

Artists as Enterprise Incorporating as Forms of Organising Agencies

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Introduction

Contemporary cognitive capitalist economies are characterised by the rise of technology, finance, media and cultural industries in a post-Fordist, post-industrial economy. The organisation of labour in this regard is one in which entrepreneurship and individual creativity is encouraged in the context of a competitive market economy. To move away from a critique of capitalism as a continual practice of *debunking* economic systems, this text explores ways in which artists can engage with contemporary economies to enable their artistic practices and to re-imagine economic systems to better support artistic work.¹ The politics here is not one of questioning existing systems, but finding a means to operate *within* market economies to regain forms of agency through organisational incorporation. Artists face rising costs of living in cities and increasingly competitive environments in which to gain visibility and recognition for their work. There is a necessity to survive to maintain a level of sustenance in order to continue to create work. As a result, economies begin to shape the kinds of works artists produce and the audiences who engage with their work, suggesting how artists may consider the economic systems in which they operate as part of the artistic process itself. To engage in contemporary economies may involve incorporating as business entities, in part to generate legibility and pragmatic functioning in society, which allows for experimentation within economies as part of an art practice, whether intrinsically or extrinsically. This opens up to ideas on how artists can re-configure the artistic system in ways that work in their own interests. To engage within market economies becomes a means to survive, but it does not mean it is motivated by capitalist logics. Rather it is about finding ways one can feed back into the economy to enable other artists, or be able to sustain and to maintain freedom over one's own work. Art and cultural workers play a central role in contemporary economies, but how can they begin to shape these economies in ways that are speculative, pragmatic, and open to possibilities?²

Moving Beyond Critique

Discussions around precarious labour in the cultural sector and the precariat as the oppressed subject, have unfolded over the past ten years by academics like Maurizio Lazzarato (2006), Andrew Ross (2008), Angela McRobbie (2009), Guy Standing (2011), Rosalind Gill and Stephanie Taylor (2013), Mark Banks (2017), among others. It has come to a point where it seems as there is no alternative and all social relations are subsumed by capital. Artists and cultural workers are doomed to live lives of flexible and free labour, creating constant states of instability and anxiety.³ Institutions and corporations simultaneously exploit artists' labour for low to no pay in

exchange for promotion and recognition. Discourses around precarity, however, fail to find alternatives beyond a critique of the problems and the demand for fair pay. Subjects find themselves in oppressive states and continue to re-enact them with no other choice as artists are interpellated into becoming economic subjects. Narratives of precarity unintentionally have the effect of further disempowering artists who feel powerless against market forces. There is a need to shift strategies from a defensive mode to a more constructive role in one's conditions.

To resist precarity means to find other work to support oneself, whether in the cultural sector, education or in a completely unrelated field. To give up one's passion in the pragmatics of survival is to find security through other kinds of paid work and regain a sense of freedom through economic stability. The other alternative is to strive to make one's artistic practice more commercial by appealing to the market. Artists are exploring market economies through establishing as corporate entities, which may enable forms of legitimacy within a market economy. Discourse of precarity suggests an impasse of no alternatives when possibilities to act, learn and renegotiate remain within an economy in flux. Stephen Shukaitis and Joanna Figiel approach a politics of ambivalence in both finding freedom in precarity and a means to resist its oppressive forces of passionate, self-exploitative work: "Ambivalence, not as a mere discomfort, but meaning, in a deeper sense, that transformations in labor contain a possibility to go in two very different directions: towards a financialized future desire to capital accumulation, or a struggle towards a future where creativity forms the basis of new horizons for cooperation and solidarity."⁴ This ambivalence is a neutral stance, which is open-ended and a way of giving up positions to allow for new possibilities. Rather than ambivalence, Rosi Braidotti calls for an affirmative politics in a dynamic process of inter-relating beyond the humanist subject of homo economicus. From the post-humanist perspectives according to Braidotti, "... the conditions for renewed political and ethical agency cannot be drawn from the immediate context or the current state of the terrain. They have to be generated affirmatively and creatively by efforts geared to creating possible futures, by mobilizing resources and visions that have been left untapped and by actualizing them in daily practices of interconnection with others."⁵

The critique of cognitive capitalism has been detailed by Marxist autonomists and the political left to the likes of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Paulo Virno, Franco "Bifo" Berardi, Maurizio Lazzarato, etc. However, critique on its own can only go so far. Bruno Latour has questioned modes of critique as a constant need to overturn institutions and structures in thought, while Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello recognise the ways in which artistic critique has become co-opted by the market⁶. Latour writes:

*The critic is not the one who debunks, but the one who assembles. The critic is not the one who lifts the rugs from under the feet of the naïve believers, but the one who offers the participants arenas in which to gather. The critic is not the one who alternates haphazardly between antifetishism and positivism like the drunk iconoclast drawn by Goya, but the one for whom, if something is constructed, then it means it is fragile and thus in great need of care and caution.*⁷

To move away from critique and market opposition is to question anti-capitalist stances as ineffective and revolutions as idealistic impossibilities. Art historian Sven Lütticken writes in *Cultural Revolution*: "... micropolitics, punk and autonomedia participated in a transformation that was *as economic as it was cultural*" as counterculture becomes the realization of "neoliberal utopia".⁸ The dream to overthrow capitalism has become inoperative in an autonomous movement, which positions itself somehow outside yet continues to be recuperated by the market.⁹ It doesn't mean we shouldn't continue to fight against injustices and inequalities brought on by capitalism, but rather develop a practice within market economies as a pragmatic, speculative

and experimental approach that begins to turn market logics into positives through an *affirmative* politics in support of artists and communities. These new agencies can be found through economic engagement that does not follow capitalist logics of profit maximisation at all costs. Agency here does not belong to individual human subjects, but rather to a process of collective becoming in incorporating and organising of intra-acting entities.¹⁰ We can conceive of change taking place in practice in an economy of constant flux. It forces us to innovate just as dynamically to counter forces of capitalism, but to open up spaces for its renegotiation.

Incorporating as Forms of Organising Agencies

Wendy Brown describes the “economisation” of subjects by a neo-liberal rationality where now financialisation is no longer reserved to banks or corporations, but can be applied to individuals as entrepreneurs or firms themselves. She writes: “As neoliberal rationality remakes the human being as human capital, an earlier rendering of *homo oeconomicus* as an interest maximizer gives way to formulation of the subject as both a member of a firm and as itself a firm, and in both cases as appropriately conducted by the governance practices appropriate to firms.”¹¹ Political theorist Lois McNay discusses “self as enterprise” as the marketisation of social relations, where individuals are “encouraged to view their lives and identities as a type of enterprise, understood as a relation to the self based ultimately on a notion of incontestable economic interest.”¹² Neo-liberal regimes operate not through conformity but rather through individual difference, where “it throws into question conceptions of individual autonomy that commonly underpin much political thought on freedom, resistance and political opposition.”¹³ Brown describes how the neo-liberal rationality “disseminates the model of the market to all domains and activities—even where money is not at issue—and configures human beings exhaustively as market actors, always, only and everywhere as *homo oeconomicus*.”¹⁴

To become an economic subject is to engage with capitalist economies, which has become a necessity as a means for survival. However, this does not mean artists employ the logics and mentalities of capitalists, whose intentions are to maximise growth and profit at the expense of others. The need to engage within capitalist economies in light of depleted government funding for the arts, and increasing privatisation of culture, means artists employing corporate means to also sustain their art practice, which begins to shape what artistic practice may look like and how it circulates in a cognitive capitalist economy. Artistic practice begins to take on characteristics of brands, agencies, and start-ups that can simultaneously enable forms of artistic freedom. In contrast to the tradition of non-profit arts or support through teaching and academic work—which has also been compromised by demands of the market—these commercial models for artistic work are evolving alongside the economy and with technological innovations that do not strictly follow capitalist logics, but can also enable the re-distribution of wealth towards supporting other artists or social causes. Artists engaging with market economies is nothing new, yet with economic models emerging from the transformation of the economy with cognitive capitalism, we see artists also taking on these new forms and practices. The image of the government funded artist is eroded, where artists begin to operate akin to brands and corporations. These modes of economic organisation can perhaps be employed to better support artistic work without replicating its logics. At the same time, it is to resist a one-sided anti-market perspective taken up by leftist artists and academics. It is a reprise of an approach that is non-ideological and balanced to find spaces within the contemporary economy in which art and artists can thrive.

The romantic ideal of art that is somehow beyond the economic obscures the fact that non-economic activities continue to support and reinforce the market. Max Haiven writes in his book *Art After Money, Money After Art*: “The notion that art and money are enemies reproduces global capitalism, preventing us from imagining alternatives.”¹⁵ To explore how artists today engage with the cognitive capitalist economy is by taking the forms

of the economy to navigate it and to find means to support or accelerate artistic practice. The examples discussed below illustrate means through the market that do not seek to purport “alternatives” to it, but instead open up to practical realities of artistic production within a market economy. Strategies of resistance must take another approach in a neo-liberal economy. Didier Debaise and Isabelle Stengers explain that “alternatives” are actually war machines “reducing thinking to mere representations, fictions to imaginary realities, values to subjective projections onto nature.”¹⁶ Alternatives are too often employed as empty promises that “say” more than they “do”. Gregory Sholette describes the invisible practices of artists working on the margins of the dominant art market.¹⁷ Here we explore how some are able to engage creatively with it through examples of artists as entrepreneurs, both as members of a firm and as a firm itself. Debaise and Stengers suggest, “Perhaps this life in the ruins calls for the apparent unnatural marriage of the speculative, open to the insistence of the possibles, and of the pragmatic, as the art of response-ability.”¹⁸ Borrowing from Donna Haraway, they approach a practice of collective becoming that is also ethical and considers human and non-human entities in an organising practice: “In passion and action, detachment and attachment, this is what I call cultivating response-ability; that is also collective knowing and doing, an ecology of practices.”¹⁹ To function in the economy is to empower artists to reconfigure and define their own economies in ways that are speculative and open to possibilities. It is a way of challenging precarity proactively and what it means to be an artist in a cognitive capitalist economy. It becomes more a question of how economies can be used *productively* to serve the interest of arts, artists and the community in ways that are not motivated by profit maximisation at the expense of others in the logics of capitalism.

Artists today operate as mini-corporations: at once managing production, distribution, promotion, resources and finances of their studio practice. However, to conceive of incorporation can be a sign of individual self-interest or it can be seen as a means to enable collaboration. Incorporating as a company also allows for protection from liabilities of the individual within a corporate entity: for instance, if a company goes bankrupt, the individual does not. Today, incorporating provides a certain legitimacy within the economic system and also allows for individuals to “hide behind the brand”. It allows for the application for certain funds and resources, including public funding, start-up grants and incubator support, often for larger amounts than funds available to an independent artist. To operate as a business is to gain deeper insight into the economic systems to learn through doing and to understand how it can be used constructively.

The following are a series of case studies of artists operating as brands, agencies, start-ups and crypto-financiers as part of their artistic practice and in reflection of their own economies. These examples reflect just a few ways in which artists engage today within contemporary economies of late capitalism to enable, re-distribute, sustain and speculate on their own artistic practices. Incorporating as economic entities becomes a collective process that enables certain agencies in practice. Beyond spectres of gloom, we can find spaces for renegotiation of the economic field to make the economy work for artists, rather than be subject to its whims.

Artists as Brands: From Mass Production to Philanthropy

Brands are corporate entities that use designs, logos and symbols to differentiate themselves from other brands with a distinct product or commodity output. Branding employs techniques of design to create a visual language to communicate ideas about the product or company. Andy Warhol can be considered an early example of the artist as brand in the 1960s through his approach to mass production in The Factory. The Factory churned out artworks (primarily silk-screened prints) employing the aesthetics of mass-produced products that were sold on the art market. It operated as a Fordist assembly line, however, it was also a model where the artist owned the means of production, which simultaneously served to sustain a community of artists and hedonistic cultural

activity. Similarly to post-Internet artists, Warhol employed the language of advertising that blurred the distinction between critique and seriousness as high art. Through the use of mass images, he created his own brand and celebrity image, which also functioned economically to support his practice and others in his community. The Factory became a space for underground culture in New York City, perhaps less possible today with the high cost of rent.

Other artists exploring their work as a branded enterprise include a number of street artists, such as Banksy and Shepard Fairey. Building on his involvement in music and skateboarding culture, Fairey started out as a designer creating stickers and T-shirts, producing designs for musicians and political campaigns. He later created his own product lines Obey Giant and Obey Clothing to sell limited edition prints, stickers, artworks, and clothing designed by the artist.²⁰ Having gained success, he now contributes to philanthropic endeavours. Proceeds from his clothing company benefit The Obey Awareness Program and various humanitarian efforts he is involved in. Although street art has long lost its lustre as the underground culture of disparaged youth, it has become a sign of urban gentrification through commissioned murals as a viable means for artists working in this realm to earn through active participation in the culture industry. Fairey uses the proceeds from his commercial work to benefit social causes and at the same time improve his personal brand image as an activist and campaigner. Fairey has received recognition in museums and institutions particularly for his work in politics and the Obama campaign, however, his practice also extends far beyond the art world in broader creative industries across music, design and popular culture.

Another artist operating in the contemporary art world while simultaneously functioning as brands or corporations is Chinese artist Xu Zhen who co-founded Biz Art Centre in 1998, a non-profit organization in Shanghai. The organization supported experimental exhibition by emerging young artists through advertising, design and commercial services.²¹ In 2009 he combined his art practice into MadIn Company in what is described as a “contemporary art creation company” to dissolve his individual identity as an artist into a company and facilitate his art practice, as well as curatorial work and the promotion of other artists. Spinning off from his growing enterprise, the artist launched the XU ZHEN® Brand in 2013, and MadIn Gallery in 2014 to support emerging artists in China. Simultaneously his artwork self-consciously interrogates themes of consumerism and advertising in his work XUZHEN Supermarket created under his brand name.²² The work features an installation of a supermarket stocked with empty packages of everyday products.²³ The first version of the work was presented at Art Basel Miami in 2007, *SHANGHART SUPERMARKET* and was sold at auction by Sotheby’s Hong Kong for 2 million Hong Kong dollars as the first concept ever sold at auction in Asia. What is purchased is not the physical installation, but the rights to commission an installation of the work.

*The successful buyer of this Lot will acquire a certificate relating to edition 1/1 of the conceptual artwork XUZHEN SUPERMARKET by XU ZHEN® giving the buyer the right to commission physical recreations and enactments of XUZHEN SUPERMARKET.*²⁴

This licensing practice, rather than the sales and ownership of physical art objects, is becoming more common for conceptual or installation-based artworks. In this case, artists are paid to install or recreate the works for each exhibition and site-specific locations provide on-going income, based on the contractual requirement to involve the artist in the installation of the work. Acknowledging the commercialised society we live in, Xu Zhen appropriates corporate mechanisms to support a wider artistic community through his ventures. He has found a way to hide behind a brand, yet also reinforcing individualised identities as both art project and functioning business.

It is valid to note that not all artists can build enterprises such as ObeyGiant and Madeln Company. These are only the few who have managed to garner enough recognition to transform themselves into brands. It reflects how artists are able to employ the language and practices of contemporary capitalism to support their artistic practice, while also enabling others through philanthropy. Artists in these cases own the means of production: they have full control over how their work is sold and distributed. On the one hand the artist's practice may be fully commercial, appealing to wide audiences and the art market to gain profit, at the same time these profits also enable experimental work in artist-led initiatives support a community of emerging artists or they contribute to philanthropic causes. This is the redistribution of wealth, where successful artists play a role in fostering and enabling other artists as a social responsibility to the community.

Artists as Agencies: Self-funding Art through Commercial Work

Agencies are companies that provide commercial services for brands and corporations. Many artists will work commercially to support their artistic practice on the side. These were also Shepard Fairey's early beginnings after art school, when he started a printing company called Alternate Graphics with some friends. Artists working with digital technologies often function as creative agencies. Studios like FIELD, onformative and Zeitguised are just a few examples that create artworks alongside commercial projects for brands. Many of these studios fund their artistic projects through the commercial work that they do. Some prefer to keep their commercial work separate from their art practice. For instance, Zeitguised branched out to create foam studio as the commercial arm of their business to keep the two practices separate.²⁵ Others find separating or making clear distinctions between their commercial and artistic work more difficult. Many of these artists treat their artistic projects as R&D (research and development), to test new ideas, aesthetics and technologies. For Berlin-based studio onformative, their artistic projects also help them to get more commercial commissions. They take great care in documenting their art projects, which are promoted through social media and are picked up by art and design blogs. Increasingly the commercial work they do allows for increasing freedom to create ambitious artworks. To create large-scale and complex works requires a team of designer, developers and project managers. These require commercial budgets in which grant funding is often not enough to support larger-scale collaborative work. Working commercially enables them to sustain a team of coders and designers and offers them the opportunity to create more ambitious artistic projects. Challenges, however, include balancing commercial work with artistic work where paid work often takes priority.



onformative, Collide, 2016, Dolby Laboratories, San Francisco

An example of a project by onformative is *Collide* (2016) a site-specific installation created for Dolby Laboratories in San Francisco.²⁶ This project was commissioned when the client saw their *Unnamed Soundsculpture* (2012) artwork, involving dance and motion-capture imported into a 3D environment where camera movements are mapped to the soundtrack.^[27] For *Collide* the artwork involved creating an audiovisual synesthetic experience that was displayed in the lobby of Dolby Laboratories. The work transformed motion data into abstract sound and visuals. For the soundtrack they collaborated with three cellists who wore VR (virtual reality) headsets while playing a composition in order to directly relate the sound to the visuals. Their work is heavily process-based, so the artistic projects provide a means to test out new technologies and ideas, which can also lead to forms of commercial work that straddle art and design. In the case of onformative, to be financially independent from the art system is to be dependent on commercial clients. However, it offers another mode of practice, which can open up to more ambitious projects requiring larger teams and budgets. Through commercial projects, they are able to experiment and sustain an art practice. Brands today recognise the value of artistic work and are working more freely with artists to provide the space and resources to create. onformative's work is often viewed as a cross between art, design and advertising and as a result lacks visibility in the art world. However, given their open-ended experimental approaches to new technologies, there is an undeniable artistic process and skilful execution to their work. The works have been exhibited at festivals and exhibitions in galleries, but tends to circulate and gain validation beyond the art market. In this way the artists have established their own economy that enables them to create work sustained through commercial projects, which create a feedback loop where they can gain further work through artistic projects. This balancing act of commercial and non-commercial projects becomes integral in the development of a system for support for more experimental artistic work.

Other examples of agencies are the trend-forecasting company, K-HOLE, which is essentially an art project, which employed the language and strategies of a marketing agency to fabricate trends through distributing PDF reports. From their efforts they simultaneously gained success by garnering attention and creating viral fashion trends such as "Normcore". Their satire of the corporate world was taken seriously and the group began getting actual clients such as MTV, Coach and Kickstarter to consult for. Their projects lasted five issues of their trend reports, from 2010 until 2015, when perhaps their joke ran dry or they were unable to establish the means to function as a real business. Their final issue has a rather sombre tone:

*There was a feeling that we could decode things as a group; that our PDFs would make us powerful; that we could use our insights to gird ourselves against the storms that were coming, be they social, political, ecological, emotional, whatever. Since then, two things have become clear. One was that the storms we predicted never came. Rather, we woke up one day and Antarctica was warmer than New York. The second was that the truth was not enough. It couldn't keep Zuccotti Park open, it couldn't explain Normcore, and it couldn't keep our friendships intact. We needed something stronger.*²⁸

To sustain and maintain momentum or any sense of change had failed to manifest and, like many other trends in fashion and the art world, their art project was simply just that. Perhaps maintaining friendships and the desire to change the corporate world from the inside was more difficult than imagined, and simply becoming a part of it was beyond their intentions. K-HOLE appropriated tactics from the marketing industry as art project, which inadvertently gained widespread attention in the real economy. Without actual seriousness in becoming a commercial agency, as an amateur artists-posing-as-a-corporate the project was short-lived, however, it

enabled experiments in the market economy that simultaneously revealed the ridiculousness of the industry itself. These art projects perform and reinforce the market mechanisms, yet fail to operate practically and economically as a functional business, which was not its original purpose. These projects intend to remain only as art projects where they take on a life and then die in the face of the realities of the economic world.

Other artists have explored corporate structures in the form of start-ups as both art projects and as functioning businesses, though whether they have done so successfully or enduringly is questionable. To both critique and open up to new modes of practice is walking a fine line between replicating the capitalist realities or failing to formulate any kind of desired change.

Artists as Start-ups: Growth Hacking Artist Practice

The phenomenon of start-ups and start-up culture emerged with the rise of technological innovation and entrepreneurship in Silicon Valley. Start-ups operate on a strategy of failing fast, learning from failures and trying again. Funding is pumped into these economies in a game of high-risk yet with potential for high-growth venture capital funding. These hyper-accelerated economies contrast with the slow process of artists. Start-ups emerge and proliferate, yet operate with a common logic of growth and profit maximisation. Some artists have begun exploring start-up economies as part of their own practice, but also as a means to engage artists in thinking about these economies for their own artistic practice. Artists who are often not motivated by profit suggest ways of thinking about start-ups as a “medium” for art and intervention.

To move beyond business as art project, such as in the practice of Corporate Aesthetics, to one that actually functions as a business can be a challenging move. In most cases these businesses operate as a means to gain access and insight into the functioning of the global economy. Constant Dullart’s DullTech™ project, for instance, developed a product, which had an actual function in the art world, as an excuse to create a tech start-up to be able to gain access to the manufacturing process in factories in China. Part joke and part serious business, the company produces media players for artists to loop artworks and sync videos across multiple screens, to help solve a common problem in galleries. The work was initiated during a residency in Shenzhen and funds were raised using Kickstarter. The project revealed the ways in which having a corporate entity and image opens doors to meet suppliers and gain a level of access that an individual artists would not. Challenges of running and sustaining the business were inevitable, as product development and manufacturing require significant resources and marketing. However, for Dullart the project’s intentions remains valid as an art project, and as a means of exploring economic mechanisms and infrastructures.²⁹



Jeremy Bailey, *I Was Raised on the Internet*, installation view MCA Chicago, 23 June–14 October 2018. Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago

Other artists, such as Jeremy Bailey, help support artists to create start-ups as a way to accelerate their artistic practice in his LEAN Artist Incubator. The project is a seed accelerator for artists in which a group of artists is brought together in short three-day “boot camps” during which they come up with a new business idea both as art project and functioning business. They receive mentorship from a number of coaches from the art and tech industry to develop their idea. Artists are taught methods for developing a business from ideation, prototyping, through to writing a business plan and raising money. The last edition of the project took place at MCA Chicago in 2018, with four local artists: Jon Chambers, Óscar González-Díaz, Mashaun Ali Hendricks, and Shawné Michaelain Holloway. Employing the methods of Silicon Valley to accelerate new tech businesses, the LEAN Artist Incubator provides artists with the tools to develop their own business and to also explore start-ups as a medium for artistic practice. Seed funds provided are comparatively small, yet Bailey aims to raise questions about the economies of artists in which artists on average make less than US\$10,000 per year (including himself), and looks to empower them through engaging in start-up economies.^[30] For employment, Bailey works as Creative Director of a start-up called FreshBooks where he gains inspiration and financial means for his artistic practice. He encourages artists to create social projects and businesses that are not just commercial ventures, but also function as art and contribute to social causes or support diverse communities. To create start-ups engages artists economically and forces them to develop skills to help them support their practice as also a sustainable business. Yet many of these projects remain small-scale, where there is a question as to whether these businesses constitute “art”: the idea is to explore product design and business economics creatively and socially beyond the metrics set out by the industry. These projects become speculative attempts to explore how start-up economies operate and provide business skills to artists. It raises questions about the kinds of start-ups we can imagine that are not purely motivated by profit, but find sustainable models to support underrepresented communities.

Artists as (Crypto)Financiers: Taking Control of Financial Futures

Start-ups are driven by technological innovation seeking to “disrupt” existing economies. It comes with high risk experimentation of prototyping, testing and initiating new models. Among the many over-hyped technologies is the blockchain and cryptocurrencies set to revolutionise the global economy. As techno-capitalists and

economic futurists jump on the bandwagon, artists are also beginning to explore the implications of this technology on their own artistic practice. Crypto has had its waves of ups and downs, without yet gaining broader legitimacy or wide-scale take-up. It hasn't stopped artists from engaging with the technology in their art, most broadly represented in the book *Artists Re:thinking the Blockchain* (2017) published by friends and fellows of Furtherfield. Artists are also employing the technology to reflect on their own artistic practice. These practices speculate on the possibilities of new technologies to participate in discourse around its development, but also opens up ways in which these technologies could better support artistic practice and operate in their interests. By engaging with these technologies, artists can contribute to imagining the future (in this case of finance) through blockchain technologies. An example is the Jonas Lund Token (JLT) in which the artist creates a cryptocurrency to create 100,000 shares of his artistic practice. These shares are distributed to shareholders, including a board of advisors with a set of shares reserved for themselves. These shares provide voting power over the decisions on the artist's own career and artistic practice. This turns the artist themselves into a commodity and corporation in which decisions are deferred to a team of shareholders and experts (with the artist retaining some voting rights). It is in the interest of shareholders to provide the best decisions for the artist in the development of their career. This model alleviates the artist from decision-making over the fate of their career, which is defaulted to expert shareholders who have a vested interest in the success of his work. This may prove to be a resolution to anxiety caused by the burdens on the self, imposed by a free market.

Another artist, Ed Fornieles, created Crypto Certs, an investment fund in which investors can help fund the day-to-day operations of the artist's studio or specific projects by the artist. Investors receive rewards for their investment or a share of future profits on a project. It provides a funding model that helps maintain the subsistence of an artist's studio to sustain a practice over a long term and allows for funding for the production of specific art projects. As stated on the artist's website: "Crypto Certs diffuse risk across a wider, decentralized network of support. In doing so the pressure is removed for artists and galleries to raise funds for production costs and allows them to develop artwork independently of market pressures. This leads to greater experimentation on the part of the artist and redirects the flow of capital towards the production, development and growth of future artworks."³¹

Ben Vickers, CTO of Serpentine Galleries explains, "In the same way the conceptual art movement sought to dematerialise the object— artists will produce infrastructure using decentralised blockchain tools in order to create market structures."³² These projects bring to light ways in which new technologies can be appropriated in the interest of artists in reflection of their own economies. The financialised nature of the contemporary economy means artists think futurally about their practice and artworks as assets to ensure the future of their career and studio. Lund now has a support network to aid the development of his career, while Fornieles created a crowdfunded model for his studio and projects. However, these speculative projects also function as art projects without really considering whether they function in practice. It provides a means for artists to determine the terms of their operations to ensure future sustainability of their artistic practices. These are speculative projects that perhaps do not yet function economically, but open up to imaginaries of how these technologies could be developed to support artists and their means of sustaining a practice and producing new works.



Wong Kit Yi, October 14, 2015, a.m. / Chanticleer / Dragon's Blood, 2015. Inkjet on archival paper, 32 x 24 inches. Private Collection.

Courtesy of the artist and P!

Artists are also engaging with financial economies in ways that do not use blockchain technologies to financialise their practice. New York based artist Wong Kit Yi's (Ali) project sees the artist pose as an investment broker and engage with a group of patrons to purchase futures contracts to help fund a residency in the North Pole in the *North Poles Futures* series (2015).³³ Patrons are asked to select a date and time, an unusual word, and a colour, which would be used in the creation of the work. The contract involves some initial risk, in case the artist doesn't return from the North Pole or does not manage to successfully create the works. The patrons take an active role in contributing to the work, where the idea of "futures" plays in time, in culture and in relationship to the economics of the artwork. The artist explores these ideas conceptually in a video created for the follow-up exhibition *Futures Again* (2017) at P! Gallery.³⁴ Wong embodies the dual identities of artist and curator, one which creates the artwork and the other who takes care of the management and finances of the artists' practice. These dual identities cannot be thought separately today from a practice where the economics and modes of production and distribution become an intrinsic part of the work itself. Here Wong's financial model is conceived as an art project and conceptually present within the artworks produced. It has created a functioning financial model to engage patrons in the process of the creation of the artist's work with possibilities for ongoing involvement and investment in the practice over time.

These projects engage with financial economies in which artists take control of the terms of their work and practice. It provides a framework to enable them to continue producing their work through building a shareholders committee, investment fund or futures contracts to ensure the viability of the art practice in the future. Incorporating becomes a means to define an organisational structure that works in the interest of the artists involved. While some projects dealing with blockchain do not yet function economically, they provide a vision for how the technologies could be developed in the future. Wong Kit Yi's project is simultaneously an artwork and a functioning financial model that can support future developments of the practice. To incorporate as an economic entity is just one way to productively explore how the economy can better work in the interest of art, artists and the wider community.

Conclusion

The ways in which artists begin to transform the economies in which they operate is through practice; by navigating the economic realm as both intrinsically and extrinsically part of their practice, as art project and as a reflection of their own economic condition. Artists explore multiple modes within the greater economy that begins to extend beyond the art world itself. Artistic practice begins to take on different shapes: as brands, agencies and start-ups operating across art, design and creative industries. Beyond simply conceptual or aesthetic explorations, economies can work productively for artists when they are able to balance both commercial aspects of their business and experimental, conceptual, social, or political aspects of their practice. Speculative projects introduce imaginaries for how these new technologies or approaches can be developed in the interest of artists. Some artists, like Wong Kit Yi, are able to simultaneously address the concepts of finance to function both conceptually and aesthetically as well as economically in their practice. To have more control economically is to also have more artistic control over the individual work and overall practice.

To approach different modes of practice in the contemporary economy begins to create an image of the artist not as a precarious worker at the throes of the market, but one that contributes to defining the terms and conditions of their work. Art is not beyond the market, but intrinsically tied to it and the market can be considered to be part of the artistic process itself. Whether they are regarded as such or not, economic systems also dictate the form of artists' practices. To resist precarity is to find other means to support one's practice. To be in control economically or financially without depending on particular funding requirements also introduces certain artistic freedoms. To incorporate as a company can be a delimitation of the self, but it can also be a means to work more collaboratively, to create a separation from the individual. It is a means to experiment with economic forms that can support a community and common interests, and to gain visibility and validation within capitalist societies. In every field there are those who are more experienced, stable and savvy than others. It becomes a moral responsibility to support others and provide for those with fewer opportunities, ones that can enable them.

Forms of incorporating as a business become a means of pragmatic functioning in society, but can also be a way of working towards an "Affirmative politics [that] combines critique with creativity in the pursuit of alternative visions and projects."³⁵ It is not to resist the market, but to find ways to operate through the methods it provides, and can also begin to shift practices away from profit maximisation and self-interest and towards an ethics of collective responsibility. For Barad agencies are a process of collective organisation that is open to the future: "Agency is the enactment of iterative changes to particular practices through the dynamics of intra-activity."³⁶ To consider organisation not as fixed, but in a constant state of renegotiation between forces allows for the emergence of new relations and practices beyond the replication of self-interested profit or states of precarity. "Particular possibilities for acting exist at every moment, and these changing possibilities entail a responsibility to intervene in the world's becoming."³⁷ Incorporating becomes one option that in practice can be part of a process that is open to changing possibilities. Agencies emerge as a collective process of organising in ways that can operate in the interest of art, artists and the wider community.

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