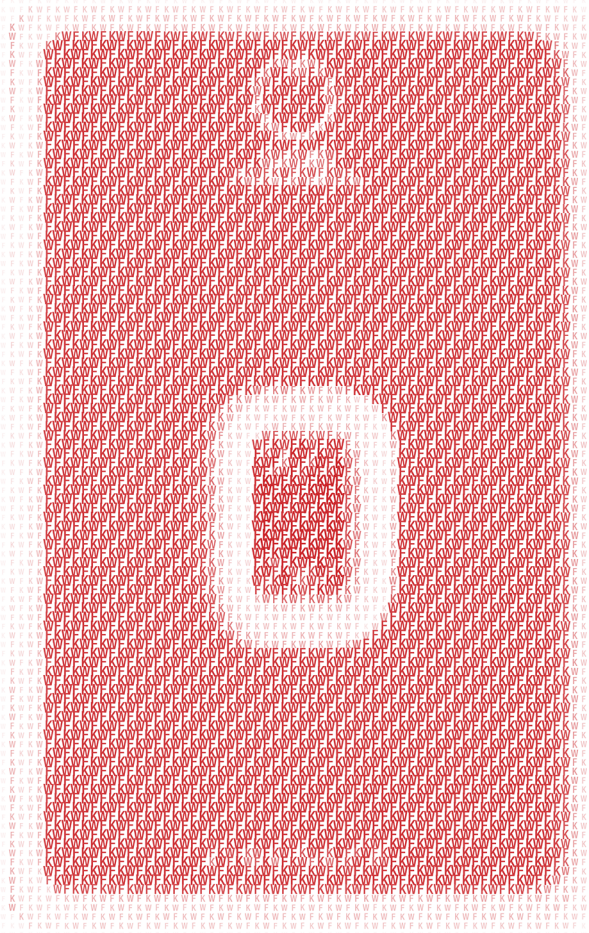


**FKW // ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR  
GESCHLECHTERFORSCHUNG  
UND VISUELLE KULTUR**

**NR. 73 // JÄNNER 2024**



**BACKYARD ECONOMY.**

**PERSPECTIVES ON MARGINALIZATION IN  
CONTEMPORARY ART AND ECONOMY**

# FKW //

NR. 73 // JÄNNER 2024

BACKYARD ECONOMY.

PERSPECTIVES ON MARGINALIZATION IN  
CONTEMPORARY ART AND ECONOMY

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## EDITORIAL

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Liebe Leser\*innen,

die Ausgabe *Backyard Economy. Perspectives on Marginalization in Contemporary Art and Economy* diskutiert künstlerische Erkundungen sozialer Reproduktion. Unter Rückgriff auf marxistisch-feministische Perspektiven und Praktiken der Institutionskritik untersuchen die Autorinnen aus unterschiedlichen disziplinären Perspektiven Motive des Peripheren und des Ausschlusses und fragen, wie in künstlerischen Arbeiten die Dynamiken, die zwischen Repräsentationsformen, der Auseinandersetzung mit den Bedingungen der (ästhetischen) Produktion und den Auswirkungen von Institutionalisierung entstehen, kommentiert und transformiert werden. Diese Ausgabe dokumentiert darüber hinaus die Ausstellung *Backyard Economy*, die 2022 in der Universitätsgalerie der Angewandten Wien von Stefanie Kitzberger und Jenni Tischer zusammen mit Studierenden initiiert wurde.

Wir danken sehr herzlich allen Autor\*innen und Künstler\*innen. Unser Dank geht an Fabian Brunke von Zwo.Acht für die Gestaltung dieser Ausgabe.

Besonders danken möchten wir Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat für ihren Nachruf zum Tod von Kathrin Hoffmann-Curtius am 25. August 2023. Kathrin Hoffmann-Curtius hat mit ihren wichtigen und wegweisenden kunsthistorischen Forschungen FKW immer begleitet – mit ihrem Denken, als Autorin, mit ihren Schriften, die in FKW rezensiert wurden, und nicht zuletzt mit der Festschrift *Übung, ein Stück Papier zu halten*, die herausgegeben von Maike Christadler und Hilla Frübis zu ihrem 60. Geburtstag 1997 in FKW erschienen ist.

Wir gedenken ihrer in aller Verbundenheit und Hochachtung!

Die kommende Ausgabe Nr. 74 wird von Elke Krasny, Sophie Lingg und Claudia Lomoschitz unter dem Titel *Feminist Infrastructural Critique* herausgegeben. Planetarische Lebensbedingungen sind seit der kolonialen, imperialistischen, industriellen, kapitalistischen, patriarchalen Moderne global durch Infrastrukturen bestimmt. Die Ausgabe versammelt Beiträge aus unterschiedlichen geopolitischen Kontexten, die situiert spezifische Methoden infrastruktureller

Bewusstseinsarbeit entwickeln. Der Fokus liegt auf zeitgenössischen künstlerischen und kuratorischen Praxen, die infrastrukturelle Ungerechtigkeiten aufzeigen und emanzipative Infrastrukturarbeit leisten.

Unter dem Titel *Landschaft, Wetter, Kraut und Kritter – Anthropozän-Diskurs und Visuelle Kultur* nimmt die von Kerstin Brandes und Marietta Kesting herausgegebene FKW Nr. 75 die sich gegenwärtig beständig beschleunigende Dynamik des ohnehin nicht unproblematischen Anthropozän-Diskurses in den Blick und fragt danach, wie ein Haraway'sches *staying with the trouble* aussehen könnte – was also Ästhetik, Visuelle Kultur und darauf bezogene Theoriebildung *tun können*, wenn der Verstrickung mit extraktivistischen Praktiken und Bedingungen niemals gänzlich zu entkommen ist. Dazu stellt die Ausgabe eine Nachhaltigkeit theoretischer Konzepte und wissenschaftlicher Erkenntnisse zur Diskussion, indem sie zu einem *neu* Lesen, zu einem Recycling von Theorien, Bildern, Texten und Visualisierungen einlädt. Mit „Landschaft“, „Wetter“, „Kraut und Kritter“ sind in diesem Zusammenhang drei betont lokale und lakonische Kon/figurationen fokussiert, die gegenwärtig in wissenschaftlichen Debatten und Tagesnachrichten gleichermaßen präsent sind.

Die geplante Ausgabe unter dem Titel *Déjà vu? Gender, Holocaust und Subjektivierung in der Erinnerungskultur nach 1945*, herausgegeben von Julia Noah Munier und Mirjam Wilhelm, kann bedauerlicherweise nicht erscheinen.

Wir wünschen viel Vergnügen beim Lesen!

Jenni Tischer und Stefanie Kitzberger als Gastherausgeberinnen und die FKW-Redaktion



## INTRODUCTION //

# BACKYARD ECONOMY – SOCIAL REPRODUCTION, PRECARITIZATION, AND MARGINALIZATION

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The present issue of FKW documents the results of an eponymous teaching collaboration at the University of Applied Arts Vienna, which involved both a seminar and an exhibition that focused on artistic explorations of the notion “social reproduction.” The title is taken from *Backyard Economy I* and *Backyard Economy II* (Diane Germain Mowing) (1974), two filmic works in which the artist, Martha Rosler, draws an intimate connection between reproductive and artistic labor. Our project – which is accompanied and expanded on by four essays, a picture spread of the exhibition, and an artist’s edition in this issue – takes early marxist-feminist theories and approaches of institutional critique as points of departure for investigating how contemporary artistic practices engage with ongoing processes of gendered and racialized devaluation of reproductive labor and the economic conditions of structural invisibility, marginalization, and precaritization inside and outside of the cultural field.

— In this, our perspectives build on recent scholarship on both economy-critical and socially engaged art that has been investigating the role of reproduction in current artistic practices.<sup>1)</sup> Here, our conversations owe much to art theorist Marina Vishmidt’s analysis of the two-fold notion of reproduction. In her text *The Two Reproductions in (Feminist) Art and Theory Since the 1970s*, Vishmidt conceives of (social) reproduction both as a spectrum of tasks largely invisible in the capitalist economy but fundamental for the reproduction of the labor force, and as the “reproduction of the conditions of production” (Althusser) through ideological, material, and institutional structures that perform and reaffirm socio-economic divisions and hegemonies. She contextualizes different strategies of affirmation and refusal in queer feminist art practices that aim for embodied, affective, and formal critiques of reproductive institutions, including the institution of art itself (Vishmidt 2017).

— One central mechanism of the art institution as an institution that maintains and propagates structural inequality (which in turn (re)produces precaritization and marginalization) is examined by literary scholar Leigh Claire La Berge in her book *Wages Against Artwork*. In the latter, she looks at how artists critically

1)

See for instance Dimitrakaki / Lloyd 2015.

respond to the promise of art's autonomy – that is, being a locus of both critique of and freedom from the capitalist imperative to commodify objects and relations, as suggested by the modernist association of freedom with the aesthetic – in the context of the neoliberal shift towards an increased decommodification of labor, as exemplified by the replacement of wage-based work contracts with an economy of freelancing subjects (La Berge 2019). What interests us here in particular is the double economic entanglement that obtains in artistic practices: Whereas its production of (symbolic) value takes place in the realm of non-waged, in most cases precaritized work, the idea of autonomy – which “survives” in a perverted form in the artist as an entrepreneurial subject – is maintained and reproduced in the artwork insofar it feeds into speculation. *Three Card Monte*, a work by artist Constantina Zavitsanos that will be discussed in more detail later in the text, represents a particularly interesting position in this context, as it directly responds to this specific circuit of accumulation and reproduction. Zavitsanos reflects on the valorization of artistic work in relation to accessibility, both as physical accessibility to artworks within the exhibition space and with regard to the monetary prerequisites, and the artist's own participation in (and/or exclusion from) value production.

— Our project furthermore relates to current theorizations of social reproduction in which the analysis of social-economic relations is bound to intersectional analyses that reveal the systemic logic of capital's dependence on racist, heterosexist, ableist, settler-colonial, and other oppressive relations and marginalizations.<sup>2)</sup> Early socialist-feminist campaigns such as *Wages for Housework*<sup>3)</sup> based their critique on the claim that unpaid housework should be recognized as (reproductive) labor.<sup>4)</sup> In this vein, feminist artists such as Mierle Laderman-Ukeles, Martha Rosler, or Mary Kelly also integrated the invisible and unpaid work that women had to perform in the household into their artworks. In performing tasks like cleaning the floors, dusting works in the archives, etc., as forms of artwork. For instance, Mierle Laderman Ukeles famously elevated the status of maintenance work in the art institution in light of the former's integral role in the latter's continued existence as a white cube. By declaring maintenance work to be artwork, she exposed the mystification of artworks and of the idea of artistic production as “societally autonomous,” through which art in turn reproduces the logic that devalues reproductive labor. Laderman Ukeles, on the other hand, confronted different valorizations and devaluations of maintenance work in order to

2)

Social reproduction theory looks at social processes and human relations as the very conditions of existence, where human labor – in Marx's original sense of “the first premise of all human history” – is at the heart of creating or reproducing society as a totality. Against the capitalist treatment (and orthodox marxist understandings) of productive labor for the market as the sole form of legitimate “work” and the naturalization of tremendous amounts of invisible familial and communitarian work to sustain workers, in this theory social reproduction is acknowledged as a central force necessary to sustain the drive for accumulation. Bhattacharya 2017: 2–20.

3)

*The international Wages for Housework campaign*, organized by Silvia Federici, Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Brigitte Galtier, and Selma James in 1972, demanded recognition and payment for female housework.

4)

For an art historical account of these feminist artistic practices see Molesworth 2000: 71–97.

make them visible as preconditions of the institutionalization of art: highlighting, in her performance *Transfer: The Maintenance of the Art Object* (1973), forms of work ranging from naturalized, feminized, and unpaid housework and care work by women artists; to low-waged cleaning and maintenance work by employees of the art institution; to the high-waged maintenance work of artworks by conservators.

— While stressing that capitalist accumulation is inherently dependent on the reproduction of society, second-wave feminism neglected the conditions of paid domestic work based on the exploitation of the labor of black, migrant, or otherwise marginalized women. In contrast – as Susan Ferguson has pointed out – black feminist groups like the Combahee River Collective or Communist Party member and Black Panthers supporter Angela Davis developed analyses of the relations between unpaid and paid reproductive labor that tackled the systemic interlocking of economic marginalization/exclusion, racism, sexism, and class exploitation (Ferguson 2020: 106–119).<sup>5)</sup> However, leftist artist's collaborations like the Berwick Street Film Collective have also tried to highlight the glaring gender and racial inequalities disproportionately affecting women engaged in reproductive labor by interrogating intersectional representations of class struggle and the fight for gender and racial equality. Their film *Nightcleaners* (1975) documents the daily routines of female cleaners at London's Shell building, capturing the precariousness and monotony of their physically demanding, overlooked low-waged work, as well as conversations between the artists and activists and the laborers during their struggle to organize a union. The film can be read as an artistic rendering of the reality of life and work for black, migrant, and white women of the lower class, while simultaneously reflecting on the obvious distance that existed among all parties involved in the production of the film. (Tischer 2024).

— Incorporating these critiques, social reproduction theory traces the interplay of exploitation (the ratio between wages and surplus) and social oppression (irrational structural or interpersonal oppression based on racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, etc.) in order to understand the perpetuated economic and social devaluation of reproductive labor(ers). As philosopher Holly Lewis has pointed out, these dynamics are critical to the maintenance of capitalism: “[t]he dehumanisation and devaluation of groups facilitates downward pressure on wages; it undermines the struggles for state benefits that allow capitalism's ‘surplus populations’ to survive. Gender and racial ideologies

5)

Such an intersectional perspective is developed, for instance, by author and theorist bell hooks. In her book *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* she describes from a black-feminist perspective the experiences of black working-class women who lacked the time to care for their own families, let alone themselves: “I had grown to womanhood hearing about black women who nurtured and cared for white families when they longed to have time and energy to give to their own.” Cf. hooks 2015: 79. At the level of theory, it was the sociologist and art historian Lise Vogel who, from a Marxist-feminist perspective, examined the systemic logic that generates the oppressive conditions under which reproductive work is performed.

lower the value and therefore the costs of reproductive labour, and they pressure women to donate services to the maintenance and development of capitalism's work-force. Oppression is always a material phenomenon" (Lewis 2018: 116). The recent shift from/ expansion of institutional critique to "infrastructural critique" in the art field<sup>6)</sup> has led to a broader conception of the systemic logics of oppression and their negotiation within artistic production as well as the ways in which these hierarchies are maintained by racist and patriarchal practices. It has enabled artists to address, for example, how categories like race act as material structures, "which mediate access to resources, whose withholding is key to the population management, key for efficient extraction – a differentiated management of 'infrastructural coercion' and 'infrastructural neglect,'" as Marina Vishmidt has stated, following Zandi Sherman (Vishmidt 2021: 13–24; Sherman 2021).

— Against this backdrop, the present issue of FKW seeks to explore contemporary artistic practices that aim to challenge the reciprocal logics of exploitation and oppression in late capitalism, and, moreover, to confront their own involvement in the process of value creation. From different disciplinary perspectives, the invited authors discuss ways in which artists reveal the economic preconditions of experiences of marginalization and precaritization. They ask how artistic works comment on and transform the dynamics that arise between forms of representation and engage with the conditions of (aesthetic) production and the effects of institutionalization. The interactions of valorization and devaluation, exploitation and profit within and outside the art field are analyzed with regard to gender-specific coding, racism, ableism, rejectionism, and colonial imprints.

— In her essay *On Some Conditions*, Marina Vishmidt reflects on artworks by Ghislaine Leung and Carolyn Lazard, which infuse the vocabulary of conceptualism with a materialism of dependency. While Ghislaine Leung's artistic practice is based on the fact that the production process of art is itself dependent on reproductive work and other prerequisites that are not visible in the exhibition space (such as sleep, exhaustion, and caring tasks), Lazard's exploration of formal materializations of access and barriers confronts us with questions of how "special conditions" can be rerouted back into aesthetic conceptualization. Vishmidt shows how Leung's and Lazard's respective sculptural practices circle around the dependencies between objects and bodies and trace how the artists address the ways that environments are shaped by needs and requirements through neglect, denial, and/

6)

See for instance Martin Beck et al. 2022, or *Feminist Infrastructural Critique* (forthcoming as an issue of FKW in spring 2024).



or affirmation. In shifting attention towards the – mostly invisible – production processes behind its apparent conditions, and towards questions of how (the exhibition) space is structured by boundaries, the artists formulate a critique of infrastructures rather than of institutions.

— Art historian Rose-Anne Gush analyzes two recent serial-films by Melanie Gilligan entitled *Crowds* (2019) and *Home Together* (2022) as part of the long-term project *Films against Capitalism*, in which the artist uses docu-fiction practices to reflect on the preconditions and effects of the on-going housing crisis with regard to precarious labor in the U.S. care and service industries. Gush develops her arguments around the artistic form of the allegory as it is used by Gilligan to expose capitalist social relations.

— Wasana Handapangoda brings a social scientific perspective into the FKW issue. Through an investigation of the relationships between migrant workers from Sri Lanka and their – mostly female – employers, she explores transnational accumulations of social reproductive labor as an important realm for the production of identities and social inequalities. She shows how in everyday practices and rituals the category of women or concepts of “family” are both differentiated and stabilized by social, political, and economical structures that create “otherness,” resulting in overlapping systems of discrimination and privilege. Migrant female workers – whose low-waged and unwaged work is composed of maintenance work, housework, and taking care of the children, the sick, and the elderly – find themselves bound up in a dynamic of dominance and submission.

— The material conditions under which the Polish artist duo KwieKulik worked, as art historian Magdalena Nieslony reflects, were restricted in a specific way. With a particular focus on Zofia Kulik, Nieslony examines how the two formulated a critique of the economies of their semi-public artistic work during 1970s State Socialism. She shows how Kulik especially negotiated the (given) entanglement of domestic, artistic and archival activities as a main condition of the duo’s practice in the artistic works themselves. In the process, they developed strategies of efficiency (*sprawność*): rationalizations of working processes that, in contrast to capitalist conceptualizations, were formulated as an ethics of improving the quality of life building on theories of praxeology developed by philosopher Tadeusz Kotarbiński.

— In her essay on artist Cameron Rowland, art historian and curator Lucie Pia expands on her investigation – which began

in an installation that was part of the *Backyard Economy* exhibition – of discursive elements in Rowland’s artistic practice: specifically, ways in which they trace material manifestations and legal foundations of racial capitalism and its genealogy in the slave-based economy through conditions of loans and distribution. The text follows the function of the captions and credits related to exhibited objects, through which the artist makes visible how structures of racism have been transformed and upheld by a range of institutions and practices, particularly within the legal forms of capital (property and contract).

**DECONSTRUCTING BINARIES: DOMESTICITY, CARE WORK, AND OTHERS** — The group exhibition *Backyard Economy*, which preceded and occasions this issue, resulted from a seminar, co-held at the University of Applied Arts Vienna during the summer term 2022, on the strategies by which contemporary artists engage with varying forms of exploitation and marginalization. The exhibition featured a selection of artistic works and texts that we had discussed together, juxtaposed with contributions by students developed during the seminar as well as by artists we invited. Next to these contributions, which were exhibited and moreover presented in a zine, *Backyard Economy* also included three twentieth-century artworks from the collection of the University of Applied Arts Vienna.

— Among these was a photograph of architect Alfred Soulek’s modernist miniature model designated as a “Lady’s Room” [fig. 1], which was presented at the 1930–31 exhibition *Die neuzeitliche Wohnung. Die Mietwohnung* [The Modern Apartment. The Rental Apartment] at the Vienna Museum of Art and Industry. A capsule with no windows, furnished in soft materials such as textiles and fur, Soulek’s conception of a domestic space is highly charged with gendered fantasies determining care, nourishment, and recreation as a field of “female,” “private” non-labor, detached from the sphere of political economy.<sup>7)</sup>

— In contrast to Soulek’s denial of reproduction as a field of low-wage and/or unwaged reproductive labor, the artist, designer, and architect Friedl Dicker-Brandeis juxtaposes romanticized images similar to Soulek’s with the hard and unembellished (working) reality of the precariat and female workers. In doing so, she busts myths surrounding marriage, the heterosexual family, reproductive work, and housework that subtend the assigned roles of the bourgeois division of labor. In one of her photo collages from the early 1930s [fig. 2], all of which were

7) Soulek’s design is, from this perspective, comparable with Adolf Loos’ for his wife Lina Loos. For a feminist reading of Loos’s interior spaces see Beatriz Colominas’ reading of Lina Loos’ bedroom designed by Adolf Loos in Colomina 1992: 92.



// Figure 1  
Alfred Soulek, Innenraumgestaltung /  
Damenzimmer [Interior Design / Lady’s  
Room], 1930–1931



// Figure 2  
Friedl Dicker-Brandeis, *Fürchtet den Tod nicht* [Do Not Fear Death], 1932–1933

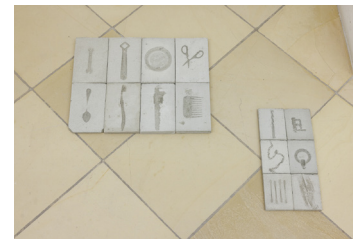
produced and photographically documented at about the same time, she establishes a marxist-feminist critique of state control over reproductive functions. The black-and-white photograph documents a (lost) wooden panel staged in a domestic space, in which Dicker traces the intersecting points of social and economic structures in the reproduction of the labor force as a resource for capitalist exploitation. In her portrayal, reproduction requires and induces the reproduction of class relations as well as concomitant phenomena such as mass unemployment, multiple burdening of proletarianized women, and the risk of fatality inherent in illegal abortion. Dicker translates these functional correlations of social reproduction under capitalism into formal language via two diagonal stripes running through the entire composition, at the crossing point of which she has positioned a cutout image of a highly pregnant worker – itself a photo montage by John Heartfield that was published 1930 under the title “Forced Supplier of Human Material Courage! The state needs the unemployed and soldiers” (1930) in the communist journal *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* [Worker’s Illustrated Newspaper]. The figure functions as the center and starting point of various smaller scenes of labor characterized by binary gender ascriptions. Juxtaposed to the situation of the proletariat are six triangular fields set off from the bands by means of light-dark and color contrasts, in which Dicker shows stereotypes of love and sexuality taken from the living conditions of the bourgeoisie.<sup>8)</sup>

— Elly Niebuhr’s documentary photograph from 1950–60 likewise establishes a contrast to Soulek’s reductive bourgeois notion of domesticity. A “Garbage Car for Paper and Leaves” close to the curb of the street [fig. 3], a tool for the maintenance of public space, is staged with the same attention and with similar principles of composition as were used in her Haute Couture pictures. This peculiar inversion of bourgeois imaginaries of the private and the public is further developed by Ella Zwatz. *Tools of Care* [fig. 4 & 4a] consists of a small, brush-like metal object and a set of concrete tiles arranged on the floor, depicting negative imprints of diverse everyday domestic tools like scissors and toothbrushes, as well as tools used on construction sites. Materially and formally related to road works, the objects attempt to blur distinctions between different forms of maintenance. In understanding reproduction as care – performed both in the private and in the public spheres – these artworks imagine the possibility of a solidarity between low and unpaid working class laborers that reaches beyond their multiplying divisions.

8)  
On this interpretation of Dicker’s collages  
also see Kitzberger 2023: 177–199.



// Figure 3  
Elly Niebuhr, *Kehrichtwagen für Papier und Blätter* [Garbage Car for Paper and Leaves], 1950–1960



// Figure 4a  
Ella Zwatz, *Tools of Care 1.0 / Imprints of the Everyday*, 2022



// Figure 4b  
Ella Zwatz, *Tools of Care 2.0*, 2022





// Figure 5  
Martha Rosler, *Backyard Economy II*  
(*Diane Germain mowing*), ca. 1974

— Martha Rosler's and Laura S. Oyuela Flores' works explore the relations that artistic and reproductive practices have to (their) environments. In drawing an intimate connection between art and reproductive labor, Rosler's super-8 films *Backyard Economy I* and *Backyard Economy II (Diane Germain Mowing)* from 1974 [fig. 5] relate to early Western feminist critiques of the economic and ideological structures that gave rise to the model of the middle class family. A backyard in a Southern California town, enclosed by tall bushes and a palm tree, becomes a visual proxy for a subtle subversion of established divisions between art-making, leisure, and household tasks. Two women are working in the yard in the bright sun: Diane Germain mows the lawn and hangs laundry; a dog is running around, and a circular pan of the camera reveals a small boy sitting on the house's back steps amidst some yellow irises. The other woman, Martha Rosler – whose body remains behind the camera most of the time – is filming these deliberate and sometimes playful everyday performances. In this way, the garden becomes an arena in which housework, filmic work, and leisure (the regeneration of humans, animals, plants); the usage of tools (the camera, the whirling water sprinkler, the hand-driven lawn mower); and artistic labor itself seem to overlap and converge. Both the repetitiveness of Diane Germain's domestic work and the traces it leaves bring it into relation to contemporary aesthetics and artistic practices: pieces of laundry are arranged in regular intervals against the blue sky, the lawnmower leaves a minimalist pattern of rectangular green monochromes in the grass, and a temporary sculpture is created when she hangs a hand-knit sweater on the handle of the lawnmower.

— Laura S. Oyuela Flores' work shifts the demarcations of art and reproduction in a different way. Her series *Traces of Care* [fig. 6] focuses on the permanent adaptation of technical, medical, and everyday objects such as furniture and other items. A ceramic pill box-like object, manufactured by the artist, is put together with fresh flowers, FFP2 masks, tissue boxes, pill bottles, and band-aids on a bedside table the artist purchased at a thrift store. By interweaving prefabricated impersonal medical products, pre-used pieces, and handmade artistic objects, the arrangement questions how environments materially shape social relations, spaces of care and the boundaries between professional, affective, and emotional care work.

**COUNTERING COLONIAL REPRODUCTION** — In their practice, the Karrabing Film Collective establishes a circular economy: the money brought in by their films and installations, which strive



// Figure 6  
Laura S. Oyuela Flores, *Traces of Care*  
(Work), Object 2, 2022



// Figure 7  
Karrabing Film Collective, *The Mermaids*,  
*Mirror Worlds*, 2018

for a visual language that counters settler colonial narratives, is invested back into the infrastructure of their ancestral lands (Bigfoot et al. 2023: p. 20). The double projection *Mermaids, Mirror Worlds* [fig. 7] is a dreamlike and at the same time radically realistic portrayal of the land of indigenous people in Belyuen in Australia's Northern Territory, which has been devastated by (neo-)colonial exploitation and violent appropriation. Based on the concept of Improvisational Realism, the collective works both with its own actors and with amateur actors – people who actually live on the site and whose “lives interconnect all along the coastal waters immediately west of Darwin, and across Anson Bay, at the mouth of the Daly River” (Fielke 2023). Improvised dialogues are drawn from real life struggles and from everyday methods and rituals of resilience, including “the dreamings” that are juxtaposed with formally defamiliarized non-fictional promotional material from industrial giants such as Monsanto and the Dow Chemical Corporation. Mistranslations, incommensurabilities, and cultural distinctions between the inside and the outside of social bodies are both motifs and methods that characterize the film. The relationship between the indigenous population and the colonizers has been and is still based almost exclusively on mining interests that impact the ancestral lands of the Karrabing community. Historically, the unrestricted exploitation of indigenous land has been justified by the “terra nullius doctrine” – the juridical definition by which land to be colonized is declared as currently “belonging to no one.” As lawyer Brenna Bhandar has pointed out, “property law was a crucial mechanism for the colonial accumulation of capital, and by the late nineteenth century, had unfolded in conjunction with racial schemas that steadfastly held colonized subjects within their grip” (Bhandar 2018: 2).

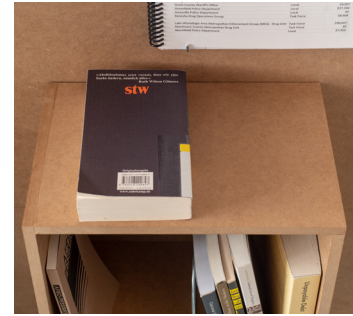
— Such colonial mechanisms, which continue to produce inequality and oppression to this day, form both the context and the object of artist Cameron Rowland's research, into which Lucie Pia's installation gives us insight.<sup>9)</sup> Her installation *Source Materials* presented a selection of books, brochures, and exhibition texts [fig. 8] that focus on the discursive aspect of Rowland's artistic practice. The selected material centered on racial capitalism and its (legal) foundation in the transatlantic slave trade, offering an example of how Black Studies and literature on subjects such as law, abolitionism, the prison industrial complex, and other forms of racial law enforcement, inform contemporary artistic practices.<sup>10)</sup>

9)

*Tiny Mutual Admirations Societies* is an exhibition space conceived of and maintained by art historian Hannes Loichinger at the painting department of the University of Applied Arts Vienna.

10)

After the exhibition the selection was made available as reference books at the library of the University of Applied Arts Vienna.



// Figure 8

Installation view *Source Materials* (Detail), curated by Lucie Pia, *Tiny Mutual Admirations Societies*, 2022





// Figure 9  
Tiffany Domke, *Dust Flares of Production*,  
2022

**EXPLORING (INVISIBLE) STRUCTURES** — In *Dust flares of production* [fig. 9], Tiffany Domke gives attention to the dust particles that randomly appear on the surface of analog film in the process of digitization. Instead of seeing these as a defect or as something that needs to be removed, the video work reverses the usual workflow by placing the artistic exploration of dust at the center of interest. This artistic approach integrating waste products draws attention to the conditions of artistic production as well as to the role of chance and art's capacity to visualize things that are not widely considered valuable.<sup>11)</sup> This becomes meaningful when contrasted with the “invisible work” of social reproduction, whose function is largely to remove the traces of the work of others.

— Samuel Ekeh's painting from his series *Frontyard Economy* [fig. 10] features several color fields enclosed by pastosely painted lines, which connect and separate the fields at the same time. The artist understands this constellation as a (simultaneous) representation of the infrastructures that organize societal hierarchies; because they are all arranged next to one another, there is no concealment or overlapping, but rather a painterly encounter with the fields of social relations.

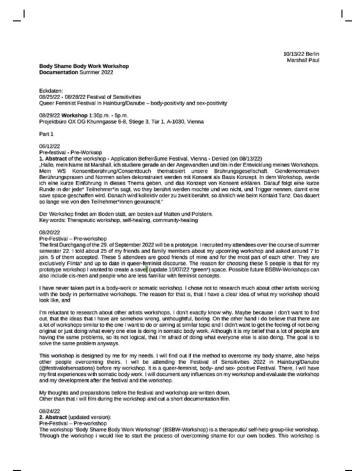
— Falke Pisano's abstract sculptural objects of her series *Learning in proximity* [fig. 11] explore the language of mathematics as a fundamental structure of thought and orientation. Axes of the coordinate system, translated into physical bodies, mark and measure the corners of the exhibition space, thereby relating the architecture to the visitors. Areas in close proximity, everyday surroundings in their “lack of harmony and beauty [...] affect people's thinking, perceiving, and relating to one another, as well as increasing the alienation many feel toward their surroundings. Aspects of people's lives such as the impact of the built environment and the use and abuse of the place in which they live are subtler and less visible than other dangers faced and thus may be more dangerous”, writes the artist in Plate 4 of the work *Learning in proximity*.

— The way in which one experiences oneself in mutual physical interdependence is deeply affected by rituals, everyday schedules, and the digital-technological mediations of our social lives. Marshall Paul's written record of their *Body Shame Body Work Workshop* [fig. 12] investigates these regimes of discipline and at the same time traces the conditions of the workshop's own organization and working processes. They thereby reflect at a very personal level on the attempt to navigate such an intimate endeavor without reproducing normative concepts of bodies and relationships by leaning into an awareness of the material conditions.

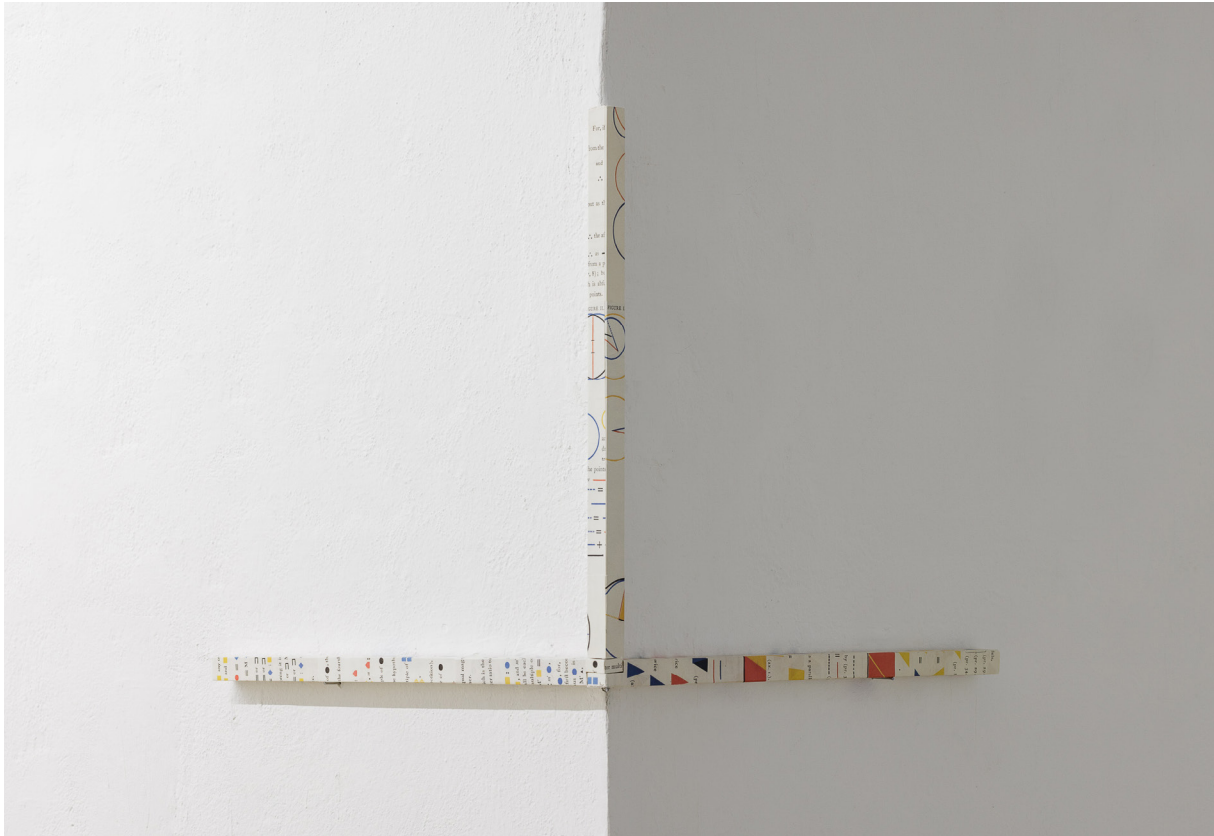
11) Domke's work here refers to modernist works such as Man Ray's *Dust Breeding* (Duchamp's *Large Glass* with Dust Motes) from 1920, but could also be related to Mierle Laderman Ukeles's *Washing/Tracks/Maintenance: Outside* from 1973.



// Figure 10  
Samuel Ekeh, *Front Yard Economy II, 2022*



// Figure 12  
Marshall Paul, *Body Shame Body Work Workshop, 2022*



// Figure 11  
Falke Pisano, *The Value in Mathematics,*  
*Learning in Proximity, 2015–2017*

**CIRCUITS – PERFORATING CIRCULATION** — The abstract dimension of money is linked to the symbol and the sign, and is negotiated in the act of valuation as a real social form. The artistic intervention by the artists' collective adO/Aptive addressed how social relationships are shaped by and themselves shape the dynamics of abstraction – in this specific case in relation to the institutional hierarchies and the monetary conditions of the exhibition itself. In order to do so, the collective was invited to present its ongoing project *the Danubian Bank* [fig. 13], in which they had launched two currencies called the Störling and the Grundl, as a 'sponsor' of our exhibition.<sup>12)</sup> In this role, *the Danubian Bank* developed a circular economy: it sold one of their gimmicks, which were produced for the exhibition (*Danubian Towel*, 2022), to the Collection and Archive of the University of Applied Arts Vienna and reinvested the proceeds into the production of more gimmicks and into small honoraria for the artists participating in the exhibition. During the term of the exhibition, it was possible to exchange all gimmicks for Störulings again.

— The caption of Constantina Zavitsanos's *Three Card Monte* [fig. 14], a work that she has continued in different constellations since 2018, reads: "Three 1 gram Austrian Mint Kinebars (999.9 gold in assay with Kinegram counterfeit detection hologram of a Lipizzaner horse in various positions) on offer to the public / While supplies last (no purchase necessary to participate; limit one gold bar per participant)." In the exhibition the bars were installed at a height accessible to wheelchair users, including the board on which Zavitsanos' three gold Kinebars were placed, until all the bars had been taken. Zavitsanos used the production budget for the purchase of three one-gram bars of pure gold, presented in their original packaging on a small dark metal tray. The work literalizes and universalizes the process of the valorization of art by seemingly reducing it to a commodity that is both the (traditional) incarnation of exchange value and its object at the same time. If the kinebars disappear, their valorization as art is suspended (their monetary value conforms with the current value of gold on the market), while Zavitsanos' (non-saleable) project remains inscribed in the institution of art and its dynamics of valorization. Reducing the artwork to pieces of gold furthermore brings its materiality to the forefront: the shiny surface of the kinebar obfuscates the brutal and unhealthy labor conditions that characterize the extraction of the raw material.

— While Zavitsanos' work incorporates the question of its own value creation into its critique, in 2016. *In Museums, Money*,

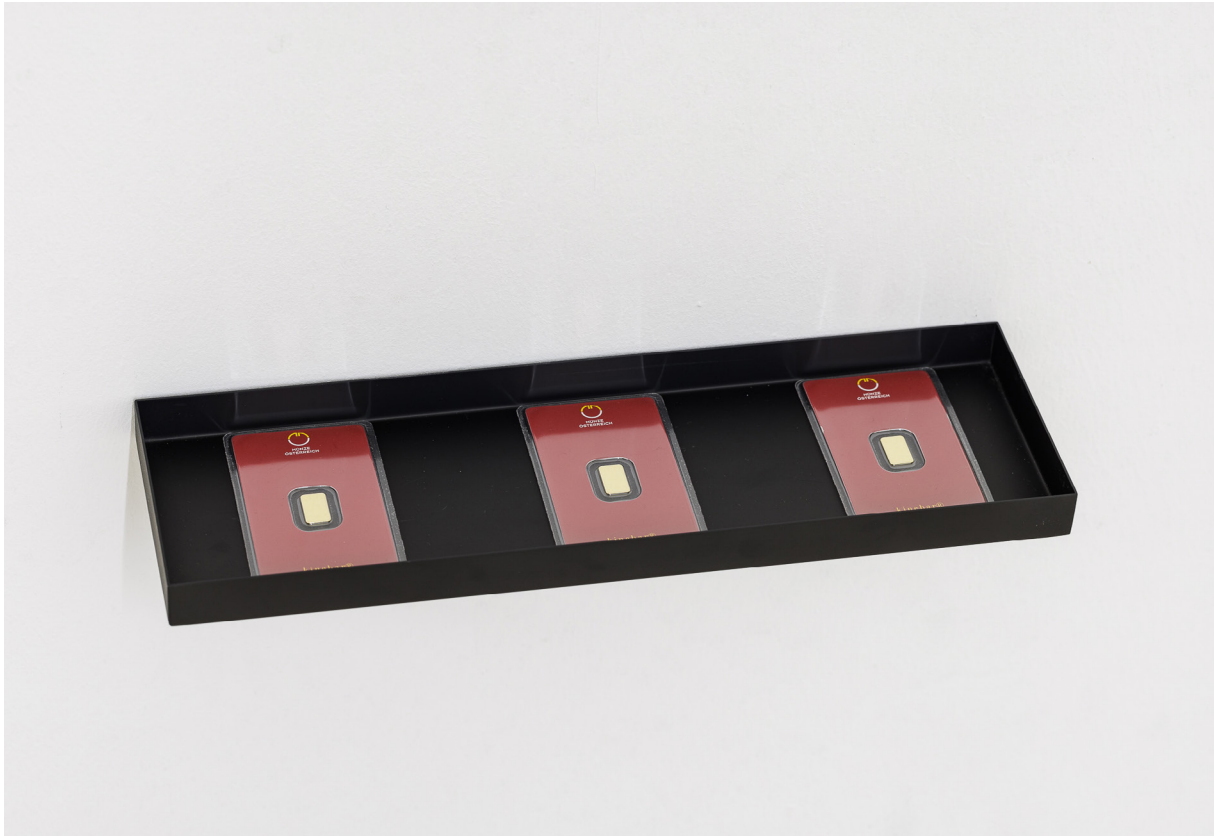
12)

While the Störling is pegged to the Euro (1E = 1€), the Grundl is a non-fungible coin that can be acquired for the cost of one cent. Both currencies can be acquired at certified Exchange Offices and are in circulation until January 2024. The acquired value of the currencies will be spent on NPO projects. The Störling and the Grundl both foster awareness around the situation of the Sturgeon fish and function as a mode of project funding.





// Figure 13  
ad0/Aptive collective, *Danubian Bank*,  
Display at the exhibition *Backyard  
Economy*, 2022



// Figure 14  
Constantina Zavitsanos, *Three Card Monte*, 2022 (2018–)

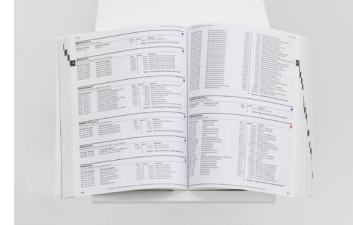
*and Politics* [fig. 15] Andrea Fraser, who famously coined the term “institutional critique,”<sup>13</sup> navigates the depths of the interdependencies between art institutions and politics. This artwork assembles all available data from Fraser’s years of research on the political alignment of trustees of more than 125 art museums in the United States as of 2016, just before the election of Donald Trump, revealing a high percentage of these donors as de facto Trump supporters. Fraser provides this data in a comparatively old-fashioned medium: a book, published with MIT Press, that contains long lists of names and figures presented in alphabetical order. In so doing, Fraser intervenes into the institutional complex in the guise of an investigative journalist: making visible the intersection of electoral politics and private nonprofit art institutions. At the same time, she uses her own symbolic capital as a well-known artist by exhibiting her book in galleries, demanding that spending power no longer be the sole selection criterion for board members.

— Melanie Gilligan’s video work *Self-Capital* [fig. 16] is a mini-series commissioned by the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) London, produced just in the wake of the global financial crisis in 2008 and openly published on the artist’s YouTube channel. Filmed in the cinema, the bookshop, and the galleries of ICA, the videos feature a personified figure named “Global Economy” who is suffering from post-traumatic stress and is trying to regain stability through psychiatric treatment involving body-oriented hypnosis techniques. While strolling through the bookshop, Global Economy animatedly chews and sucks on economic terms like “crea-tive indus-try,” “commer-cial,” “emer-ging markets,” “migrant workers,” and “casual labor,” whereas the word “wages,” which provokes nausea, is choked out of her nervous system to re-stabilize a flowing, unregulated market. The abstract nature of capital is figured here in the body of an individual and its (neoliberal) strategies of self-regulation, while structures of repetition and defamiliarization subvert this narrative at the same time. All characters are played by the same actress (Penelope McGhie); in their conversation, the book cashier and Global Economy eventually become interchangeable, thereby structurally mimicking the circulation of commodities.

— Jammed between various labor tasks and everyday life, Laura Egger-Karlegger watched Gilligan’s films *Self-Capital* (2009) and *Crowds* (2019) during her work for the production of the exhibition. Her artistic commentary for the zine of the exhibition, which takes the form of a collage entitled *I Wouldn’t Have Chosen Those Stickers Without Watching Crowds and Self-Capital* by

13)

“I first used it in print in a 1985 essay on Louise Lawler, ‘In and Out of Place.’ When I ran off the now familiar list of Michael Asher, Marcel Broodthaers, Buren, and Haacke, adding that ‘while very different, all these artists engage[d] in institutional critique.’” Fraser, Andrea (2005): 100–106.



// Figure 15

Andrea Fraser, 2016 in *Museums, Money, and Politics*, 2016

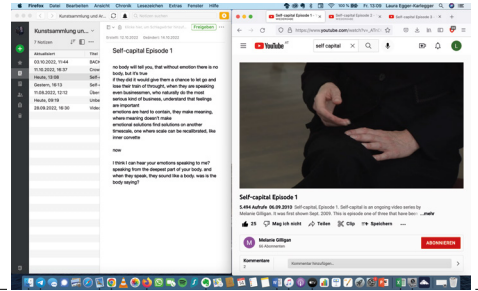
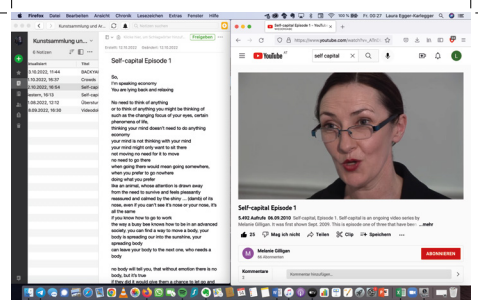


// Figure 16  
Melanie Gilligan, *Self Capital*, 2009

*Melanie Gilligan* (2022) [fig. 17], consists of three screenshots, two transcripts, and 35 stickers that were handed out to the customers of an Austrian supermarket for every 10€ they spent. The stickers depicted groceries, as well as Austrian dishes and landmarks (landscapes and architecture). The repetitive manner in which they were mounted on paper gives rise to ornamental forms suggesting capitalist overproduction and the commodification of food and nature.

— Various people and institutions have contributed to the realization of this issue. Our thanks go first of all to the authors for their instructive essays and for their care and patience in revising their papers, to the artists for supporting this issue with images of their works, as well as to our students for their fantastic contributions to the exhibition and the zine. This issue would have not been possible without the astute and accurate proofreading of Caroline Durlacher and Edith Futscher's patient inquiries. We would furthermore like to thank Brigitte Aulenbacher, Laura Egger-Karlegger, Melanie Gilligan, Maxwell Graham, Jim Gussen, Quinn Harrelson, Sami Hopkins, Carolyn Lazard, Ghislaine Leung, Cosima Rainer, Eva Maria Stadler, the board of FKW, and Wiktoria Szczupacka for valuable conversations and for all their support in organizational, content-related, and personal matters.



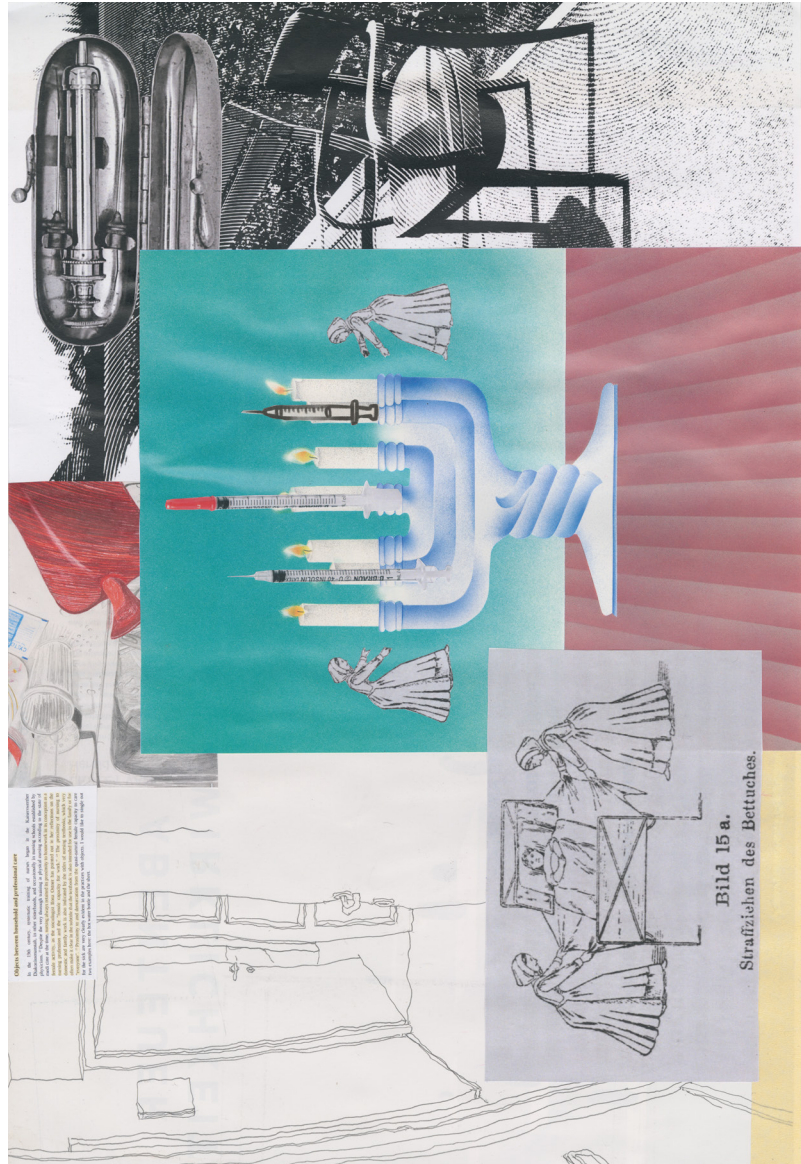


LAURA EGGER-KARLEGGER

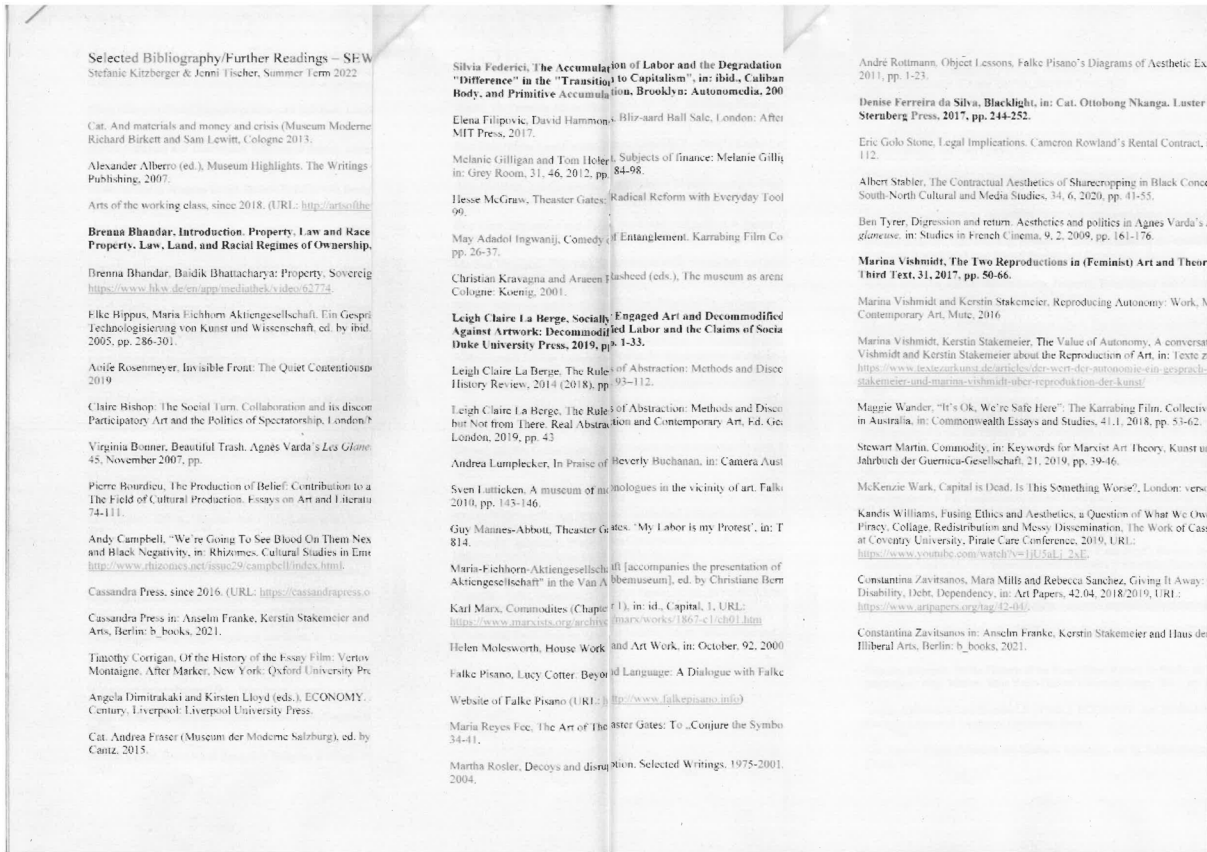
// Figure 17  
 Laura Egger-Karlegger, *I Wouldn't Have Chosen Those Stickers Without Watching Crowds and Self-Capital* by Melonie Gilligan, 2022



// Figure 18  
*Backyard Economy*, Exhibition view, 2022



// Figure 19  
Laura S. Oyuela Flores, *Traces of Care (Work)*, poster, 2022



// Figure 20  
Bibliography (zine excerpt), *Backyard Economy*, 2022



Socially Engaged Art  
and Decommodified Labor

Artists and their artworks circulate in strange economies. Many artists desire a wage, payment often seems elusive; when they reject the payment system, their rejection offers no guarantee that money will not be attracted to their work. In this book I examine socially engaged artists and their relationships to the wage form. I describe a collection of artists who address their own or other artists' lack of a wage to ground their method of artistic social engagement and, indeed, to critique our economic present. Sometimes this art thematizes its economic concern: Cassie Thornton, an artist who works on debt, invites other artists to construct "debt visualizations," verbal and imagistic collages of the consequences of a wageless life. Sometimes the art effects a change: Renzo Martens creates art in institutions that attempt to transform wageless Congolese farmers into money-making artists. At still other times such art allegorizes the lack of a wage: Tracey Riley's pigeon-based performances and Koki Tanaka's child-oriented enactments both use as their subjects those among us who cannot be wage-d: animals and children.

Two anecdotes from contemporary art illustrate well how artists themselves understand their own economic possibilities and limitations. The first concerns Caroline Woolard, an artist I write about in chapter 2. While speaking at a panel on artists' pay during Bushwick Open Studios in 2015, Woolard was asked to comment on the possibility of artists' resale rights. At a most century-old idea, such rights enable artists to continue to make money if their artwork is resold after its initial purchase, much as authors retain the right to new editions and translations of their texts through copyright protection. The audience nodded in seeming agreement at the idea; it was the first concrete proposal of the event, after all. Woolard then responded: "I've never sold any art. I don't know many artists who have ever sold anything. Most art will never sell and most artists won't make money from their art." If one does

DECOMMODIFIED LABOR AND THE CLAIMS OF  
SOCIALY ENGAGED ART

Leigh Claire La Berge

Backyard Economy

SEW - Stefanie Kitzberger & Jenni Tischer  
Di, 9-12.00 (bi-weekly), SR 23, VZA 7  
jenni.tischer@uni-ak.ac.at / stefanie.kitzberger@uni-ak.ac.at

economy (n.)  
oikonoμία (i.e. "household management")  
oikos; ("house; household; home")  
vōn ("manage; distribute; to deal out; dispense")  
oikonomia ("household management")

The title of this seminar, *Backyard Economy*, is borrowed from a video series by Martha Rosler (1974). Rosler's work refers to the intrinsically economic determination of social reproduction. Associated with women\*, children, pets, plants, care and regeneration, this domain is usually regarded as "private" and therefore unjoined from the political economy. Proceeding from Rosler's work and its foundations in Feminist accounts of the 1970s that challenged this dichotomous conception, our course will explore contemporary artistic engagements with allegedly "subordinate" aspects or "marginal" actors of the economies of global capitalism. Accompanied by discussions of selected texts we will analyze art works that not only address economic inequalities and exclusion thematically, but also critically examine the aesthetic and material conditions of their own practices within the institution of art. Beyond a comprehension of notions such as (social) reproduction, (private) property and value as well as a discussion of their intersections with class, gender, race, (neo)colonial imprints and environmentalist perspectives, we will thus specifically be concerned with questions of representation as well as with art's continued intricate relationship with political activism.

Kindly note that the seminar is co-taught by Jenni Tischer and Stefanie Kitzberger. In terms of practicability please register for both courses entitled 'Backyard Economy'. You can get grades either for an academic practice or for a practice that combines academic and artistic approaches. Classes will be held in English, however, you can hand in your papers both in English or German.

Course requirements:

- attendance (you may miss no more than one class unexcused)
- active participation
- on-time submissions

Assessment criteria (you can choose between two options):

Academic practice

- preparation of the assigned readings, readiness to engage in discussion in class
- analysis and presentation of one of the selected artworks (10 mins max)
- written seminar paper (ca. 25.000-30.000 characters incl. footnotes; excl. appendix)

Artistic + academic practice

- preparation of the assigned readings, readiness to engage in discussion in class
- analysis and presentation of one of the selected artworks (10 mins max)
- development and presentation of your own artistic work (situated in the contexts of the seminar; 10 mins max)
- written seminar paper (English or German, 10.000 characters incl. footnotes; excl. appendix)

// Figure 21  
Readings (zine excerpt), *Backyard Economy*, 2022



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- Fig. 1:** Alfred Soulek, *Innenraumgestaltung / Damenzimmer* [Interior Design / Lady's Room], 1930–1931, b/w photograph, 22.9 × 16.3 cm, Exhibition view *Backyard Economy*, University Gallery Die Angewandte Vienna, 2022, 16.257/FW/1, Collection and Archive, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Photo: Manuel Carreon Lopez, [kunst-dokumentation.com](http://kunst-dokumentation.com)
- Fig. 2:** Friedl Dicker-Brandeis, *Fürchtet den Tod nicht* [Do Not Fear Death], 1932–1933, digital print on aluminum (reproduction from a glass negative), 150 × 100 cm, Exhibition view *Backyard Economy*, University Gallery Die Angewandte Vienna, 2022, 15.590/7/FW, Collection and Archive, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Photo: Manuel Carreon Lopez, [kunst-dokumentation.com](http://kunst-dokumentation.com)
- Fig. 3:** Elly Niebuhr, *Kehrichtwagen für Papier und Blätter* [Garbage Car for Paper and Leaves], 1950–1960, b/w photograph (reproduction), 30 × 30 cm, Exhibition view *Backyard Economy*, University Gallery Die Angewandte Vienna, 2022, NIE/1043/F, Collection and Archive, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Photo: Manuel Carreon Lopez, [kunst-dokumentation.com](http://kunst-dokumentation.com)
- Fig. 4:** Ella Zwatz, *Tools of Care 1.0 / Imprints of the Everyday*, 2022, concrete, spray paint, watercolor, acrylic, 103 × 77cm (dimensions variable), Courtesy of Ella Zwatz, Exhibition view *Backyard Economy*, University Gallery Die Angewandte Vienna, 2022, 19.295/1-10/0, Collection and Archive, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Photo: Manuel Carreon Lopez, [kunst-dokumentation.com](http://kunst-dokumentation.com)
- Fig 4a:** Ella Zwatz, *Tools of Care 1.0 / Imprints of the Everyday*, 2022, found metal object, 13 x 10 cm, Courtesy of Ella Zwatz, Exhibition view *Backyard Economy*, University Gallery Die Angewandte, 2022, Photo: Manuel Carreon Lopez, [kunst-dokumentation.com](http://kunst-dokumentation.com)
- Fig. 5:** Martha Rosler, *Backyard Economy II (Diane Germain mowing)*, ca. 1974, super-8 film on video, color, silent, 6:39 min, Courtesy of Martha Rosler and Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), New York, Exhibition view *Backyard Economy*, University Gallery Die Angewandte Vienna, 2022, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Photo: Manuel Carreon Lopez, [kunst-dokumentation.com](http://kunst-dokumentation.com)

- Fig. 6:** Laura S. Oyuela Flores, *Traces of Care (Work)*, Object 2, 2022, night table with a plastic weekly pill container, a handmade ceramic pill container, plastic portable pill container, tissue box, four pill bottles, water carafe, small water glass, two vases with flowers, four 500ml clinical alcohol bottles, one 200g cotton bag. Contents in the night table's drawers: different types of bandages, insulin syringes, small tissue bag and FFP2 masks, 59.5 × 41 × 38 cm, Courtesy of Laura S. Oyuela Flores, Exhibition view *Backyard Economy*, University Gallery Die Angewandte Vienna, 2022, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Photo: Manuel Carreon Lopez, [kunst-dokumentation.com](http://kunst-dokumentation.com)
- Fig. 7:** Karrabing Film Collective, *The Mermaids, Mirror Worlds*, 2018, two-channel installation, 34:50 min, color, sound, film still, Courtesy of Karrabing Film Collective, Exhibition view *Backyard Economy*, University Gallery Die Angewandte Vienna, 2022, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Photo: Manuel Carreon Lopez, [kunst-dokumentation.com](http://kunst-dokumentation.com)
- Fig. 8:** Installation view *Source Materials* (detail), 2022, curated by Lucie Pia, Tiny Mutual Admiration Societies, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Photo: Demian Kern
- Fig. 9:** Tiffany Domke, *Dust*, 2022, digital video, silent, 0:18 min, Courtesy of Tiffany Domke, Exhibition view *Backyard Economy*, University Gallery Die Angewandte Vienna, 2022, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Photo: Manuel Carreon Lopez, [kunst-dokumentation.com](http://kunst-dokumentation.com)
- Fig. 10:** Samuel Ekeh, *Front Yard Economy II*, 2022, oil on canvas, 140 × 80 cm, Courtesy of Samuel Ekeh, Exhibition view *Backyard Economy*, University Gallery Die Angewandte Vienna, 2022, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Photo: Manuel Carreon Lopez, [kunst-dokumentation.com](http://kunst-dokumentation.com)
- Fig. 11:** Falke Pisano, *The Value in Mathematics, Learning in Proximity*, 2015–2017, wood and paper, 42 × 26 × 26 cm, Exhibition view *Backyard Economy*, University Gallery Die Angewandte Vienna, 2022, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Photo: Manuel Carreon Lopez, [kunst-dokumentation.com](http://kunst-dokumentation.com)
- Fig. 12:** Marshall Paul, *Body Shame Body Work Workshop*, 2022, text, photos of sketches made with a phone (zine excerpt), Courtesy of Marshall Paul, *Backyard Economy*, University Gallery Die Angewandte Vienna, 2022, University of Applied Arts Vienna
- Fig. 13:** ad0/Aptive collective, *Danubian Bank Banner*, 2022, Digital print, Roll-up & Display system, 85 × 200 cm, *Danubian Towels; 100Stö.*, 2022, Sublimation print on Towel, 70 × 140 cm, *5-Störling Magnets; 5Stö.*, 2022, Digital print on Magnet, 13.4 × 6.6 cm, *Danubian Bank Stickers; 1Stö.*, 2022, Digital print on Sticker foil, 10 × 10 cm, *Störling Folders 1–2*, 2021–2022, Presentation Folders, *Störling Bills*, 21 × 29.7 cm, *GRUNDL coins*, 2022, 3D print, 3 × 3 × 0.4 cm, *Danubian Bank Exchange Office*, 2021, Störling community currency, metal box, variable size, Courtesy of ad0/aptive collective, Exhibition view *Backyard Economy*, University Gallery Die Angewandte Vienna, 2022, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Photo: Manuel Carreon Lopez, [kunst-dokumentation.com](http://kunst-dokumentation.com)
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- Fig. 15:** Andrea Fraser, *2016 in Museums, Money, and Politics*, author: Andrea Fraser, contributor: Jamie Stevens, co-published with Westreich Wagner Publications, the CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, and MIT Press, 2018, Exhibition View *Backyard Economy*, University Gallery Die Angewandte Vienna, 2022, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Photo: Manuel Carreon Lopez, [kunst-dokumentation.com](http://kunst-dokumentation.com)
- Fig. 16:** Melanie Gilligan, *Self Capital*, 2009, 1-channel HD video, three episodes, 23:00 min, color, sound, Courtesy of Melanie Gilligan and Galerie Max Mayer, Exhibition view *Backyard Economy*, University Gallery Die Angewandte Vienna, 2022, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Photo: Manuel Carreon Lopez, [kunst-dokumentation.com](http://kunst-dokumentation.com)
- Fig. 17:** Laura Egger-Karlegger, *I Wouldn't Have Chosen Those Stickers Without Watching Crowds and Self-Capital* by Melanie Gilligan, 2022, collage (zine excerpt), Courtesy of Laura Egger-Karlegger, *Backyard Economy*, University Gallery Die Angewandte Vienna, 2022, University of Applied Arts Vienna
- Fig. 18:** *Backyard Economy*, Exhibition view, University Gallery of Die Angewandte, 2022, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Photo: Manuel Carreon Lopez, [kunst-dokumentation.com](http://kunst-dokumentation.com)
- Fig. 19:** Laura S. Oyuela Flores, *Traces of Care (Work)*, poster, 2022 (insert for the zine), Courtesy of Laura S. Oyuela Flores, *Backyard Economy*, University Gallery Die Angewandte Vienna, 2022, University of Applied Arts Vienna
- Fig. 20:** Bibliography (zine excerpt), *Backyard Economy*, University Gallery Die Angewandte Vienna, 2022, University of Applied Arts Vienna
- Fig. 21:** Readings (zine excerpt), *Backyard Economy*, University Gallery Die Angewandte Vienna, 2022, University of Applied Arts Vienna

// Exhibition *Backyard Economy*

*University Gallery Die Angewandte*

Exhibition installation: Martin Hotter, Wolfgang Konrad, Michael Krupica, Andreas Unterpertinger, Catharina Wronn

Exhibition management: Laura Egger-Karlegger, Stefanie Kitzberger, Jenni Tischer

Head of the exhibition office, University Gallery of Angewandte at Heiligenkreuzerhof:

Anette Freudenberger

Graphic design of poster and invitation card: Sarah Podbelsek

Graphic design zine and poster: Stefanie Kitzberger, Jenni Tischer, Lian Hannah Walter

Tiny Mutual Admiration Societies: Hannes Loichinger

Sponsor: the Danubian Bank

// About the Authors

Jenni Tischer is an artist and educator. In her sculptural installations she reconceptualizes and recontextualizes principles of form, material and spatial references from a feminist perspective. Tischer's work has most recently been shown in solo exhibitions at Galerie Krobath Vienna, Kunstforum Baloise, Basel, mumok Museum für Moderne Kunst, Vienna, and in group exhibitions at MAK Museum für Angewandte Kunst Vienna, MAK Center in Los Angeles, Kunsthalle Tübingen, after the butcher in Berlin, and Kunsthalle Wien, among others. Tischer was awarded the 15th Baloise Art Prize at Art Basel, and was an Artist in Residence at the MAK Schindler Residency program in Los Angeles. Since 2019 she teaches at the University of Applied Arts Vienna on social reproduction and art and economy. Together with Eva Maria Stadler she is co-editor of the anthology *Abstraction & Economy. Myths of Growth* (forthcoming in 2024).

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## ON SOME CONDITIONS<sup>1)</sup>

Given that the topic of this issue is the relationship between valorization and devaluation, participation in the economy and marginalization from it, as parameters for reckoning with gender and labor as themes and/or methods in recent art, my point of departure here will be an exploration of how forms of marginality rooted in gender and ability are re-imagined in both conceptual and embodied form in the exhibition context, with reference to two specific art practices.

— Ghislaine Leung and Carolyn Lazard each have practices in both writing and in visual art. Lazard has published a number of influential texts on the biopolitics of disability and questions of access that have a rare incisive force in their combination of research, personal reflection, and analysis; and Leung studied philosophy at the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy in London, a bastion for critical aesthetics, and was an administrator, writer, and curator with LUX, the UK artists' moving image agency—this is the context in which I knew her for many years. She has recently published a book with Divided.

— In approaching the artwork of either, however, we encounter what seem to be quintessentially formal problems. Two historical truisms appear, asking to be dissolved. The first is the opposition between color and line; works by Leung such as *Browns* (2021) and *Red* (2021) both generate a space, and delineate it, through the deliberation of color. The second truism is that conceptual art is opposed to relational art because it is tautological and self-contained. What is interesting for the purposes of this essay is that Leung and Lazard infuse the vocabulary of conceptualism with the materialism of dependency. The sketching out of an atmosphere through the delegated installation of industrial or quotidian objects, as in Leung's *Fountains* (2022)—which echoes Lazard's *A Conspiracy* (2017) [fig. 1], an installation of twelve ceiling-mounted white noise generators often found in healthcare and hospitality settings, shown at Cell Projects in London in 2019—is also a production of space, or rather, of its socially enforced conditions of

<sup>1)</sup> This text is based on a lecture at Kunsthalle Steiermark, Graz, on the occasion of the exhibition *on affairs* (2023).



// Figure 1a & 1b  
Carolyn Lazard, *A Conspiracy*, 2017

possibility. The indeterminate status of objects between conditions and décor is perhaps not so new as a post-conceptual gesture, yet what these two practices, represented here by the first three works cited, accomplish, is a patterning of an exhibition space as a space of dependency, of self-insufficiency. This patterning both performs formalism and undermines it by evoking social form at the same time. Which is to say, it shows the conditions necessary for appearance in a space of pure form, a phenomenon that depends on *non-dependence*, on the erasure of the demands of gendered, racialized, and classed living in the world, such as caring responsibilities or chronic illness. The puzzle is how to make the artwork appear in its self-sufficiency while at the same time being an index of its dependency on what cannot be present in the space.

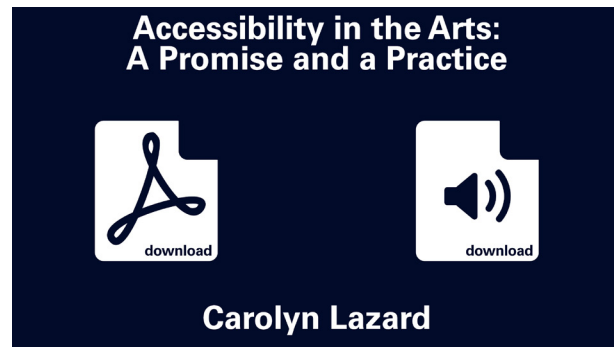
— For Lazard, this is a praxis that unfolds through questions around access in the exhibition space, a questioning which has been evoked, for instance, by a switch from a potentially seizure-inducing flicker between black and white to red light, which pulsates more gently. Before even this can have its effects however, a text may be presented that describes the potential experience for the viewer, preparing them for it, undermining the truism that art is most radical when it disturbs the assumed complacency of the viewer: the old avant-garde shock tactic that seemingly never gets old. The reference, to Tony Conrad's *The Flicker* (1965), as well as to Paul Sharits' films, is sublated from shock into an empathic gesture. Minimalism no longer as theatre, as art historian Michael Fried fretted, but perhaps a braver, if still equivocal phase-shift: minimalism as therapy. Structural film literalizes the conditions of the viewing experience by bracketing everything that falls outside the phenomenological grain of the encounter between eye and moving image; Lazard unravels this by bringing the conditions for this bracketing into the picture. More than this, however, they articulate the dependency of the formal as a matter of labor: the commingled labor of the artist, the curator, the gallery staff, and the visitor. The labor is translated into access, into information and adjustment, which combine to create an 'independent' artwork, modulating the time and space of the encounter in a different way, with its polemics (dependency) and autonomy (coherent gesture) tightly imbricated.

— Lazard's work is often characterized by the proposition that access can be a formalization of artistic labor, with the relevant conditions enacting the principle of this labor rather than representing a sidelong supplement. Their engagement with disability politics is what allows them such a specific vantage on the problem



of labor conditions for not just the artist, but the situation of art. Lazard's writings, work, and advocacy over the past decade give us an insight not only into the impact of disability on a person with an art practice, but also into the ways in which chronic illness starts to undermine the parameters of time and achievement imposed on young artists. It also provides a view onto questions of access and accessibility that can be generalized to all kinds of conditions of limitation but also can move to constituting an ethics and a politics in themselves. Lazard is very clear that disability is a social condition, and one that insofar as it deviates from capitalist understandings of health, individuality, and productivity can also serve as a ground to critique those understandings and to organize differently. An example of that is *Accessibility in the Arts: A Promise and a Practice* [fig. 2], which adopts the perspective that inclusion is not a special adaptation to some people who are less able to navigate conventional architectures and choreographies in art spaces, but rather a shift in how the audience-institution relationship is imagined, that inclusion is inclusion for all, given an understanding of disability as an eventual horizon for all (Lazard 2019). This is a standpoint that has in many cases been integrated into policy, as in many university settings where the standard assumption is that documents and lectures should be accessible for all, not just for a minority who have specific 'needs.' This leads to the emergence of and consensus, to an extent, around the "social model of disability," which is that, as Lazard describes it, impairment may be a physical or mental loss of function, but disability is a relationship to the social and physical environment, which can be modified in such a way that it is easier for both disabled and non-disabled people to negotiate. Such a conception confronts the relegation of some bodies as not useful or appealing and thus needing to be excluded from public space as well as from employment, education, and other structures of survival in a capitalist economy.

— The question of disability justice allows us to connect the ways labor appears and is practiced in the field of contemporary art to broader issues around social reproduction, and ways in which labor is gendered, racialized, and naturalized until it is no longer visible as labor. At the same time, raising labor to visibility is not enough if the working conditions are not seen to include both exploitation and oppression, which is to say that the conditions in which such labor is performed rely on its allocation to groups



// Figure 2

Carolyn Lazard, *Accessibility in the Arts: A Promise and a Practice*, first edition, 2019

already deemed economically marginal and socially disposable. The social field is always already stratified. Raising the question from the standpoint of dis/ability and access means that the injustice is not located simply in the fact that social reproduction becomes the responsibility of certain groups, but also in the kind of society and social relations that are being reproduced thereby. And this is an inquiry that can unfold both on the plane of the economic and on that of the aesthetic. The link between them is a reflection on conditions.

— In Lazard’s earlier, more autobiographical text *How to be a Person in the Age of Autoimmunity*, they stake out their project of approaching disability, and the particular kind of autoimmune condition that they have and share with millions of other, predominantly feminized people, through its implications for a broader analysis whose co-ordinates are socio-economic, political, and affective. They write, “The story I’m telling here is equal parts a processing of the trauma of illness and an exploration of how the body is treated under the regime of capitalism. Stories of illness like mine should not be kept away in beds and in hospital wards. They should be written so that we can understand the body as something beyond a sheet of plain glass” (Lazard 2017). Here illness is seen as a biomedical and a social condition at the same time, and one does not exclude the other – the biologically dysfunctional individual who just wants to get well and participate in society independently, and the person produced as ill by a society because they fail to live up to its expectations, are both actual and are dialectically entangled with one another. This is described as a paradox, or might also be thought of in the psychoanalytic terms of a ‘double bind’ (the inability to not not want something): even as the ill person recognizes that health and illness are social and not natural conditions, and that these constructs can also serve to discipline the body in capitalist production (and, as a vast source of profits in privatized health care systems such as the one in the U.S., also serve as a strong engine of inequality) – at the same time, the ill person wants to be well.

— An important part of this analysis is to see the body as an indicator or barometer of social ills, rather than as a transparent window to the soul, as they suggest with the “sheet of plain glass,” a citation from Virginia Woolf, and having this conversation requires overcoming the shame and secrecy around being ill or disabled or differently abled in a society that values health, productivity, and independence above all. It is also to insist on the relationality and contingency of the body, contra the self-defensive,

military metaphors of everyday speech and medical science, the security metaphor of “immunity”; but, also, “auto.” In the text, they identify some of the ideological co-ordinates of this kind of metaphor by drawing an analogy between autoimmune disorder as the body attacking itself and capitalism as humans attacking their own conditions of survival, with the ecological consequences correlating with the enormous expansion over the last decades, especially in the West, of autoimmune illness. They put this as “[m]imicking, on a molecular level, the degrees of alienation and commodification that happen to the body on a social and economic level” (Ibid.: n.p.). A recursive view, in other words. They observe how people who otherwise identify as critical can mislay their skepticism when it comes to modern techno-medicine and neglect the questions raised by disability.

— “What happens when our bodies ‘revolt’ and the factories stop functioning so smoothly? Perhaps they are trying to tell us something about their working conditions” (Ibid.: n.p.). Lazard revisits radical sickness politics as social movements, as with the 1970s German Socialist Patients Collective, with their critique of the ‘medical-industrial complex’ and demand for autonomy from the medical establishment. This should be understood in the sense of a historical left German autonomist politics – collective self-determination – rather than the insipid, formal autonomy of the liberal subject that may also be lurking within the ‘auto’ of autoimmunity, but harder to dislodge than ideology normally is since it has taken up residence in the double bind of health.

— The accessibility guidelines Lazard develops in the *Promise and Practice* elaborate the social model of disability in the pragmatic test case of cultural venues. The notes are titled “a promise and a practice” to underline the prefigurative aspect of disability politics – that access is a horizon that both needs to be worked towards and can already start to transform practices and relations in the present. This poses disability justice as a ‘speculative practice’ emerging out of real needs and conversations organized by the affected collectively through trial, error, offense, and defense, rather than a government-imposed guideline for example, although the latter may also take on the character of a demand. Lazard writes, “Within this framework, disability is defined as an economic, cultural, and/or social exclusion based on a physical, psychological, sensory, or cognitive difference. Disability Justice movements understand disability to be unevenly distributed, primarily affecting black and indigenous communities, queer and trans communities, and low-income communities. Disability is structurally reinforced

by ableism, a system rooted in the supremacy of non-disabled people and the disenfranchisement of disabled people through the denial of access” (Lazard 2019: 6).

— There is also an emphasis on the need for infrastructure – for the need to do infrastructure differently, that is, for infrastructural critique<sup>2)</sup> – that would allow disabled artists and art workers, as well as audiences, to take part, thus for arts institutions that are not just spaces of representation but that can actively support the lives and capacities of their participants: “Supporting the cultural labor of disabled artists and thinkers must happen in tandem with infrastructural changes. Additionally, arts organizations need disabled art workers in positions of leadership to create actual substantial shifts. There is often a striking discord between an institution’s desire to represent marginalized communities and a total disinvestment from the actual survival of those communities. The ideal arts space is simple: it’s one in which art and culture are not sequestered from the lived experience of artists and their communities” (Lazard 2019). Such a formulation pinpoints conditions in a sense that evokes a number of the recent decades’ debates on social engagement and usefulness in art. Specifically, it calls on the image of the “useful museum,” as trialed by e.g. MiMA in Middlesbrough, UK, where the arts institution was presented as a social infrastructure that is dedicated to supporting its communities in ways other than exhibiting and mediating art. The contradictions here come down, once again, to conditions. Access may be a preliminary to justice, just like visibility, but it remains a neutral descriptor unless the power relations of the thing or experience to be accessed are also challenged.

— In any case, the definition of access Lazard seems to be formulating is one that radically counters precisely the specter of autoimmune personhood. The latter vision of self-enclosed, bounded, and self-reliant individuals stands to be dismantled in favor of a more relational concept of people as subjects with needs and caring abilities as well as capacities and skills. Such a redefinition makes labor a relational and aesthetic activity rather than a productive and commodified activity, and once this relational element is front and center, the contradictions of a pre-determined visibility and/or useability, the unvarnished good of representation, start to diminish in importance, along with the inclusivist fantasies that form the hard barrier to this genre of radicalism.

— It might be observed at this point that the essay has wandered somewhat from its initially charted course of discussing how both Carolyn Lazard’s and Ghislaine Leung’s work deal with the

2)

I have set some further thoughts on infrastructural critique down in Vishmidt, Marina 2021.

question of dependency – of conditions for (the) work to be made and viewed – from a minimalist or post-conceptual starting point. The tiny red herring of color and line disappeared at some point as well. The essay instead directed itself to outlining some of the relational and political premises informing Lazard’s practice in particular, with some prospects on wider contexts and debates around access and usefulness as matters of urgency for contemporary art. It might be said that Leung works in a more reticent way in this territory, but the proximity is there. Atmosphere is a medium for her, with the barely noticed or proprioceptive serving as the range in which questions of access – to production time, to exhibition space – can be felt. Recent exhibitions such as *Balances* (Maxwell Graham, NYC, Sep–Oct 2022) [fig. 3–5] problematize access to an artistic identity, an artistic work schedule, in light of the gendered labor of parenthood. There is a chart explaining when the artist can work and when she cannot. There are baby monitors, child safety gates, and the work *Fountains* that appears in a number of shows, in combination with other works or expanded into an installation.<sup>3)</sup> Leung writes in the exhibition text: “A work is contingent on its context, this vulnerability is my work’s resilience. It is a negotiation of what it means to have dependencies and be dependent. It is a negotiation of what it means to value the labour of maintenance” (Leung 2022). If dependencies featured for Leung in the past as a formal principle ‘below the radar,’ digging out the infra-thin of an exhibition situation through color, lighting, and measurement, the dependency has now ramified outside of that situation into what it takes to be present within it, and how that presence can itself be revised both into a series of work and the experience of their diagrammatic insufficiency, their non-performativity as works or, rather, their performativity as the limits to working. At the same time, Leung’s insistence that her propositions are presented not only in space but as an analysis of spatial properties as the core of what it is to make an exhibition, means that they are minimally didactic, minimally present – an organization of selected elements into a rebus or a rhyme of objects in a space which always have to do with atmosphere: a certain height of wall painted, a certain color, a certain shape of light ornament, a certain sound

3)

*Fountains* has appeared in several exhibition contexts, including the Graz exhibition *on affairs*, as a solo installation at Simian, Copenhagen (2023), and in *Balances*, a solo exhibition at her gallery Maxwell Graham/Essex Street, NYC (2022).



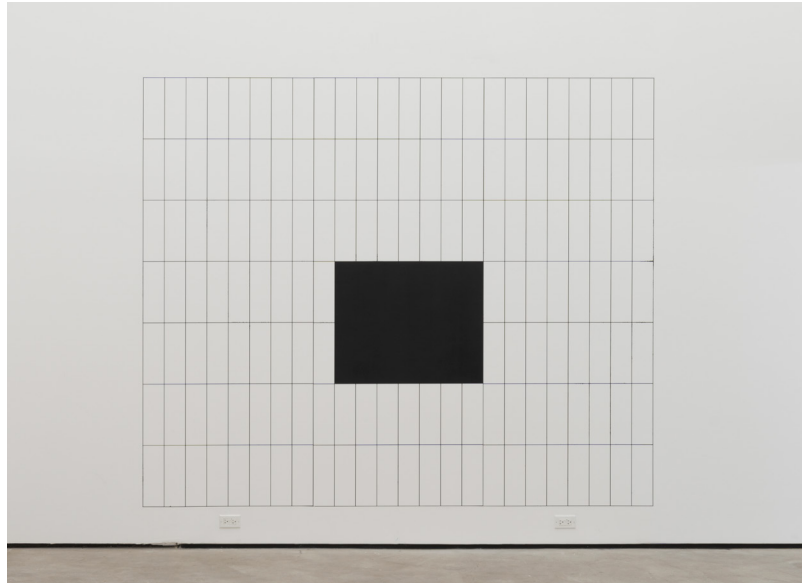
// Figure 3  
Ghislaine Leung, *Monitors*, 2022



// Figure 4  
Ghislaine Leung, *Gates*, 2019



coming from a certain fixture. The elements are never alone, they are always serial, the better to pattern the experience of the space. In this initially evident sense, Leung's approach is phenomenological as a tangent to the minimalist legacy, albeit less concerned with materiality or direct experience than with tweaking standard settings to tell stories and make jokes about dependency. A vanishing mediator, shedding an electric charge as it disappears around the wall at the corner of your eye.



// Figure 5  
Ghislaine Leung, *Hours*, 2022

— But even if spatiality has remained the focus for the artist, keeping the affect light and allegorical, the previously noted *Balances* started to extend the analysis into time, the recursive time of being available to think about art that installs a materialized thought of dependency somewhere else, through the hands and tools of others. The delegated performance of the install becomes the delegated performance of the reproductive and the waged labor that enables the artist to maintain their life and their family on the other side of the chain (one might even say the other side of the hierarchy of idea and execution), and the query becomes whether a continuity rather than a break (be it thematized or hidden) can be visualized as evidence in the space of the absence of time. So, a space that is not just about modulating the visitor's experience as an allegory of the dependency of art on standards, but that goes further back into the artist's production process as itself dependent on standards that cannot reasonably show up in the space of exhibition as anything but absences (sleep, exhaustion, caring tasks). Such a trajectory seems to merge with Lazard's exploration of the formal properties of access, all the ways the inaesthetic adaptation to 'special conditions' can be rerouted back into aesthetic conceptualization. And this perhaps is what qualifies these two practices as an infrastructural thinking in post-conceptual artistic practice that is capable of levering slices of operational autonomy out of a teeming image world in which circulation and permutation never stop. As Peter Osborne has written recently, "The photograph's 'existential proximity to the world' – its indexicality – is thus increasingly registered less in the content of the image than

in the often rapidly image-obliterating act of its exchange” (Osborne 2022: 23). His term “distributive unity,” denoting a fragile, historically-bound way of unifying matter under a category – here, “photography” – always from a retrospectively unifying vantage, allows us to see that categories like “infrastructure,” “affairs,” or even “artwork” have no ontology to unify them except a historical one: that is, the possibility of understanding what we are referring to by agreeing on what it is and how it works. This baseline understanding of what we are looking at is in contemporary exhibitions often identified as a space of operations, of logistics and permutations. Not a showcase of systems, but of possible modes of experience mediated through materializations which may include various levels of distributive unity: be it mathematical formulas, codes of conduct; or temporality, gender, space, scent, and texture. All resonate with an interest in dependency, on- and off-site, structural and infrastructural.

—— Looking at Lazard’s and Leung’s work separately, and trying to think them in conjunction, brings up a common affinity with the project of making visible as a first step in a wider problematization of absence as socially produced: a problematization of who is not in the space, who cannot pretend that the autonomy of art is either livable or defensible, and of the fact that this ‘who’ is both determined (by gender, race, wealth, age, capacity) and contingent, for example on the levels of support a gesture of dependency can attract. The “social model of autonomy” is like the social model of disability, but enacted in the space(s) of art. Yet art, like the job market in general (Ryan 2023), does not support everyone who wants or needs to thematize their dependencies; maybe here ‘access’ should also be thought as providing routes of identification to those whose dependencies have not yet emerged, an access secured with smart works and words. Perhaps the work of these two artists announces their relation to dependency most unequivocally, even perhaps literally, but evoking the literal has often been a direct way of getting in attunement with a critic. It is a way of making a start – using their facility with art and writing to create an opening for their own vulnerability, and this vulnerability as changeability: of people, spaces, and structures.

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#### // Image Credits

**Fig. 1a:** Carolyn Lazard, *A Conspiracy*, 2017, dohm white noise machines, dimensions variable, Courtesy of the artist, © Carolyn Lazard. Description: Twelve Dohm white noise machines mounted on the ceiling of a white room. The farthest wall features windows and a windowed entry door, through which the street and cars outside can be seen, and natural light floods the space. Each beige cylindrical device is purposefully placed, equidistant from its neighbors, with recessed light fixtures interspersed between them.

**Fig. 1b:** Carolyn Lazard, *A Conspiracy*, 2017, dohm white noise machines, dimensions variable, Courtesy of the artist, © Carolyn Lazard. Description: A close-up view of four Dohm white noise machines—beige, cylindrical, each resembling the structure of a smoke detector—mounted to a white ceiling. The black on/off switch of each machine faces forward.

**Fig. 2:** Carolyn Lazard, *Accessibility in the Arts: A Promise and a Practice*, first edition, 2019 (screen shot). Commissioned by Recess, written by Carolyn Lazard, edited by Kemi Adeyemi, designed by Rosen Tomov & Riley Hooker, development by Rosen Tomov, <https://promiseandpractice.art/>

**Fig. 3:** Ghislaine Leung, *Monitors*, 2022, Score: A baby monitor installed in one room and broadcast to another, Edition 1 of 3 + 2AP, Courtesy of the artist and Maxwell Graham, New York

**Fig. 4:** Ghislaine Leung, *Gates*, 2019, Score: Child safety gates installed on all thresholds in the exhibition space, Edition 1, 2, 3 of 3 + 2 AP, Courtesy of the artist and Maxwell Graham, New York

**Fig. 5:** Ghislaine Leung, *Hours*, 2022, Score: A wall painting the size of the artist's home studio wall divided into all the hours of the week with the portion of studio hours available to the artist marked in black. Thursday 9AM–4PM, Friday 9AM–4PM, Edition 1 of 3 + 2AP, Courtesy of the artist and Maxwell Graham, New York

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Marina Vishmidt is a writer and educator. She is Professor for Art Theory at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna. She has also taught at Goldsmiths, University of London. In 2022 she was the Rudolph Arnheim Visiting Professor in Art History at the Humboldt University in Berlin. Her work has appeared in *South Atlantic Quarterly*, *Artforum*, *Afterall*, *Journal of Cultural Economy*, *e-flux journal*, *Australian Feminist Studies*, and *Radical Philosophy*, among others, as well as in a number of edited volumes. She is the editor of *Speculation* (Documents of Contemporary Art series, Whitechapel/MIT 2022), co-author of *Reproducing Autonomy*, with Kerstin Stakemeier (Mute, 2016), and the author of *Speculation as a Mode of Production: Forms of Value Subjectivity in Art and Capital* (Brill 2018/Haymarket 2019). She is a member of the Marxism in Culture collective and is on the board of the New Perspectives on the *Critical Theory of Society* series (Bloomsbury Academic).

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## ARCHITECTURES OF SOCIAL CRISIS IN MELANIE GILLIGAN'S FILM'S AGAINST CAPITALISM

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Those who cannot people their solitude can never be alone  
in a busy crowd.

Baudelaire, *The Crowd*

Her obsolescence is indispensable to her work with resistance. She will have become the philosopher of her own ruin, which is also the ruinousness of capital. By entering the theatre of the street each day and displaying the dignity of her irrelevance, she alters the interpretation of necessity.

Lisa Robertson, *Proverbs of a She-Dandy*

— This article takes as its principle subject the work of artist Melanie Gilligan, in particular two serial-films that comprise part of her recent project, *Films Against Capitalism*. These films address capitalism's polycrisis – its economic, social, and health crises – through its manifestations in the present. *Crowds* (2019) is an allegorical docu-fiction series that takes Orlando, Florida as its object of investigation, specifically as a town undergoing a process of gradual impoverishment.<sup>1)</sup> It follows a young woman named Irene as she drifts through the low-waged service economy that serves the tourist industry. Irene's semi-fictional encounters are interwoven with interviews with workers and members of the labor union Unite Here about their experiences, their 'social consciousness,' and their economic anxieties, introducing documentary elements into the film.<sup>2)</sup> In contrast to the individuated perspective in *Crowds*, *Home Together* (2022), to which I will make passing reference in this article, is a docu-fiction series that looks at the idea of community, and specifically, communities of older people who have made the decision to live collectively in order to fight the alienating effects of isolation, both in the context of Covid-19 and more broadly in relation to aging.

— Gilligan's films investigate how housing, infrastructure, care, and community – areas of reproduction, and their representations – are inscribed socially, economically, and politically in a system mediated by capitalist social relations that evades its real function. In what follows, I want to suggest that *Crowds* and *Home Together* allegorize architectural representation and its

1)

*Parts-wholes 2*, the precursor to *Crowds*, is also set in Orlando. Rather than a traditional film, *Parts-wholes 2* is a video-sculpture: a cube made of screens which show various images simultaneously. The screens show moments of the hospitality industry – non-places in which people are pictured working: hotels (draped in the US flag); hotel rooms; motels inhabited by workers who cannot afford to rent their own apartments; highly securitized spaces of tourism and business, e.g. an airport. The description of the work states: "The video cubes, held together by metal bars, are sculptural forms that figuratively actualize the real abstractions of exchange, but they inevitably can only ever do this inadequately." Gilligan 2022a.

2)

Unite Here is a labor union that represents 300,000 working people, mostly women and people of color, in Canada and the USA with backgrounds from 200 countries across the planet. It represents workers in hotel, gaming, food service, manufacturing, textile, distribution, laundry, transportation, and airport industries. Unite here 2023.

concomitant social ordering. This article investigates allegory as a tool to illuminate capitalist social relations and its relevance for (militant) artistic research, which is the context in which this body of Gilligan's work was produced. Specifically, these works, along with an accompanying book, formed the qualifying materials for Gilligan's art-practice PhD. In her PhD book, Gilligan lays out "provisional directions for filmmakers interested in reflecting on capital as a social form, using film as part of the struggle to fight against it" (Gilligan 2022b: 11). Though not the main aspect of my argument, I will address the context of artistic research as a framework governing much artistic production today, within which *Films Against Capitalism* makes a critical intervention.

— In *Crisis as Form*, philosopher Peter Osborne extends architectural theorist Manfredo Tafuri's idea of "history as a project" to form the theoretical basis for an idea of "history as a project of crisis," which is how Osborne conceives of *contemporaneity* as a historical project. For Osborne, the translation of the architectural use of project to mean design and plan, allows for the idea of plan or form of crisis to emerge. Building on Tafuri's work, Osborne argues that architecture's fate is entangled in its crisis: it is "addressed to the source of the crisis of architecture in history itself, that is, in the history of capitalism: in the subjection of architecture (with its primacy of the project, design or plan) to a capitalistic form of urban planning, in which the capital functions of building have primacy over all other architectural and social forms" (Osborne 2022).<sup>3)</sup> This idea – of an architectural form/plan of crisis – comes close to offering a description of Gilligan's films, which expose the contemporary as a crisis of planning. In this essay, I explore how her most recent film works investigate the form and manifestation of capitalist crises in the current conjuncture, with the built and ruined environment and its architectures at its center.

— In order to describe the "house" in its fullest extent, Denise Ferreira da Silva and Paula Chakravartty investigate the racial and colonial inheritances within the "subprime crisis," within which those who failed to pay their mortgage (subprime loan) were also burdened with interest rates far higher than those given to 'prime' borrowers. They write: "Houses are unsettling hybrid structures. A house is, in all its figurings, always thing, domain, and meaning—home, dwelling, and property; shelter lodging, and equity; roof, protection, and aspiration—oikos, that is, house, household and home. A house is a juridical-economic-moral-entity that, as property, has material (as asset), political (as dominium), and symbolic (as shelter) value" (Chakravartty / da Silva 2012: 362). In

3)

For a contextually specific account of Tafuri's arguments and political positions, see Day 2012: 31–77. I am not engaging in the nuance of debate around the reception of Tafuri by e.g., Jamison that is countered by Day in her very insightful article; rather I want to engage with this idea of planned or formed crisis.



*Crowds*, architectural representation is cast with housing crisis, and is explored in the political and legal notions of representation in the protagonist's investigation of the labor union Unite Here. Unite Here also actively engages in struggle both in legal institutions such as courts, and in protests in the public sphere. In its economic analysis, *Crowds* explores the architectures of tourism and the service economy that feeds it. In these instances, the film addresses the racial dynamics – in terms of housing access, and in terms of access to the wage – that structure participation and exclusion in both markets. It is worth mentioning that Gilligan's fictional protagonist is a white woman, who, starting with her own disenfranchised material conditions, critically investigates these dynamics in her research and interactions.

— In the second film *Home Together*, which I will only briefly touch on in this essay, Gilligan follows Janette Ledwith who discusses the community-home she is building and the obstacles she faces in realizing this home, including the Covid-19 pandemic. Gilligan combines found news footage from Democracy Now and Real News, as well as interviews with researchers such as Seong-gee Um (who discusses immigrant and racialized elderly people) and Catherine Doherty (who discusses the devaluation of care-work and the relationships that care workers build with those under their care). In the final part of the series, the actor (Theresa) attempts to join a co-housing community but is turned away due to discrimination on the basis of her chronic illness. The docu-fiction series criticizes rampant liberal individualism and shows the ways that the pandemic exposed it, as well as the obstacles in the way of acting differently. In what follows, *Crowds*, and secondarily *Home Together*, are analyzed with respect to their representation of the form of the crisis of contemporaneity and the political potential or foreclosure that they figure.

**PRECURSORS** — For more than a decade, Gilligan's work has addressed the double notion of collective action and collective subject of Capital, in crisis. In an interview with art historian Tom Holert conducted between April and May 2011, she discussed the temporality of her (first wave) of narrative serial-films, *Crisis in the Credit System* (2008), *Self-Capital* (2009), and *Popular Unrest* (2010), in relation to capitalist regimes of time and domination (Gilligan / Holert 2012: 84–98).<sup>4)</sup> With these early works, she focused on how capital's foreclosure of the future leads it to mine 'human capital' – the aspects of subjectivity that are optimized for capital's logic, and by default the logic of the market. For example,

4)

Holert describes the works as "fictional episodic dramas, displayed in traditional art world venues and distributed via Internet websites, function as allegories of the complex relations between the worlds of art and finance, but they might as well be watched as elegant, neo-Brechtian *Lehrstücke* about the interdependence of systemic collapse and individual trauma". See Gilligan / Holert 2012: 84.

according to Gilligan's *Popular Unrest* “looks at how capital manages and captures the future behavior and physical health of populations” (Ibid.: 87). In the film, capital is represented by Spirit, a figure that can instrumentalize technologies to predict human behavior. Using the logic of pre-emption – modelling probabilities – Spirit uses capitalist biopolitics to “increasingly incorporate the affective and biophysical dimensions of people’s lives” into its logic (Ibid.). In exploring the capacity to diagnose economic reality, Gilligan’s early video art articulated how capital’s orientation towards the future expands, precisely when value produced at one point is valorized through exchange at a later point. The version of crisis elaborated here is a secular crisis in a Marxist sense, meaning that it is a permanent crisis of the reproduction of the capital-labor relation – which weakens the position of workers in the wage relation.

— In these works, Gilligan locates aspects of the financial crisis and represents them but insists that “Capital as a whole is inexpressible” (Ibid.: 87). It cannot be represented. Yet she attempts to understand and depict the *meaning* of “total social capital” through its self-valorization process.<sup>5)</sup> *Films Against Capitalism* exists on a continuum with these early works, producing a partial vision of the relations and conditions within which people produce their lives. However, I argue that the films I investigate here are more politically open because they offer materializations of the ongoing crisis, figuring capitalism’s abstract relations through the concrete scenarios that are staged and improvised.<sup>6)</sup>

**WHERE IS THE CROWD?** — *Crowds* takes place over five episodes that spiral around Orlando.<sup>7)</sup> It starts with picturesque, somewhat banal scenes resembling stock images that do not suggest poverty but its opposite: the camera follows roads manicured with flowers and palms; cars speeding along highways that serve as both connectors and borders; children playing inside fake, plastic modelled waves that reach over their heads. Tourists walk through an airport. The camera glances across streets at motels, before it settles on Irene working in Denny’s, a fast-food restaurant. Using her laptop, the protagonist signs onto a job search website for service industry work [fig. 1].

— Orlando is sprawling in a way that cannot be navigated by foot. It is a city that *belongs* to cars and traffic. In episode 2, as

5)

Gilligan writes, “Toward the end of *Popular Unrest* the group confronts and does final battle with the Spirit. As this segment ends, they encounter a vision of capital in its totality and see it for what it is—the totality of human relations touched by capital. They realize that the Spirit is not the totality but that we are and that capital’s mediation of our actions both unites us and puts all our activity into abstract relation. This point in the film is meant to suggest that perhaps this totality itself—or its contact through abstraction, if this characteristic could somehow exist without the value form—could be the ground for a new movement out of capital.” Ibid.: 88.

6)

“I sincerely want to engage an audience in the way that a fictional drama does, using the moving and immersive forms of contemporary TV and film but making dramas that question the operative assumptions of our economic and political world.” Ibid.: 94.

7)

*Crowds* was presented in an exhibition as a video installation on top of the floorplan of a home. The screens scattered within the space are punctuated by household utilities such as a sink and a mobile bearing the cliché “LIVE LOVE LAUGH.”



// Figure 1

Melanie Gilligan, *Crowds*, 2019

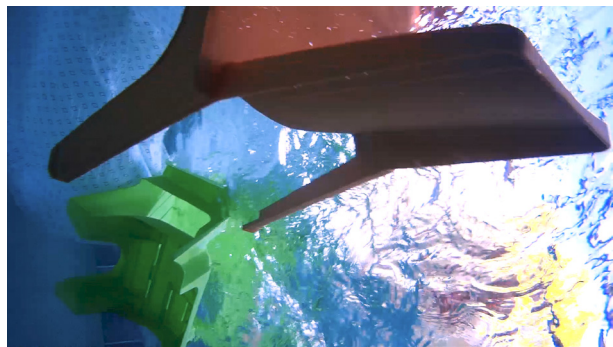
Irene is forced to cross the city by public transport, she considers buying a car but has no means. Upon entering a car dealership, she begins an interview with a woman describing buying a car after one year of taking busses, but it becomes audible. The conversations that she has with members of the labor union, Unite Here – mostly women and people of color – are integrated as meta-narrative within Irene’s reflections, or as memories bleeding fictional situations with documentary. As viewers we are required to hold these layers together, either simultaneously as in the conversation about car ownership, or at a delay, as when Irene takes a bus to the supermarket to buy food and a worker describes their experience of food poverty. In another instance, when Irene drifts between cleaning jobs, we encounter hotel workers who describe the brutal effects of housekeeping on their bodies. These moments, layered together, amount to a weaving of the texture of working-class life.

— In another scene, Irene walks to visit her cat (which she cannot keep because she has no stable home). In a voiceover she narrates a story about a person who saved their money to buy a house. The house is described as big but affordable; the people were happy there but did not feel at home. These people live in rooms that stretch out in front of them infinitely, but the walls and floor alone fail to provide a felt sense of stability. Irene sits on the steps belonging to the homeowners who are looking after her cat. In her story, the house was porous; its structure could be undermined; it lacked boundaries; its architecture was insecure. Gilligan’s rendering brings together the economic architecture of capitalism in terminal decline with the physical architecture in Orlando, itself built on swampland, and the character of Irene, who herself seems to be identified with the house as a figure whose internal structure is insecure.

**ALLEGORICAL STRATEGIES** — In Gilligan’s account, the difficulties in representing capitalism emerge from both the impossibility of comprehending capitalism as a whole and the ways in which representing its fragments remains insufficient to understanding capitalist totality as the artist writes in *Treating the Abstract of Capital Concretely*. With regards to the specificities of film itself, a medium that produces “non-instrumental deliveries of affect,” which “at times defy logic and communication” (Gilligan 2022b: 107) – she determines that even this medium is unable to depict capitalism’s density of information. Nevertheless, her chosen environments for filming are cities and their thickly interwoven convulsions of capitalist social relations. In her attempt to represent

capitalism in these films, Gilligan resorts to allegory as a method that can also critique liberal individualism.

— Following art critic Craig Owens, Gilligan’s model of allegory is defined as the doubling of one text by another: telling a general truth by means of narrating a particular story. In her terms, this allows readers and viewers to “make narrative sense from the fragments, from the wreckage of colliding narratives” (Ibid.: 107) In this sense, allegory provides Gilligan with a means to explore the fragments of capitalist life. She reaches for Walter Benjamin’s *The Arcades Project* as a tool to think about the ways the commodity form impacts the city and the relentlessness of the commodification of everyday life. Benjamin’s focus was on Paris during the second half of the nineteenth century, where he saw the commodity inaugurating an allegorical



// Figure 2a & 2b  
Melanie Gilligan, *Crowds*, 2019

mode. He writes, “the commodity fetish is itself allegorical, modern culture is intrinsically allegorical, with the exchange value of the commodity devaluing all other traditional or use values. Allegory is no longer a stylistic choice but a predicament” (Ibid.: 108; Benjamin 1999) For Benjamin this predicament arises after his engagement with Baudelaire, for whom “*Everything* becomes an allegory” (Benjamin 1999: 10). Benjamin describes Baudelaire, the flaneur, looking upon the city from its threshold, pierced by alienation. Baudelaire does not belong to the city; he looks for refuge in the crowd. As Gilligan’s protagonist Irene drifts through Orlando, she evokes something of this figure’s rootlessness. While Benjamin’s view of Paris as a city cannot simply be transposed directly onto Orlando as urban sprawl, Irene is figured as a nomadic outsider whose sole stable objects are her cell phone and laptop, thus revealing the contradictory and alienated social world through her interactions.

— In this state, Irene drifts from her role as child minder, to that of a care worker, a nanny, a pool cleaner. In the last instance, she falls into the pool and hits her head. In a surreal moment, she hallucinates household items floating around her, as if she is overwhelmed by them [fig. 2a & b]. Her behavior starts to shift. When Irene finds herself in the carpark of Home Depot, a home improvement chain store, she walks the lines of an empty parking space. She jumps up and down. She repeatedly opens and



closes a car door. She then lies on the ground in a parking space, as if she were a car [fig. 3]. We are made aware of the difference in scale between a person and a city wholly designed for cars, a space that is, in the sense given by Guy Debord, unified and homogenized so that it is merely free space for commodities (Debord 1970: 165). Here, the person rotates through life by working enough to survive, unable to get out of such conditions.



// Figure 3  
Melanie Gilligan, *Crowds*, 2019

— In his *Arcades Project*, Benjamin builds on Baudelaire in writing about the modern as spleen (Ibid.: 10). Spleen is here a kind of malaise that grows on melancholy, pain, pathos, creating a kind of pathology of a culture with the power and capacity to fracture. But spleen also has a utopian aspect. Benjamin writes that “[a]mbiguity is the appearance of dialectic in images, the law of dialectics at a standstill. This standstill is utopia and the dialectical image, therefore, dream image. Such an image is afforded by the commodity per se: as fetish. Such an image is presented by the arcades which are house no less than street. Such an image is the prostitute—seller and sold in one” (Benjamin 1999: 10). This appearance of the dialectic, this dream image, is held in the arcades: which represents both house (interior, covered, domestic, inward) and street (outward, bustling, trade, exchange) in one, just as the ‘prostitute’ is both seller and sold in one. I have already discussed the house in *Crowds* as “shelter, lodging, and equity,” and architecture in general per Tafuri as subjected to capitalistic forms of urban planning, and thus at the forefront of capitalism’s ongoing crises. In the twenty-first century, the house has come to signify property, commodity, asset, and above all credit tethered to future (foreclosed) labor, or unpayable debt and ruin.

— In Benjamin’s schema, the predicament of allegory relates to how meaning is made, which is contrasted to a reductive movement within the valuation of commodities: “The modes of meaning fluctuate almost as rapidly as the price of commodities. In fact, the meaning of the commodity is its price; it has, as a commodity, no other meaning” (Gilligan 2022b: 109; Benjamin 1999). In Gilligan’s film, there is an identification with this reduction, in that the film produces a landscape of price differentials, but in a way that takes a stance. *Crowds* thus renders visible “the unaffordability of everyday life, where the housing crisis is caused by the commoditised environment” (Gilligan 2022b: 109).



—— Philosopher Howard Caygill describes Benjamin’s dialectical analysis of allegorical contexts as antinomic, in its “nihilistic devaluation of the meanings of the world of things and actions accompanied by their re-evaluation” (Caygill 2010: 248). The devaluation and revaluation takes place by means of allegory. Here, there is a processual logic whereby “meaning is first destroyed and then restored at a higher, allegorical level” (Ibid.). Caygill describes this moment of destruction as one of fragmentation where the contexts of meaning are subject to ruination — “with the ruin as an emblem of the destructive character of allegory.” Time becomes spatial: “temporal meanings are frozen, objects and actions either piled up or stratified according to their structures that are indifferent to their natural meaning” (Ibid.). This logic is infinitely perpetuated. Caygill continues, “The annihilation of natural meaning by the allegorical is then succeeded by an allegorical restitution, one in which the destructive impulse of allegory is applied to itself” (Ibid.: 249). The meta-shift – the allegorization, the fragmentation of the fragment – allows for the questioning of the destroyed or ruined meaning.

—— Gilligan’s films should be understood to partake in this process. The filmmaker’s method, in which she develops scripted improvisations that are then played out in the context of the city as commodified environment by the protagonist, generates interactions with, and thereby brings into question, the material conditions that produce the city. In this sense, her interviews are also part of her own consciousness-raising process, presented as a moment of self-directed learning. The spontaneity of the shooting allows for a degree of chance and contingency and necessitates flexibility in terms of narration.<sup>8)</sup> These scenes, layered with absurd or surreal moments that break the illusion of the video work in a Brechtian register, are then cut with interviews that incorporate documentary realism into the frame. It is by means of these formal strategies deployed throughout the episodes – which produce ambiguity between the real, the factual and experiential, and the sur-real – that *Crowds* creates allegorical meaning.

**A TOWN THAT IS BECOMING POOR** —— In the two final episodes of Gilligan’s partial vision of capitalist ruin, Irene works for a caterer in Winter Park, part of Orlando marked by former and foundational racial segregation. The camera pans across scenes

8)  
Gilligan compares this style of producing to candid camera comedy films such as Eric Andre’s *Bad Trip* (2021 ).



// Figure 4  
Melanie Gilligan, *Crowds*, 2019

of affluent villas, leafy streets, swamp lakes dotted with boats [fig. 4]. The area traverses Orange Blossom Trail, from Osceola to Orange County, the heart of tourism and the theme park industry.

— White Europeans settled in Orlando in the late nineteenth century, forcing native populations off their lands. Because of the region's climate and natural resources suitable for citrus production, the area grew steadily until the 1950s, when limited-access highways were built, putting the city at Florida's crossroads (Hollander 2011: 97). Soon after, the US Missile Test Centre was built 50 miles east of Orlando, bringing high tech industries. With the arrival of the world's most popular tourist attraction in 1971, the city almost doubled from 99,006 and carries on growing, as Gilligan's narrator says. But it remains poor.

— Just under a decade before Gilligan made *Crowds*, scholar of urban planning Justin B. Hollander described the typical characteristics of a couple who could leave the city, citing the widespread devaluation of homes that took place after 2006 as their reason for doing so. The neighborhood in question was built to provide for the growing population that came with the 1970s tourism boom and tech industries, modelled for suburban development with large lots and space for cars. Contra Gilligan, or maybe just prior to her, Hollander addresses the depopulation and abandoned property through the sub-prime crisis, observing that in their levels of turbulence, the theme park's rollercoasters and the housing market's booms and busts resemble one another. Indeed, in the moment of Hollander's investigation just after the 2008 crash, the city's population started to shrink: during 2009 an estimated 1,000 people left, and many more left Florida as a whole.

— Orlando is an object lesson in cities that rely on tourism. In turn, this reliance produces a service industry. Hollander explains that "tourism and theme parks brought 'an economy that is structurally deficient—the vast majority of workers are part time, low wage, and have few if any benefits,'" continuing that "the Orlando area is home to a permanent underclass of gainfully employed workers who cannot break through to higher-wage positions" (Ibid.: 97).

— Florida's history as a site of tourism reaches back to the era of Reconstruction. In *Emancipation Betrayed* – a history of Black organizing against White capitalists who tried to re-establish themselves during the initial period of reconstruction until the 1920s – historian Paul Ortiz writes about how Florida was already seen as a place of leisure for rich Whites and Europeans, built on the labor of the racialized and formerly enslaved (Ortiz 2006: 15). During the nineteenth century, newspapers compared Florida to

Italy, describing its climate as better than Naples and its landscapes as better than Florence, in bids to lure in rich Whites from the North or European settlers to spend their wealth (Ibid.: 16). Ortiz writes, “At the bottom of this entrepreneurial plan rested a disenfranchised and powerless black population whose low wages and hard work would underwrite the booming agricultural, service and shipping sectors” (Ibid.) This compulsion and this work discipline are among the afterlives of slavery, in which the paths to economic growth were paved by democracy’s concessions – how much freedom was given away? Ortiz’s title, *Emancipation Betrayed*, suggests an answer to this question. Florida’s draconian nineteenth-century Black Codes extended slavery by other means. In a private correspondence to me, Gilligan cited Ortiz’s observations as continuing in Orlando in many forms today.<sup>9)</sup> As well as Ortiz’s account, Tana Mosier Porter’s article “Segregation and Desegregation in Parramore: Orlando’s African American Community” was an important reference in Gilligan’s research on Orlando. The scenes in Winter Park, which explore the continuation of systemic racial segregation after the Jim Crow laws in the post-civil war South, build on Mosier Porter’s account of this. Mosier Porter describes urban developers in 1881 building separate communities for white resort goers, and Black employees (Porter 2004: 292). This spatial division would later become legally enshrined segregation, intensifying until the 1950s. In her book, Gilligan points out the “tangible evidence of this history with its design for oppressive spatial control with its winding cul de sacs that seem constructed to limit access to people attempting to navigate these securitized private environments” (Gilligan 2022b: 114–15). Gilligan describes this planning as reminiscent of a form of Haussmannization, which controls the movement of people, here maintaining a racist hierarchy within the built environment. The scene around Winter Park progresses. A member of Unite Here narrates an account of hotels being run down, having become temporary homes for undocumented immigrants entering the USA to live and work as cleaners, housekeepers, and dishwashers, the underbelly of this magic landscape. We learn that these hotels also practice wage debt, an illegal process whereby workers are asked to clock out but continue working. Mosier Porter describes a zoning code adopted in Orlando in 1927, wherein White citizens demanded that Black residents be ousted from their homes and forced into newly segregated areas (Porter 2020). Gilligan traces the afterlife of this segregation, as it manifests in the service economy and in Orlando’s economically unstable built environment, as capitalism is inflected with the ongoing history of racialization.

9)

Melanie Gilligan, email to author, 13 April 2023.

— In *Crowds*, Irene joins a protest organized by Unite Here, opposing a Florida State Bill that would allow ICE (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, a federal agency) power over the local police [fig. 5a & b]. This crowd scene is intercut with her conversation with an organizer from Unite Here, who talks about how in Orlando undocumented workers vulnerable to deportation are mistreated because they have so few legal rights. The crowd leaves the court after the senate fails to decide on the Bill [fig. 6]. An interviewee describes the risk immigrants are subject to simply in walking to a grocery store, for fear of being stopped by the police, as well as that of working when they are sick, since they do not have access to the health system.

— In Orlando, major new housing construction took place until 2006, when it *began* its phase of managed decline. Single family units increased from 642 to 1,104 and multi-family units from 3,590 to 4,273 in the space of 3 years (Hollander 2011: 98). Between 2006 and 2009, the texture of the city changed dramatically. The real estate market crashed, and the foreclosure crisis began, effectively leading to vast sums of housing being abandoned; in these circumstances it was cheaper to abandon than to sell.<sup>10</sup> This abandonment also led to the unkemptness of neighborhoods, the effective rewilding of formerly landscaped lawns, and graffiti and vandalism. In Gilligan's rendering of the crisis, though we are not given the specific history, we begin to see an account of the human suffering that the crisis and foreclosures produced, countering the ideological image of stability. Synthesizing Gilligan's *Crowds* and Hollander's text, we sense the presence of an employed but permanent underclass, that, due to this history, and current migration patterns, is also highly racialized. This is mediated through Irene's interviews with members of Unite Here, and the character of their protests.

— At the end of the film, as Irene is evicted from her apartment, from the singular house, she narrates a story about a *town* becoming poor. Irene tells how the town tries to stop this process, but the process is too strong. In

10) Single family rental permits dropped by 78% and multi-family permits dropped by 98% to just 66 in 2009. See Hollander 2011: 99.



// Figure 5a & 5b  
Melanie Gilligan, *Crowds*, 2019



// Figure 6  
Melanie Gilligan, *Crowds*, 2019



Gilligan's script, the failing economy cannot be saved through hard work and perseverance. From inside the crisis, the liberal dream of the land of opportunity is an impossibility. In Irene's speculative fairytale about capitalist urban planning, the mayor and 'honorable townspeople' do all they can to open factories. Eventually, there is a lack of food and no ability to grow food. The town is hungry, and the people do not know why. The town's activities cease.

— In her analysis of capitalism's secular crisis through its concrete manifestations in Orlando, Gilligan diagnoses a poverty of low-income housing and an abundance of minimum wage service-work: in this equation, people cannot afford to pay for their basic needs. Orlando grows fast and poor. Those who service the tourist economy pay the highest price. They must work multiple jobs to live in conventional housing; otherwise, they live in cars.<sup>11)</sup> *Crowds* narrates that the 17,000 USD minimum wage, with 12% going to taxes and more than 50% to housing, leaves 77 USD per week for what is left – spelling out a crisis that produces decisions between leaving kids at home alone and not going to work.

— At the end of the film, Irene moves into a car with a rescue cat. In this fairytale, *Crowds* allegorizes capitalist polycrisis through its plans and designs that in turn produce insecurity on structural, economic, and emotional levels. In this sense, the internal, psychic fragmentation and the fragmentation of the external world are coterminous.

— Though I do not have space here to analyze *Home Together* in as much depth, I want to suggest that, with its focus on the collective, it is a response to the problem of the individual in *Crowds*. As the pandemic showed us, there are real crises across all sectors of the reproduction of life and care. In the final scene of that film, Michelle articulates the ways in which we will all become sick. Our crises will also be secular. We will not be able to revive ourselves. Michelle allegorizes the crisis of capitalism as a human health crisis, in the sense that, as the etymological roots of the word crisis suggest, a decisive point is reached that just precedes interminable decline.

#### **CODA – ON MILITANT OR LIBERAL ARTISTIC RESEARCH** —

*Crowds* is one of a series of film works and writing that comprise *Films Against Capitalism*. The films include *The Common Sense* (2014–15), *Parts-wholes* (2018), *The Bay Area Protests* (2016–2022), *Health as Individual vs. Health as Social* (2021), and *Home Together* (2020–2022). The written portion is a handbook titled *Treating the Abstract of Capital Concretely* (2022),

11)

The car plays a significant symbolic role, as the car is both travel infrastructure, and increasingly it provides a place in which to sleep for low wage workers who cannot afford housing, ending in tragedy. See Román 2018.



to which I have referred throughout this article. All elements of *Films Against Capitalism* are presented on a website, designed by LOKI and licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. The website also signals that this material is the virtual component of Melanie Gilligan's Doctoral Dissertation, completed at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm in 2022 (Gilligan 2022a). All the films/video works are available to access on the website [fig. 7 a & b]. They include a general description, stills, credits, and, when necessary, episodes, which include descriptions, effectively mimicking Netflix or other streaming services. The descriptions use simple, non-theoretical language, even if they ask probing questions. They are pedagogical, attempting to raise awareness and politicize their viewers.

— Gilligan's practice is discernibly political but does not easily fit into existing models. Using scripted improvisation, the films experiment with innovative allegorical structures in an attempt to represent capitalism at the point of its multiple (infrastructural/reproductive) crises. The project has a pedagogical and activist function that is legible in its name: *Films Against Capitalism*. It is inspired and frank in its linguistic clarity. In this final section, I would like to ask: what kind of artistic research is this, what does it offer politically and aesthetically in relation to contemporary artistic tendencies that attempt to critique capitalism?

— Art historian Larne Abse Gogarty posits the political spectrum as polarized between the irrational in the realm of emotion and belief, in contrast to truth and science which stand as sovereign. Abse Gogarty sees these two positions – cleaved between the “ultra-left valorisation of spontaneity” that accompanies mass movements guided by the political compass of lived experience, and the moderate and liberal visions of “political education” guided by party structures – as the two poles that animate leftist political debates today (Gogarty 2022: 53). Her concern with this polarization between the rational and irrational is spurred by the epistemological foundations of Fredric Jameson's notion of “cognitive mapping,” which has become a dominant tendency for artists and writers concerned with the critique of capitalism during the last three decades, including Gilligan.<sup>12)</sup> In Jameson's

12)

Gilligan argues for relevance of narrative scenarios to analyze capitalist dynamics, rather than 'God's eye view' overviews of, e.g., supply chains. See Gilligan 2022: 125.



// Figure 7a & 7b  
Melanie Gilligan, *Films Against Capitalism*, 2022

account, these polarized epistemological foundations lead us to conspiracy. Specifically, conspiracy is the degraded version of the “cognitive map’s superior attempt to ‘think the impossible totality of the contemporary world system’” (Ibid.: 55). Abse Gogarty formulates conspiracy as a “model of knowledge in legibly political art via the aesthetic category of the sublime (along with the racialised, proprietary dynamics that underpin it), emphasising this as the glue holding together the dyadic relationship between the respectable quest for knowledge that propels the cognitive map and the low associations of the conspiracy theorist” (Ibid.: 54). When manifested as art-making, this info-loaded mode uses lens-based media to attempt to map the relations of capitalism, a project linked with the liberal (and) conspiratorial tendency to imagine that data mining and foreign interference are the main culprits of the contemporary turn to the far-right in recent years.<sup>13)</sup> Gilligan offers a model that counters this liberal tendency to blame data mining, but does not simply concede to the irrational; instead, she brings into view the social relations that index violent abstraction. It should also be understood that art’s irrationality is dialectically linked to its rationality, and the role that rationalization plays in the social process.

— In a similar vein as Abse Gogarty, Claire Bishop addresses this informational tendency within contemporary art as producing mild panic. For Bishop, contemporary art has become dominated by research – through the development of arts-based PhDs in Europe and the United States – where the systems of value are derived from neoliberal notions of “return on investment” and “measurable impact” (Bishop 2023). Bishop’s aim in her article, like Abse Gogarty’s, is instead to attend to the *forms* and *knowledge* that artists produce within information-based aesthetics.

— Bishop’s genealogy of data returns to artist Renée Green’s installation titled *Import/Export Funk Office* (1992–93), which she understands as introducing research-based art as a hybrid form.<sup>14)</sup> In her schema, she invokes three models of art. The first, pre-internet, is a distributed form of knowledge as per Green, wherein knowledge production itself becomes a collaborative process (Ibid.).<sup>15)</sup> The second model is contemporaneous with Green’s, but opts for soon-to-be-obsolete analogue media: slides, celluloid, record players, typewriters.<sup>16)</sup> For Bishop, within this “archival impulse” (Hal Foster), the artist seeks to connect what cannot be connected: the self takes up a prime position as “a glue that enables the debris of the past to stick together, at least temporarily” (Ibid.).<sup>17)</sup> Finally, the third model, the digital, is labelled

13)

In this view, Trevor Pagan stands out as an artist whose practice embodies this liberal imagination, par excellence. Moreover, Paglen’s work is described as determined by a kind of “info-optimism” which derives largely from conceptualism and is additive and information centric. Abse Gogarty links this to notions of data sublime (building on James Bridle and Will Davies) and then reads this history of the concept of the sublime through the racialism in the language of Burke and Kant. I am convinced by the argument that this idea of unveiling some kind of state secret leads to liberal quietism.

14)

“Green’s video recordings total more than twenty-six hours and can be consulted by viewers, as can her audio recordings and reading materials. *Import/Export* marks a rupture with preceding modes of artistic research by inviting the viewer to be a *user*, someone who can explore the fragments, synthesize them, and potentially even mobilize the material for his or her own research (or at least perform that role—notice the white gloves placed on top of a box marked DATA).” See Bishop 2023.

15)

At that moment, this strategy was deployed to avoid the simple takeaway – to avoid didacticism – opting for complexity. This tendency to avoid authorial mastery, as Bishop underlines, responded to post-structuralism and feminist and postcolonial theory, which aimed to critique linear history as, “evolutionary, univocal, masculinist, and imperial.”

16)

This is exemplified in the work of Tacita Dean and Danh Vo, in which information is narrated by storytelling, in purposeful sequences derived from serial methods producing individual micro-narratives – research based and fictional – which intersect with “history.”

as post-internet (Ibid.). It is based on, in David Joselit's words, "aggregation"—the tendency to select and sample autonomous elements. This process results in an "epistemology of search" (Ibid. 2023; Joselit 2013) Here, artistic work involves downloading and assembling existing material—suggesting modes such as appropriation and the readymade. This is solved through a process of "conflation:" Bishop writes, "search becomes research." Artist Wolfgang Tillmans' *Truth Study Center* epitomizes this tendency, wherein the content can be continuously "refreshed," inhabiting a post-internet imagination. Bishop describes the artist herself, unable to draw conclusions, as being lost in data. Artists present information without an authorial voice, or they present information that can't be contested, but merely agreed with—producing a dead-end.<sup>18)</sup>

— In Gilligan's research into and representations of capitalist crises we have seen a model for film against capitalism, that, in allegorical fashion, attempts to capture the fragmented moments of everyday life and its concomitant political struggles, as they index abstract reality. Gilligan's engagement with the labor union *Unite Here* lends itself to a kind of radical openness against political quietism, and in turn contributes to one of the concrete moments of resistance to capital's determinations, which is premised on the efforts of people working together to build structures of solidarity. In particular, *Crowds* has shown a way to engage with the surrounding environment, to question and test one's encounters with reality.

— The architectures of social crisis, manifest in housing and its legal structures whose socio-historical, political formations have produced the racialized inheritance of the sub-prime crisis, bring into view the extent to which the project of history is, by design, a project of capitalist crisis.

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17)

Here, this research-based art pries open a gap between *research* and *truth*: Instead of starting from social themes (migration, translation, female labor, environmental damage), "the artwork pulls disparate strands together through fiction and subjective speculation." As such, this tendency opens up overlooked narratives, but shores up a canon of white male protagonists, thus consolidating received history. Bishop compares this to Saidiya Hartman's notion of "critical fabulation," which is much more radical, and struggles with the question of invention, itself an artistic category, in the face of 1) the ethics of the researcher, and 2) the constitutive exclusions and violences of the archive, here, the archive of slavery told through the violence of the slaveholders and their legal institutions. In Bishop's view, and I would agree, Hartman thus achieves a methodological breakthrough in writing the difficulties of this kind of research.

18)

Ways of pushing against academic research, for Bishop, are offered by 1) allowing personal narrative into research, thus challenging the relationship between truth and fiction, and 2) "by presenting research in aesthetic forms that exceed the merely informative (the pleasure of a well-crafted story; connections and juxtapositions that surprise and delight)." Thus, Bishop's problem is solved in the work of Anna Boghiguian: "Boghiguian's internalization and processing of history is not simply the outcome of digital meandering (although that inevitably plays a role). It is a lived, sensuous encounter that has been digested. The format of the grid enables a line of inquiry that is nonlinear but not unstructured, while the honeycomb frames anchor the research in a nondigital apparatus of communication. Nor is it an unmediated truth claim: *The Salt Traders* is a poetic and critical journey of visualized connections between the past and today—one in which history is presented as messy, unfinished business." Thus, for Bishop, the answer is given in this notion of the metabolization process within research. The encounter has been digested. The artist feels their way through the world. Bishop's model for artistic research is all the more artistic, poetic, before it is political, or rather, its politics are held in this mode of production, digesting and feeling encounters with the world, fully idiosyncratic. See Bishop 2023.

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// Image Credits

- Fig. 1–6: Melanie Gilligan, *Crowds*, 2019, 5-channel HD video, 12–15 min each, 5 episodes, stills, Courtesy of Melanie Gilligan and Galerie Max Mayer
- Fig. 7a & 7b: Melanie Gilligan, *Films Against Capitalism*, 2022, virtual component of Melanie Gilligan's Doctoral Dissertation at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm, Sweden: *Treating the Abstract of Capital Concretely: Films Against Capitalism*, Courtesy of Melanie Gilligan (screenshot)

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## CREATING BOUNDARIES IN THE POLITICS OF HOUSEHOLD LABOR: SRI LANKAN MAIDS IN THE KUWAITI HOME<sup>1)</sup>

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**INTRODUCTION** — Over the past few decades, in a global context of economic neoliberalism and labor market flexibilization, care work<sup>2)</sup> worldwide has been increasingly commoditized, defamilized, and foreignized. As a consequence, women, primarily from less-developed countries, are increasingly on the move, filling growing care deficits in private households in developed and/or more affluent countries in a globally interconnected world. At the receiving end, under the auspices of global capitalism, these migrant women substitute for upper- and middle-class women who are no longer able to perform ‘unpaid’ social reproductive labor due to their entry into the labor market as salaried workers or are no longer interested in the drudgery of ‘unpaid’ household work, the constantly made-over status symbol of women. Social reproductive labor is therefore the basis of an employment relationship between two women, maid and mistress, who occupy very different class stations. These class stations are neither fixed nor given but continually (re)produced and challenged in the politics of (paid) household labor. Indeed, the maid’s ‘otherization’ and the mistress’s affirmation of the status quo takes place on a daily basis in the not-so-private world of the home and family life. The category of women is thus at once challenged and stabilized, as too are the binary and familial concepts of care and the women’s lives that apparently coalesce around it. It is within this context that in this paper I scrutinize the (re)making of ‘self’ and ‘other’ distinctions between maid and mistress through the daily politics of household labor. Defined as everyday practices, rules, rituals, and symbolism of constructing family and work, the daily politics of household labor produces feelings of intimacy and distance as well as the images of mistress and maid in the domestic space. My research examines a dynamic maid–mistress relationship in the Global South, characterizing Sri Lankan migrant maids and their mistresses in oil-rich Kuwait. The two women forge a curiously intimate labor relationality that casts new light on ‘sameness’ as much as on ‘difference’—making and breaking boundaries—in the complex organization of reproductive labor.

— Based on my fieldwork in Kuwait in 2022, I offer a qualitative, post-structuralist analysis of the phenomena, the micropolitics of domestic labor, boundary work, and ‘self’/‘other’ identities. The field interviews were carried out on the premises of the Sri Lankan

1)

This paper is based on research within the FWF Lise-Meitner Programme project: “‘Ideal’ Migrant Subjects: Domestic Service in Globalization” (M 2724-G) led by Wasana Handapangoda (applicant/chair) and Brigitte Aulenbacher (co-applicant/mentor), Johannes Kepler University Linz, Austria (duration: 11/2019–04/2023).

2)

This is all the work related to the provision of everyday caring needs, including household chores and care for the elderly, children and frail performed in and for a private household or households.



Mission in Kuwait and focused on two different groups of participants: live-in Sri Lankan migrant maids and Kuwaiti employers of Sri Lankan maids. Notably, in a society where the spatial options and behaviors of women are largely restricted and controlled as defined conventionally, meeting with female Kuwaiti employers as potential interviewees was challenging and limited. In these circumstances, my field interviews with the male employers were used as an informative window into the employment relationship between their wives (mistresses) and Sri Lankan maids in the private Kuwaiti home (Handapangoda forthcoming). Together with my field observations, the interviews yielded important insights into the employment relationship between Sri Lankan maids and their Kuwaiti mistresses. It is an intimate relationship, yet bounded by different social locations, which are sustained, contested, and reproduced through the daily politics of household labor concerning space, food, clothing, and religious faith in the private home.

**A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE** — Linked to the legacies of slavery and colonialism, domestic work has long represented class and race hierarchies in the most intimate sphere (Lan 2003: 535), making the domestic labor relationship between maid and mistress a politically charged terrain of class-based and racialized troubles and struggles. Today against the backdrop of rising neoliberal globalization and labor migration, the historically fraught image of the maid has been increasingly replaced by that of ‘migrant maids’ from developing countries worldwide, who have repositioned the maid–mistress relationship within an ever-widening matrix of power (Nakano Glenn 1992: 1–43). Migrant domestic work constitutes an employment relationship between two women characterized by unequal dependencies and thus imbalances in power and inequalities; women are structurally connected by gender while simultaneously divided along various other intersecting social axes, such as class, race, nationality, religion, and immigration status (Yeates 2012: 135–154). Migrant domestic work thus represents an ideal space within which the female subject is at once located and dislocated, rendering the essentialist construction of women as common victims of capitalist patriarchy effectively non-pertinent.

— Hiring migrant maids involves an interactive process of establishing, reproducing, and contesting social and spatial boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them.’ The boundaries are drawn along structural lines of (in)equality, forming ‘socio-categorical boundaries,’ and through the divides that establish the public/

private zones, constituting 'socio-spatial boundaries' (Lan 2003: 525–526). Migrant maids are subjected to everyday regulation and disciplining of the body, emotions, and sexuality, as Casanova points out (Masi de Casanova 2013: 562.), through which the employers set the boundaries and manage any boundary-threatening situations that may arise in the domestic workplace. This involves domestic politics concerning the choices and conditions of employment, such as food and space, appearance/clothing, movements and privacy, via which the employer constructs 'self' and 'other' identities and social ranks (Lan 2003; Casanova 2013). That said, these everyday interactions simultaneously represent the territories within which maids negotiate their bodies, actions, space, and affects, making the boundaries that exist permeable and/or constructing alternative boundaries (Lan 2003: 525). Identity in the domestic workplace is therefore co-authored by maids and mistresses, for which process the narrative of the Sri Lankan migrant maid and Kuwaiti mistress provides an informative case of analysis.

**CREATING BOUNDARIES OF 'SELF' AND 'OTHER' IN THE DAILY POLITICS OF HOUSEHOLD LABOR** \_\_\_\_\_

The Kuwaiti mistress's home provided both the working and the living space for the Sri Lankan maid. Home was therefore shaped by the ideologies of family as well as (paid) work, thus embodying different meanings for the two women, maid and mistress. In the home they were tied by a mutually dependent relationship: the maid relied on the mistress for her job that she could not afford to lose while the mistress relied on the maid for everyday household work and family care that freed her, to a greater degree, from the burden of unpaid household work, allowing her to pursue her own passions and interests, including paid work as a 'career woman'. In the home they were thus connected by the traditional gender division of labor that determines spatial divisions, where everything that is related to the sense of home constitutes the women's world in both Kuwait and Sri Lanka (Fathi 2021: 979–993). Through everyday rules, rituals and practices, they negotiated, affirmed, and contested their social positions in the home, which were very different yet at times comparable in significant ways. The conceptions of 'self' and 'other' were thus (re)constructed in an everyday struggle between the mistress, the head of the Kuwaiti domestic space, and her maid through the politics of bodily actions, space, signs, and symbols in the home that embodied a locus of material, spatial, and symbolic boundaries of inclusion and exclusion.

— In accordance with this view, what follows are narratives from the field, casting light on the ways Sri Lankan migrant maids and Kuwaiti mistresses engage with the conceptions of ‘self’ and ‘other’ through everyday exchanges, rules, and rituals of household labor.

— **SRI LANKAN MIGRANT MAIDS:**

*Account 1:*

“All the families I have worked for have been nice to me. Thank the Lord, Allah protect me. .... I work hard. We come here to work; I have no problem with it. Some say it’s hard and difficult. .... What our people [Sri Lankan maids] do is, they are always on the [mobile] phone. These people don’t like that. They pay us and just expect us only to work for them. ... Your religious faith is part of you; it is about what you believe in, a state of mind, isn’t it? I observe my daily Buddhist rituals like that, all in my mind. But in this country, half the time you believe in the Lord, Allah. .... I have been given everything; a phone, a separate room, clothes, even gold jewelry.”

*Account 2:*

“Most of the time, they [employers] would bring takeaway food except for me. I had nothing to eat; nothing in the fridge kept for me. .... *Mama* [mistress] kept everything in their fridge. I told her that I want to cook for myself. So, she told me to cook some vegetables, like eggplant or something like that. .... I had to do everything around the house. I cooked, cleaned, did the laundry for them, looked after their children, and did everything. .... I had to wear a uniform and cover my head. ... I was not allowed to talk with men. I could speak with *baba* [male employer] only when I was spoken to. I was not allowed to wear clothes that revealed my body. .... We think they are our family, but they aren’t: they will hit you with anything they can find and say anything to you that comes to their minds.”

*Account 3:*

“They [the employers] said they’d give me 4,000 dinars as a reward if I converted to Islam. No, I wouldn’t do that. .... You must work hard, listen to your employers and work as they please. You must look after their children with care, without scolding or hitting them. Only then will they pay your salary and be kindly to you.”

**KUWAITI MISTRESSES:**

*Account 1:*

“... they [Sri Lankan maids] are not cheeky. They are polite; they accept anything, flexible. .... When I go to the kitchen, I can find dust and dirt under the fridge, behind the cupboards and all. I know they have not been cleaned up thoroughly. But she [her maid] has an excuse this time because she is working alone. So, I will not scold her, but tell her to clean up. But when there are two [maids], there is no excuse, no. I must be serious about not cleaning. .... If she deserves a mobile, that is only after she has proven to me that she’s no trouble, yes. There are no days-off. .... If she is a liar, I don’t like her. She should do her work, what I tell her to do, and be polite. If she is tired, she can tell me; ‘sorry, madam, I cannot do it’; tell me openly without being afraid or lying to me.”

*Account 2:*

“I love Sri Lankans [maids]. She [her Sri Lankan migrant maid] has been with me for 26 or 28 years. Yes, she came to work for me when I had my first daughter. .... I love her. She is part of my family. She is like a second mom to all of us. She works very little now. She is old. What she does is only cooking and washing. I cannot press her to do more because she has worked more than enough. .... She speaks Arabic better than me [here, the interviewee was laughing]. Everyone in my family asks me how many more years I am going to keep her. I tell them until she wants to leave. I will never tell her to leave [said firmly].”

— Migrant domestic work has an inescapable ‘otherness’ ascribed to it. In the process of ‘otherization,’ space – physical, social, bodily and symbolic – proved critical. In the visible presence of an outsider, a foreigner and underling in the home 24/7, the mistresses deployed space as a strategic arrangement to construct family boundaries and to safeguard privacy (Lan 2003). The mistresses’ superior social position enabled them to stake claims to such arrangements and mark boundaries in their private homes. Therefore, separate spatial arrangements like servants’ rooms, bathrooms, and toilets prevented unwanted contact and intrusion on privacy for both parties in the usually extensive living spaces in Kuwaiti homes. The maids’ separate and demeaning spatial arrangements symbolized their inferior social status, amplifying their servitude, against which the mistresses’ superior social

status was highlighted. The spatial arrangements and controls also manifested the symbolic and bodily boundaries constructed around the maids that were connected to their subjectivity and sexuality: measures taken to save the ‘promiscuous migrant subject’ from her own body and any threat that her promiscuity might inflict upon the integrity of the morally righteous Kuwaiti family home (Handapangoda 2024). Such acts of restraint demonstrated the Kuwaiti mistresses’ unrestrained power in (re)constructing and (re)affirming the subjected position of their maids, which was entangled in tensions over categorical distinctions such as class, race, nationality, religion, and immigration status.

— The maids’ dual status as immigrants and domestic workers afforded them little juridical status in terms of workers’ rights, legal status, and freedoms, with absolutely no right to organize on Kuwaiti soil or in any of the other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Organizing migrant maids in GCC countries is extremely challenging within the restrictive legal provisions dealing with them—especially *kafala*, an endemic law that exclusively ties migrant workers’ work and residence status to individual employers, denying them rights to unionization or entry into a labor dispute process. The isolated working conditions and limited mobility and privacy also placed migrant maids among the workers most vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. However, this is not to say that the migrant maids were passive victims of circumstances. In their own ways they resisted against oppressive forces that intruded upon their spatial boundaries: from running away from the workplace to simply living with abuse, they used both defiance and compliance as household strategies to negotiate, defend, or simply surrender the right to space in disparate embodiments of ‘other.’

— Food has the capacity to mobilize strong emotions (Appadurai 1981: 494)—love, affection, and inclusion as much as disgust, shame, and exclusion. Daily food culture in the Kuwaiti home embodied critical practices through which everyday domestic labor relations were regulated and disciplined via the workers’ bodies (Ceradoy 2022: 922–937). The migrant maids were subjected to control of their food by the mistresses in many ways. These ranged from giving them insufficient food or the employers’ food waste, restricted food choices, the imposition of irregular and controlled mealtimes, to the maintenance of separate refrigerators for the employer’s family and the maid. Home thus became a place in which the maids were denied the right to food and food security. In addition, in receiving employers’ food waste that they had rejected and discarded (Ibid.), home was portrayed as a place in which



the proximity of dirt and filth was used to protect and maintain boundaries; and on this basis, class and racial distinctions were drawn in both bodily and symbolic form. Food control signified perhaps the most tangible and immediate form of boundary-making and power over the maids' bodies exercised in the Kuwaiti home through deprivation, abuse, humiliation, and surveillance. Food nevertheless acted as a locus for the maids to negotiate their place within the home. Through acts such as cooking separate food for themselves, refusing to eat undesirable food, buying separate food for themselves, or stealing food, they strove for the right to bodily integrity and for their place in the home.

— Appearance and clothing were the site of another critical, overtly established code of conduct within the private Kuwaiti home. The maids were enforced a strict dress code at work by their mistresses. They dressed in a maid's uniform, made of loose trousers and a shirt of a single color with a white frill collar and sleeves, as well as a head cap; through it their bodies were scrutinized and controlled. The uniform clearly distinguished the maids from the mistresses and the rest of the family. It was an outward manifestation of inferior social status and a symbol of 'otherness' imprinted on them under protest. The uniform signified a form of symbolic violence against the maids, where the mistresses monopolized the cultural codes and symbols, taking control of the maids' body and bodily space, over which they had exercised greater control and autonomy at home in Sri Lanka (Handapangoda forthcoming). Furthermore, the maids succumbing to wearing uniforms and the mistresses clothes – again dictated by the social conventions on 'appropriate' clothing for women in Kuwait – violated both maid's and mistress's right to bodily expression and bodily space in the most intimate sphere.

— In terms of religious faith, for the mistresses and their families as Muslims, living out Islam was a major part of everyday life in the private Kuwaiti home. This often positioned maids, who were mostly Buddhists, in a conflicting and confounding moral cosmos, where they found in religion a sense of emotional reassurance from the fears and anxieties of life in a foreign land. The mistresses often forced their religious beliefs, values, and attitudes upon the maids, obligating them to follow everyday Islamic rituals and practices, sometimes culminating in the extreme of religious conversion; the maids' spiritual space was thus intruded upon (Handapangoda 2024). In return, the maids practiced a range of everyday coping strategies in a simultaneous manifestation of resistance and obedience. These included keeping religious identity

a secret, borrowing a relatively 'favored' religious affiliation while secretly practicing their own religious rituals, refusing to give in to the mistresses' demands of faith, and religious conversion. Religious faith created a form of morally-based social division and associated outcomes of reward and retribution in the private Kuwaiti home.

**CONCLUSION** — In the dynamics of global inequality that push more and more women into the labor market, social reproductive labor represents an important realm for the production of identities and social inequalities. It simultaneously differentiates and consolidates the 'category of women' along structural lines: while gender forms a common denominator of 'oneness,' such social categories as class, race, nationality, religion, citizenship/immigration status, and language constitute structures of 'otherness,' creating overlapping, interdependent, and mutually constitutive systems of discrimination and privilege. Therefore, in a curiously intimate employment relationship bounded by intersecting structures, the maids and mistresses can become caught in a dynamic of dominance and submission, in which they practice mutual surveillance (Bohata 2017: 341–359). The rules, rituals, and practices of (paid) household labor, i.e., domestic politics concerning space, food, clothing, and religious faith, proved useful in this. The question of who can draw boundaries and to what extent may alternate between the two women, maid and mistress, with the maid often becoming the subject of boundary-making exercised through punishment and violence as well as reward and recognition. The boundaries are physical, social, bodily, and symbolic; they are policed and safeguarded, yet fluid, movable, and crossable.

— Sri Lankan women's emplacement as migrant maids in the Kuwaiti private home exposes social reproductive labor as a desirable commodity, thus setting off conflicting discourses of economic opportunity against hyper-precarity. It provides an opportunity to question the propriety of the intrusion of instrumental means into the reproductive realm and the de-centering of 'family' in the concept of care; yet it simultaneously unfolds the possibility of a more or less successful union between the reproductive and the productive that has become essential for a succession of transnational regimes of accumulation. 'Women's work' has been repositioned within a framework of capitalist production that treats various factors that determine social location, including but not limited to gender, class, race, nationality, religion, and immigration status, as fundamental to capitalist accumulation (Bohrer 2018: 46–74). In this way,

migrant domestic work provides a glaring example of the ways in which global inequalities have been anchored into the most intimate sphere, differentiating the ‘category of women’ and power dynamics not only between mistress and maid but also between maids.

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## THE ART OF EFFICIENCY: KWIEKULIK'S REFLECTIONS ON THE ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS OF THEIR WORK

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That KwieKulik (1971–1988), the artist duo formed by Zofia Kulik and Przemysław Kwiek, were also a couple in their private life and lived and worked in a joint household throughout the duration of their collaboration is crucial to the form and mode of production of their work. It is because of this fact that KwieKulik were able to intertwine their everyday and artistic activities in their performances, photos, and installations, as well as in the archive of ephemeral Polish art of the 1970s and '80s that they maintained in their Warsaw apartment (Studio of Activities, Documentation and Propagation / Pracownia Działań, Dokumentacji i Upowszechniania – PDDiU). The duo's artistic work had a semi-public existence in state-socialist Poland. Even if it was not exhibited in prestigious state-run museums, the cultural situation in Poland in the 1970s was quite liberal, and there were some possibilities for innovative artists such as they were to exhibit work. On the one hand, KwieKulik were able to show it in avant-garde institutions such as the Galeria Repassage or the Galeria Remont (both in Warsaw), often financed by student organisations and tolerated or even sometimes supported by the state. On the other hand, KwieKulik used their apartment as a locus for artistic interventions and for encounters with invited guests. In the following, I will show how various dimensions of the concept of 'economy' in the life and work of the couple are addressed in their art: On the one hand, commissioned so-called "potboiler" work and domestic household activities are shown as economic conditions underlying artistic work. On the other hand, their artistic work itself is deliberately governed by an economic ideal of efficiency.

**THE ECONOMICS OF COMMISSIONED WORK** — Worth recalling first of all is KwieKulik's engagement—unique in the Polish art of the 1970s—with the "political economy of the potboiler," as Tomasz Załuski puts it. The latter is referring to the artists' activities thematizing the harsh economic conditions of their precarious existence (Załuski 2018b). Under state socialism, no free art market existed in Poland, making it almost impossible for artists to make a living by selling their work. Instead, they were dependent on state commissions, an arena in which young and politically disfavored artists such as Kwiek and Kulik were discriminated against, e.g. in being refused commissions or in being assigned

the execution of third-rate propaganda works such as decorations for socialist festivities or commemoration plaques (pol. *Chaltura*, eng. Potboiler work or hackwork). Załuski describes KwieKulik's artistic approach to this situation as follows: "While executing such potboiler commissions, KwieKulik also created their ephemeral and documented 'activities.' They combined potboiler works with their experimental artistic practice in order to show that they were able to 'act efficiently' within given conditions of life and artistic production and, at the same time, critically expose those very conditions. This was a way to combine 'art and life' under socialism. Such joint works were called [by KwieKulik] Earning and Creating" (Ibid.: 396).

— An example from the category of *Earning and Creating* is the extensive series of black-and-white photographs and color slides from 1974 entitled *Activities with AK Kinga Plaque* [figs. 1 & 2].<sup>1)</sup> In this work, a memorial plaque produced by the duo to honor AK Kinga [fig. 3] – the resistance group murdered by the Nazis during World War II – serves as the literal basis for various ephemeral activities (pol. *działania*), which were carried out during the production of the plaque in the state studio the artists were allowed to use for their potboiler work, with the aid of diverse materials and objects such as paper, plaster masks, and fruit. The arrangements were made without an audience, for the camera only; they were recorded on photographs and slides, preserved in the artist's archive, and shown in changing combinations in slide presentations and exhibitions. Some of the arrangements articulate a humorous but trenchant critique of the Polish art institutions of the time and of their representatives, while others exhibit a similarly playful but more enigmatic character.

An example of the more critical work is the slide with the casually inscribed strips of paper laid on a slab in such a way that they complete words already chiseled into the sandstone [fig. 1]. In the works involving writing, KwieKulik play with the semantics of words, altering the plaque's intended message through their own interpolations. In this 'reworked' version, the solemn memorial plaque bears an ironic inscription: "Here ZK [Zofia Kulik] and PK [Przemysław Kwiek] died a heroic death at the hands of middlemen, art critics, cultural activists, MKiS [Ministerstwo Kultury i Sztuki / Ministry of Culture and Art] officials Czartoryska, Skrocki, director Ubranowicz, Oseka, Stanisławski." As Załuski aptly observes,

1)

In the publication containing the most comprehensive catalogue to date of the duo's works, the series is listed as number 068 and illustrated with more than fifty photographs and slides of various activities; see Ronduda / Schöllhammer 2012: 170–177.



// Figure 1 & 2

KwieKulik, *Działanie with AK Kinga Plaque* – Earning and Creating, 1974



“[f]or a short—but well-documented—moment, the potboiler work became a critique and an indictment of the Polish institutional ‘artworld’ [sic] of the 1970s, represented there by the names of its leading protagonists” (Ibid.: 397–8).<sup>2)</sup> Less clear in its meaning is the slide with fragments of plaster masks and pieces of orange and grapefruit distributed relatively evenly across the plaque [fig. 2]. Cut up in various ways and hence fragmented, the masks look as if they are partially submerged in the plaque, while the pieces of fruit suggest little boats “floating” on its surface. Here, too, the semantic meaning—of things rather than words, in this case—is presented as context-dependent: In the neighborhood of “sunken” masks the pieces of orange turn into boats. Works such as this one do not employ strategies of institutional critique or directly refer to political conditions. Rather, they deal with self-reflexive artistic questions, at least on the level of the pictorial motif. Their critical significance thus lies at the superordinate level of production. By contrasting the playful, ephemeral interventions with the conventionality of the memorial plaque, the works show how formulaic the forms of official commemoration have become. And last but not least, through their juxtaposition of the commissioned work with their own artistic activity, KwieKulik draw attention to the impossibility of artists’ making a living from their art proper.

— Furthermore, the couple’s engagement with the economic conditions of artistic work under state socialism led them to adopt a specific perspective on the situation of artists under the capitalist economic system, a view they expressed in the text “Our Comments on the East and West” (“Nasze uwagi o Wschodzie i Zachodzie,” 1976) addressed to their Western colleagues (Kwiek / Kulik 2012c). After first depicting the unappealing economic constraints at play in their own lives as artists under Polish state socialism, they write:

“One feels like saying: Why complain about business in art? Be happy that you have the hope that your art will be bought one day and that will enable you to keep on living

2)

The text of the manipulated plaque reads: “In this very place ZK and PK died a hero’s death at the hands of mediators, art critics, cultural activists, Ministry of Art and Culture officials, Czartoryska, Skrodzki, Oseka, director Urbanowicz, and Stanislawski”; *ibid.* Załuski’s text also contains a detailed account and excellent analysis of KwieKulik’s engagement with the political and economic conditions of artistic work in socialist Poland.



// Figure 3

KwiekKulik, *The unveiling ceremony of the AK Kinga Plaque with the participation of scouts and war veterans, 103 Solec Street in Warsaw, April 4, 1974*

and making art. [...] Is business in art not better than a constant division between a) making art and b) earning one's living + earning to finance one's art + earning to finance its distribution? Do you want to live off hairdressing or be a clerk? Or do you want full state support? This requires competent and risk-taking officials, that is, officials that keep up with artists. That is certainly utopia. We find this strange: the constant opposition to business, commercialization, but these 'oppositions' keep becoming marketable commodities. If you eliminate business from art and eliminate the necessity of earning one's living outside art, the result will be to reject money as an equivalent of work and potential possibilities" (Ibid.).<sup>3)</sup>

3)

KwieKulik's relationship to the West, or to the geopolitical division into East and West, is explored in detail in Załuski 2014: 19–41.

4)

"Activitation" is the translation used in the abstract for Jakubowska 2018. "Actioning" is employed in Szczupacka 2019: 99–115.

Even if KwieKulik lacked detailed knowledge of the economic constraints that existed beyond the "Iron Curtain" and thus ran the risk of idealizing the Western system, their position outside the capitalist market economy enabled them to discern the contradictions of the attitude toward "business" in which their Western colleagues were (and still are) entangled. For KwieKulik, who otherwise sympathized with communism, participating in the market meant potentially being freed from the need to carry out state commissions and hence from dependence on state institutions.

**THE ECONOMICS OF DOMESTIC ACTIVITIES** — In addition to their examination of the economics of commissioned work, the theme of seemingly banal, repetitive, everyday activities as a condition of creative labor is central to KwieKulik's engagement with art's economic dimension. After the separation of the duo in 1988, Zofia Kulik continued to address this constant bustle of everyday life and work in her art, and in the 1990s coined the term "czynnośćowanie" (translatable into English as "activitation" or "actioning")<sup>4)</sup> to designate this ongoing busy-ness that conditions our lives. In this neologism she turns the noun "czynność" (activity) into a term for a monotonous, repetitive behavior. For Kulik, "activitation" denotes "an inner urge to constantly 'do something' and the resulting ongoing performance of a range of activities that are [...] necessary for the maintenance of the collection and the surrounding environment" (Jakubowska 2018). In a discussion of two films produced in 2016 and 2017 that associate Kulik's on-going maintenance of the archive with the domestic activities of her mother, Agata Jakubowska points out that "activitation" has an economic dimension, in addition to an existential one (Ibid.). The films show how

Kulik's mother, who was living with her daughter at the time, takes care of the household while the artist herself organises her archive. According to Jakubowska, they present the division of labor as the basis of art's symbolic and financial capital. Additionally, they also exhibit another economic aspect of "activation": that it resists the neoliberal imperative of productivity characteristic of the post-socialist, newly capitalist societies among which Poland has belonged since 1989 (Ibid.).

— Indeed, Kulik addressed the division of labor and "activation" as conditions of life and work long before she coined the latter term and before the end of state socialism. As early as 1977, she created the mail art collage *Alice's Adventures in Fucked Wonderland* [fig. 4], the center of which is occupied by a photograph of a woman deeply bent-over, sweeping the floor. As Wiktoria Szczupacka and Agata Jakubowska observe, in this essentially unrecognizable self-portrait—as in a number of works created together with Kwiek during the same period—Kulik is referring to the practical and domestic aspects of her everyday life and work (Jakubowska 2018; Szczupacka 2019). Tidying and cleaning but also the laborious task of shopping for groceries<sup>5)</sup> were among the latter's indispensable components.<sup>6)</sup> Interestingly, Szczupacka interprets the attitude toward housework expressed by Kulik in this collage as eminently positive. In her view, the artist's frustration, reflected in the expletive of the title, with the workings of "wonderland" (which Szczupacka interprets as the milieu of the Warsaw neo-avant-garde) is aimed at the "inability [of the neo-avant-garde] to acknowledge the 'menial' work necessary for its own survival" (Szczupacka 2019: 114). According to Szczupacka, the artist here expresses her frustration with the absurd rules that prevailed in the circles of the neo-avant-garde, where material labor (here: cleaning the room), which was mostly done by women like Kulik herself and which underlay the production and presentation of art, was negated and went unnoticed while male artists led public discourses. Szczupacka places the collage in the context of statements made later by Kulik, in which the latter expresses her appreciation of housework as a form of anxiety management or meditation, and describes the supporting role she played in her artistic milieu, which was dominated by men and their abstract discourse. In this context, Szczupacka reads Kulik's *Alice* as a "call for recognizing [cleaning] as an important form of contributing to collective well-being—as commitment expressed in a different language [...] other than by excelling in public debates" (Szczupacka 2019: 114–15).

5)

One aspect of the economics of KwieKulik's artistic work was the fact that their groceries were provided by Kulik's mother, which enabled them to use their extremely limited financial resources for artistic materials. See Jakubowska 2018.

6)

This is also emphasized by the artist in a number of interviews; for example, in *Kwiek / Kulik 2012a*, as she describes cleaning the apartment after potboiler works as an onerous task.



// Figure 4

Zofia Kulik, *Alice's Adventures in Fucked Wonderland*, 1977

—— Jakubowska and Szczupacka emphasize Zofia Kulik’s positive attitude toward household tasks in the 1977 collage as well as in the films made forty years later. In contrast to their interpretations, however, I seek in what follows to differentiate more strongly between the early work and the late. I will focus on the negative side of the deeply ambivalent meaning that daily house-keeping had for Kulik and KwieKulik in the 1970s. For instance, it can hardly be denied that, with its crude choice of words, the title itself—*Alice’s Adventures in Fucked Wonderland*—casts the cleaning displayed in the photograph in a negative light. Even if it is not the act of sweeping itself that is referred to as “fucked” but rather its setting, the image unquestionably links this description to the action displayed. Why else should viewers perceive the wonderland as “fucked” if not because of the activity imposed on the photograph’s heroine, particularly since she is carrying it out in a borderline-uncomfortable position and with no sign of pleasure? In later recollections, Kulik describes the constant tidying and cleaning as something she would not wish on anyone (Kwiek / Kulik 2012a: 538). Her late films, by contrast, tend to valorize seemingly unproductive activity. Here again, this is apparent from their titles alone, despite their ironic undertone. Thus, underneath the series title *Cultivating the Archive*, we find the titles *How the Sum Total of Small Actions Builds the Archive* (2016) as well as *A Sum of Rugs and an Archive Next Door, the Kingdom of Helena Kulik, Zofia’s Mother, in which the Archivist Grew Up* (2017). Moreover, beyond the fundamentally positive connotations of their titles, Jakubowska is certainly correct in suggesting that the films themselves pay tribute to “activation” as an aspect of life in general and archival work in particular to be welcomed for its resistance to the productivity-imperative of the post-socialist turbo-capitalism.

**THE ECONOMICS OF ARTISTIC LABOR** —— In what follows, I would like to discuss a third level at which KwieKulik negotiate the economic dimension of their artistic and domestic working partnership. Doing so may help to accentuate the gradual difference between KwieKulik’s earlier and Kulik’s later works. This level has already been hinted at by Załuski; to repeat his comment from above: “They combined potboiler works with their experimental artistic practice in order to show that they were able to ‘act efficiently’ within the given conditions of life and artistic production” (Załuski 2016: 396). I have in mind the economic ideal of efficiency in artistic production, which the duo strove to realize in their work



of the 1970s. This ideal of the rationalization of work processes stands in tension with the repetitive, monotonous housework shown by Kulik in her version of “Alice in Wonderland,” a kind of work that was necessary for but also delayed the achievement of artistic goals. In my view, in the 1970s KwieKulik largely sought to minimize, in their production, the everyday labor that Kulik later referred to and valorized as “activation.” It is important to remark that the daily difficulties in the lives of KwieKulik and other avant-garde artists without a fixed income were many, and the living conditions were hard. Circumstances KwieKulik address repeatedly in their work include the lack of space for their artistic labor, resulting in a continuous re-arranging of their apartment; the lack of money; the ongoing ‘organizing’ of food and everyday goods; the difficulty of living in a small apartment in a loud and dirty house, and so on.<sup>7)</sup>

— In order to understand KwieKulik’s attitude toward repetitive housework and what an economy of artistic labor meant for them, it is of great importance to look at the origin of their ideal of efficiency. The duo borrowed the concept of efficiency (*sprawność*) as an ideal for “good work” from the philosophy of Tadeusz Kotarbiński, whose lectures they attended in 1971 and whose “praxeology,” the research field for which he was most famous, deeply occupied them at the time (Ronduda / Schöllhammer 2012: 148). Thus, in a wide-ranging interview with Maryla Sitkowska, Kulik remarks: “There was a time in our lives when Kotarbiński was more inspiring for us than any artist” (Sitkowska 1986–1995).<sup>8)</sup> Załuski rightly interprets KwieKulik as having aspired to become artists-as-scientists, stressing Kotarbiński’s centrality for their conception of art (Załuski 2016: 392; Załuski 2012: 532–533).<sup>9)</sup> Praxeology in particular, as a science of efficient action, is very important for their conception of efficient artistic work. In his many texts—particularly his major work, *Traktat o dobrej robocie* (A treatise on good work, 1955, translated into English in 1965 as *Praxiology: An Introduction to the Science of Efficient Action*)—Kotarbiński develops and systematizes a set of general rules or principles of efficient action that apply universally and to all forms of human activity (Porębski 2019: 30–40; Skurjat 2018): 119–128). Praxeology, for him, is bound up with the goal of improving the quality of human life by optimizing work processes; in this sense, he views praxeology as a component of general ethics (Pszczółowski 1971: 227–31). In this, too, KwieKulik followed him in connecting artistic goals with ethical ones, as will be shown further on.

7)

A prominent example of a work that deals with their living conditions, and which comes from the joint oeuvre of Kulik and Kwiek, is the collage *KwieKulik Circle* from 1976: Ronduda / Schöllhammer 2012: 234–235.

8)

I am grateful to Wiktoria Szczupacka and the KwieKulik Archive for making this text available. Under Kotarbiński’s leadership, praxeology attained a prominent position in the Polish academic world. This is reflected, for example, in the establishment of a Center for Praxeology (Zakład Prakseologiczny) as part of the Polish Academy of Sciences with its own journal, *Praxeological Papers (Materiały Prakseologiczne)*, later *Prakseologia*. KwieKulik attended events at the Center for Praxeology beginning in 1974, forged connections with the scientists who worked or spent time there, e.g. Maria Nowakowska, and subscribed to the journal *Prakseologia*. Ronduda / Schöllhammer 2012: 148–149, Kwiek / Kulik 2012a: 538.

9)

KwieKulik were also interested in Marxism, logic, and cybernetics, among other things, and beginning in 1970 audited other lectures and seminars at Warsaw University as well; see the remarks in Ronduda / Schöllhammer 2012:148–49.



— Just how important praxeology was to KwieKulik is made clear not only by the retrospective reflections in the interview with Sitkowska mentioned above, but already by the terms coined by the duo to refer to their art at the time of its making. Thus, departing from the terminology commonly used in art criticism, they do not describe their performances as actions or activities but instead employ the Polish term *działania*, which they deliberately choose not to translate into English. In their programmatic text “Our Activity: Aims, Principles, Practice, Benefits” (“Nasza działalność, cele, zasady, praktyka i korzyści,” 1978), they describe their artistic ideals under point eight, “*Działania* and the Activities,” as follows:

“When we started translating our texts into English it turned out that the Polish ‘Działanie’ literally means ‘Activity.’ Information about activities started to flow from the West. In spite of the fact that certain elements or aspects or fragments of these activities resemble our *Działania*, we have not come across any Western artistic activities which would qualify as *Działania* in our understanding. The reason for that is that the whole complex of operations [...] which comprise *Działania* is not taken into account in the activities. The same goes for the aspect of efficiency” (Kwiek / Kulik 2012b: 449).

— Under point nine, “Efficiency and *Działanie*,” they add:

“Of the many elements which make a *Działanie* [...] we intentionally choose to write about efficiency as a criterion characterizing and separating our *Działania* from other activities. The idea of efficiency, which has been treated instrumentally in the past, is carried over by us into the realm of aesthetics by saying ‘Efficient equals beautiful.’ If efficiency will radiate from a *Działanie* it may become useful to other people in their activities. It will make them realize what efficiency ‘looks like,’ and that is a lot in the social realization of the axiom: to work more efficiently means to live better. A man may also act when he is not working; if he acts correctly then he will live more beautifully for himself, for others and together with others” (Ibid.).

— The combination of *działanie* and *sprawność* (efficiency) makes the origins of KwieKulik’s conception of the artwork unmistakably clear, since both of these notions play a central role in

texts by Kotarbiński, who defines his praxeology as the theory or science of efficient activities (*sprawne działania*).

— But how do KwieKulik attempt to realize the ideal of efficiency in their *Działania*? In what sense, that is, do they design and produce their works efficiently and hence economically? The examples from the *Działania* series *AK Kinga Plaque—Earning and Creating* already display a number of attributes that can be connected with efficiency even without any knowledge of Kotarbiński's detailed lists of efficiency measures [figs. 1 & 2]. KwieKulik's arrangements are produced using objects that were probably already available in their workshop (masks) or could be brought there with little effort (orange and grapefruit): their production did not require any more time and energy than was absolutely necessary. The added text is done on cheap brown paper in casual handwriting—producing it requires no more material, time, or attention than is needed to communicate the “message” (the aforementioned semantic displacement). Moreover, if it took little time to spread out the objects across the plaque—they were not affixed to it—it took just as little to remove them, and some of them did not even need to be returned to their original locations (the fruit could surely be eaten as a snack once the work was completed).

— The series *Działania with Dobromierz*, produced between 1972 and 1974 and consisting of some nine hundred black-and-white photographs and color slides, shares some of these attributes, but it also exhibits additional economical design measures (Ronduda / Schöllhammer 2012: 130–141).<sup>10</sup> Even a cursory glance at the roughly 120 documentary images included in the KwieKulik catalogue reveals the simple patterns that regularly recur there [figs. 5 & 6]. The household items, books, and foodstuffs employed—again, all things that were immediately available—are often laid in circles around the couple's young son Dobromierz—who was also always immediately available. When they do not form a circle, the objects tend to be evenly distributed across the floor without any visual centers of gravity (like the masks and fruit on the AK Kinga plaque). Moreover, the structure of many of these assemblages is static and symmetrical, oriented around a central axis, even though the artists are not especially concerned with precision of execution. By repeatedly returning to the pattern of the circle and the principle of dispersion, KwieKulik avoid a more time-consuming composition of their arrangements. The

10)

Some 120 examples from the series are reproduced there. For a detailed discussion of the genesis and structure of the series, see Załuski 2008, who considers the work's mathematical, logical, and linguistic aspects. The emotional dimension of *Działania with Dobromierz* is treated in Dauksza 2015: 65–74.



// Figure 5 & 6

KwieKulik, *Działanie with Dobromierz*, 1972–74

circle may be seen here as a self-referential figure for forgoing a more complex type of organization in which multiple formal focal points would be brought into creative equilibrium; after all, with its unparalleled centrality and symmetry, the circle is one of the simplest of all geometric figures.

— *Działania with Dobromierz* and *Działania with the AK Kinga Plaque* also reveal another economical aspect of KwieKulik's artistic work—the methodical approach and meticulous preparation that were necessary in order to execute the *Działania* efficiently and later to systematize their results. For evidence that the individual actions were conceived in advance and that their execution was planned, we may turn to the published notes on the *Działania with Dobromierz* and the handwritten catalogue of the *Działania with the AK Kinga Plaque*. The notes, which were written partly before and partly after the fact, capture the preconditions of the individual actions, the objects involved, and the resulting situations. Some of them also depict unrealized plans in a similar fashion (Ronduda / Schöllhammer 2012: 131–134). The catalogue contains a description of the process of conceiving and preparing to realize *Działania with the AK Kinga Plaque*, making clear not only the level of planning and organization that went into them but also the extent to which everyday chores and “primitive” physical activities were regarded as aspects of the artistic work and hence worth communicating:

“5) 27 March 1974, Wednesday [...] On a crowded bus 106 we got the idea to perform ‘Activities’ with the plate while carving the inscription, referencing primarily the sets with our son, and to add to the carved words some new ones that didn’t belong to the project. [...] 6) 28, 29, 30 March 1974—Przemek [Przemysław] burnishes the stone. 7) 28 March 1974—Zosia ventures to the cemetery in Bródno to order 10 chisels. 30 March 1974—Z. picks up the chisels. 8) [...] Somewhere around midnight we go together to PSP [PP PSP: Państwowe Przedsiębiorstwo Pracownie Sztuk Plastycznych / State Enterprise of Visual Arts Workshops] and move the plate to a lower sculpting table. 9) 30 March 1974—at about 3 p.m. the two of us gather together for a brainstorm—what to do with the plate. Time for thinking—2 hours. Thinking at the paper [...] Ideas for activities 3 p.m.–5 p.m. [...] At about 6 p.m. we resolve to bring Maksio [Dobromierz] to the workshop. We ask Paweł [Przemysław Kwiek’s brother] for help. At 7 p.m. the following left home: Zosia [Zofia], Przemek, Paweł, Maksio in a pram. We took: 2 photo cameras, lamps, color

cellophane, grapefruit, orange, red sash, black paper, estrop-hole, dinner, and Maksio's stuff. Paweł took a small ivory dog and a color folder [...]. At 8 p.m. we begin work [...]" (Ronduda / Schöllhammer 2012: 171).

— It should come as no surprise at this point that the planning of the artistic work described here is compatible with a number of rules and principles for the economization of activities defined by Kotarbiński in his major work, the *Treatise on Good Work*, and other texts (Kotarbiński 1965).<sup>11)</sup> Consider, for example, his measure of "minimizing interventions": this includes, among other things, "refraining from actions until the right moment"—easily recognizable in KwieKulik's connection of potboiler works with actions of their own—and the "replacement of materials by less work-intensive alternatives"—visible in their substitution of paper for stone as a writing surface. The rule of "anticipation" includes, among other things, "resorting to already accomplished and irreversible deeds," as in the duo's use of potboiler works as the basis for additional actions and pictorial documents. Furthermore, the constant incorporation of existing images and concepts into new combinations, the persistent use and reuse of old works for new ones, a "recycling" principle present in KwieKulik's whole oeuvre, can be interpreted as a measure to produce art efficiently.<sup>12)</sup> "Automation," another of Kotarbiński's rules of efficient action, hardly requires further explanation in connection to KwieKulik's work: this measure involves facilitating the execution of actions by resorting to repetition, standardization, and imitation—for example, the recurring circular shapes in *Działania with Dobromierz*. Last but not least, the "immanentisation or internalisation of actions" also plays a fundamental role in KwieKulik's work, since it involves "using reflection instead of physical efforts, analysis and conceptualisation instead of trial-and-error."<sup>13)</sup>

— KwieKulik were thus committed, in their art which was produced under the conditions of state socialism, to the ideal of the rationalization of work processes, something that is by no means universally embraced today in a world marked by an unfettered, neoliberal, capitalist economy and the associated acceleration even of ordinary life processes and sequences of events.<sup>14)</sup> If we are to empathize with this commitment, we must historically embed KwieKulik's position in a material and intellectual context in which the word "optimization" had not yet lost its positive connotation. For KwieKulik, the efficiency of their *Działania* was not an end in itself but a part of their work toward improving the reality of

11)

See also Klinecicz 2017: 76–88.

12)

Tomasz Załuski aptly describes the persistent reuse of already existing images for new works as reflecting the logic of the database; see Załuski 2008. The highly intricate structure of KwieKulik's archive, in which individual objects exhibit multiple layers of reference to others, is demonstrated by Załuski 2018a. In his text, he considers KwieKulik's "economy of the archive": the relationship between the financial economy (of its commercial exploitation) and its *oikonomy*, that is, its location in the household, which is overseen by Zofia Kulik.

13)

The descriptions of Kotarbiński's economization measures are taken from Klinecicz.

14)

See for example the critique of modern acceleration processes in Rosa 2005.

ordinary life. Here, too, their ethos is aligned with the attitude of Kotarbiński, for whom praxeology, as mentioned above, formed a subcategory of general ethics and was related to ethics in the narrower sense as well. He gave his concept of an ethics independent of religion and other framework conditions the title of an “ethics of the reliable caregiver” (“etyka spolegliwego opiekuna,” often translated as “ethics of the reliable protector”). Czesław Porębski defines Kotarbiński’s ethical ideal in this way: “Briefly, a reliable protector is a person who, possessing the proper qualities of character, attitudes and conduct, succeeds in ‘efficiently’ combating suffering and other evils that endanger the life and well-being of people he is obliged to safeguard” (Porębski 2019: 40). Efficiency and social welfare come together in the “reliable caregiver,” whom KwieKulik strove to emulate through their posture of consistent engagement, economy, and ethics.

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// Image Credits

**Fig. 1 & 2:** KwieKulik, *Działanie with AK Kinga Plaque – Earning and Creating*, 1974, color slide, Courtesy of Kulik-KwieKulik Foundation  
**Fig. 3:** KwieKulik, *The unveiling ceremony of the AK Kinga Plaque with the participation of scouts and war veterans*, 103 Solec Street in Warsaw, 06.04.1974, color slide, Courtesy of Kulik-KwieKulik Foundation  
**Fig. 4:** Zofia Kulik, *Alice's Adventures in Fucked Wonderland*, 1977, pencil, ink, paint, photograph on paper, own technique, 56x40 cm, Courtesy of Kulik-KwieKulik Foundation  
**Fig. 5 & 6:** KwieKulik, *Działanie with Dobromierz*, 1972–74, color slide, Courtesy of Kulik-KwieKulik Foundation

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## SOURCE MATERIALS: DISCURSIVE ASPECTS IN CAMERON ROWLAND'S PRACTICE

In this paper, I will reflect on the installation *Source Materials*,<sup>1)</sup> which I arranged for Tiny Mutual Admirations Societies<sup>2)</sup> at the University of Applied Art's Painting Department in Vienna and which showcased a selection of print materials related to the artistic practice of artist Cameron Rowland [fig. 1]. The installation was featured as part of the exhibition *Backyard Economy*, held at the University Gallery of Angewandte. Rowland's research-based practice confronts us with material manifestations and legal foundations of racial capitalism<sup>3)</sup> and its genealogy, tracing back to the slave-based economy. In so doing, it makes visible the ways that structures of anti-Black violence have been transformed and upheld by various institutions and practices particularly within the legal forms of capital (property and contract). However, Rowland also points to blind spots of the archives such as historical forms of refusal on slave plantations, as well as introducing new forms intended to affect the future, such as contract-based works that employ and repurpose legal economic instruments to establish forms of reparations that run counter to the logic of property deriving from slavery and its afterlife. Rowland aims with these contract-based works, intended as suggestions for reparations, to challenge "the definition, formation and existence of property."<sup>4)</sup>

— Rather than examining the works that directly intervene in the legal economic regime of property, I wanted to take a closer look at discursive and methodological aspects of Rowland's practice, and how they contribute to challenging the logic of property and value production. Some of these aspects can be traced in the various forms of work distribution, reproduction, and mediation used by Rowland in their practice. Since each form of dissemination is given a discursive component through the use of captions, text (in form of printed matter) is omnipresent in the artist's work. It is also through captions that Rowland makes reference to their own "sources," most of which stem from the transdisciplinary work of Black studies and the critical thought on constructions of time, property, and race, as well as concepts of negation and refusal, that have been elaborated within it, all of which deeply inform Rowland's art.

1)

The entire title of the installation reads: "Source Materials: Some Pamphlets, Footnotes, Books, Numbers, Captions, Periodicals, Maps, Images, Magazines (related to the work) of Cameron Rowland."

2)

The showcase is located in an office window facing the corridor, which was transformed into a small exhibition space by art historian and curator Hannes Loichinger, who teaches at the University of Applied Art. It is visible from the hallway to students and the public during the building's opening hours. See <https://tiny-mutual-admirations-societies.uni-ak.ac.at/> (November 1, 2023).

3)

As coined in Robinson 2022.

4)

Transcription from the recording of the talk: Rowland 2020.



// Figure 1

Installation view *Source Materials*, 2022

— With the selection of print materials displayed in *Source Materials*, my focus was on enhancing understanding of the diverse methods Rowland employs within their practice to disseminate and document their work. Furthermore, I aimed to provide a broader contextualization of these methods in relation to the artist's early work and their collaborations with others. The installation's title *Source Materials* already emphasizes aspects of mediation, both in terms of form and in terms of content, primarily pointing to an exploration of the artist's use of print media in their research as well as their artistic practice. Besides two of Rowland's artworks on paper, the selection otherwise focused on materials that are not commonly perceived explicitly as exhibition pieces within Rowland's exhibitions, but rather serve as conduits for disseminating information. Additionally, the installation featured a small selection of reference books from Black studies, comprising both a concise collection of literature that Rowland considers as central references for their practice and thinking [fig. 2]<sup>5)</sup> as well as a selection of supplementary literature that I used in my previous research on Rowland's practice [fig. 3].<sup>6)</sup> In the course of the project, the university library's stock of relevant literature was expanded to include all the reference books that were not previously in the collection, ensuring that these reference books remain accessible as sources to students after the exhibition had ended. To enhance the comprehension of the exhibit, a wall map was positioned adjacent to the showcase containing a comprehensive list of references to the exhibited literature, original captions, and download links. It continues to be available online, alongside visual documentation of the exhibited print materials.<sup>7)</sup>

### A (PRINTED) MATTER OF INFORMATION —

Rowland's exhibitions each have a similar structural composition, comprising various types of works complemented by printed materials. In contrast to the abundance of text provided, the exhibition spaces remain largely empty. Contemporary and historical everyday objects are sporadically placed in space, often referencing their original use. A prevalent theme is a critique of dominant constructions of time and property. This critique is not only conveyed through

5) In an email to the author on October 23, 2022, Cameron Rowland described their suggestion of reference books for *Source Materials* as follows: "As far as books go, there are many that I use as references, and then there are some that function more as central texts to my thinking over-all." See Rowland's literature suggestions in the List no. 8 in Pia 2023.

6) See additional literature on related subjects in no. 9 in Pia 2023.

7) A link to the full documentation of the project can be found in Pia 2023.



// Figure 2  
Installation view (No.8: Book references proposed by Cameron Rowland), *Source Materials*, 2022



// Figure 3  
Installation view (No.9: Additional literature), *Source Materials*, 2022

content but is also structurally and methodologically embedded in their practice, in part through the use of different types of works that each necessitate different forms of distribution. The various types of works that can be distinguished are objects (historical and contemporary everyday items), framed legal contracts, and works on paper to take home – all forming an interconnected web of different temporal and spatial references.

— The artworks shown at solo exhibitions are always accompanied by a multi-page pamphlet written by the artist. All pamphlets share a common format [fig. 4 & 5]:<sup>8)</sup> they include an extensive essay similar to the format of an academic paper with footnotes that introduce the exhibition’s theme, a floor plan, detailed captions for each individual work, as well as specifics about the exhibition’s dates and locations together with acknowledgments. Rowland considers these descriptive captions “as part of the material of the work” (Rowland 2020: 36:20 min) (so one could say they function as components of the works).<sup>9)</sup> In addition to providing the usual work specifications such as the title,<sup>10)</sup> year, and material(s), they also convey the original context of the exhibited objects, encompassing their (previous) use and context, production conditions, provenance, as well as their future distribution as artworks. These captions deviate from conventional usage not only in offering more information but also in omitting some: Measurements are not always provided, and materials used for presentation purposes, such as frames or other materials exclusively used for display, are not mentioned. Thus, the captions only detail what constitutes the works’ materiality and historicity, independent of their presentation as artwork.

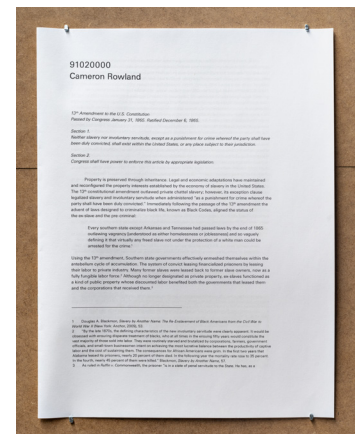
— The caption of the work titled *Summer 3d One Stroller – Item: 6781-005030*, 2018 [fig. 6] can serve as an example.<sup>11)</sup> The title already gives away its material form: the specific model and brand of the stroller that comprises the work. What seems like an ordinary stroller with traces of use could easily be mistaken as belonging to a museum visitor if a handwritten label bearing a number had not been attached to it. The stroller was first shown in Rowland’s second institutional solo exhibition *D37* at MOCA, Los Angeles 2018, which centered around racial housing policies and practices such as redlining and the financialization of prosecution via property seizures. Besides the title, the caption of the work lists the material as “Summer 3d One Stroller sold for \$1,” followed by its dimensions and information on its distribution as “Rental at cost.” Furthermore, the caption gives information on the context of the work: starting with the fact that U.S. police departments raise funds for

8) Four pamphlets were on display at *Source Materials*, see references no. 1, 2, 3 & 4 in Pia 2023.

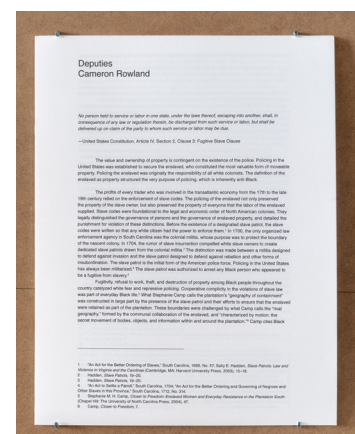
9) A comprehensive caption accompanies the work’s information in each instance, also when works are exhibited independently in group exhibitions.

10) With titles Rowland points to further discursive contexts: they are often references to the specific model of the object or references to specific legal or economic terms and instruments or descriptions for informal practices of refusal.

11) For the full caption of the work *Summer 3d One Stroller – Item: 6781-005030*, 2018, see the Rowland 2019.



// Figure 4 Installation view (No. 1: Exhibition pamphlet for “91020000”, 2016), *Source Materials*, 2022



// Figure 5 Installation view (No. 4: Exhibition pamphlet for “Deputies”, 2021), *Source Materials*, 2022



themselves by auctioning seized property, the caption goes on to detail the genealogy of civil asset forfeiture and auctions and their establishment during the transatlantic slave trade, when enslaved people were auctioned like goods.<sup>12)</sup> After reading the caption, one might understand the handwritten label as the marker of a seized good, and further that the price (one dollar) realized at the police auction would also be the total price for which the artwork is available for rent on a five-year term. Thus, the caption not only refers to the price the artist paid to the police for acquiring the object but also conveys terms for a future distribution of the object as a work of art.

— On the one hand, the “seemingly” banal everyday objects that Rowland primarily exhibits evoke the typical features of the readymade, which according to artist Marcel Duchamp was meant to perform as a referenceless and neutral, fungible commodity object; but, on the other hand, this allusion is interrupted by the captions’ references to the objects’ original context of use or production, linking their typical features to a history of racial capitalism and its regime of value production.

— These captions have the function of revealing the embeddedness of ordinary objects in circular structures of racial dispossession and disenfranchisement. Contrary to notions of a linear time, this circularity emphasizes that the abolition of slavery did not mean the end of anti-Black violence, but introduced new forms of control and domination: what could be described with literary scholar and writer Saidiya Hartman as the afterlife of slavery. As mentioned before, it is through Rowland’s use of captions that a discursive aspect is given to all the various forms of work dissemination including its mediation, its economic distribution, and its medial reproduction (documentation).<sup>13)</sup> The latter two forms will be elaborated in the next sections.

**IMAGES IN SERVICE OF TEXT** — In the case of their medial reproduction, Rowland stipulates that images of individual works must always be presented with their specific accompanying caption. *Source Materials* demonstrated this aspect by looking at how photographic reproductions of individual works appear in art magazines, such as *October* [fig. 6] or *Springerin* [fig. 7]. As the example of the translation of English captions into German for the Austrian art magazine *Springerin* shows, Rowland uses the

12)

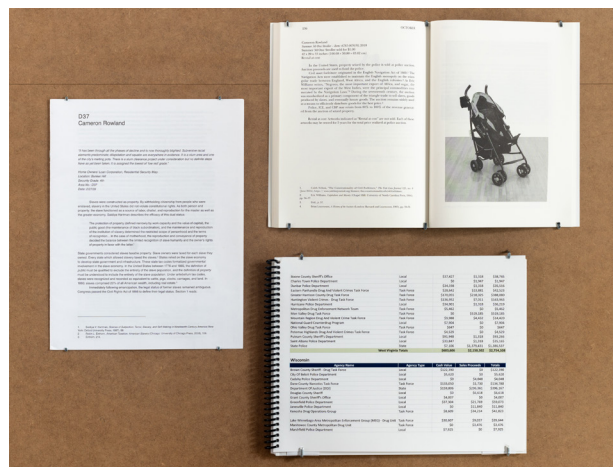
In *D37* Rowland further showed historical tax receipts, on which slaves were listed as taxable goods. This makes manifest the historical fact that slaves were legally declared as objects and that the state benefited from slave ownership monetarily, as well.

13)

To illustrate this, the installation brings together examples of the various (media, economic and mediating) forms of dissemination from a particular exhibition (fig. 6 & 7).

14)

See reference no. 2b in Pia 2023.



// Figure 6

Installation view (No. 2: Exhibition pamphlet for “D37”, 2018; No. 2b: October; No. 2a: Cameron Rowland, “Equitable Sharing”, 2018), *Source Materials*, 2022



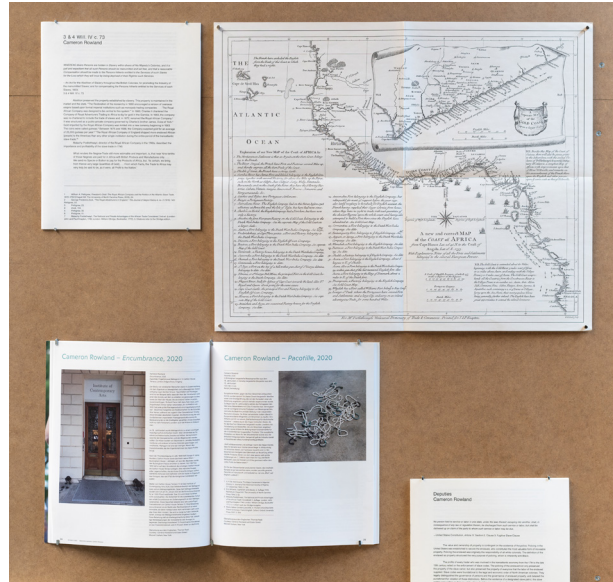
opportunity of visual reproductions of their work not only to expand its visibility but also to facilitate accessibility by translating the captions into the respective language of the magazine.<sup>14)</sup> Similarly, in Rowland's contribution to the journal *October*, the artist reprinted the entire pamphlet from their show *D37*, including all captions, alongside a selection of installation views and images of individual works and details.<sup>15)</sup>

— When it comes to announcements of the exhibitions, texts take precedence over images. Institutional press releases announcing an exhibition are solely made up of the artist's pamphlets. Official installation views of Rowland's solo shows cannot be found on the art institution's website;<sup>16)</sup> however, pamphlets are consistently available for download in their entirety, ensuring digital accessibility even after the exhibition has concluded. While the texts may be more accessible than the visual documentation of the exhibitions, it is crucial not to diminish the significance of the aesthetic experience, i.e. embodied perception of the works. The pamphlets explicitly do not offer a mediation of the aesthetic experience, since they never contain a formal description of the exhibits and only convey contextualizing content. This division could be considered an attempt to insist on both a reading of the text and an embodied experience of the work. Just as the visual documentation of the work should not be disseminated without context to prevent the risk of a neutralized image consumption, so too the reception situation in the exhibition spaces is also carefully guided. However, it is also evident that the pamphlets serve as a distinct discursive medium within Rowland's artistic practice, as they are deliberately designed for broader distribution and increased accessibility. The artist's comprehensive research and numerous citations of others' research continue to be accessible as "source material," irrespective of the exhibition's location or duration.

**ECONOMIC DISTRIBUTION AS DISCURSIVE ASPECT** — In the tradition of institutional critique, Rowland engages with the operative structures of the art field (e.g., documentation, communication, distribution). While exhibition texts or the dissemination of images are typically created by institutions, Rowland applies and adopts these operative structures as part of their artistic practice.

15) See reference no. 3b in Pia 2023.

16) Except a small selection of images are published on the gallery's website of Maxwell Graham: Cameron Rowland: All Images, Maxwell <https://maxwellgraham.biz/artists/cameron-rowland/>, October 28, 2023.



// Figure 7  
Installation view (No. 3: Exhibition pamphlet for "3 & 4 Will. IV c.73", 2020; No.3a: Cameron Rowland, "Enclosure", 2020; No. 3b: Springerin), *Source Materials*, 2022

In contrast with their liberal use of pamphlets, which involves the production and dissemination of knowledge in a way counter to a proprietary logic, Rowland handles the dissemination of photographic documentation more cautiously, e.g. in withholding the rights to publish images on the institutions' websites.

— Furthermore, Rowland also addresses economic distribution as a discursive aspect by experimenting with different modes of distributing the artworks: some are completely unsaleable, others saleable, and some only rentable. In so doing, Rowland uses the “expectation of the transactional capacity of an artwork” (Rowland, Cameron (2020): 1:05:37–1:05:45 min). to not only subvert the logics of the art market but above all to further their critique of racial capitalism and concepts of property and ownership. Contrary to a logic that values artworks as exclusive property, all of Rowland's institutional solo exhibitions to date have incorporated a paper-based artwork available for immediate purchase. This type of artwork is usually displayed in the museum shop, where it is sold at an affordable price. One could describe it as a multiple, given that it is often unlimited and available for immediate purchase. Two such works were on display at *Source Materials: Equitable Sharing* (2018),<sup>17)</sup> first shown in *D37*, MOCA, Los Angeles, and *Enclosure* (2020),<sup>18)</sup> shown in *3 & 4 Will. IV c.73*, ICA, London. Both have the character and aesthetic of informational material: the first is a detailed statistical representation of equitable sharing payments by state in 2017 [fig. 6], and the latter a historical map of European slave factories and forts on part of the African coast in 1753 from *The Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce* [fig. 7]. Thus, in providing and disseminating information that is not easily accessible otherwise, the form of the artwork – which corresponds to the function of the reproduced materials – insists on its use value.<sup>19)</sup>

— Additionally, there are works (contemporary and historical objects) that are not offered for sale, but only for rent. In general, renting can be considered a transaction that does not meet the collector's expectations of ownership, or, through the lens of artists' rights, it can be understood as a possibility for the artist to retain full ownership of their work and to circumvent the secondary market.

— Rowland applies a variety of different rental systems. On the one hand, the abovementioned example of *Summer 3d One*

17)

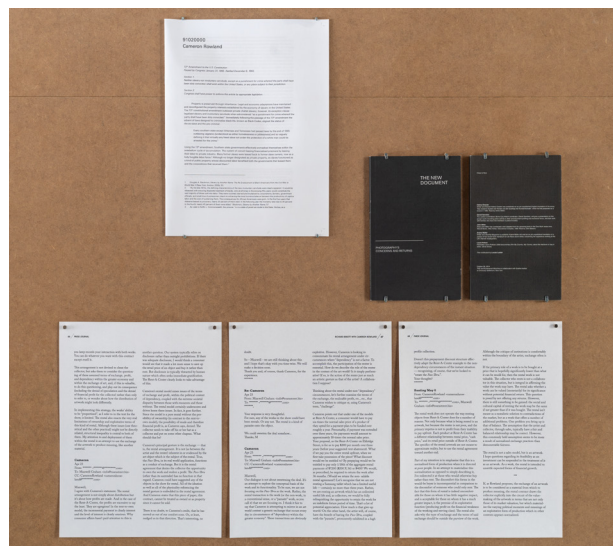
See full caption in wall map no. 2a in Pia 2023.

18)

See full caption in wall map no. 3a in Pia 2023.

19)

There are also no indications that would identify it as a work of art, such as an artist's signature.



// Figure 8

Installation view (No. 1: Exhibition pamphlet for “91020000”, 2016; No. 5.1: “The New Document: Photography's Concerns and Returns”; No. 5.2: “Close to Now”; No. 6: excerpt from “Rotate the Pass-Thru”, *Source Materials*, 2022

*Stroller – Item: 6781-005030*, 2018 uses a “rental at cost” contract which “pegs the price of the rental period to the total cost of the products constituting the artwork” (Stone 2018: 102). On the other hand, artworks designated as “rentals,” like the sculptures of *Pass-Thru* (2014), are made available partly as a “rental,” partly as a sale, producing a “comparative anxiety” (Ibid.) between collectors (what some have to rent, others can buy).<sup>20)</sup> As an example, *Source Materials* featured an excerpt from a text by Richard Birkett co-authored with Rowland [fig. 8], in which an email conversation between Rowland, the gallery owner Maxwell Graham, and an anonymous collector discuss the terms and intentions of renting.<sup>21)</sup> In the text, Rowland describes rentals as an “attempt to use the exchange of the artwork to produce meaning, like another material” (Birkett / Rowland 2015). This explanation and the willingness to publish the abovementioned email conversation (which would usually be a private agreement happening “behind closed doors”) make manifest the artist’s interest in using the exchange of artworks for a discursive exploration of distribution models that challenge the concept of ownership.

**COLLABORATIONS AS SOURCES** — The significance of text in Rowland’s practice can be traced back to their early work, for example in the form of early collaborative practices exemplifying an interest in text-based work, diverse discursive formats, and interdisciplinary exchange. Together with John Beeson and Daniel Herleth, Rowland co-edited the publication series TND [fig. 8]; their first publication titled *The New Document: Photography’s Concerns and Returns* (2013) was published in conjunction with *Concerns and Returns* (2012), an exhibition curated by Beeson featuring works by Rowland and Herleth.<sup>22)</sup> Furthermore, they published *Close to Now* (2017), which served as a documentation of and collection of contributions from a symposium bearing the same name.<sup>23)</sup> This symposium was organized by the three in 2014 together with the Goethe Institut at University Settlement in New York and Kunstverein Munich. Notably, the invited speakers included not only figures from the art world but also journalists and political activists. As for Rowland’s institutional solo exhibitions, it is evident from the public programs that the artist invites theorists from the field of Black studies rather than art theorists to historicize the artist’s own practice. Just as Rowland reveals in the footnotes of their pamphlets what sources they are building on in their practice, so too the symposium is a way of showing the extent to which the practice is in exchange with other disciplines of Black studies.

20)

For more detailed information on rental contracts, see Stone 2018.

21)

See reference no. 6 in Pia 2023.

22)

See reference no. 5.1. In Pia 2023.

23)

See reference no. 5.2 in Pia 2023.

— In a talk dating back to 2020, Rowland explicitly states that they view their artistic practice as an extension of theoretical Black study: their aim, as they put it, is “to develop a materialist analysis within art that both refers to the practice of historical materialism but also acknowledges the limitations that Black Marxist scholars have drawn out.” In this sense, Rowland is not only drawing on but also adding something to academic forms of knowledge: “archival practices and academic scholarship have certain built-in parameters that the sort of immediacy of material within art practice might be able to supplement and so I think I really come to making art as a way of trying to work in service of other forms of Black study.”<sup>24)</sup> In the talk Rowland primarily refers to contract-based art works such as *Depreciation* (2018). However, on a different level, one could also consider Rowland’s contribution to the 2022 reissue of Saidiya Hartman’s *Scenes of Subjection* as being in service of another form of Black study. The book, originally published in 1997, is a central source for Rowland’s work.<sup>25)</sup>

Rowland maintains a significant exchange with Hartman and has invited her to their public program’s multiple times. For the reissue of the book, Hartman asked Rowland to transform concepts from the book into visual graphics.<sup>26)</sup> Conversations between the two resulted in notations [fig. 9] by Rowland – “scores for thought,” as Hartman describes them – which were integrated into different chapters of the book (Hartman 2022: 382). Additionally, a detailed view of Rowland’s work *Society* (2020) is featured on the cover.

— In summary, *Source Materials* explores how Rowland’s refusal of the legal-economic regime of property manifests itself across various facets of their artistic practice. Rather than primarily focusing on Rowland’s contract-based works, where it is more evident, the installation sheds light on other, methodological aspects of Rowland’s practice – its operational structures, such as medial and economic distribution, and the production and dissemination of knowledge – that accompany and structurally inform their works of art.

— A comprehensive bibliography compiled for the installation *Source Materials* can be accessed here:

[https://tinymutualadmirationssocieties.uni-ak.ac.at/pdf/Source\\_Materials\\_Rowland\\_Pia\\_TMAS\\_202212.pdf](https://tinymutualadmirationssocieties.uni-ak.ac.at/pdf/Source_Materials_Rowland_Pia_TMAS_202212.pdf)

24)

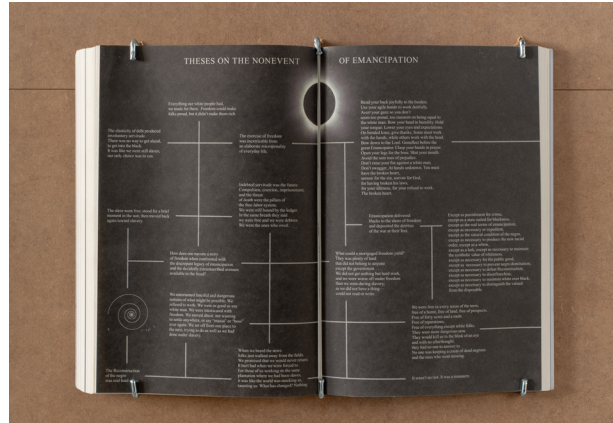
Transcription from the recording of the talk: Banard College 2019.

25)

See reference no. 8.2 in Pia 2023.

26)

See reference no.7 n Pia 2023.



// Figure 9

Installation view (No.7: Notation “Theses on the Nonevent of Emancipation” by Cameron Rowland in Saidiya Hartmann’s “Scenes of Subjection”, 2022), *Source Materials*, 2022



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## // Image Credits

- Fig. 1:** Installation view *Source Materials*, curated by Lucie Pia, Tiny Mutual Admiration Societies, 2022, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Photo: Demian Kern
- Fig. 2:** Installation view (No.8: Book references proposed by Cameron Rowland), *Source Materials*, curated by Lucie Pia, Tiny Mutual Admiration Societies, 2022, University of Applied Arts, Vienna, Photo: Demian Kern
- Fig. 3:** Installation view (No.9: Additional literature), *Source Materials*, curated by Lucie Pia, Tiny Mutual Admiration Societies, 2022, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Photo: Demian Kern
- Fig. 4:** Installation view (No. 1: Exhibition pamphlet for "91020000", 2016), *Source Materials*, curated by Lucie Pia, Tiny Mutual Admiration Societies, 2022, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Photo: Demian Kern
- Fig. 5:** Installation view (No. 4: Exhibition pamphlet for "Deputies", 2021), *Source Materials*, curated by Lucie Pia, Tiny Mutual Admiration Societies, 2022, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Photo: Demian Kern
- Fig. 6:** Installation view (No. 2: Exhibition pamphlet for "D37", 2018; No. 2b: *October*; No. 2a: Cameron Rowland, "Equitable Sharing", 2018), *Source Materials*, curated by Lucie Pia, Tiny Mutual Admiration Societies, 2022, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Photo: Demian Kern
- Fig. 7:** Installation view (No. 3: Exhibition pamphlet for "3 & 4 Will. IV c.73", 2020; No.3a: Cameron Rowland, "Enclosure", 2020; No. 3b: Springerin), *Source Materials*, curated by Lucie Pia, Tiny Mutual Admiration Societies, 2022, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Photo: Demian Kern
- Fig. 8:** Installation view (No. 1: Exhibition pamphlet for "91020000", 2016; No. 5.1: "The New Document: Photography's Concerns and Returns"; No. 5.2: "Close to Now"; No. 6: excerpt from "Rotate the Pass-Thru"), *Source Materials*, curated by Lucie Pia, Tiny Mutual Admiration Societies, 2022, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Photo: Demian Kern.
- Fig. 9:** Installation view (No.7: Notation "Theses on the Nonevent of Emancipation" by Cameron Rowland in Saidiya Hartmann's "Scenes of Subjection", 2022), *Source Materials*, curated by Lucie Pia, Tiny Mutual Admiration Societies, 2022, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Photo: Demian Kern.

## // About the Author

Lucie Pia is an art historian and curator living in Vienna, where she currently works for the archive and estate of artist Linda Bilda. In 2024 she will begin to work as a curatorial assistant at the Kunstverein Munich. A selection of recent exhibitions, screenings, lectures, and texts: *On Cameron Rowland*, exhibition, Kunsthalle Zurich (2020); *Freiheit als Eigentumsdelikt*. In: *MALMOE* 92 (spring 2020); *Entwertung als Entschädigung*, paper at the 5th Swiss Congress for Art History, University of Zurich (2022); *Mothers and Parents*, exhibition, co-organized with Valentina Tried, Oxyd, Winterthur (2023); *Capture Captures*, University Gallery Die Angewandte, (2022); *Entwertung als Entschädigung oder akkumulierende Schulden als Dauerleihgabe. Reparation als juristisch angelegte Wertminderung und -negation in Cameron Rowlands Arbeiten «Depreciation» und «Bankrott»*. In: *The Value of the Present* (working title), edited by Barbara Reisinger and Felix Vogel (forthcoming).



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# CIRCUIT OF (RE-)PRODUCTION (DISHCLOTH)

## EDITION VON JENNI TISCHER FÜR FKW NR. 73

// Jenni Tischer

*Circuit of (Re-)Production (dishcloth)*, 2023

35 × 100 cm, Jacquard weaving, linen-cotton blend

Edition 49 + 1AP for FKW, produced in cooperation with  
Collection and Archive, University of Applied Arts Vienna

Price: 160€

Half of the proceeds go to the [Verein Wiener Frauenhäuser](#)

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The term “real abstraction” was coined by the national economist and Marxist philosopher Alfred Sohn-Rethel, who uses it to refer to the moment “in the exchange process” when “doing and thinking diverge on the part of the participants.” He importantly emphasizes that for him, this abstraction is not merely conceptual, but actually takes on a real social form.

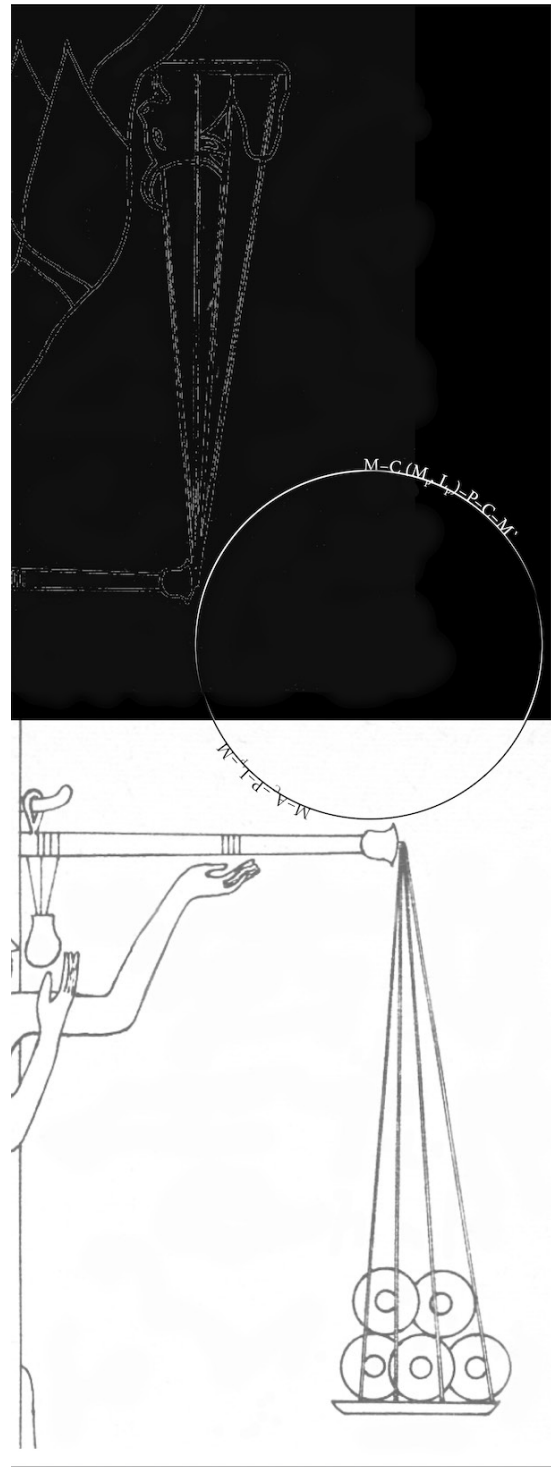
*Circuit of (Re-)Production (dishcloth)* depicts two economic circuits: the production circuit, and the circuit of re-production. An Egyptian wall painting from Thebes illustrates the weighing of cattle for ring money, depicting a person bending over in the middle of the scales between the object to be exchanged (the cattle) and the corresponding abstract equivalent value (ring money). The negotiation of the (counter) value and the exchange based on it, the “real abstraction,” takes place in precisely this intermediate space.

$M - C (M_p, L_p) - P - C' - M'$

Money (M) is exchanged for commodities (C): that is, a combination of means of production ( $M_p$ ) and labor power ( $L_p$ ). The two elements combine through capitalist production (P) to produce new commodities and surplus value ( $C'$ ), which are then exchanged for a greater amount of money ( $M'$ ).

$M - A_c - P - L_p - M$

Money (M) in the worker's hands is exchanged for articles of consumption ( $A_c$ ), which are then consumed in a similar process of production (P). But now what is produced in this “production process” is a unique commodity – the worker's labor power ( $L_p$ ). Once produced (or reproduced), it is then sold to the capitalist in exchange for wages ( $M'$ ).



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## NACHRUF AUF KATHRIN HOFFMANN-CURTIUS (1937–2023)

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Erstmals begegnete ich Kathrin Hoffmann-Curtius 1984 bei der zweiten Kunsthistorikerinnen-Tagung in Zürich. Für sie war es der erste Kontakt mit einer Kunstgeschichte, die begann, sich kritisch mit Geschlechterfragen auseinanderzusetzen. Viele Beiträge waren geprägt von der Position einer genuin weiblichen Ästhetik, einem angeblich weiblichen Blick und abstrahierten von einer historischen Perspektive. Kathrin reagierte darauf mit Ablehnung und heftiger Kritik. Wir waren alle in einer Suchbewegung; erst allmählich kristallisierten sich reflektierte feministische Positionen heraus. An der dritten Kunsthistorikerinnen-Tagung 1986 in Wien hielt sie ihren ersten auf Geschlechterfragen fokussierten Vortrag zu Oskar Kokoschkas Frauenbildern, einen Vortrag, der auf der individuellen Psyche des Künstlers und psychoanalytischen Fragestellungen basierte. Kathrin Hoffmann hat dann zur Entwicklung einer theoretisch und historisch fundierten feministischen Forschung ganz wesentlich beigetragen: einer Forschung, die davon ausgeht, dass *Geschlecht* eine historisch gewordene, sozial und diskursiv hergestellte Kategorie ist. Kathrin Hoffmann war, wie viele von uns, gut vernetzt mit Kolleginnen wie Silke Wenk, Sigrid Schade, Viktoria Schmidt-Linsenhoff u.a. An den insgesamt sieben Kunsthistorikerinnen-Tagungen beteiligte sie sich an den intensiven inhaltlichen Auseinandersetzungen – eine Form der offenen Debatte, die ich heute vermisse. Mit Silke Wenk zusammen organisierte sie die 2. Sektion der 6. Kunsthistorikerinnen-Tagung zu *Mythen von Autorschaft und Weiblichkeit im 20. Jahrhundert* an der Universität Tübingen, die 1997 publiziert wurde.

— Kathrin Hoffmann, verheiratet mit Konrad Hoffmann, Professor für Kunstgeschichte an der Universität Tübingen, und Mutter zweier Söhne, gehörte einer Generation an, für die es immer noch selbstverständlich war, keine eigene berufliche Karriere anzustreben. In der kleinen Universitätsstadt Tübingen war es zudem praktisch undenkbar, dass sie als Professorengattin eine Stelle an der Universität hätte annehmen können. Kathrin Hoffmann blieb freiberufliche Wissenschaftlerin, auch nach ihrer Übersiedlung nach Berlin. Allerdings hatte sie kurze Lehraufträge an den Universitäten Tübingen, Hamburg, Trier und Wien. Trotz einer gewissen Bitterkeit über das Missverhältnis zwischen ihren wissenschaftlichen Fähigkeiten und dem begrenzten Raum ihrer Entfaltungsmöglichkeiten, machte Kathrin Hoffmann das Beste aus ihrer Situation: Sie arbeitete unablässig bis kurz vor ihrem Tod; sie hielt Vorträge und

publizierte. Sie nützte die Chance, Zeit für tiefgehende Forschung zu haben. Ich kenne kaum jemanden, der oder die so gründlich und sorgsam gearbeitet hat. Ihre Arbeitsweise zeichnet sich durch hohe Komplexität aus: differenzierteste Analysen der jeweiligen ästhetischen Inszenierung, Kontextualisierung in Bildtraditionen und den zeitgenössischen Diskursen und gesellschaftlichen Bedingungen, hohe theoretische Reflexion und genderkritische Überlegungen; aber niemals hat sie über die konkreten Kunstwerke hinweg theoretisiert, sondern ist immer von den konkreten Werken ausgegangen. Großartig sind ihre Analysen zum Werk von Hannah Höch (Michelangelo beim Abwasch – Hannah Höchs Zeitschnitte der Avantgarde. In: Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat, Alexandra Pätzold (Hg.), *Die Verhältnisse der Geschlechter zum Tanzen bringen*, FKW 12, Marburg 1991). Bewundernswert war ihre Entscheidung, sich mit den schwierigsten Dingen zu befassen: mit der Darstellung von Frauenmord, mit Denkmälern, Kunst im Nationalsozialismus und vor allem mit Bildern des Judenmords (Bilder zum Judenmord. Eine kommentierte Sichtung der Malerei und Zeichenkunst in Deutschland von 1945 bis zum Auschwitz-Prozess, Marburg a.L. 2014). Kathrin Hoffmann hat in diesem Buch in heroischer Detailarbeit das schwer auffindbare und schwer aushaltbare Material zusammengetragen. Die deutsche Kunstgeschichte hat sich 70 Jahre lang geweigert, sich mit diesem düstersten Kapitel ihrer Geschichte auseinanderzusetzen. Der Band ist viel mehr als eine „kommentierte Sichtung“, wie das Understatement der Autorin vermuten lässt. Es ist eine differenzierte Analyse der unterschiedlichen Zugänge von Künstlern wie Joseph Beuys, Gerhard Richter, Werner Tübke und unbekanntem KünstlerInnen, eine Auseinandersetzung mit den gegensätzlichen Haltungen in der BRD und DDR und deren ideologischen Ursachen, eine prinzipielle Erforschung der Gründe für das westliche Dogma der abstrakten Kunst nach 1945.

— Kathrin Hoffmann hat sich mit der Disziplin Kunstgeschichte, mit ihren methodischen Zugängen, blinden Flecken und politisch-ideologischen Implikationen auseinandergesetzt. Als Gründungsmitglied des Ulmer Vereins – aus dessen Sektion *Frauenforschung* in den späten 1980er Jahren die FKW entstand – hielt sie 1998 zu dessen 30jährigem Bestehen einen Vortrag, der in den *kritischen berichten* 2/1999 veröffentlicht wurde. Darin geht sie mit dem männlich dominierten Mainstream der Kunstgeschichte hart ins Gericht: Die großen Errungenschaften feministischer Forschung wurden weitgehend ignoriert, so auch die Einbeziehung theoretischer Felder wie die Verbindung von Sozialgeschichte und Psychohistorie, eine aktualisierte Weiterführung Warburgscher Bildtheorie, wie die



Semiotik, Diskursanalyse, Dekonstruktion, die *cultural studies* und die Grundlagen von Kulturwissenschaft. Sie geißelt die politische Praxis der Institutionen des Faches, die immer noch männliche Kollegen bevorzugen.

— Kathrin Hoffmann hat sich mit ihrem hohen politischen Verantwortungsbewusstsein auch in tagespolitische Kämpfe eingebracht, so etwa in dem Widerstand gegen die Instrumentalisierung einer vergrößerten Kopie von Käthe Kollwitz *Mutter und Sohn* für die Zentrale Gedenkstätte in der Neuen Wache in Berlin 1994 (Ein Mutterbild für die Neue Wache in Berlin. In: Daniela Büchten, Anja Frey (Hg.), *Im Irrgarten deutscher Geschichte, Die Neue Wache 1818–1993*, Berlin 1993).

— Die Eigenständigkeit des Denkens, der Verzicht auf modische Begrifflichkeiten, die Sorgfalt der Analysen verleiht den Texten von Kathrin Hoffmann Aktualität. Aber der Mensch Kathrin Hoffmann fehlt: ihr strenger Blick über die Brille, ihre Herzenswärme, ihr Humor, ihr mädchenhaftes Lachen. Ich werde sie sehr vermissen.

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