

## On consumption, Laziness and Less Work

The aim of my book is to draw on the relationship between art and work, as well as on reflections on the characteristics of artistic labour, in order to show how art approaches capitalism and at the same time resists the capitalist appropriation of human power and creation. The contemporary relationship between art and work is closely connected to the relationship between work and life as well as with the ways that life (subjectivity, sociality, temporality, movement) has been entering the core of contemporary production. My argument is based on the belief that art is a way of life, but not in the sense that the border between life and art is disappearing; in fact, this border establishes itself time and time again, creating forms and representations of life as well as shaping the language of art. Art is a form of life, its perceptive and aesthetic power, the life yet to come. These ways radically change the conditions of common life, the intensity of co-being and the existing forms of subjectivisation. Art could therefore be connected to the disclosure and shaping of life conditions as well as with the perceptive, affective and presentational proposals and possibilities whose disclosures also profoundly shatters the conditions of art itself since they are articulated regardless of the existing power relations. Today, the relationship between art and life is highly topical because their merger underlies the capitalisation of human powers and their exploitation for the generation of profit. In contemporary ways of working, the boundary between production and reproduction is disappearing. In this, art is of central importance; it comes across as the ideal and most speculative representation of this disappearance, which is why it is at the very centre of the capitalist interest in generating value. It is therefore essential to critically analyse the labour of the artist and connect it to the post-Fordist way of working, as well as with capitalist exploitation procedures.

This kind of understanding of art is especially important at a time that often feels one of crisis and transformation – a time of an excess prevalence of capitalism on the one hand and the radical powerlessness of political activity and the inability to think the future on the other. Interestingly, after two decades of ‘political art’ and constant transgression of the border between life and art, the art of today faces a deep crisis in terms of value articulation and its social role; at the same time, it is under attack from rightist politics in connection with the neoliberal understanding of freedom. Although we have been confronted with numerous engaged, political and critical artistic projects over the last two decades, their pseudo-activity makes them ineffective and they fail to penetrate and affect the social field. The pseudo-engagement of art has also contributed to making art a target of dangerous populist reproaches that art is but ‘leftist elitism’; in this, it is claimed that art is an activity that does not interest the public and has no social role or influence, whereby the artists enjoy subsidies from the state and their alleged ‘laziness’ is protected from the self-regulating and dynamic nature of the market. This is not only a Slovenian but also an international story. Although there are several ‘classic’ arguments in this tirade that come up fairly constantly as a part of a completely erroneous moral belief (that artists supposedly do not work), these need to be looked at more closely. It is important to recognize that the arguments against the elitism of contemporary art belong to a fusion of populist and neoliberal rhetoric with the aim of profoundly reevaluating the articulation of the common and the community in contemporary society. In this populist and corporate language, the community and the common are left to the decisions of ‘free’ individuals in the market; these people will choose (buy) whatever they like or whatever suits them most, and thus shape their relationships and connections with others in accordance with their own individual desires (interestingly, the belief in the *a priori* rationality of choice is never questioned in this instance).<sup>1</sup> Along these lines, art is a result of the choices made by individuals rather than for the common good; and beyond even this, in the light of populist rhetoric, any support for and cultivation of the common good is viewed as politicianer elitism, an engaged leftist circle.<sup>2</sup> There are many layers to this problem. On the one hand, this populist argument against art requires a reevaluation of the notion of the public,

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1 This is discussed in: Renata Salecl: *Izbira*. Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 2012.

2 The problem is all the more acute because in many countries, the common only exists at the symbolic, national level, and whenever the arts are under fire, the argument in their defence is the problematic and homely notion of ‘culture’. It is argued that the arts are the good, humane, civilized kernel under the surface of brutal capitalist inhumanity, which only gives rise to a moral discussion, in terms of the good and the bad, with the argument taking the wrong direction.

and on the other it touches upon the core of the problematic politicisation of art over the last two decades. It is a fact that, although the art of this period has never ceased to be interested in political activity, it has simultaneously become distanced from the political public sphere.

In the conclusion of the book, I would like to discuss three different lines of argument that should indicate the possibilities of an affirmation of art and its public place today. I would like to show that these arguments need to be disobediently rethought so that the artist's work can withstand the exploitation of the creative power and, at the same time, reveal itself as a potentiality of the common - so that the work of the artist may open up the lives of everyone, not only to those who work.

I.

The first disobedience concerns the relationship between art and the economy -- the 'economic' argument for the usefulness of art that goes something like this: it is bad not to support art because art also produces economic value.<sup>3</sup> This therefore concerns argumentation about the value of art, which goes hand in hand with the value of artistic work (both in the sense of works created by artists and works performed by them). Many active participants in the arts nowadays, who fight political pressure and radical financial cuts to subsidies and support for the arts on various fronts, articulate common interest as economic value; oftentimes, part of the arguments in favour of the arts is the fact that they form an important part of the contemporary economy and the creative industries, generating important economic value. Although it is wise to use the language of one's opponent in political argumentation, this argument is actually false and does not affirm the value of artistic activity as such: the arts do not have an economic value because one cannot speculate on the value of what is to come. The proposals for common being, which are articulated regardless of the existing power relations, can never be evaluated. If art really needs to be affirmed through the language of economics, it needs to be pointed out that art is not connected to the economy of the production of value but is much closer to aimless spending, to giving gifts without expecting a return. This is discussed by Robert Pfaller, who argues that the basic trait of the economy of art is actually lavish consumption.<sup>4</sup> Pfaller states that this understanding is closer to Bataille's notion of consumption and points out something important when we think about the relationship between art and economics. It is not only that art spends senselessly; an enormous part of consumption is senseless in the contemporary capitalist economy as well, but the difference is that the senseless consumption in the arts is constantly visible: the fact that we openly embark on lavish senseless spending (and without any repayment at that) is the very power of art. According to Bataille, every society will generate surplus; the surplus will be spent or wasted, but societies differ in

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<sup>3</sup> There needs to be a differentiation between economically successful artists who can generate an enormous fictitious value (one of the most famous examples today is Damien Hirst) and the remaining artistic production, which operates under completely different economic conditions. The dependence of the arts on financial speculation is not really part of my discussion since I am more interested in the wider and financially less successful artistic production (still subject to market principles, however), which is far from the speculative excesses of the art market. Nevertheless, such speculations do testify to a basic irrationality of value and confirm that art has very little to do with economic value; its value chiefly results from irrational expectations and investments. This is also the reason for the great number of intermediators, whose task is to constantly establish, check and contextualize the value of art.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Pfaller, *Wofür es sich zu leben lohnt, Elemente materialistischer Philosophie*, S. Fischer Verlag, 2011.

*the way* this is done.<sup>5</sup> “Therein lies the greatest difference compared to the present day. Today, we spend without noticing. Our consumption exists, but not on a grand scale abounding with pleasure. This is why today’s society destroys its surpluses through forms of unconscious pleasure that are actually neurotic and devoid of pleasure.”<sup>6</sup> The economy of invisible spending places its impediments everywhere; according to Pfaller, this is also the case in the arts: “In this field, there are the impediments and consumption mechanisms of curating and intermediation, so that there are at least two curators and agents per artist nowadays. The rest of today’s artists, however, are hardly productive at all: within an artist’s work, actual artistic work only has a decreasing 10 per cent share in comparison to studying the market, self-marketing, public relations, branding, socializing etc.”<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, the production of life and sociality are at the core of the ways of working in the arts; these are the ways in which creative powers are capitalized and also in which impediments are placed upon their consumption and spending. One could claim something similar for other creative fields like science and education, which are also under the considerable pressure of economization and rationalization.<sup>8</sup> It is no good, however, to moralize over this kind of intermediation (in terms of art being destroyed by the various intermediators); it needs to be noted that constant spending and lavishing takes place in the intermediation and the economization of the arts – in the production and market models of the arts. At the same time, this intermediation functions as an impediment to lavishness; it attempts to make this spending ‘meaningful’, to control the affective atmospheres and forces of spending. This also has a lot to do with the instability of value, which must be rendered rational and transparent, at least in appearance. “However, just as there are societies that know they make magic and those that are not aware of that, there are societies that know they spend and those that are not aware of it. It is the latter that have created huge spending mechanisms that gobble up their sources. Since they are not aware of it, however, they also miss out on the magical glow, the glamour of their spending, and thus no longer know the feeling of doing things on a grand scale.”<sup>9</sup> The contradiction of contemporary consumption can also be viewed along these lines: with today’s irrational, neurotic spending and a lavishness that radically alters and destroys nature, this consumption is utterly neurotic and destructive to life. In view of this, Pfaller claims, “Bataille’s objection to the advocates of efficiency would be entirely different. Bataille would not say: do give us some money so that the human side will not be completely extinguished in the process. But he would also not say: look, we can also be efficient from time to time and demonstrate the still invisible

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<sup>5</sup> Ibidem, p. 202.

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, p. 203.

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem, p. 204.

<sup>8</sup> The notion of rationalization can be placed parallel to the notion of transparency; they both reflect the desire of the contemporary capitalist economy to prove itself to be as rational as possible, with any use and consumption being goal-oriented. This obsessive need for rationalization springs from the irrational nature of this economy – that of increasing and constant production, where excessive profit arises from the consumption of the surplus. However, there is no pleasure left in this kind of consumption. Furthermore, rationality in the contemporary economy goes hand in hand with a bad conscience; we always buy too much of what is supposedly good for us and nature.

<sup>9</sup> Pfaller, p. 205

practicability of our undertakings.”<sup>10</sup> When defending the ‘economic effects’ of art, the answer to the question of why art needs to be defended in the first place should be based neither on the metaphysical ‘humanist’ argument nor on pragmatic arguments in terms of its efficiency and economic profitability. Lavish consumption resists the interpretation of art as something that defends the human essence in this time of raging capitalism, but also refuses to agree with the contemporary economic understanding of art as a part of the creative industries and the new development of mankind. These two interpretations are most frequent when art finds itself in the grip of financial strictness and under critical attacks. Public discussions attempt to shed light on the hidden essence of art (art civilizes, does something good etc.) or stress its usefulness (art gives rise to profit and value). According to Pfaller though, Bataille’s response to the critical reproaches would be entirely different: “Let us talk openly. We have clearly not co-operated enough so far. This gives you a reason to limit us by means of various consumption mechanisms. However, as a test, simply give us the funds you now use for spin doctors, evaluation gendarmes, reform preachers, education agencies etc. and you will see: we will certainly use these sources down to the last cent, for cultural and cultural-theoretical expenses abounding in pleasure. Unlike now, we and you will be surrounded by the beautiful glamour of doing things on a grand scale.”<sup>11</sup>

This beautiful glamour is not only an aesthetic category but also the category of common pleasure arising from consumption. The affirming of art with the language of economics is therefore yet another false consequence of the ‘political’ pseudoactivity of art; a time might be coming when the most radical politicisation of art will be its detachment from any kind of economic value in order to reveal new affective and aesthetic articulations of the community. Art deals with social problems and it is constantly pseudoactive because we live in a time with a radical inability to establish and conceive of a reality through which people’s communities could be articulated. We live in a time of the disappearance and rearticulating of the public, the disappearance of the public sphere. If, therefore, we wish actually to speak of political art, we need to discuss its relationship with the common. Along the same lines, we also need to rethink the social and political values of art, which are connected to the perception, recognition and establishment of the various forms of the visibility of what we have and will have in common. At the same time, art is also closely connected to the new politics of temporality, which no longer participate in the endless production of the new and in training for the creative contexts with which it will be possible to prevail in the contemporary market of provocative and political artistic projects. In this sense, art has a lot to do with ‘doing things on a grand scale’, as Pfaller argues; this refers to the pleasure of life and creation when spending and creating, the pleasure felt when creating and gifting senselessly, in the endless lavishness and creation of a life in common.

## II.

The second line of argument for disobedience concerns the artist’s relation to work, especially the usefulness and productive nature of that work, which affects every dimension of an artist’s life (and therefore also comes across as a fusion of life and work). Not only is this a time when numerous kinds of work and activities (not only artistic) are becoming ‘useless’ and unnecessary, it is also a time when one’s potential abilities must be constantly updated: one needs to constantly perform oneself in a way that allows one to become something other than one already is. Contemporary work is strongly marked by transformation and flexibility; this does not actually open up new possibilities though, but frequently results in even more rigid and exploitative working conditions, in which every moment (including those of inactivity) is dedicated to seizing work better. Many artistic practices and ways of working should therefore be viewed as a resistance to this kind of definition of all activities through human work; for this reason, many artistic works from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are interested in methods of creation that

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<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, p. 205.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem, p. 205

have an interesting and incestuous relationship with laziness and non-work: mistakes, minimum effort, coincidence, duration, passivity, daily life etc. This intertwining between work and non-work, or between activity and laziness, is also connected to what I discussed earlier – visible senseless spending. It reveals the materiality of work, which is closely connected to time and space and is no longer considered project-type headway towards the goal, but can also embrace long periods of passivity, sleep, inactivity etc.

In a photography series with the telling title of *Artist at Work*, the Croatian conceptual artist Mladen Stilinović is depicted in his sleep – in his bed, covered with a blanket and in various sleeping positions. In 1992, the same author published the text *In Praise of Laziness*, inspired by *Laziness as the Truth of Mankind* (1921) by Kamizir Malevich, in which he claims that laziness is the mother of life. In his writing, Malevich condemns socialism's obsession with work and is also critical towards capitalism, which enables laziness for a select few. *In Praise of Laziness* continues this comparison of the different concepts of laziness in Eastern and Western Europe (the socialist and capitalist worlds). At the beginning of the 1990s, Stilinović offers an interesting interpretation and one that, in my opinion, is highly topical for the present time. He points out an interesting difference between artists from the West (Europe and the US) and the East (the former Eastern European countries): "As an artist, I learned from both East (socialism) and West (capitalism). Of course, now when the borders and political systems have changed, such an experience will be no longer possible. But what I have learned from that dialogue, stays with me. My observation and knowledge of Western art has lately led me to a conclusion that art cannot exist... any more in the West. This is not to say that there isn't any. Why cannot art exist any more in the West? The answer is simple. Artists in the West are not lazy. Artists from the East are lazy; whether they will stay lazy now when they are no longer Eastern artists, remains to be seen."<sup>12</sup> In this way, Stilinović's manifesto touches upon yet another kind of wasteful consumption – laziness, which often wastes the most precious commodity of life in the present day, i.e. time.

After two decades have passed since the creation of Stilinović's text, we can say that artists from the 'East' are no longer lazy either but participate in the methods of western artistic production, with the last traces of laziness having been successfully expelled by the transition processes. I therefore read Stilinović's text as an insightful and humorous analysis of a certain situation that reveals many aspects of the close connection between art and capitalism, which was especially visible to artists from the East at the beginning of the nineties, because the history of their practices was characterized by a different attitude to work. In comparison with socialism, capitalism has always been characterized by the artistic system (a developed system of contemporary art institutions, the market mechanisms of the presentation of contemporary art etc.) – a system that developed contemporary art and was not known in socialist countries. But this is not about contemporary art not having existed in the East; it did, however, develop under different circumstances. There was an absence of what Stilinović ironically describes as the preoccupation of the artists from the West with irrelevant things "such as production, promotion, the gallery system, the museum system, the competition system (who is first), their preoccupation with objects, all that drives them away from laziness, away from art. Just as money is paper, so a gallery is a room"<sup>13</sup>. The artists of the East were therefore "lazy and poor because the entire system of insignificant factors did not exist. Therefore they had time enough to concentrate on art and laziness. Even when they did produce art, they knew it was in vain, it was nothing". The difference between the East and the West is thus reduced to a thought hypothesis that tries to affirm the creation of art in the East with the absence of the capitalist system of the production and dissemination of art. The contradictory nature of the hypothesis is deliberate, as it is generally believed that the development of art in the East was not similar to that in the West due to the absence of this system (contemporary art institutions and the artistic market). For this reason, 'Eastern' art is practically non-existent in the canonized collections of contemporary art; also, the history of the contemporary art of the East is still more or less invisible.<sup>14</sup> At the same time though, it is true that the East formed other models for making and producing art as well as other methods of collaboration and connection between artists that were not part of institutional forms similar to

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12 Mladen Stilinović, *Artist at work: 1973 - 1983 = Umetnik na delu: 1973 - 1983*, Ljubljana: ŠKUC Gallery, 2005.

13 Ibidem.

14 Of course, this not only holds for visual art but also for contemporary dance and experimental theatre forms.

those in the West.<sup>15</sup> Although the prevailing opinion at the beginning of the 1990s was that the art of the East remained somewhat invisible and marginalized because it had not developed its institutions, this lack could also be reflected on from an affirmative standpoint: it could be rethought what this subversive affirmation of 'the absence of production models' actually brings. This is what Stilinović does in his manifesto; his artistic work points out the problematic connection between art and work. Work is actually at the forefront in both communist and capitalist societies; work is believed to be the way one finds one's purpose and becomes a part of society. In a communist society, however, the artist is still able to question this centrality of work, disclose its hypocritical ideological matrix and point out the true layabouts at the centre of the ideology of work. This is also what Stilinović does in a number of his works from the 1970s and 1980s that demonstrate the paradoxes of celebrating work through rest, for example in his series of works dedicated to the 1<sup>st</sup> of May (Labour Day) or by depicting the artist as a layabout (the photographic series *Artist at Work*). Today, however, this disclosure of the non-work at the centre of work seems to have become impossible because today's artists are always primarily focused on working; even artists can only be lazy in order to work better. In this, the central value of work, the constant changes to the different kinds of professional expertise, flexibility and the close connection between work and the manner of production are rarely questioned. As I attempted to show in the book, the actual problem is that communication, creativity and using one's power and potentiality are at the very core of artistic work. In terms of the manner of working, the contemporary worker is close to what the artist should be doing; the contemporary ways of working and artistic pursuits seem to have nearly fused. At the same time, there is a modality to contemporary work that, despite all the freedom this work offers, does not allow for futile activities; as Stilinović writes, the artist of today cannot work with an awareness that what he/she does is actually nothing. Or, if we come back to Pfaller, an awareness that the activity of the artist is actually visible and lavish senseless consumption. Quite the opposite: a part of artistic work is the numerous conceptualizations and determinations created by the mediators, in the sense that the artist's work is hardly nothing and empty spending. Useless as it may be, every activity must have a purpose and strive for a value on the market; every futile activity needs to be shown to have value. Stilinović's text from the beginning of the 1990s points out several key changes in artistic work, or in the ways artists perform their work; at the forefront, there are the centrality of work, the artist as an entrepreneurial person, constant nomadism, the constant readiness to reflect upon one's work, participation in the presentation and dissemination of one's own production, the networking aspect of work, and the internationalization of work. In this, the artist actually does not have the time or scope for other types of creativity, those also connected to other temporal modalities of being. At the same time, Stilinović's manifesto can also be read as a process of affirming the methods of artistic creation that have emerged outside the capitalist art systems, or at least as a manifest way of stepping on the brake, as an attempt to elude the temporal totality of capitalism that connects the acceleration of contemporary time with the visibility of work.

There is something else that needs to be added to Stilinović's manifesto. It is the massive amount of work performed by the artist that makes him or her lose the political power to show or expose the true layabouts at the core of the capitalist ideology of work. The lazy artist of socialism was still able to hold up a mirror of irony to the ideological hypocrisy of the celebration of work; with the absence of institutions that could provide work, the artist actually needed to remain without work if he or she wanted to remain an artist. Today, the artist cannot remain without work if he or she wants to remain an artist; this is why the artist works constantly and, at the same time, must be incessantly critical of their work. Their every gesture, no matter how lazy it may be, must necessarily be turned into work – if not by the artist themselves, then in connection with the institutions and other elements of the system that make the artist's work visible and evaluate it as work. In this constant striving to expel any trace of laziness from his or her useless work, the artist overlooks the fact that this is how he or she loses any critical power to hold up a mirror to the true layabouts at the core of the capitalist system. According to the philosopher Aaron Schuster, the problem is that laziness was finally subdued by neoliberalism yet can actually be found at the neoliberal core. "Contrary to protestant work ethics, postmodern work ethics are basically some kind of tolerated guided laziness. The enigmatic and tragic character of *Bartleby* has changed into a universal farce, into the absurdity of contemporary corporate life".<sup>16</sup> According to Schuster,

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15 Cf. e.g. *East Art Map, Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe*, Irwin (ed.), London: Afterall, 2006.

16 Aaron Schuster, »Zelo težko je početi nič«, *Dnevnikov Objektiv*, 1. 10. 2011. <http://www.dnevnik.si/objektiv/intervjuji/1042476800>.

this is why some of the laziest masters of this planet are the credit rating agencies, companies that affect the fate of the entire planet by 'opinions only' and without any public accountability whatsoever. While laziness is the new postmodern ethic cultivated by those who speculate and evaluate the future, the artist works incessantly, producing critical models, reflecting, warning, problematizing, provoking and participating publicly in one way or another. The most absurd thing, however, is that the artist is still frequently considered a parasite and a free-thinking freeloader who needs public funding instead of establishing themselves on the 'free' market. In my opinion, these reproaches need to be connected to the spread of laziness at the core of capitalism, whose speculations and creative solutions can only spread by simultaneously erasing the antagonistic sphere of the public – everything that belongs to and is valued as the common good. It is in this public sphere where the artist needs to be active. Even though the closeness of art and capitalism calls many practices into question, art still plays a very important role in the constitution of the social. After all, this always becomes apparent at the moment the public field has been put under a question mark: every intervention into the privatization of the public and every attempt to exploit the public sphere always highlight the issue of art. The attempt to leave art to private interests is therefore equivalent to striving for everyone to work for their own private interest and in this way, indeed, to become rich layabouts. As Schuster writes, however, the problem is that this easy life always slips away and the necessity of working remains.

### III.

As Hannah Arendt writes in her book *Vita Activa*, all activities in the public sphere have become labour. This has resulted in the fact that everything we do is pushed to the lowest level of supplying life's necessities and sufficient living standards.<sup>17</sup> 'Making a living' thus becomes the centre of contemporary life. The consequence of the liberation of work is not only the entry of workers into the public sphere; without doubt, work also rules everything else. In this sense, the prevalence of work is by no means connected to freedom and emancipation but to the omnipresent yoke of necessity. At the same time, however, the utopian liberation from work (also demanded by Marx) is not a proper answer to the prevalence of work, because work is closely connected to the materiality of life and the painstaking preservation of nature. According to Arendt, however, this working life would never be human life proper if *homo faber* ne bi »obvladal umetnosti, s katerimi si lahko uredi nenaravno umeten dom, svet stvari, katerega trajnost in obstojnost sta v neposrednem nasprotju z življenjem njegovih prebivalcev«. <sup>18</sup> According to Arendt, the only exception that society is still willing to grant is that of the artistic professions: "the artist is the only 'worker' left in the labouring society".<sup>19</sup>

I deal with the changes in artistic ways of working in order to show that, today, the 'artistic profession' is no longer so 'exceptional' because the place of art in society has undergone profound changes in the last few decades. Subordinated to the necessity of work, artistic work no longer knows a division between life and work: every aspect of life is an aspect of labour. It is flexible and subordinated to the project-oriented logic of work. It is losing its autonomy and is regulated by numerous mechanisms of evaluation. Furthermore, the situation of artistic work is even more complex than that. Although artistic work is no longer exceptional because it is subordinated to the necessity of work (i.e., it is more and more about working and less and less about creating), it does preserve its exceptional place within the capital and economic speculations on artistic life, which is ascribed social and economic value as a kind of life that is actually free from work; in bizarre contemporary phantasms on creativity, it turns into 'pure

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<sup>17</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Vita Activa*, Ljubljana: Krtina, 1996, p. 128.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, p. 137.

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem, p. 128.

creation'. Artistic work is therefore at the core of the twisted ideological relationship between work and freedom; cynically, the work that comes across as the freest is the work that is completely fused with life. The work considered free is the kind whose level of dedication and intensity leaves no further room for life. According to Arendt, work as liberation from work can be described as a highly intense life process,<sup>20</sup> and contemporary work actually seems precisely that: a highly intense life that often has a devastating effect on the subjects who invest into it. As Arendt argues, this kind of work could also result in the downfall of humanity's 'arts', "all human productivity would be sucked into an enormously intensified life process and would follow automatically, without pain or effort, its ever-recurrent natural cycle, i.e., its actual productivity".<sup>21</sup> Arendt primarily refers to the changes in work that were supposed to come with mechanization and automatization, but her thoughts from the 1950s also bear weight from the contemporary perspective. Arendt develops this thought on the basis of the classic differentiation between the spheres of human activity from Aristotle onwards. According to Virno, these spheres – work, creativity and political activity – are no longer fundamentally different. Virno states that the basic characteristic of contemporaneity and post-Fordist work is the disappearance of any differentiation between these three different types of activity. He focuses especially on the vanishing difference between work and politics: many traits of political activity constitute part of the post-Fordist world of work. In his interpretation, the public nature of work not only comprises the fact that everything has become work but also that work has taken over the traits of a public activity. Contemporary and communicative work is a virtuoso kind of public work; it is performed for its own sake and it also generates a surplus value.<sup>22</sup> As mentioned several times in this book, the public and political nature of work profoundly marks the artistic work of today: artistic work should no longer be about creating, but about activity (or working with political, engaged and communicative human powers); the production of subjectivity, sociality and flexibility should be at its core. These powers become the powers of life and nature that are quite intense and extremely 'fertile' nowadays, accelerating the natural rhythm of life. According to Arendt, this does not change the basic character of this rhythm according to the world: "The rhythm of machines would magnify and intensify the natural rhythm of life enormously, but it would not change, only make more deadly, life's chief character with respect to the world, which is to wear down durability".<sup>23</sup> The intense use of human powers destroys the tenacity, duration and persistence of the world, as well as the duration and persistence of subjectivity; for this reason, this use not only results in exhaustion and burn-out but also in the problematical subordination of our lives and activities to the ways of contemporary production. Art is therefore ambivalently close to capitalism. On the one hand, it is no longer exceptional; instead, it represents a way of seizing work to the fullest. On the other hand, however, it still indicates the material and embodied processes of creation that elude the necessity of life. Art is not useful and purposeful. It can result from a total coincidence or failure. The length of its duration is unforeseeable. Art lasts and is the potentiality of human powers that have not yet been realized. At the same time, however, art also does not belong to the intensification of the production of life. Quite the opposite, it is the anarchic force of waste, sleep and inactivity that opens up atmospheres and rhythms of life that are different from anything production-oriented. Because of its paradoxical autonomy, however, art is also fused with the entropy of life.

What might lie at the core of artistic autonomy is an awareness of the unrealized potentiality of creative powers; it opens up human activity and being to the kind of activity that is always less than it could be. The critical relationship between art and work could therefore be viewed through the prism of the possibility of working less; this does not concern lazy rebellion, the privilege of non-work or the extension of free time, but making it possible for artistic work to go on and on so that it can be, to paraphrase Agamben, work without qualities. It is this ability to do less, to

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20 This is also how projective temporality operates: the life processes are made more intense by means of projects.

21 Arendt, p. 129.

22 Virno's statement on surplus value is key to understanding the changes in post-Fordist work and also poses the difference to Marx's understanding of virtuoso work. In post-Fordism, the work considered by Marx as personal services becomes work into which capital is invested: industry changes into a communication industry and the shaping of factories of ideas. I can also connect the surplus value of virtuoso work with my own statement on the speculative value of artistic life: what is invested in is not art but artistic and creative powers: the artist's life is at the core of the interest on the capital.

23 Arendt, p. 134.

endlessly persist in this 'less' and in what could be, that opens up the human being to the temporal dimension and makes it historical. According to Heller Roazen, the human being owes its consistency to the possibility of being less than it is, which also gives human existence a temporal dimension: "To grasp a human action as such, one must look to the shadows of the more minor acts it inevitably projects around it: to those unaccomplished acts that are less than it and that could always have been performed in its stead, or, alternately, to those unaccomplished acts with respect to which it itself is less than it could have been."<sup>24</sup> It is the potentiality of doing less that gives tenacity to human activity and gives art the permanent and autonomous power to rethink the borders between the various types of human experience: art actually opens the gateway leading to this useless confirmation of life. Therefore, doing less could also be understood as a new radical gesture that opens up speculation about the value of artistic life and, rather than working towards the perfection of work, starts working autonomously for life itself. It is therefore an important aesthetic and ethical attitude for the artist as a worker. This *less*, however, is uncompromising and performed on a grand scale: what can make human activities common to us all is the fact that we have the wonderful ability to do less and to do something other than what we could be doing. Doing less also speaks of a specific attitude on the part of the artistic worker, who needs to withstand the creative speculations about his or her life in order to open up the temporal materiality of his or her own work. In this way, the artist's work yields to life, not in the sense of breaking the boundaries between life and artistic activity but always in the sense of placing its activity as the autonomous difference of a lesser act: it is enabling life through doing less. In this sense, doing less can be understood as an exceptionally important affective shift that can significantly influence the rhythmic and flexible atmospheres of contemporary artistic life and open up new ways of solidarity. This would then be the third disobedient line of argument in the defence of art: do less, precisely when confronted with the demand to do more.

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<sup>24</sup> Daniel Heller Roazen, *Echolalias. On the Forgetting of Language*, Mit Press, 2005. Heller Roazen develops this thought on the basis of reading the ninth-century scholar Al-Jahiz. In his monumental work *Book of Animals*, Al-Jahiz reflects on the difference between animal and man.