class of industrial owners with political and economic power and the class of workers without political rights was enormous compared to pre-industrial work relations. Marx argued that this industrial capitalism created alienation: between

the producer and the consumer, between the producer and the product of the work, and between producers.²⁵

According to Marx, this capitalist society, with its division of classes of bourgeoisie and proletariat, stands in contrast to his ideal communist society. To Marx a “communist society” is a society in which everyone is linked in a mutual interdependency with others and nature, self-actualisation is the driving force, and production is a mutual exchange that strengthens individuals.²⁶ Expressing themselves through their work strengthens the producers’ identities, and the product is an expression of their subject position, and thus communicates their power and range. When this self-expression is put into use, and used by others, the producer also gets the satisfaction of seeing their products in use as a response to human needs. But what happens if this self is expressed online, and the self-expression is disseminated in a broad network of friends of friends, or consumed by an anonymous public? To formulate it in Marx’s terms: if the product that is produced is the presentation of self, how can this production alienate the producer (the self) from the work (the self-presentation), or how can it strengthen the relation between the self and the self-presentation?

To answer these questions I have been exploring artists’ self-expression online, focusing on relations between different actors such as “the artist”, “the artwork”, and “the art consumer”, and how the different tools and practices online might support or hinder these relations. “Art” in this context is, following an institutional perspective on art, something defined and developed collaboratively by all the institutions in the arts from art consumers, to critics, to artists. In my ethnographic study that took place at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm from 2009 to 2013, consisting of content analysis, participant observations and interviews, I have looked at how 50 young artists and art students at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm communicate through speech acts, clothing and online style. The focus is not so much on the singular artefact or practice, rather on how artefacts and practices are used, organised, and understood in a larger context. I not only look at how these communication acts are used, but also at their symbolic meaning when expressing identity.²⁷

The art school gathers students from a large diversity of backgrounds, and they all try to make sense of the field, but also change it to make place for their own perspective. The Royal Institute of Art

17. Boltanski, Luc and Chiapello, Eve. *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. London: Verso. 2005.

18. Lazzarato, Maurizio. “The Misfortunes of the ‘Artistic Critique’ and of Cultural Employment”. In *Critique of Creativity: Precarity, Subjectivity and Resistance in the “Creative Industries”*. Gerald Raunig, Gene Ray, and Ulf Wuggenig (eds.). London: MayFlyBooks. 2011.

19. Berardi, Franco. *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e). 2009.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Andrejevic, Mark B. “Surveillance and Alienation in the Online Economy”. *Surveillance & Society*. No. 8. 2011. pp. 278-287.

22. Nygren, Katarina Giritli and Gidlund, Katarina L. “The Pastoral Power of Technology: Rethinking alienation in digital culture”. *Marx in the Age of Digital Capitalism*, 2015. pp. 396-412. DOI: 0.1163/9789004291393_013.

23. Fuchs, Christian. “Class, Knowledge and New Media”. *Media Culture and Society*. Vol. 32. No. 1. 2010. pp.141-150. p. 149. DOI: 10.1177/0163443709350375.

24. Hansson, Karin. “Controlling Singularity: The Role of Online Communication for Young Visual Artists’ Identity Management”. *First Monday*. Vol. 20. No. 5. 2015. DOI:10.5210/fm.v20i5.5626.

25. Marx, Karl. “Critique of the Gotha Programme”. Marxist.org used *Marx/Engels Selected Works*, Volume 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970) as a source, first published/abridged in *Die Neue Zeit*. Vol. 1, No. 18. 1890-1891. URL: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/> (Accessed 2015-12-24.)

26. Marx, Karl. “Comments on James Mill”. N.p., 1844. URL: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/james-mill/> (Accessed 2015-08-20.)

27. For a more thorough description of methodology see Hansson, Karen. *Accommodating differences: Power, belonging, and representation online*. PhD thesis Stockholm: Stockholm University. 2015.

is also one of the most prestigious art schools in Sweden: most students here have studied at several art schools before, and some of them are already established or upcoming artists. The school accepts about 25 students each year, and the pool of students is usually around 25 years of age, with slightly more women than men. I have chosen to study two groups, first-year and fifth-year students, in order to obtain a variation in age and at the same time an opportunity to make comparisons between students who have just entered the school and those who have completed four years. This material has then been the starting point for the 12 additional semi-structured 40-minute interviews that are the focus in this article.

Result

To explore how the art students handle the tension between social media as a way to establish direct relations, and as a way to further alienate, I have in the interviews focused on how they look at the idea of communicating their professional self online, and how they use different tools in this process of self-management and the specific tools and practices in use, to reflect on how these in general can be seen as supporting or hindering relations. By using Marx's definitions of alienation as a framework to interpret the interview material I have conceptualised three distinct but often parallel ideologies in the material, or what I prefer to call *modes of production* as they represent different ways of looking at the production of art and artists. I call these production modes *Competing*, *Performing*, and *Belonging*. In the following I present these modes of production using examples from the interviews.

Competing

Visual art is interesting as it attracts both art lovers and financial investors, and this tension between humanistic value and economic value gives the

visual arts a special energy. But to navigate this social sphere can be very confusing. The younger students especially found it difficult to understand the rules of the game, and the majority of younger students also generally believed that the system was not very fair.

This is just what I think. [laughs] I think it is very much about contacts and suchlike, and I don't really like it and so. But I think it is like that. [Why don't you like it then?]

I actually think that it should be so that good things find their own path in some way, and that they become picked up and presented and go further as well. But I don't really believe that it is so. But the fact is that when someone talks with the right people and someone has the right contacts, it is their art that is seen.

(Ella, first-year student)

This quote can be seen as expression of a liberal ideology, an idea that everyone should be treated equally, and that it should be what one achieves that counts, not who you know or who you are. The artwork is seen as something that can be alienated from oneself and that can be judged objectively. That means that you can compete to see who is best, and then be compared on an easily accessible market where the rules are transparent. There is also an idea that you should not have to "sell" your art yourself, but that this should be done by someone else. There is a clear division between the artist, the artwork, and the consumer. Though the work of art is an expression of oneself, it is also something that can be separated and sold. The artist is seen almost as a passive object, an oracle, a prisoner in her own creative anxiety, almost reluctantly producing artwork that she can neither speak for nor take responsibility for.

Ideally, the artist should have a gallery that takes care of all contacts with potential buyers and that can package and make the art accessible in a market. Thus alienation between the artist and the work of art is seen as something desirable. Even though

many of the students have their own websites that they themselves designed, it looks as if they were made by someone else, as if it is an art gallery's sparsely designed website, and the texts that are posted are usually not written in the first person but in the third person, as if it were someone other than the artist who made the presentation. The artist is usually presented as an individual outside any collective context. Especially the younger students, who had just entered the school through fierce competition, used this mode of discourse. At the school, they were met by a contradictory discourse, in which being an artist is about creating context and networking, and that can be seen as conflicting with the idea of competing with other artists and let others sell the artworks.

Here they talk a lot about networking, it's like it is missing out on the work itself. There is much talk about the network, network. It's like an extra job, and I do not know if it is always what is best. I'd rather be noticed for doing good stuff than because I'm a good networker. (Lilly, first-year student)

Several students talked about the difficulty of finding information about artists they were really interested in. The following example refers to an older artist, which may be one reason that there is not much information digitally, but artists from the generation that grew up with the Internet are also fastidious about what they publish online. Art should preferably be communicated through means other than through one's own website.

Yes, right now I have trouble finding pictures of an artist, which makes me feel very frustrated. And then it's like this: where is his website and where can I see all of his stuff? He is not like this very established artist and he is not Swedish. I keep on chasing, picking up traces that could lead me to more pictures. Then I feel that it is an incredible job. Of course it requires a huge interest in a person in order to make such a survey of his stuff. (Lilly, first-year student)

Although students complained about the lack of communication by others, they themselves communicate very reluctantly, and primarily showed interest in finding others who are just like them, or important to them, rather than reaching a wide audience. The idea of themselves publishing their art online for anyone to see was rather seen as something negative, a kind of failure. This form of evil, but necessary commercialisation of art should preferably be handled by someone else, for example a gallery owner. If the goal with their work would be to make money they should have invested in a different profession.

The teacher at the school in Germany was very clear about it, that you did not win the war by sitting at home, and that it was pretty important to get out and meet people. One thing leads to another, and then you will get to exhibit and so, it's nice of course. But I would not [...], If I would have pictures or anything that I want to show, and I do not land on a gallery where I want to be on, then I guess I print a book or something. Then probably that personal webpage would come quickly. [laugh] (Lars, first-year student)

Thus, broad promotion and popularisation, what many of the artists and art students call "commercialisation", for example through a publicly available self-published website, is seen as a sign of lack of relationships, that the artist has failed to establish reciprocal relationships with the right people. This approach, that the artist sells her art online to a potentially broad market, most frequently occurred as a negative description of the artists, and can with Marxist terminology be described as if art producers and art consumers are alienated. The artist is also alienated from their work, which can be sold on a market as a commodity regardless of the artist. The artist is also an object, alienated from her self as she does not really take responsibility for her own expression, but leaves the actual knowledge-making and contextualising of the work to others, at least officially, while in reality this is often orchestrated by the artist. The artist

is also alienated from other artists in that they are *competing* instead of cooperating.

Performing

An art school is an interesting place to study artists' identity building as it brings together, and is divided by, several conflicting ideas of what art can be, and it is a place that is both about developing artists and defining what an artist actually is. In the students' practices and interviews, the performative aspects of the arts were very dominant: how the artist is enacted in different situations and the collaborative "making" of the art. This is not surprising as an art school is foremost about becoming an artist, and to understand what an artist is and how to perform a trustworthy one. Here is one student's description of what you do to become known as an artist:

This is the way you market yourself: going to an art school; making art exhibitions in general; exposing yourself in an art world, that is pretty much the best ways. [Pause] Therefore, if you are exposed to the art world, you show that you are at home in the art world. Though perhaps not everyone will accept you, your name will be associated with the art world, and then you are positioned in the art world, and then you will be known in the art world, and then you're there. (Anders, fifth-year student)

This quote exemplifies one of the ideologies in the interview material. In this perspective to manage an artistic identity is about mimicking other artists' behaviour. The self becomes a mirror of what the self desires: to become part of a larger community of artists by performing as if you are part of this community. However, it sounds easier than it might be. Understanding and mastering what is needed is not always easy, not everyone can perform the artist. For example, it is difficult to be accepted at the Royal Institute of Art, and they might need to show a certain craftsmanship or competence.

The question is also what this action of "to be exposed in an art world" actually entails. Especially online it is difficult to understand where different art worlds begin and end, as there are no physical boundaries to the art worlds online, as it is when you walk into a gallery or go to a concert, for example. Instead there are very subtle signs that signal that the art is real art, and not an unintentional mistake. The signs can be how the photo is taken and the typeface and colour of the page. It can be in the way the art is described, or where it is described, or who it is that describes it. It is like a dialect that signals a belonging to a certain interest. This aesthetic online thus becomes a tool that performs an identity-position.

Not having a website and not using more popular social media tools like Facebook was also considered a symbolic capital. This kind of instrumentalisation of relations was seen as something opposed to the values an artist should maintain, and if you used social media it was something you used sparsely (or at least they said so). Even though many admitted a website could be useful, it was something they did not feel pressure to acquire, at least not from their teachers:

There's some who do not think that one should have websites, some older, but they think that it is enough with a portfolio and so. Some people here at the school and all that, I think, teachers and so. It was well he [name] who are here at the school now. [...] I do not think he has a website, but perhaps he has, but he did not think we needed it. (Annelie, fifth-year student)

However, despite what older artist thought about it, most of the students believed a web presence was necessary, at least to start with. One first-year student admitted that this was what she planned to do, but reluctantly, as she had no need to show herself to a mass audience. Her strategy was instead to turn this project of maintaining an artist persona into an artwork as a performance. In this way she could get recognition as an artist on a larger commercial art scene, while exploring this identity-

position as a research project and thus creating a distance to the role.

To use the theory of alienation to interpret this mode of identity production: the relation between the producer of this artwork and the consumer is established by repetition. If the artist repeats what previous artists have done, they will become artists. The product can be seen as an *ideal* of how art is performed, and the artist's work is to interpret and contribute to this ideal. The artist can be seen as an *instrument* that expresses this ideal, and recognises others with shared beliefs. The artwork is a way to contact consumers who share this *belief*. Most importantly, this is not for everyone, the audience is not a mass of people, but a specific group that believes in the same thing: the art.

Belonging

In this group of like-minded believers in art there are also differences, and not least power differences. For your own survival's sake, you have to connect with the right "friends". It is also about getting enough space and a position in a context that you feel you belong to. Aesthetics is about recognition and esteem: it shows that you don't want to be treated as just anyone but acknowledged for being a certain being with a certain knowledge. One student, active on an alternative music scene and with a strong online presence, used his art as a way to find other people like himself, rather than trying to communicate the art broadly or to the established art scene:

*It can [instead] be alternative art scenes on which many are, or it is just many others who like a special form of expression. Since it is a question about the boundaries of what is artistic and what is something else, it could be very unclear.
(Bo, fifth-year student)*

This student often used an alias. For this artist the work was a means to be recognised by others with

similar interests, rather than something he wanted to distribute broadly. The internet functioned as a tool to find "his" group, a public that could be globally distributed, and as a way to create a personal art world rather than to establish relations with actors on the more established art scenes. In practice, when he communicated about an art event, for instance, he mainly used Facebook or email to contact people he already knew. He also looked at the school as an important way to connect.

*[Do you go to art exhibitions and art openings?]
Randomly. You get so much of it anyway when you go here. And it is such a closed world also, at least the Stockholm art world. Actually, I may not meet as many still who are older and so, but in the younger generation, those who go to art schools and so, where everyone meets everyone at parties and such. There is always someone who has studied with someone earlier on at some preparatory school and so, so it's a very small world.
(Bo, fifth-year student)*

The art world that dominated the school may therefore also be seen as an alternative art world, separated from wider popular culture and alive in art contexts such as art schools. The internet can be used to find alternative art worlds or contexts to one's own local context, an opportunity to find other like-minded people. One of the students was very much involved in a musical genre that was not particularly big in Stockholm, but through the internet it was still possible to find others with a similar taste in music. Another student was active in a narrow but internationally fairly large performance area, and another was partially active in modern dance as a set designer. They had increased their opportunity to be in multiple parallel rooms, with different discourses and ideas about art, through the internet. Therefore, they might have been less stressed about the demands of performing correctly according to the dominant norm and about art as something sold at a market through an art gallery, as they also had identities in other contexts.

I think it is much about the [Internet] culture that I grew up with. The fact that what I mostly listen to are smaller bands. I don't think they earn any big money, but they still keep on with their thing. It is above all about trying to find your own niche. It is perhaps something the Internet has helped with too. Finding others who are doing similar things as you. (Bo, fifth-year student)

This artist's position was something he could identify with and which he saw as a way to keep up with art as an alternative to "succeeding" commercially or establish himself in a prestigious gallery. This student did not feel quite at home in the art scene that was the most prominent in the school; circulating around some Stockholm galleries with international connections and a global art scene manifested in events like Documenta and the Venice Biennale. Not surprisingly, it was the students who had the best family ties to the art world who also felt that they belonged there, and they also had the best relationships and the most realistic approach. These children of culture workers or artists were certain about their place and that everything probably would work out. Money was no problem. They had seen their parents and their friends get along despite uncertain conditions, without money, and saw this as a possible lifestyle. Although money clearly made things easier when they were travelling, for example, it was not the main thing. The main thing was to connect with people with similar beliefs who could help if needed.

Yes, but as you, yeah, look [at art exhibitions when travelling], that is also where you make friends. Although I'm pretty bad at keeping in contact with people as I am not involved in those forums or great at writing emails, but I think if I, for example, would land in New York, I would have someone I could contact, and it's the same thing in Berlin and in different parts of Germany. (Anders, fifth-year student)

If you only have a network, things will work out. There are a number of students who testify about

how the study trips and exchange with other art schools abroad they had made during their school years had been important. Important partly for establishing international networks and to see art, but perhaps primarily because this enabled them to get to know the professors and other students better. To hang with the older artists, colleagues and artists from other countries, is an important way to transfer and develop ideas about art, and not least a way to transfer how to be in different kinds of situations. It can be about going to see an exhibition, to hang on at an art opening, or in a bar, or simply just to have breakfast. Important information is conveyed in this type of informal settings. These more interesting events were primarily advertised in exclusive circles.

One of the fifth-year students I interviewed was almost invisible online, and represented the fifth generation of artists in his family. He was of the opinion that he should mainly devote himself to finding out what he wanted to say and how he wanted to say this, and that art was a means to finding one's own voice. So the art was a means to self-fulfilment, not a goal in itself. To possibly reach out with this art was no problem if he had something to say.

There is no conscious strategy... I do not mean that I think it is not nice to promote oneself, it's just pointless. When I know what the fuck I want, I will not have any trouble getting people to see it. [How does one do then, when you know what you want?]

It feels like it's going to be pretty obvious when you face the problem and have done something you think is really important, but no one is looking. I have no idea.

(Anders, fifth-year student)

From the outside, this statement sounds very bold and a bit ignorant. After five years of college education you might expect the students to have a more thought-out plan for how to make a living. But in reality the student knew exactly how to

communicate his art and manage his self. Six years after this interview, he was well established on the international art scene. But still without his own website. This student, like many others, avoided communicating their persona clearly in a public place, although he used social media, but like other art students this was done reluctantly. Facebook was not something you wanted to be associated with. However, these types of tools were useful even considering the drawbacks. Networking tools online gave the student a simple way to keep track of relationships with people he might not be meeting regularly, and who were in other places. But he used it mainly as a way to facilitate face-to-face meetings.

Thus, to use the theory of alienation to interpret this process of self-management; there is a direct relation between the producer of this work and the consumer: if the artists have good relations with other players in the art world they will be able to be artists. The product can be seen as a voice, a clear vision or *agenda*. The producer can be seen as a *subject* with agency, someone who expresses her self, and *belongs* to a community.

Three Intersecting Modes of Production

What was valued by the students foremost was the creation of stronger relationships but also to get recognition, or at least a reputation. Students also expressed a wish to be able to compete in a market of artists, even though they were ambivalent about this and really didn't believe such a free market existed. I divided these differences in three different modes of production:

The first mode is *Competing*: in this mode the art producer and the art consumer are separated, there are no bonds, and everyone is equal. Instead of producing something for another person, the artist produces for money, alienated from others and competing with other artists on a market. The artist

is also alienated from her own work, as she does not take responsibility for her own work but depends on others to do the contextualisation and communication of the work, as well as the capitalisation. In this production mode the technology is mainly used to make the artist and the art visible and accessible in the market, however, ideally someone else does this. The artist only provides the raw material.

The second mode is *Performing*. The relation between the producer and the consumer is established by repetition. If the artists perform like previous artists they will be recognised as artists. The work can be seen as an ideal image of art, and the artist's work is to interpret and contribute to this ideal. The artist is an instrument that expresses this ideal and recognises other actors with shared beliefs. Here the technology is used as a fashion, and as a way to perform an artist persona online, expressed in the right style.

The third mode of production is *Belonging*. In this mode recognition between the artist and the art consumer is important, to connect with people that you recognise and that also give you esteem, and to get involved in a dialogue with others in a public sphere. The artwork is a way to establish a voice in this alternative public, to be a subject with agency and autonomy who knows how to express her self and to bond with her community. The communication technology is used to maintain the bonds with one or several communities, as an address list, or as a shared file library.

As the interview samples shows, these contradictory modes of production sometimes intersect, creating confusions and tensions but also strategies to balance the roles. For instance, the need to perform a trustworthy persona online could become a piece of art, recognised and acknowledged by other artists, as a way to hide behind a mask while at the same time functioning as a valid artist brand in the commercial art market.

Conclusion and Discussion

Marx formulated his theory in an era of great social changes due to new production and communication methods. Today we live in a hyper-capitalist era, and most of us are largely alienated from the globally dispersed people who work together to produce the material basis we take for granted. I rarely have contact with any of the people who produce what I need on a daily basis; from the components of the building I live in, to the clothes I wear, to the food I eat – and they have no contact with me. Allegedly, products such as visual artworks are different from ordinary products as the artwork is an artwork just because it is linked to a person, unlike most consumer products.

This may be a person I esteem, and that I perhaps even know, who recognises me and what I stand for. It can be a drawing from my child directly to me. Alternatively, it can be a reproduction of a painting by Miró. They are both manifestations of my subjectivity and the relationships I have or want to have. Just as these works are an expression of a specific person, they reflect me and show in this way that I too am a special person.

To formulate this with the help of Marx's theory of alienation; in the ideal art world, the mode of production will strengthen relations:

- The relationships between the producer and the consumer. Instead of producing works for money, you produce for another human and a direct relation to another person is developed.
- The relationship between the producer and the product of the work. As the work is an expression for and by the producer, the producer has total control over her own work and can feel proud of this work.
- The relationship with the self. When production is mainly about expressing oneself and creating one's own community of followers, the producer is no longer a stranger to herself.
- Relationships between producers. By not

competing for a salary, but working together for the common network that everyone depends on, relationships are strengthened.

In this perspective no one can own anyone else's work, or even their own work, as their own subject is dependent on all the others, and cannot therefore exist outside of this relationship. But in practice the artist exists within a capitalist system (where communicating "belonging" is how brands operate), far from the communist utopia of self-realisation and interdependency. Art exists in the paradox between these two principles, the market's objective and the relational and subjective, alienation and relation, competing and belonging.

The result of the content analysis and interviews shows how the students handle this paradox in different ways, and the role information and communication technologies play in this. In order to manage their relationships with others in the art world, such as colleagues, gallery owners and audiences, they feel a need to have control over who they communicate with, which they do not have if they are easily accessible, as they then will be vulnerable to eventual "stalkers", ignorant criticism, surveillance, or that people simply do not understand. When managing their self online, it is important to control that their self-expression isn't consumed by an anonymous public, but is directed exclusively to known friends. They therefore use the technology mainly to communicate with those they already know, and that they have encountered in art context as art openings, while travelling, and at art schools. People they therefore already have confidence in. Perhaps most importantly, the relationship should be reciprocal. The technology can help to facilitate maintaining this relationship and destabilise capitalism by avoiding an anonymous market, and serve as a portfolio where people who already know them can get to know them better.²⁸ They use social media reluctantly, well aware of the potential surveillance that Andrejevic sees as a new form alienation, as this data is controlled by someone else.²⁹

Communication technology can also strengthen the relation between the self and self-communication, (the worker and the result of the work), when the communication becomes more mediated and thus more clearly a piece of art. Just as the artist's clothing style (or lack of style) at an art opening is a manifestation of a belonging to certain values, his or her online presence is carefully designed to adhere to the world of fine art. In a way this can, as Boltanski and Chiapello suggest, be seen as a way to commodify relations, as they turn their persona into an artwork in the public realm, becoming targets for others' projected belonging.³⁰ This persona also needs to conform to a hegemonic artist ideal to be recognised easily in a globalised context. Most students were reluctant to having a public web presence and preferred technologies that supported mutual relations rather than mass communication to a broad audience. This is similar to Velthuis' study of art dealers, where maintaining long-term relations and a stable value was more important than instant economic success.³¹

However, the technology is used not only to maintain the art world, but also to find new art worlds that acknowledge students' self-expression if they feel alienated in the dominating art world. In this way they strengthen their own voice by getting it confirmed by others with similar expressions. This practice can be described as a networked model for resistance against a powerful global art world, supporting what Paolo Virno, and Hardt & Negri call the Multitude, consisting of multiple intersecting collectives of individuals working together in networks based on mutual relations.³² To express this in Marx's terminology: by getting their own expression confirmed by others, they receive a direct confirmation that they are human, that is, that through expressing their particular voice, their singularity, they become part of a larger group. In Marx's words:

*In the individual expression of my life I would have directly created your expression of your life, and therefore in my individual activity I would have directly confirmed and realised my true nature, my human nature, my communal nature.*³³

This communist utopia might lack different classes, but difference between people in terms of belongings is a central feature of this "multitude". This way of lumping together individuals, in collectives based on their interest rather than location, age or economy, like in a guild system, is something that nowadays is made possible on a global scale. Previous research on the Swedish art context has also pointed to how being an artist is something that is inherited, just like a guild, from one generation to the next.³⁴ Students' motivation to use the technology and their communication strategies also corresponded with these findings. Students from families of culture workers and artists foremost relied on face-to-face meetings and personal encounters. Students without established contacts in the arts took a public online presence more serious, hoping that their work would speak for itself in an open market. However, between these different modes of production, of on the one hand competition in a market, and on the other hand reproducing a role that is inherited, there were students whose motivation to communicate online provided the possibility to simultaneously connect to several contexts.

The ability to easily move from one context to the other, with different sets of rules and aesthetics, might undermine and displace rules and social norms, and thus enable a multitude that is not reduced to a single collective or hegemonic identity position.³⁵ Or maybe this is just a new factory, enslaving our souls in a production of multiple belongings. The control over the technology, the capital that enables the multitude, is still situated somewhere else.

28. Stacey, *op. cit.*

29. Andrejevic, *op. cit.*

30. Boltanski and Chiapello, *op. cit.*

31. Velthuis, *op. cit.*

32. Virno, *op. cit.*; Hardt and Negri, *op. cit.*

33. Marx, Karl. *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Foreign Languages Publishing House: Moscow. 1959.

34. Gustavsson, *op. cit.*

35. Hardt and Negri, *op. cit.*