



LJMU Research Online

Byrne, J

Social Autonomy and the Use Value of Art

<http://researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk/id/eprint/6977/>

Article

Citation (please note it is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from this work)

Byrne, J (2016) Social Autonomy and the Use Value of Art. Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry, 42 (201). pp. 60-69. ISSN 1465-4253

LJMU has developed **LJMU Research Online** for users to access the research output of the University more effectively. Copyright © and Moral Rights for the papers on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may download and/or print one copy of any article(s) in LJMU Research Online to facilitate their private study or for non-commercial research. You may not engage in further distribution of the material or use it for any profit-making activities or any commercial gain.

The version presented here may differ from the published version or from the version of the record. Please see the repository URL above for details on accessing the published version and note that access may require a subscription.

For more information please contact researchonline@ljmu.ac.uk

<http://researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk/>

Essay

John Byrne

History, Use-Value, and the Contemporary Work or Labour of Art

Until relatively recently, asking ‘what kind of work is the work of art’ would immediately open up a well-rehearsed discourse surrounding a range of familiar and received wisdoms. More often than not, these romanticized clichés and sedimented forms of common sense depended, almost exclusively, on the deployment of a set of key terms and conditions that framed the specific role and function of art and artists in Western culture and society: alterity, aesthetic autonomy, artistic vision, and an almost messianic commitment to the ideology of the artist as secular shaman.

Likewise, to ask ‘what is the use-value of the work or labour of art’¹ would, more often than not, open up an alternative set of debates and assumptions about utility, function, purpose, and instrumentalized culture. It also followed that these two kinds of debates pointed toward a fundamental schism or divide within Western culture, between the autonomy of art and the heteronomy of everyday life, which it was the sole purpose of the historical avant-garde to somehow bridge or reconcile. In doing so, it was also assumed that the historical avant-garde might be able to also offer us both aesthetic and political alternatives that would help us to imagine ways of living otherwise.

However, over the last decade or so it has become far more common for those involved in the art world to propose that art occupies both the spaces of autonomy and heteronomy. To put this another way, it has now become safer to assume that art’s use-value and/or purpose (or useless use-value and purposeless purpose if you prefer) is that it allows us to keep both the seemingly irreconcilable opposites of autonomy and heteronomy in a kind of useful tension. Coinciding roughly with the 2002 publication in *New Left Review* of Jacques Rancière’s ‘The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes: Emplotments of Autonomy and Heteronomy’² the idea that a broader ‘politics of aesthetics’ represents an overarching metanarrative (within which the very struggle for meaning is played out through complex forms of shifting interaction) has allowed for a radical rethink of the role, function, and purpose of art within the terms and conditions of globalized neoliberalism. At its weakest, this way of thinking has led to a form of pseudo-radicalism

¹ I use the phrase ‘work or labour of art’ throughout this essay as a means to both identify, separate (and re-conjoin) three common and problematic senses or distinctions concerning our understanding of art: first, the ‘work of art’ seen as either an autonomous entity to be experienced as an isolated phenomena; second, the idea of the work of art as an autonomous entity which is imbued with, or somehow embodies, the work (as craftsmanship and skill) and labour (as time and effort spent) on the production of the art object itself—this idea is usually synonymous with the ideology of authorship; and third, the idea of the labour of art as either an individual or collective process, often ‘open-ended’ which is separate to, and usually bracketed off from, the art object (or work of art) in senses one and two.

² Jacques Rancière, ‘The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes: Emplotments of Autonomy and Heteronomy,’ *New Left Review* 14 (March–April 2002), pp. 133–135.

whereby art is seen as a collective noun that can somehow string together a range of practices and experiences that combine both the concrete and the ephemeral—the luxury commodity form of the art object sold at auction on the one hand and ground-up forms of collaborative social intervention on the other. At its best, this possibility has led to a range of projects, practices, and initiatives, undertaken by artists, museums, and galleries alike, which are attempting to renegotiate the Western split between art and life. This, in turn, is opening up the possibility of fundamentally renegotiating the existing structures of accepted institutional relationships that make art possible—artist, artwork, audience, museum, gallery, etc., through practices of constellation thinking, coproduction, and a commitment to active forms of usership.

At the same time as this, it also becomes clear that the more art as we know it (or knew it) changes, the more the old boundaries blur, the harder it becomes to tell what or where art is anymore.³ Usually, the two answers to this difficulty are quite extreme—either hold on fiercely to what we already know to be art, or let art finally merge, unrecognizably, within the all-encompassing texture of everyday life. Such polarities, of course, return us directly to the bifurcatory logic of autonomy (where art is seen to provide a rebuff against instrumentalized culture) and heteronomy (where there no longer exists a case for art as a useful category in itself). Because of this, I would argue that it is becoming increasingly necessary to reuse history as a contemporary means of navigating between the Scylla and Charybdis of autonomy and heteronomy and to help us imagine alternative forms of future.

An example of this reuse of history was recently given to us by art historian and philosopher Georges Didi-Huberman in his article 'The Supposition of the Aura: The Now, The Then, and Modernity.'⁴ Here, Didi-Huberman

argues against an over-simplistic use of Walter Benjamin's work, specifically his 1936 text 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,'⁵ as a means to inscribe the 'death' of the 'aura' of an artwork. Instead, Didi-Huberman advocates convincingly for a more sophisticated and dialectical sense of the 'aura' which is embedded in Benjamin's work as a 'falling away': a 'supposition' of the auratic quality of an artwork which subsequently haunts any attempt to rethink the 'loss of originality.' This idea of a history as decline, of a history which haunts the present—rather like the barely visible calligraphic inscriptions that always lurk beneath any attempt at palimpsest—implicates history as the imperfect negotiation of erasure in order to rewrite. In this sense the lessons of history, for Didi-Huberman, are never simply there to be learnt, as if they somehow present an archival index of a future that was yet to be. Instead, the act of history is always a process of becoming. As Didi-Huberman, via Benjamin, puts it 'decline ... is part of the "origin" so understood, not the bygone—albeit founding—past, but the two-way flow of a historicity that asks, without respite, even to our own present, "to be recognized as a restoration, a restitution, as something that by that very fact is uncompleted, always open."' ⁶

Such an active use of history, of literally allowing ourselves to go back to the future and to remind ourselves of a time when art functioned in very different ways, would allow us to begin actively recuperating the period circa 1848. This was a period of radical thinking, of John Ruskin and Mechanics' Institutes, a period in which art still occupied a useful role in the production of new forms of citizenship. Crucially, this was a time before art and utility, autonomy and everyday life, had gone their own seemingly irreconcilable ways. An active use of this history would, I would argue, provide us with the means to begin reimagining our own current

³ See John Byrne, 'Critical Autonomy: Inside Out – Outside In,' *The Autonomy Newspaper # 1: Positioning* (Onomatopoe 43.1 2010), pp. 14–21.

⁴ See Georges Didi-Huberman, 'The Supposition of the Aura: The Now, The Then, and Modernity,' in *Walter Benjamin and History*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (London: Continuum, 2005).

⁵ Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (New York: Penguin, 2008 [1936]). There are also many versions of this essay which can be found online including www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm.

⁶ Didi-Huberman, 'The Supposition of the Aura,' p. 4.

situation. This would also allow us to begin the task of rethinking art and the kind of work, or labour, that the work of art has become (and is still becoming).

- I. In my own research, this operation of returning to the future has led to an ongoing analysis of use-value and exchange-value, in relationship to contemporary art, via Marx.⁷ More specifically, I have become interested in Marx's insistence on a bodily/mental split between use-value and exchange-value as a means to re-imagine the shifting and complex relationships between autonomy and heteronomy within our increasingly networked and globalized neoliberal economy. In the early pages of *Das Kapital*, for example, Marx attempts to separate out use-value from exchange-value in any consideration of the commodity form. However, as Fredric Jameson has recently pointed out in his book *Representing Capital: A Reading of Volume One*,⁸ this separation also belies a more fundamental and metaphysical distinction in the work of Marx between qualitative materiality and quantitative abstraction. By arguing that use-value does not matter to the capitalist who wishes to sell commodities for profit, Marx simultaneously proposes that use-value in the commodity form is, at best, subsidiary to its potential as exchange-value. One could go as far as to say that, for Marx, the supposition of use-value by exchange-value and profit was the defining condition for the development of the commodity form under capitalism. In doing so, Marx both externalizes use-value from the quantitative and abstract procedures of the commodity form (and its purpose as a vehicle for profitable exchange). At the same time he privileges use-value as something qualitative and material, something that both precedes and becomes lost from the commodity form under capitalism. To put this another way, use-value comes to be seen as the

⁷ John Byrne, 'Back to the Future: Grizedale Arts, Use Value and the Work of Art' available at Grizedale Arts New Mechanics Institute Library, www.grizedale.org.

⁸ See Fredric Jameson, *Representing Capital: A Reading of Volume One* (London: Verso, 2011), pp. 19–20.

bodily and socially produced necessity to satisfy basic human needs and to ensure the continued development of the means of production. It could also be argued that Marx's attempt to separate use-value (as qualitative bodily physicality) from exchange-value (as quantitative mental abstraction) ensures that any subsequent consideration of the commodity form is haunted, at every turn, by the absence of that which it can never fully be.

Marx presents us here with a now familiar ethical and moral hierarchy which clearly places qualitative bodily materiality above quantitative mental abstraction and, ultimately the productive over the ideological. His separation of use-value and exchange-value in the commodity form also marks a historical juncture. This is the point at which any calls for a future beyond capitalism begin to be predicated on use-value and, more often than not, on the valorization of ethical forms of non-alienated work and labour as an inalienable human right. We must, however, remember that the work of Marx was itself also formed and conditioned by this very same historical separation—a division between real and material forces and the abstraction of work or labour, within the growing mechanisms of capitalism, into the mental and judiciary formulation of structures which govern and contain us.⁹ It is precisely at this historical moment—roughly the mid-nineteenth century—that we begin to witness the opening up of the familiar gap between art and life. Within this gap the possible complexity (and the potential use-value that the work or labour of art could embody or represent within this complexity) begins to get lost. It is also from this point onward that it becomes possible for the development of a European avant-garde which can imagine its job or work to be that of reuniting art and life. As we also know, it is under the aegis of this unificatory logic that both art's autonomy (as a resistance to the onslaught of

⁹ For example, as Raymond Williams pointed out in his 1977 book *Marxism and Literature*, Marx's own ideas were themselves determined by, and have to be read against, the tumultuous conditions of the Industrial Revolution and its concomitant faith in empirical science. One of the key examples Williams uses here is Marx's assertions that the economic conditions of a determining base of material forces could be read with the accuracy of a science.

mechanized industrialization) and art's utility (as a means of harnessing the power of mechanized industrialization as aestheticized revolutionary potential) begin to be offered up as possible avant-garde solutions to this division.

By returning to the past in this way, it becomes clearer to see the complexity of legacy that we have inherited from this period—a complexity which is obfuscated by the overly simplistic notion of an autonomy/heteronomy divide. On the one hand, the future of art carries with it the possibility of conceiving both autonomy and heteronomy, via use-value, as complex forms of interaction. On the other, the existing infrastructures of art that we have inherited from this period, predicated as they are on the narrow conception of an autonomous art that is capable of staving off the alienating horrors of industrialization, would seem to militate against the very idea of such complex interaction.

- II. However, to bring us sharply back to our present cultural condition, we might well ask what happens to the role and function of art when, as theorist and activist Franco Berardi argues, the hallmarks of modernist avant-garde resistance have long since been co-opted by the rhetorics of financial capitalism, and, more specifically, by the economically driven model of the culture industries.¹⁰ If this is the case, then artists, or for that matter art institutions which see themselves as progressive progenitors of artistic possibility, can no longer simply reach out to the well-rehearsed mantras of artistic autonomy and cultural alterity. As both left and right increasingly occupy the same territory of rhetorical discourse surrounding freedom and community, the implications for our traditional understandings of the work or labour of art would appear to be stark.¹¹

Berardi offers one way of thinking and working ourselves out of this melancholic dead end. In his recent

book *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance*,¹² he argues that the radical deregulation of neoliberal capital is predicated upon the increasing abstraction of language from the body. Deregulatory logic, he suggests, relies on the possibility of endlessly connecting and reconfiguring language into regulated, recombinable and meaningless components. This, he points out, runs counter to the open, porous, and poetic use of language as a fluid form of conjunction—as an endlessly open means of understanding ourselves and each other through evolving forms of communication and growth. In light of this, Berardi proposes that the new job of the artist or poet is to return non-alienated forms of porous, mutable, and productive language to the physical and social body. By recombining language, autonomy and production in this way, Berardi also allows us to go back to the future. We can then begin rethinking the potential of radical alternatives while at the same time, returning to the social and historical bifurcation of use-value and exchange-value.

More specifically, Berardi insists on the distinction between abstract and connective forms of language from material and conjunctive uses of language. In doing so he consciously replays Marx's struggle with the codependency of use-value and exchange-value and its development, through the imposition of capitalism, of abstracted forms of use-value as an ideological means of measurement and calibration. In this way, we can see clear parallels beginning to emerge. On the one hand, between connective forms of language and the quantitative abstraction of exchange-value. On the other, between conjunctive and productive uses of language with the bodily necessity of use-value. Here, the use of language provides a material means to challenge the established status quo of economic predicates and determinates through the material production of new social meanings, and autonomies. These are themselves capable of escaping the gravity of power and its reliance

¹⁰ See Franco Berardi, *After the Future* (Oakland: AK Press, 2011).

¹¹ For a stark account of the artist as 'at best the ultimate freelance knowledge workers and at worst barely capable of distinguishing themselves from the consuming desire to work at all times,' see Liam Gillick, 'The Good of Work,' *e-flux journal* 5, no. 16 (2010), www.e-flux.com/journal/the-good-of-work.

¹² See Franco Berardi, *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2012).

on increasingly interchangeable, centralized, and regulated forms of connectivity. In this scenario, the job of the artist or poet becomes the work or labour of keeping language alive when there are no longer any simple distinctions between autonomy and heteronomy. If this is the case, then it also follows that the work or labour of art is no longer to unite, bridge, or combine the seemingly irreconcilable—it is to operate as a form of autonomous and social possibility, or use-value, within an already networked and saturated world of deregulatory and delusory logic.

- III. Berardi begins to offer us a useful resource for strategically rethinking what kind of work, or labour, the work of art has now become within a globalized and networked neoliberal economy; that of returning an instrumentalized and abstracted language, reconfigured as a porous and mutable form of poetry, to the physical and social body. But how, we might then ask, is it possible to imagine (let alone effect) such a strategy within a dispersed and networked society that is already predicated upon forms of alienation, instrumentalization, and abstraction on every level? And how can we even begin to imagine forms of resistance and organization, based upon the use-value of art, when all forms of traditional organization and resistance (class, race, gender, religion, sexuality, party affiliation) seem to be collapsing into each other under the weight of flexibilization and the exploitation of precarious labour? How does one radicalize, collectively or individually, when all faith in the mechanisms of inherited political affiliation would seem to be lost?

One way of beginning to think this conundrum through, I would argue, is again offered by Rancière. However, I'm not thinking of Rancière's suggestion of a metapolitics of aesthetics here—as a means of usefully rethinking the interconnectedness and emplotments of political and aesthetic activities that are, fundamentally, made of the same stuff (of a politics and aesthetics that are both, in essence, mechanisms for the re-distribution of the sensible, or of making 'sense of sense and sense'

as Rancière puts it). Instead I'm thinking here of the Rancière of 'The Nights of Labour: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France,'¹³ of the Rancière who looks back to the future at the historical struggle of artisans, workers and craftsmen who used writing—and the growing availability of ground-up political publications in the 1840s—as a means to reuse and challenge existing languages of power and control. In doing so, Rancière consciously avoids the trap of projecting a revolutionary and proletarian class who is yet to be—a mythologized class somehow standing at the ready to free itself from the shackles and yoke of capitalist oppression (when, and only when, it is brought to the full consciousness of its own servitude by enlightened bourgeois revolutionaries). Instead, he weaves a more plausible picture of everyday micropolitical dissent—a rhizomatic reuse of the existing languages of mastery made by a class that is already fully conscious of its own fixed position within the hierarchies of power. For Rancière, this already existing class of fully conscious workers, who are willing to reuse a language that is always too mutable and porous to be owned completely by the hand of their masters, contains within it more revolutionary potential than an idealized and abstracted proletariat to be:

A worker who had never learned how to write and yet tried to compose verses to suit the taste of his times was perhaps more of a danger to the prevailing ideological order than a worker who performed revolutionary songs. ... Perhaps the truly dangerous classes are not so much the uncivilized ones thought to undermine society from below, but rather the migrants who move at the borders between classes, individuals and groups who develop capabilities within themselves which are useless for the improvement



Fig 1 Alexander Rodchenko, Soviet Workers' Club, 1925

¹³ See Jacques Rancière, *The Nights of Labor: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989).

of their material lives and which in fact are liable to make them despise material concerns.¹⁴

This kind of work or labour, this continual reuse and reconfiguration of the possibilities offered by language, technology, and existing architectures and protocols of power is now, I would contend, the kind of work, or labour, that the work of art has now become. It is epitomized by the struggle for meaning that is the root of collaborative propositions such as Arte Útil and the new Museum 3.0,¹⁵ and which resides at the heart of projects such as Grizedale Arts's Office of Useful Art.¹⁶



Fig 2 Grizedale's Arts's Office of Useful Art, Grizedale

IV. However, in a sense, this leads us straight back to the key difficulty I pointed to earlier on: How might we envision a useful work or labour of art based around the use-value of conceiving both autonomy and heteronomy as a complex emplotment through which the struggle for meaning is played out? More specifically, how is it possible if to do so would seem to decisively re-invoke a traditional bifurcation between art and life? Again, I would argue that it is now more necessary than ever to reuse history as a means to navigate between the Scylla and Charybdis of autonomy and heteronomy. Additionally, it is equally important to do this through using the past as a means to imagine our possible futures, to escape the strong gravitational pull of our own inherited structures of understanding. Another

¹⁴ See Jacques Rancière, 'Good Times or Pleasures at the Barriers,' in *Voices of the People*, ed. Adrian Rifkin and Roger Thomas (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1988), pp. 51–58. This essay appeared originally as 'Le bon temps ou la barrière des plaisirs,' *Les Révoltes logiques* 7 (Spring–Summer 1978), pp. 25–66.

¹⁵ In his book *Toward a Lexicon of Usership* (which is available as a free .pdf at the Arte Útil website, www.arte-util.org/tools/lexicon/www/), Stephen Wright argues that museums and galleries have already adopted elements of Web 2.0 culture insofar as they are relying more heavily than ever on audience participation, feedback, and knowledge production. Wright goes on to speculate that a more radical shift toward the Museum 3.0 may be underway, one which will see the complete breakdown in the museum/audience divide. Instead, we will see the development of coproduced/open-source museums as both online and offline shared resources.

¹⁶ The Office of Useful Art is a vehicle for developing ideas of an open source and user-led museum and gallery experience which is coproduced through the active making of art. I have described one of the first iterations of this mechanism, which took place in 2010 as part of the São Paulo Biennial, in my article 'Back to the Future: Grizedale Arts, Use Value and the Work of Art,' cited previously. Since then the Office of Useful Art has amalgamated with artist Tania Bruguera's Association of Arte Útil and has manifested itself in Tate Liverpool and Ikon Gallery, Birmingham. There is now a permanent Office of Useful Art at Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (under the directorship of Alistair Hudson) and also further plans to continue developing this project.

key example of (or 'blueprint' for) this kind of historical methodology that helps us understand the problematic bifurcation of autonomy and heteronomy—and its potential use-value for radical change—is found in T. J. Clark's *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*.¹⁷ In his discussion of the Abstract-Expressionist painter Jackson Pollock, Clark makes an astonishing assertion: 'Modernism is Craftmanship' he declares 'even in its wildest moments.'¹⁸ Here, Clark refers to a particular outtake of a Hans Namuth film in which Pollock appears to be using two brushes that have been fused together by dried paint. He uses this as a tool for carefully dripping his own paint at a consistent and variable speed onto a floor-based canvas. By making this assertion, and by using this particular example, Clark usefully confronts a complex process here. In doing so, he studiously avoids any attempt to normalize it. In the act of Pollock's making, Clark suggests that 'there had to be built in a whole series of obstacles to aesthetic freezing and framing. Aesthetic decision-making had somehow to be ingested into the act of manufacture, the de-skilled address to the surface from above.'¹⁹ Perhaps even more interestingly, Clark then goes on to quote from Hegel's *The Unhappy Consciousness* by identifying this decision-making moment as 'the positive moment of practicing what it does not understand.'²⁰

By analyzing Pollock's methodology in this way, Clark takes us right back to Hegel's identification of modernity as a moment in which both self-sameness and contingency (or, for the sake of our argument, autonomy and heteronomy) tragically confront one another as opposites. 'The "Simple Unchangeable" on one side, the "protean Changeable" on the other,'²¹ as Clark succinctly puts it. At this point in history, absolute individuality (undividedness) and the endlessness of difference confront each other in



Fig 3 Hans Namuth, Jackson Pollock painting in his studio at Springs, Long Island, 1950, gelatine silver print

¹⁷ See T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 328.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 328–329.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 329.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 329.

what, for Hegel, is the essence of Spirit or Consciousness: the being together of the both in one. But the essence of modernity, for Hegel, was also its failure to grasp this—and this, of course, is also the root of our bifurcatory logic. The unhappy consciousness knows this bifurcation but simply cannot accept it. These two sides of self-consciousness are, for the ‘unhappy consciousness,’ alien to each other.

So far, so familiar. However, Clark also goes on to remind us (regarding Hegel) that, because the unhappy consciousness is itself the product of this division—brought into being, if you like, by the very friction of this opposition—it sides with the changeable consciousness (heteronomy) and ‘takes itself to be the unessential Being.’ Therefore, the real problem for Clark (again, regarding Hegel), lies in the inability of the unhappy consciousness to ‘lay hold of mere difference and embrace it as its Truth because difference turns on indifference, and contingency on essential nature.’²² As a consequence of this (and through, as Hegel defines it, a series of ‘movements of surrender’—first of all the right to decide for itself, then of the right to decide its property and enjoyment and, finally, through the positive moment of practicing what it does not understand) the unhappy consciousness ‘truly and completely deprives itself of the consciousness of inner and outer freedom, of the actuality in which consciousness exists *for itself*. It has the certainty of having truly divested itself of the “I,” and of having turned its immediate self-consciousness into a *Thing*, into and *objective* existence.’²³ At this point, Clark usefully reminds us that the movements of surrender that Hegel had in mind are those of modern religion and its forms and, for Clark, the way in which ‘the religious surrenderings have been extended and amplified by those of art.’ Clark then goes on to conclude this remarkable section of his book by stating that: “this would be the level on which even the self-satisfied Leftist claptrap about ‘art as a substitute

²² Ibid., p. 329.

²³ Ibid., p. 329.

religion’ might be reworked so as to have some critical purchase To investigate why *God is not Cast Down*.”²⁴

This return to Hegel, via Clark, as a means to re-understand the necessity of Modernity’s bifurcatory project, as well as its own essential misunderstanding of the conditions of its possibility as a bringing together of those bifurcatory opposites is, I would say, crucial here. If the self-sameness of identity (of autonomy, of a God who is not cast down) thereby underpins the very means of our surrender to an endless difference (and eventual indifference) of heteronomy, in which our self-identity is just one objectifiable contingency amongst others, then, by proxy, the endless fractalization through which neoliberal logic would alienate us from our own bodies does not, indeed cannot, guarantee the inevitability of our total surrender to this logic.

In this sense, the return of language to the body, which Berardi would advocate was now the job of the artist, would also depend (dare I say for its revolutionary success) upon the aesthetics of decision making being ‘somehow’ ingested—as we have already seen Clark put it in his analysis of Pollock—‘into the act of manufacture, the de-skilled address to the surface from above.’ A willful act, if you like, of re-inscribing precisely that line of bifurcatory distinction which modernity, and by proxy the avant-garde, sought so hard to ameliorate and undo. However, this time the re-inscription of this bifurcatory line would not be a decisive act of foreclosure or censure. Instead, it would be to allow, once again, the conjunctive ‘working through’ of art and life, use-value and exchange-value, as a means to reopen the possible dynamic of real social change, as the being together of the both in one. This sense of a reframing manufacture, as we have also seen, is for Hegel ‘the positive moment of practicing what it does not understand.’ It can also help us to repurpose Rancière’s historical identification of a worker who attempts to reuse the available languages of mastery

²⁴ Ibid., p. 329.

as a means to create alternative possibility. In so doing, they might keep alive a sense of agency within the all-encompassing confines of global neoliberalism. We can then, again, imagine that it is those migrants who refuse their place, who move between and across the fractalized borders of our endlessly networked culture, who are most effective in the production of real social change.

However, it is at this point, above all, that we must not fall back into the romantic trap of reinvesting the familiar object with the magical ability to negatively resist the ravages of the culture industry. Instead, if we are at the point where it is possible to reimagine our future through a revolutionary participation in a period of true change, then we must also allow our notion of art—what it can be, who can make it, where it can gain visibility, and how it can be used—to radically mutate. As such, the artwork now belongs as but one nodal point within a network of choices and refusals. In light of this, the craft of history is, of course, no longer the act of bearing transparent witness to ontological certitude. The use-value of art has now become the work of tracing a strategic pathway back through those rhizomatic networks of choice and refusal. It has become the collaborative use of art as a means to actively rework our histories as a political means to negotiating our alternative futures.