

Exit, Unworking & Utopia. An Essay on Three Potential Methods of Resistance

Abstract: This text examines three possible forms of resistance in art and politics: unworking, exit and utopia. It hints that all three modes to resist are limited in their execution by a system where critique only perpetuates that what it is trying to negate, and that a reconsideration of how resistance can take form is a necessity in the present neoliberal condition of art. Resistance as a rupture is insufficient; what else could be considered to move beyond the linear scope between one extreme and another? This could open up possibilities to create new criteria for an alternative institutionality in both art and politics.

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INTRODUCTION

Setting the stage for disagreement

*This leads me to a methodological remark: disagreement is not only an object of my theorization. It is also its method. Addressing an author or a concept first means to me setting the stage for a disagreement, testing an operator of difference. This also means that my theoretical operations are always aimed at reframing the configuration of a problem.*¹

What Rancière points out in this extract is the importance of resistance, as a theory, and as a method. But how do you resist something? Resistance being the struggle ‘to reframe the configuration of a problem’ because you disagree. And what form can this struggle take? Amanda Beech questions in her essay *Art and its’ Science*: “What is the distinction between the paradigm of art as we know it, and another category of art [...]?”² And how is that other category of art linked to the political? Ideas of resistance could play an important role in thinking through these questions. This essay will introduce three potential forms of resistance in both art and politics. ‘Exit’ from contemporary art, as talked about by writer Suhail Malik in his lecture series *On the Necessity of Art's Exit from Contemporary Art*. A second form of resistance could be ‘unworking’, a concept established by philosopher Maurice Blanchot. For him, art and literature try to become the work, but fail at the point they succeed. Therefore in order to ‘work’, the work should remain in an infinite impasse of ‘unwork’. The third possible means of resistance is in the conception of ‘utopia’. Not in a standard interpretation of an ideal future-to-come, but in philosopher François Laruelle’s idea of utopia as immanent in the here and now. Laruelle sees utopia as a method, not as a narrative or the fantasy of an alternative world.

¹ Jacques Rancière, “The Thinking of Dissensus. Politics and Aesthetics” In: *Reading Rancière: Critical Dissensus*, ed. by Paul Bowman and Richard Stamp (London, New York: Continuum International Publishing Group 2011), p. 1-17. Text via chtodelat.org, <http://goo.gl/10VS0C> (accessed Nov. 14, 2014).

² Amanda Beech, "Art and its 'Science'." In *Speculative Aesthetics*, ed. by Robin Mackay, Luke Pendrell and James Trafford (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2014), p. 9-18.

1 EXIT

Anything can be Art

'Surrender to it, and call it culture'

MF: John, wouldn't you say that what we're dependent on, we call reality, and what we don't like, we consider an intrusion in our life? Consequently, I feel that what's happening is that we're continually being intruded upon.

JC: But that would make us very unhappy.

MF: Or we surrender to it, and call it culture.

JC: Call it culture?

MF: Or whatever.³

Radio Happenings is a conversation between John Cage and Morton Feldman that took place between July 1966 and January 1967 in New York City. The talks are intensely serious and very humorous at the same time, ranging from culture to art and the radio, music and politics; nothing is kept from the radio audience. The passage used here is the opening paragraph of the recording. A bit further on in the recording, Morton Feldman explains where the question came from: at one point he found himself at the beach where a nearby radio was "blaring out rock'n' roll."⁴ That noise made the whole beach experience so unpleasant, that he had to divert himself through thinking "of the sun and the sea as a lesser evil."⁵ Cage says that he made amends with the radio as an intrusion of the environment, through considering that they probably are just playing his work, which allows him to listen to it with pleasure.

For Feldman, his thoughts are the reality, and the environment – the sun, the sea and the radio - are an intrusion of that reality. Cage comes up with a remark by composer Erik Satie: "What we need is a music which will not interrupt the noises of the

³ This extract is taken from the transcription of the sound recording.

John Cage and Morton Feldman, *Radio happenings I-V* (Cologne: MusikTexte, 1993), p. 11.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

environment”. This reverses Feldman’s thinking; “the reality is the environment. What you want to do in it is an intrusion”. “And”, Cage adds, “finally, the work of an artist, for instance, is it not an incisive intrusion? Because, for heaven’s sake, it didn’t exist until the artist does it.”⁶

Cage’s point is clear: art is an intrusion of reality because it has the capacity to make an incision in that reality. But what if we replace Feldman’s ‘thoughts’ by ‘art’, because his thinking would eventually lead to a composition, and see them as constantly being intruded upon by reality. Then art would constantly suffer from reality, at sunny beaches, with sandy toes.

Who is right or wrong in this talk is of no importance, it is the affirmed paradox that’s interesting, namely that art needs non-art in order to exist; somehow material is being drawn from life. Whether it is through reality’s intrusion on the artist’s thinking, or a voluntarily artistic surrender to it. In a more recent dealing with the issue, French philosopher Jacques Rancière writes in *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetic* that art has at its centre a heterogeneous sensible. This term is “the identity of art and non-art”. “When art ceases to be non-art, it is no longer art either.”⁷ Marcel Duchamp instigated the dissensus of ‘this is art and this is not art.’ Before him, the avant-garde guaranteed a constant production of ‘new’ art through negating whatever was before. Duchamp’s readymade broke that chain by stating that there is no more distinction between art and non-art.⁸ Rancière explains this via Hegel’s thought that “[w]hen prose is only prose, there is no more heterogeneous sensible.”⁹ The heterogeneous sensible is a concept that combines elements that don’t belong together; just like democratic politics, it is a place for dissensus.

When art is always at the same time non-art, there is the risk of everything becoming artistic. Rancière gives the example of art exhibitions that put copies of commodities and advertizing on display; assuming that these artefacts offer a radical critique via the fact

⁶ Cage and Feldman, *Radio happenings I-V*, p.13

⁷ Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London, New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), p. 124.

⁸ This will be further explored in the following chapter

⁹ Rancière, *Dissensus*, p. 124.

that they are the reduplications of commodities.¹⁰ Irony – a figure that is often used in this kind of art – only repeats the problem, and in that way confirms its existence. It doesn't undo nor question the spectacle produced in both life and art.¹¹ In the coming chapters art and politics will be treated as two sides of the same coin in finding means to resist centralization and institutionalization informed by neo-liberalism.

The Exit from Contemporary Art

'Does anyone ever get out of here?'

Carel Willink, a Dutch magical-realist painter, wrote an essay in 1950 about how painting found itself in a critical moment. In the text, he fulminates against modern, abstract art and criticizes abstract-expressionists for not having any traditional *métier* or expertise. Another realist painter, Gerard Jan van Bladeren, read the essay in 1986 and decided that something had to be done: the artworld had to be woken up by a necessary act of resistance. The Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam was the place, the abstract painting *Who's afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue III* by Barnett Newman the recipient. With a Stanley knife, he cut four horizontal and four vertical slits in the canvas.

The restoration of the piece was a long process executed by an American firm called Goldreyer. Four years later, the painting finally returned to Amsterdam only to appear unrestored and fully repainted with three layers of opaque alkyd – a type of paint used mostly for window frames. Furthermore, it was not done with linseed oil and a brush, but with a paint roller. This resulted in an elongated, highly expensive court case, and eventually the city of Amsterdam gave up. A settlement was arranged: Amsterdam was not allowed to be critical about the restoration any longer - the director of the Stedelijk Museum had called the painting handicapped. In 2010, the story surfaced again because there was a demand for the reexamination of the restoration. Final conclusion: the new layer of paint did differ from the original one. And Goldreyer had indeed painted two layers of varnish on top of the red paint, with a paint roller.

¹⁰ Rancière, *Dissensus*, p. 128.

¹¹ "The whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. All that once was directly lived has become mere representation." Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1995), p. 12.

In the mean time, Van Bladeren, the cutter, is released from prison and still obsessed with *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue III*. He believes to have created a masterpiece through destroying it and, after hearing of the restoration, wants to reinstall his work. In 1997, he returns to the Stedelijk, but the painting is nowhere to be found. However, *Cathedra*, another work by Newman, caught his eye and he attacks this one instead. Now the knife cuts three long horizontal and two short vertical incisions. Van Bladeren believes that destroyed abstraction is the best art there is.¹²

Van Bladeren was held responsible for his actions, but also modern art was to blame. The action was seen as an artistic critique on the reactionary nature of museums for still installing this type of paintings. There were speculations that the value of the painting would even increase because of the damage done. 'It is a turning point in the history of modern art', so it was declared, 'it should remain on the wall in its current state of destruction'. The destruction was received as a political act of resistance with an artistic meaning and as an artistic act of resistance with a political meaning – seeing that both parties were found guilty.

If – as noted in the previous chapter - anything can be art, and therefore everything that is spectacular can be art, than anything that is destructive and passive could be art as well. This reminds that the concept of resistance as a method to 'make' art could be misunderstood for a passive modus, a form of refusal that is completely unproductive. The question is how one can differentiate between refusal as industrious, or refusal as an excuse to be destructive, or lazy? It's important to be aware of this possibility; it can easily fall into the trap of gratuitously being abused as a synonym for passivity. And what about resistance as an illusion to keep things going out of a mood of defeatism? Look at all the strategies: disengagement, exit, boycott, not-working, un-working, un-authoring, retreating, withdrawing, operating in the margins, ... They seem to be only focused on one illusion: How do we get out of here? And how do we get out of here fast? But does anyone ever get 'out of here'? In *The Iceman Cometh*, a play by American playwright Eugene O'Neill, all the characters repeatedly say: tomorrow we'll stop drinking; tomorrow we'll do better. They create an illusion to maintain passive so they don't have to take

¹² The narrative follows the Dutch version that appeared in De Volkskrant. Just Fontein, "Reconstructie: Het Bizarre Verhaal van Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue III", *De Volkskrant*: Sept. 19, 2013. <http://goo.gl/36d6Jb> (Accessed Nov. 14, 2015).

responsibility for badly made choices in life, combined with excessive alcoholic consumption. At one point in the play, the bar folks decide to take responsibility for once, and they actively try to make their different illusions real. Obviously it ends in disastrous failure, along with sadness and even more drinking. Is it a necessity to keep this illusion of another and better possible real alive, to avoid ever dealing with reality?

According to Suhail Malik, this illusionary form of resistance is exactly what perpetuates the system. His tactic of resistance could easily be mistaken for a passive struggle, namely a strategy of exit. Suhail Malik claims that contemporary art is post-negational art. This is why contemporary art cannot seriously contest injustice, because if you contest or resist injustice you negate the injustice¹³. So what then is needed to allow for art's contestation of the wrongdoings of the world? Malik vouches for an exit from contemporary art.

In his lecture series *On the Necessity of Art's Exit from Contemporary Art, Part 3: A History of Negations*, Malik elaborates on a possible exit. He uses art as a generic term, in order to "identify a global logic of art" and starts off with two claims: contemporary art has to bear the maxim of anarcho-realism and contemporary art is indeterminate. Anarcho-realism searches for an art that is more real, because contemporary art is a shortcoming of what art should be; it is too institutional and too academic. They try to create a truer contemporary art through negating anything characteristic of contemporary art. Malik notes that negating the aspects of contemporary art will only perpetuate contemporary art, for it adopts anything that tries to negate it, as in an endless flux. In this way, the anarcho-realist demand is exactly a contemporary art demand for in the constant negation of it, they produce precisely the thing itself.¹⁴

The other claim is that contemporary art suffers from indeterminacy. The present is heterogeneous, and contemporary art aligns itself to that, and in that way it can be anything; it knows no limitations in material, media, subject, matter, form or presentation, nor in production, exhibition-making or formatting. There is no "definition of content, definition of addressee, definition of criteria" as it is an accurate response to the inconsistency of the present that is accepted as inexplicable. Meaning is always

¹³ Suhail Malik, "On the Necessity of Art's Exit from Contemporary Art. Part 3: A History of Negations." Talk Series, Artists Space: Books & Talks, New York, May 3 – June 14, 2013. <http://goo.gl/99K5eq> (accessed on Jan. 17, 2015).

¹⁴ Ibid.

ambiguous and questions are never expected to get an answer. Contemporary art believes not to have an identity, just like the present; Malik says it does for it has “indefinite characteristics with common features.”¹⁵

Contemporary art is a fetish of the present; we look at it to know what’s the now. But, as a fetish of the present, contemporary art gets in the way of the present and blocks access to the real. Malik’s counter-demand in his lectures is the call for an exit from contemporary art; an exit from both the anarcho-realist maxim and the indeterminacy of contemporary art.¹⁶ In choosing for an exit, Malik moves beyond Rancière’s argument on avoiding consensus and the need for dissensus; that discussion would be one of the anarcho-realists, i.e. a perpetuation of that what’s negated. If it would be possible to pass by the dissensus of ‘this is art and this is not art’, instigated by Duchamp¹⁷, there might be a way to exit contemporary art. This would be an exit from the way art institutions, galleries and biennials have constructed what contemporary art is: indeterminate and containing the anarcho-realists maxim that contemporary art through negation perpetuates what it negates.

Malik says there are two ‘reals’: the super-idealization of the real by the anarcho-realists, and the unidealized present as such. So, in order to exit contemporary art, Malik suggests that we remove ourselves from art that refers to the idealized real, and move towards the present as it is: ‘unreal, insincere, unauthentic’; in other words: artificial. Malik calls art that has exited contemporary art: ex-contemporary art. It’s a practice of negating consensus and dissensus that affirm art as power of negation.¹⁸

Malik exceeds acts of resistance, such as retreat, deterritorialization, disengagement and the option of an in-between-state, by choosing for an exit. He swipes the entire possible discussion of the table. The question is though whether this exit from contemporary art falls again into the trap of using ‘art’ as a proper name?¹⁹ Somehow, the ‘critique’ bites its own tail as it’s critiquing the possibility of critique via critiquing. Can

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Malik states that we have to get out of Duchamp’s model of post-negational art, i.e. that there is no distinction between art and non-art. Malik refers to Thierry De Duve’s book *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge, MA: Mit Press, 1996). This text follows Malik’s interpretation of De Duve’s book.

¹⁸ Malik, “On the Necessity of Art’s Exit from Contemporary Art”.

¹⁹ Thierry De Duve. *Kant After Duchamp*. (Cambridge, MA: Mit Press, 1996), p. 13.

we really fathom what 'the avowal of art in its artificiality' is?²⁰ This artificiality being the reality of art according to Malik. How can we tell the difference between that what perpetuates capitalism, and that what tries to break the power relations without perpetuation? What are the tools necessary to make that distinction? This question refers back to Rancière's concern about the statement that anything can be art, for it transforms easily into plain opportunism.

²⁰ Malik, "On the Necessity of Art's Exit from Contemporary Art".

2 UNWORKING

Unworking as Resistance

'This idleness was also my task, it kept me busy'

On a semantic level, the word resistance means a slowing down or stopping of one material onto another. The brakes of the train resist the rolling nature of the vehicle and therefore prohibit the train from moving forward. Resistance blocks the train's movement and makes it stationary. Since the train is meant to be in motion, resistance is a feature that makes the train negate its purpose. Still, the brakes are crucial in the process of movement, for without resistance there would be no difference between standstill and progress. The train moves exactly because of its resistance. Because of its resistance, something persists. Its 'unworking' makes the train 'work'.

Maurice Blanchot coined the word 'désœuvrement' in *The Unavowable Community (La Communauté Inavouable)*, translated by Lydia Davis to 'worklessness', and by Pierre Joris to 'unworking'²¹. Other possibilities of translation could be idleness or aimlessness, but none of those contain the verb 'to work'. Preferred for this essay is the translation to 'unworking' by Joris. The reason: worklessness seems to refer to something passive, and unworking in its full meaning, all possibilities included, is inherently active.²² Joris notes that the term goes back to a 1952 essay titled *The One Who Was Standing Apart From Me (Celui Qui Ne M'Accompagnait Pas)*, and that Blanchot wrote not before 1969 about the complexity of it in the essay *The Absence of the Book*.²³ Lydia Davis translated *The One Who Was Standing Apart From Me*, but Pierre Joris' earlier translation of the following text is more striking.

²¹ The first part of the *The Unavowable Community: 'The Negative Community'*, is a response to *The Inoperative Community (La Communauté Désœuvrée)* by Jean-Luc Nancy, a work that reflects on the loss of community. The term désœuvrement is contained in the title of Nancy's essay, but it is definitely a Blanchot-word, as Pierre Joris notes in his Preface (22): Blanchot covers while uncovering, reveals while unrevealing, works while unworking.

Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, trans. Pierre Joris (Barrytown: Station Hill Press, 1988).

Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis and Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

²² Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, p. 24.

²³ Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, p. 23.

Though I did not feel tired, I was disoriented and prodigiously idle [désœuvré]; this idleness [désœuvrement] was also my task, it kept me busy: maybe it represented a lull [un temps mort], a moment of giving up and of blacking out on the part of the watcher, a weakness that forced me to be myself all alone. But the empty churning I was caught in had to have another meaning, evoking hunger, evoking the need to wander, to go further, while asking "Why did I come in here? Am I looking for something?" though maybe I was not looking for anything and maybe further on was yet again the same as right here. [...]²⁴

This idleness, or laziness, keeps the protagonist busy without making him lethargic. On the contrary: unworking evokes hunger, the need to wander and the urge to ask questions. This seemingly inert state of activity – a possibility to not do - is a complex position. Blanchot is very adamant that his theory relates to literature specifically, made obvious through the fact that he only refers to writing, not art-making. But ‘unworking’ as a concept could be used in the broader field of art and culture as well.²⁵ Unworking also has a political meaning for Blanchot: In *The Unavowable Community*, he relates the art of writing to politics, and more particularly to communities. For Blanchot, a community is unworking because it is not connected to any institution. Therefore, the community is unavowable, “we touch upon the ultimate form of the communitarian experience, after which there will be nothing left to say, because it has to know itself by ignoring itself.”²⁶

The community is always impossible; there is no steady ground for it. It is built through unworking, and not-doing is an important element in that concept. It’s not about production nor completion, but about “interruption, fragmentation, suspension.”²⁷ Once the community becomes ‘a work’, or working, it reduces itself to certain goals. So, at the point when something, even a friendship between two people - friendship for Blanchot constitutes the ultimate possibility of community - becomes recognized as a community, it seizes to be a community²⁸. We need to be constantly unworking in order not to undo

²⁴ Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, p. 23.

²⁵ Literature, just like film and theater, is categorized traditionally as ‘art’. But since Blanchot writes about literature specifically, it is more useful to make this distinction in order to be able to find a link between unworking and ‘art’, as in contemporary art or fine art.

²⁶ Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, p. 25

²⁷ Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, p. 13, 25.

²⁸ Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, p. 23

the work we've put into the construction of an 'unavowable' community; in order not to undo the presence created in the absence of it.

This idea finds articulation within art; literature for Blanchot: unworking is charged with an artistic significance. At the moment when something is recognized as art, it seizes to be art, as Blanchot famously believes that there is no finished work. Writing for Blanchot is not about producing a book, or a finished text, but about focusing on the relationship, by means of the production of a book, between "the act of writing and the absence of the work."²⁹ Meaning is produced in spite of the work, the author or the medium. This never-ending process of the production of an absence allows to never reach a certain objective, and therefore the work remains unworking. For Blanchot, the "book [is] a ruse by which writing goes toward the absence of the book."³⁰ Unworking is an infinite process of a production of absence of the writer, and of the respective reader(s) for – just like the writer – he/she attributes to the unworking of the work, and this absence produces meaning. The information, experience, and interpretation a reader inserts into the work changes the meaning of the work, and therefore the reader is an essential facet for the infinite process of the unfinished work. The fragment is preferred to the finished work, since the fragment intrinsically seeks its own erasure and ruins the unity or totality of the work.³¹ The artwork comes into existence through a constant unworking; its construction is executed via the medium of the material – whether sculptural, painterly, in the form of video, film, photography, or immaterial – there is an absence formed in a presence, an infinite absence further produced by the viewer.

This endless instability of the work that disables reaching a final point in time and space, reminds of methods of resistance that have a fragmentary and ongoing unrest by nature and are always dynamic. In this chapter, unworking will be appropriated as a possible form of resistance on a political and artistic level. Unworking inherently opposes overproduction and consumption and therefore offers an alternative to capitalism that thrives on too many and too much. In the symbolic realm of art, capitalism is represented in the overproduction of the art object as a commodity. Furthermore, using unworking as

²⁹ Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, p. 23

³⁰ Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 424.

³¹ Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p. 60-61. This book is written in fragments.

a form of resistance allows for a constant renewing. It is not just one action in the shape of a rupture, and then onwards to the next big break. Unworking as a concept has the capacity to quickly shift meaning in a nonlinear way, constantly deviating in all directions.

Beyond Resistance: New Forms of Instituting

Subject to constant transformation

*AND is neither one thing nor the other, it's always in-between, between two things; it's the borderline, there's always a border, a line of flight or flow, only we don't see it, because it's the least perceptible of things. And yet it's along this line of flight that things come to pass, becomings evolve, revolutions take shape.*³²

Stephen Wright notes that “anyone who believes that art, [...], by ‘questioning,’ ‘investigating,’ or otherwise ‘depicting’ some socio-political issue, actually empowers anyone to do anything about it, is actively engaged in self-delusion.”³³ But art keeps on pretending to have the capacity to perform this via its infinite tie to being a representation of the real thing. Political gestures in the arts are often mistaken for real societal action instead of a symbolic representation.³⁴ No better way to introduce a chapter on the search for new forms of institutional critique and instituting than with this disillusion.

Every Belgian child has learned in school that Daniel Auber’s opera *La Muette de Portici* was the instigator of the Belgian Revolution in 1830. It is a social drama about a revolt against the Spanish oppressor in 17th century Naples. At the staging of the opera on a Brussels’ summer night, the aria ‘Amour sacré de la patrie’ (sacred love of the fatherland) moved the public to their nationalist core. The final “aux armes!” was the deathblow and the crowd returned with “Vive la liberté!” As a result, people stormed out of the Royal Theater de la Monnaie in Brussels to fight the Dutch oppressor, and

³² Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchill (London, New York: Verso, 1994), p. 100.

³³ Stephen Wright, *The Future of the Reciprocal Readymade (Use-Value and Art-related Practice)* Apexart, Introduction to a show curated by Stephen Wright, www.apexart.org/exhibitions/wright.htm (accessed June 20, 2015).

³⁴ Ibid.

Belgium became independent from The Netherlands. The opera ended up in the annals as a fully romanticized representation of the Belgian revolution.

The truth in this narrative is suspicious, obviously. Some say it was staged; that rebels were waiting for the aria to start warfare against Willem I. Sure is that under the Dutch domination the poor working class suffered most, but what are the odds that they were actually in the opera? At the same time, it seems hard to imagine that a group of bourgeois men would take up arms against the Dutch. Furthermore, it's unlikely that the revolutionary feelings Auber's opera aroused came out of the blue. Due to a failed harvest people were already hungry and France had recently been through a revolution. The feelings of discomfort were present long before the opera took place, and the repercussions afterwards were as important.³⁵

Although it's very unlikely that the revolution came about because of that opera only, the narrative of art's influence on the minds and hearts of the people lives on. In 2012, De Muntschouwburg decided to restage the piece, but instead of Brussels they chose for the safe-haven of Paris. Safe, because in 2011, the political climate in Belgium would have made it seem like De Muntschouwburg wanted to make a political statement: a plea for a unitary Belgium. Something the opera house did not want to burn its fingers on. Another Belgian revolution on their plate? They would prefer not to.³⁶

There are as many variants and interpretations of the story as there are primary school teachers. But the narrative of an unsatisfied crowd that starts a revolt in their fight for independence, seizes power and installs a new system is a typical and often highly romanticized version of what a revolution could be, was or is. A one-dimensional rupture originated by the proletariat as a cut with whatever existed previously, followed by the installment of an alternative regime is a beautiful thought, but not a very realistic one. Just a rupture is not an option for revolutionary change, for it seems to be impossible to set up an alternative structure in a system that already has a particular way of working. One could mention that it is not about taking over and installing a new system, but about which class is in power; power executed by the working class is better than power in

³⁵ "De Munt Laat 'De Stomme van Portici' Opnieuw Horen", *Cobra.be*, cobra.be/cm/cobra/podium/1.1265078 (accessed May 25, 2015).

³⁶ "De Opera Die België Niet Mag Zien", *VoxEurop.eu*, www.voxeurop.eu/nl/content/article/894681-de-opera-die-belgie-niet-mag-zien (accessed May 25, 2015).

bourgeois hands. But it is still about transferring power to 'better' hands, not to a different kind of hands. Taking power, whoever achieves it, is conforming to a hierarchy already inherently part of the system that was supposed to be annulled. This is clear in the storyline of *La Muette de Portici*: the opera shows how a revolution against an existing power can lead to an alternative rule where the new leader turns out to be a tyrant either way.³⁷

Philosopher and theorist Gerald Raunig stresses in *Art & Revolution* that a revolution is not something that happens sequentially overnight. It is a slow process of building up an essential dynamic, and it's subject to constant transformation. Raunig follows Deleuze and Guattari's notion of revolution that resistance is not a linear movement but a process. Raunig notes that "the revolutionary machine does not function by starting from an origin, mobbing through a sudden break to a different end. It moves across and through the middle, through a rampant and lasting middle, where things pick up speed."³⁸ Resistance is multiple, and responds to an idea of power that is no longer uniform.³⁹

Instead of shifting from power to power, Raunig proposes to look for radically different ways of organizing and instituting that go beyond mere resistance. He sees a refusal to be involved in the system of capital and power as a collaborative practice between artists, thinkers and activists. He does not make a distinction between artists and activists; what's important are the "transitions, overlaps and concatenations of art and revolution" that "become possible for a limited time, but without synthesis and identification."⁴⁰ What is needed, Raunig notes, is a rethinking of institutional critique in the form of an instituent practice. Fact is, when critique becomes too radical, it just won't be seen as art. Activist art is not included in art's canon, unless their radical aspects are removed, to be able to be part of the spectacle.⁴¹

Instituent practice should be a combination of social critique, institutional critique and self-critique, and forms an exodus or flight from the world of the institution. Raunig

³⁷ "De Munt Laat 'De Stomme van Portici' Opnieuw Horen", *Cobra.be*, cobra.be/cm/cobra/podium/1.1265078 (accessed May 25, 2015).

³⁸ Gerald Raunig, *Art & Revolution. Transversal Activism in the Long Twentieth Century*, trans. Aileen Derieg (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007), p. 30.

³⁹ Raunig, *Art & Revolution*, p. 49.

⁴⁰ Raunig, *Art & Revolution*, p. 18.

⁴¹ Raunig, *Art & Revolution*, p. 19.

quotes Paolo Virno when he says that the exodus “transforms the context within which a problem has arisen, rather than facing this problem by opting for one or the other of the provided alternatives.”⁴² This flight doesn’t mean that the individual artist runs off to the studio to make a work disconnected from society. It is about finding new forms at the dead ends of critique. This new form of instituting as exodus should transform “the arts of governing.” It traverses structures through using radical social criticism, self-criticality and by disconnecting from its existence in the field of art and its institutions.⁴³ Institutent practice holds the possibility to change the way of instituting itself, to escape the dominant ways of institutionalization and to look for a new horizon full of possibilities.

This suggestion of instituent practice as an exodus to go beyond just resistance reminds of Suhail Malik’s notion of exit from contemporary art. Perhaps Malik would call this collaboration of people that get together for a limited time a group of anarcho-realists? The ones that try to react to contemporary art as a shortcoming of what art should be with the objective of a truer art, that is less institutional and more real and adequate? Institutent practice might be another one-dimensional proposition under the cloak of a multi-dimensional gathering of artists, thinkers and activists. Even though Raunig borrows the notion of ‘the experimental lines of flight’ from Deleuze, which is focused explicitly on getting rid of the status quo, not to just oppose it. When all these different critical thinkers and makers from diverse fields come together for a limited amount of time to produce engagement, knowledge, opposition, struggle and alternatives, wouldn’t they still be generating thought in and about that same field?

Political activist and theorist Brian Holmes refers to a third movement⁴⁴ in institutional critique that he calls extradisciplinary.⁴⁵ It’s founded on Guattari’s connection between

⁴² Gerald Raunig & Gene Ray, *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice: Reinventing Institutional Critique*, (London: MayFlyBooks, 2009), p. 7.

⁴³ Raunig & Ray, *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice*, p. 11.

⁴⁴ The first wave of Institutional Critique could refer to the artists that were critiquing the institute in the late ‘60s and ‘70s. The canon brings us Michael Asher, Hans Haacke, Marcel Broodthaers and Daniel Buren. Their critique was mainly economic or political and focused on the institution as an entity. The second phase takes place in the late ‘80s and ‘90s with Renee Green, Christian Philip Müller, Fred Wilson and Andrea Fraser. These artists developed the practices of the ‘70s further in combining the economic and political discourse with a growing awareness of the individual interpretation of experiences.

art, and social and political movements that function elsewhere. The projects that are formed in this way cannot be called unambiguously art, since they are rooted in different disciplines including social movements, squats, autonomous universities and politics. It's a change in what was called the public sphere. This "change has transformed the contexts and modes of cultural and intellectual production in the twenty-first century."⁴⁶ For those who no longer yearn to discover an outside of the system, but show an interest in how things are formed in the present in combination with a desire to obstruct constructively in the processes and decisions that shape them.⁴⁷

It is easy to critique without a better proposal, but it seems that this form of reinventing institutional critique is critiquing without consequence, again. It's a continuation of the attribution of a role that eventually creates consensus. On a political level, Rancière writes that citizenship only happens in dissensus, it is created through the ability to rule, and be ruled in turn. An accepted role means social consensus, and a system of consensus is always incomplete. Democracy consists out of the included and excluded members of a community, and politics has to offer a space where these two worlds can come together in dissensus, to avoid the distribution of a role.⁴⁸ At the most abstract level, dissensus is a difference within the same.⁴⁹ An artist whose work, today or in the past, is under the flag of institutional critique, gets sucked up in a circle of trying to think of a method that could create dissensus in the institutional format, perhaps eventually finding a form for it, and next seeing it on display in that exact institutional format. Doesn't reaching that consensus eventually ruin the work? Or at least its intention, seeing that, in its true anti-institutional character, it never aspired to be an institutional monument via means of rebellion in the first place.

Political theorist Chantal Mouffe doesn't make a distinction between the political and the artistic, but sees an aesthetic dimension in the political and a political dimension in art.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Brian Holmes, "Extradisciplinary Investigations. Towards a New Critique of Institutions", *eipcp.net*, eipcp.net/transversal/0106/holmes/en (accessed March 30, 2015).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ David W. Hill, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics: Review*, marxandphilosophy.org.uk/reviewofbooks/reviews/2010/173 (accessed May 2, 2015).

⁴⁹ Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London, New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), p. 1.

⁵⁰ Chantal Mouffe, "Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces", *Artistic Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods*, 2: 2007, p. 4.

She confirms that critique creates a consensus rather than a dissensus. In her agonistic model of democratic politics, Mouffe states that the aesthetic strategies of the counter-culture are exploited by neo-liberalism⁵¹. Just like Malik, Mouffe notes that artistic critique is an important element of capitalist productivity; capitalism neutralizes any critique and therefore criticism perpetuates what it tries to undo. Every new form of critique forms another innovative method to think outside the box. But critical art and artistic activism are important to her, since they try to inspire dissensus via making “visible what the dominant consensus tries to obscure.”⁵² Mouffe does not believe that “artistic activism could, on its own, bring about the end of neo-liberal hegemony.”⁵³ It has to be linked to the political fundamentals of society.

In her article *Strategies of Radical Politics and Aesthetic Resistance*, Mouffe states that asking the question whether there is an artistic strategy in politics and a political strategy in art supposes that “artists and cultural workers can no longer play a critical role in society, because they have become a necessary part of production.”⁵⁴ This remark is key, for if all criticism is subsumed by capitalism as a part of production, how can critique adhere to its ontology? Especially when talking about art as a place to experiment with possible alternatives to the existing system in both art and politics.

This could refer back to unworking as a form of resistance: it inherently resists any form of production and consumption since it never works towards a final product. It allows for a nonstop reviewing and redefining of impossible solutions that disappear once they come about.

⁵¹ Mouffe, “Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces”, p. 1.

⁵² Mouffe, “Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces”, p. 4.

⁵³ Mouffe, “Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces”, p. 5.

⁵⁴ Chantal Mouffe, “Strategies of Radical Politics and Aesthetic Resistance”, *truthisconcrete.org* truthisconcrete.org/texts/?p=19 (accessed on January 15, 2015).

3 UTOPIA

Where is our Desert?

No more castles in the sky

Foucault says in his lecture *What is Critique* that “being governed” can never be detached from the question “how not to be governed?”⁵⁵ It is a continuous question, so it doesn’t mean: “we do not want to be governed, and we do not want to be governed *at all*”; but rather: “how not to be governed *like that*, by that, in the name of those principles, with such and such an objective in mind and by means of such procedures, not like that, not for that, not by them.”⁵⁶ And in this, according to Foucault, we could find the critical attitude. Mere words, for how can we disconnect from institutionalized governing?

Institution is used here as a generic term, and can refer to either art institutions or any instituted structure in society. In the previous chapters, we discussed the exit from contemporary art and unworking as an act of resistance, both aspiring to find a method to move beyond resistance. But all these acts do not have the capacity to create a necessary presence in the absence of moving beyond, since that absence cannot be determined. These are days of abundance where societal overproduction and overconsumption is embodied in an overload of art’s organizations, collaborations and self-organized artist collectives siding with the mainstream artworld’s museums, galleries and biennials. Where is that alleged ‘desert’ of possibilities, where criticism, or post-criticism, is constructive and reclaims productivity without being exploited by capitalism immediately? Where is this absence that validates “[t]he art of not being governed like that and at that cost”⁵⁷ and therefore avoids institutional capture? And the use of the interrogative ‘where’, might as well be replaced by: ‘what’, ‘when’, ‘how’, or ‘who’ is our desert?

This question has no straight answer, but what’s worrying is that one can incessantly talk about forms of resistance, but it remains one-dimensional in its execution. Only on a

⁵⁵ Michel Foucault, “What is Critique?”, *What is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Questions and Twentieth Century Answers*, ed. by James Schmidt (California: University of California Press, 1997), p. 28.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Foucault, “What is Critique”, p. 29.

philosophical level it seems to have the capacity to take on a more complex attitude than just another reproduction under a different entry. In this longing for a break with the present state of society and the arts, and the desire to see it replaced by an alternative version, the notion of utopia as a form of resistance could come to mind. Not utopia as some imaginary state of being in a perfect future, but as the future-still-to-come that needs to be formatted according to certain concepts like equality, possibilities and freedom from neoliberal hegemonies. It is utopia as François Laruelle defines it: not as something transcendent, but as something immanent. Laruelle's key concept is non-philosophy, which is built on 'the absurd', as the 'Real'. Standard philosophy functions on the level of the real that is mistakenly seen as the Real, non-philosophy departs from a 'utopia of the Real'.⁵⁸ Utopia is not a non-place disconnected from the world we inhabit, his utopia is a non-world fully rooted in the present; it is completely real. According to Laruelle, insufficiency is absolutely crucial to utopia: "We are not saying one has to live according to a well-formed utopia... Our solution lies within an insufficient or negative utopia. The point is not to construct bigger and better castles in the sky, transcendental and sufficient for all. Rather, utopia is always finite, generic, immanent, and real."⁵⁹

Key to Laruelle's utopia is that he uses it as a method; a non-standard method for it's a technique, and not a fictional narrative or an image. It's a refusal to create alternative worlds, no 'bigger and better castles in the sky'. Fiction is generally seen as a creative force, generating something like a narrative or image. Fiction to Laruelle is 'non-expressive and non-representational', it always occurs in an immanent and real way, not as an imaginary representation of something else.⁶⁰ In *Photo-Fiction*, Laruelle writes about non-standard aesthetics, and mentions philo-fiction. Fiction philosophy according to media-theorist Alexander Galloway which is "a philosophical artistic genre that strives to make a work with pure and abstract thought, but not to create concepts parallel to artistic works."⁶¹ According to Galloway, this refusal to create alternative worlds is exactly what makes Laruelle a utopian thinker, "for his non-standard world is really a non-world, just as utopia is defined as 'non-place.' To refuse the philosophical decision

⁵⁸ François Laruelle, *Dictionary of Non-Philosophy*, trans. Taylor Adkins (Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2013), p. 166-167.

⁵⁹ Alexander Galloway, "Laruelle and Art", *continent.*, 2.4: 2012, p. 235.
<http://goo.gl/ilz45e> (accessed May 25, 2015).

⁶⁰ Galloway, "Laruelle and Art", p. 234.

⁶¹ François Laruelle, *Photo-Fiction, a Non-Standard Aesthetics*, trans. Drew S. Burk, (Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2012), p. 6.

is to refuse the world, and thus to discover the non-standard universe is to discover the non-place of utopia.⁶² Could the use of utopia as an immanent method hold the possibility to avoid institutional capture? And how can the insufficient non-place of utopia relate to art?

To Laruelle, only photography produces a fiction that is real in the only mode it can be: through its essence – “an essence which, yet, is in its turn absolutely distinct from it and not conditioned by it.” Photography has its own intention and is disconnected from philosophy because it happens in immanence. The photo to Laruelle is not inscribed in the World, and does not create oppositional thought to try to develop alternative worlds.⁶³ Photography can escape institutional capture; it remains abstract and disconnected from philosophy since it’s immanent. But what else can?

In the play *Liefhebber* by the Dutch playwright Gerardjan Rijnders, the main character is a theater critic, called Lover (*Liefhebber*). After another highly disappointing performance he comes home, decisive to never go to the theater ever again, to not write any reviews any longer, no Ibsen, no Brecht and no Shakespeare. He’d rather go to China, Chile, Bali and Mongolia. He’d rather have cancer; he’d rather be dead. But never will he ever see another show. He blames the theater for not having any relation with real life drama, for there is drama everywhere, except on stage. He starts ranting about the contemporary theater-theater, the so-called art-theater that has nothing to do with reality. He sees himself as a socially engaged being, a little sentimental even, but not even him the theater can thrill. While continually furious about a reality that he compiles out of newspapers, radio and television reports, Lover does not see the real life drama that is happening in his own living room. His son Peter drinks from a vase, eats the flowers, burps, farts, masturbates, takes a heroine shot, smashes the television and the radio, fucks his mother, strangles his mother and kills himself. Lover does not react to any of this, and has decided to call his editor to resign. Whether he actually does that is left open.

⁶² Galloway, “Laruelle and Art”, p. 236.

⁶³ François Laruelle, *The Concept of Non-Photography*, trans. Robin Mackay (New York & Falmouth: Sequence Press & Urbanomic, 2011), p. 24-26.

The theater is obviously not a place for Laruelle's utopia, for it is merely an account of a narrative, which articulates his idea of utopia. There is no real life drama on the stage, as it is a fictionalized version of reality. But Liefhebber does complain about the theater for lacking any real life drama, whilst missing all the real life drama in reality. As an extra, the text is performed in a theater, where it again becomes fiction. To Laruelle, human thinking doesn't link with the world but is "is a direct clone of the real."⁶⁴ Therefore human thinking could be directly linked to utopia. Theater does nothing but construct a clone of the real that doesn't necessarily aim at creating an alternative or different world. Perhaps it could also offer this immanent utopia to avoid institutionalization? There is something essential about that moment when the actress is about to say her lines whilst the audience is in the space, thrilled with anticipation. Even though the words produced are fictional in a generic way, not in Laruelle's non-representative way, the moment when they are uttered has something of immanence, a clone of the real, with its own intention and freed from philosophy.

Instituting in a utopian form can be proposed as an insufficient hypothesis without the creation of an 'alternative'. Herein we could take agency of whatever governs us, and acknowledge that perhaps through leaving, exiting or withdrawing, we confirm the power of whatever oppresses us. Could working inside and alongside an institution be the ultimate form of resistance? And should that happen in idleness: a non-active but neither passive situation; an ultimate version of Rancière's being and not being? Could it be the completely insufficient, but only way of responding to Foucault's 'not be governed *like that?*' If one is idle and doesn't care, one cannot provide the critique an institution would want. But is not-caring utopian?

The question 'where is our desert' seems an unanswerable mainstay; a place where we won't be governed like that and at that cost, and where we can avoid institutional capture. If that utopian desert is in the real, we need to look out for our own silent corners and alleys of scarcity.

⁶⁴ Galloway, "Laruelle and Art", p. 235.

The Hollow Men

The refusal to create an alternative world

Between the idea

And the reality

Between the motion

And the act

Falls the Shadow

For Thine is the Kingdom

Between the conception

And the creation

Between the emotion

And the response

Falls the Shadow

Life is very long

Between the desire

And the spasm

Between the potency

And the existence

Between the essence

And the descent

Falls the Shadow

*For Thine is the Kingdom*⁶⁵

This excerpt from *The Hollow Men* hints at the impossibility of reconciliation, which doesn't mean a lack of potential. We keep on wavering on the threshold of insolvability, of dissensus, and perhaps it is on that poetic threshold, where the shadow falls, that established structures can be investigated, revolutions come about, resistance

⁶⁵ Excerpt from T.S. Eliot: *The Hollow Men* www2.bc.edu/john-g-boylan/files/thehollowmen.pdf (accessed May 25, 2015).

flourishes. The shadow creates a thick darkness, hence the falling, but with the potential to find a match.

In the final paragraph of his book *Potentialities*, philosopher Giorgio Agamben writes: “Gabriel’s dark wing is the eternal scale keeping the best of all possible worlds carefully balanced against the counterweight of all impossible worlds.”⁶⁶ That shadow casted in T.S. Eliot’s poem could be the dark wing of the archangel Gabriel, the black veil between potency and impotency. The question Agamben asks in the chapter *On Potentiality*, is what happens if one chooses *not* to do? He explains it through the figure of the poet, whom has a *potential* to write poetry. However, the poet can also decide to not bring that potential into actuality and not make a work. The poet is potential insofar that he/she has the potential to not write poetry.⁶⁷ All potentiality is impotentiality and ‘artist’ is an empty concept; one has to invent it in combination with the option of saying ‘I’d rather not’; therefore potentiality makes one an artist and not an artist at the same time. “What is essential is that potentiality is not simply non-Being, simple privation, but rather *the existence of non-Being*, the presence of an absence.”⁶⁸ In the “possibility of privation”, if you can do but don’t do it, power is constructed.⁶⁹ And although comparing Agamben to Blanchot is problematic, for Agamben believes in the figure of the artist as the one that can choose to do or not do, whereas Blanchot does away with the artist/author, this presence of an absence could be said to have a connection to unworking, as all works of art aspire to be the work, and fail through succeeding. Through the absence of the work, meaning is produced, further developed by the viewer.

On the threshold between to do and not to do, Bartleby the Scrivener wanders⁷⁰. He never says yes or no; Bartleby says: ‘I would prefer not to’. That answer is not one-dimensional, it’s highly ambiguous. He does not create a rupture by saying I cannot, but a slow understanding of the fact that he can, but actually won’t. It’s the possibility of privation that Bartleby’s going for. He balances on the threshold between possibility and

⁶⁶ Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (California: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 271.

⁶⁷ Agamben, *Potentialities*, p. 179.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Agamben, *Potentialities*, p. 181.

⁷⁰ *Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street* is a short story written by Herman Melville in 1853. Bartleby is a clerk who works on Wall Street and executes his job well. One day he decides to respond to requested tasks by saying ‘I would prefer not to’. This potential refusal continues further and further throughout the story until he prefers not to eat, and dies because of starvation.

impossibility whilst peering through the feathers of the black archangel's wing. Art theorist Thierry de Duve writes:

It is not only that contradictions cannot be solved; it is that they ought to remain unsolved. Their irresolvableness makes them vulnerable to further contradictions and thus keeps open the possibility of reconciliation as a potential.⁷¹

Art and politics could perhaps find a space of alteration on the threshold of a contradiction. But can we actualize this in-between-state, or does it exist only on the level of art and philosophy?

⁷¹ Thierry De Duve, "Resisting Adorno, Revamping Kant", In: *Art and Aesthetics after Adorno* (Berkeley: The Townsend Center for the Humanities University of California, 2010), p. 256.

CONCLUSION

The line from A to B becomes an ellipsis

In a recent interview, a reporter asks PSG footballer Zlatan Ibrahimović about not giving any passes. Zlatan replies swiftly: 'And you know better football than me?' 'No', the journalist stutters. 'So why're you talking?' The man speculating about what happens on the field is taken aback by the man actually on the field, because what on earth would a journalist know that Ibrahimović doesn't know about a game of football? Only those who are in the game know the game.

Certainly, this example should be taken with a pinch of salt, but when football is not your main field of research, but art is, this account could be used as a metaphor. The outsider speculating incessantly about what happens on the field but never gets to experience what it is really like, is often thought of as the art critic, for example, or the artist-as-researcher, maybe, or the dissatisfied artist, urgently looking for ways to escape the field, ... or whoever else that tries to uphold an 'unusual' position. Some skepticism is essential here, for art isn't football, and doesn't anything that suggests or discusses art hold the capacity to eventually be art? The art-arena allows for forms of research that are not possible in any other field, and it allows for disagreement, dislike and even apathy, without exclusion.

Artists are picky wanderers, and therefore most welcome because any critique of the field of art is interesting to the field of art. With open arms, art welcomes the saboteurs, dissidents and pirates that could possibly create new waves of criticism and upheaval, and perhaps subsequently: art. The best thing is: you can hang out, attend the schools, build the exhibitions, and receive the funding, without necessarily ever 'producing' anything. This is exactly where the nothing you produce becomes interesting to art, for that nothing might be art too; it allows for discussion, and things can get appropriated and experienced and liked. The art world(s) is often seen as an epitome of the bigger, global world. A mirror of the present state we live in, which is unlimited, chaotic and indeterminate, and therefore art can be unlimited, chaotic and indeterminate as well.

The saboteurs in the arts are many; finding forms and ways to resist the field of contemporary art, and critique present-day society, is a popular topic of art-production. I am part of that group as well. The topic of this text came about through my artistic

research in different forms of resistance, keeping in mind that resistance today has a certain kind of reactionary sadness to it. Within my practice I attempt to find seemingly trivial corridors through thought experiments that could make it possible to go beyond resistance. These could be seen as mechanisms to deal with neoliberal society manifest within the contemporary artworld, or an attempt to not fall into the traps of an action being merely symbolic, or being absorbed by the exact system it is reacting to - as seen in practices like institutional critique, the so-called activist's (artists-activists) practice, the multiple artist's collectives, self-organized galleries and temporary art spaces, and even the artists that openly appropriate critical gestures or activist aesthetics in order to make art. The question asked in the case of the latter is where actual critical interest is replaced by opportunism? Or possibly this question could be repeated for anyone that takes on a critical position. It is clear that even those who try to escape, or to be critical, or those that try to think about alternative forms, can't really execute it. And instead, paradoxically, perpetuate the unlimited character and the neoliberal agenda art copied from the larger world it survives in.

In that larger world, somehow, dissidents are being loved as well. Perhaps a bit superseded, but one could say that inventiveness and initiative come into existence at the point of a refusal to follow the prescribed paths. The values people fought for in the sixties – such as authenticity, autonomy and individualism – have been appropriated by the neoliberal creative industries and are the norm for a thinking-outside-the-box mentality today. An artist is often called a creative entrepreneur, as most of the practice of an artist runs like a small business, often according to the same legal status as a company, or because the artist works for a company in the so-called 'creative industry'. Most artists take this – a massive amount of paperwork, brain-smothering restaurant jobs or endless days at the office - on as a necessary evil, but the question that comes up is what defines being an artist then, since in labor terms, artists take on the same jobs and legal parameters as non-artists. When every artist can take the position of the non-artist, can everybody be an artist then? And where does labor stop being the mere real thing and become art? Resistance to the arts, or more specific, the contemporary arts, can never be disconnected from a refusal to go along with society as a whole. Not in a sort of hermit-like passive withdrawal from life in total, but a thinking through possibilities to oppose neo-liberalism. Seeing the close relation between the art world and the real world, art might have the capacity to think through concepts and ideas

about society or the 'real' that would not be possible in any other field of research. Perhaps.

On the spectrum from creative industry to ivory tower there's surely more than just these two extremes. Blanchot declared that literature only begins when literature becomes a question, and therefore there is no finished work. Even though art and literature are somewhat diverse, the same could be assumed: art begins when it becomes a question, or even, resistance only starts when it becomes a question. The inaccessible way out might exactly lie there where the spectrum becomes a question and the straight line from A to B becomes an ellipsis, like in playwright Harold Pinter's work. Pinter often incorporates an ellipsis, a 'pause' or a 'silence' in the middle of a sentence as a break for the characters, the audience, the actors and the text. It creates an opportunity for the interpreter to speculate on what else could be possible beyond the words, beyond language, without losing the dynamic of the script; there is no clear explanation for the emptiness an ellipsis creates. But it is a necessary element to step away from the linear dialogue, to fall off that straight line: a crucial form of resistance to the text to look for alternative possibilities. Further elaborated, these three dots contain everything and nothing, all and none. It's Agamben's potentiality, Blanchot's unworking and T.S. Eliot's shadow. It's Laruelle's immanent utopia and Malik's exit. The three dots hold the possibility for things to come together: art and life, actuality and potentiality, dream and deed, idea and execution.

To conclude: even though the notion of the ellipsis is a beautiful one, it remains a figure of speech that doesn't hold the key to re-territorialize and break the hierarchical structures institutes place upon contemporary art and society. Perhaps Blanchot's unworking could somehow offer a way to keep resistance dynamic and enduring as a non-linear force. A constant state of trying to balance between several extremes, for when radical goals are met, the fight comes to an end which is comparable to a work of art becoming the work and failing through succeeding. The plans for an alternative disappear; they are only supported until it becomes the desired thing. Once the 'ideal' goals are met, the becoming starts again. It's an infinite continuum of small ruptures and therefore it could hold a new way of instituting – on a political as well as an artistic level - for unworking 'evokes hunger', every time, over and over again.

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