Precarity as an Artistic Laboratory for Counter-Hegemonic Labour Organization

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Abstract

Understanding the art field as a testing ground for our current neoliberal labour condition, we argue in this article how that same terrain can also function as a battle field; a field of "agonism" where counter-hegemonic responses can be developed. It will be argued how precarity may function as a point of articulation from where those moments of insubordination can develop. It will be emphasized how the romanticization of the precariat as a class-for-itself, or the idea of precarity as a potential form of coalition in contemporary politics based on "bodies in alliance" (Butler), tends to be limited to powerful moments of insubordination that in many cases obviate the necessity to envision proper positive political projects (Lorey).

Introduction: Repressive Liberalism and the State of Insecurity

> Forced with social movements that seek collective interventions […] the neoliberal state is itself forced to intervene, sometimes repressively, thus denying the very freedoms it is supposed to uphold.
>
> —David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*

The fact that neoliberalism may count both collectives and unions among its greatest enemies is by now common knowledge. Margaret Thatcher's provocative statement that "there is no such thing as society" (qtd. in Harvey 23) was indeed in line with the undermining of labour movements and trade unions in the 1980s. While in the UK a battle was fought with the mineworkers' unions, in the US then President Ronald Reagan began to break up the strike of the traffic controllers' union PATCO (Harvey 25). Whether it is organizations of labourers or middle-class workers (such as PATCO), so-called neoliberalism has a strong aversion against all forms of collective self-organization. Historical events certainly suggest an at least selective handling of the concepts of "liberalism" and "freedom." Whereas neoliberal politicians and theorists do afford freedom to the market, the individual, and the entrepreneur, when it comes to collective associations and public institutions the opposite is true: their freedom must be reined in.

According to French sociologist Loïc Wacquant, authoritarian moralism, law and order, but also the aggressive deployment of the police, court, and prison are not just negative side-effects of a free market ideology (308). On the contrary, they make up the very core of the neoliberal project's success. The free market cannot function properly without an authoritarian state, seems to be the conclusion that both sociologist Wacquant and social geographer David Harvey draw from their analysis of neoliberalism. Neoliberal politics and theories do indeed seem to have problems with democratic regimes. Governance by majority rule is seen as a potential threat to individual rights and constitutional liberties, and neoliberals therefore tend to favour governance by experts

and elites (Harvey 66). The success of China proves that one doesn't need a democratic regime to implement a neoliberal policy and stimulate a "free" market. It all leads us to conclude, for now, that the notion "neoliberalism" does not quite cover what it actually stands for: "new freedom." While classical liberals such as Adam Smith and William Gladstone believed that the utmost priority was to maximize individual liberty through supporting entrepreneurship and a free market system, neoliberals focus on maximizing market liberty, deregulating markets and privatizing public institutions. A new kind of freedom that brings with it the implementation of austerity and privatization programs, the rejection of the welfare state and the unequal distribution of property and privatization of natural resources. For both collectives and for the lower classes this regime thus represents a repression of individual and collective freedom. Hence, our choice to use the notion "repressive liberalism" to describe the two-faced head of current hegemonic politics (Gielen, *Murmuring*).

Neoliberalism does indeed use double standards, as Wacquant states, since it deploys a relatively authoritarian policy against collectives and lower social classes. Convincing as this analysis may be, we would like to add one here. While at the level of *government* an increasingly authoritarian policy is obviously being developed, we could join Michel Foucault in saying that at the level of *governmentality*—the control techniques the government uses to govern the conduct of the population, providing society with a feeling of political, economic, and cultural well-being and safety—a much more subtle authoritarian regime has developed (Foucault). This regime concerns itself not as much with the lower class of society or collective or union actions, but rather with the well-meaning and "hard-working" middle-class, including the so-called "creative class." The belts are not only tightened in factories, but also in the domains of universities, schools, public broadcasters, cultural organizations, creative industries, hospitals, and even within the own administrative bodies of governments. According to sociologist Luc Boltanski and economist Ève Chiapello, neoliberal policy has led to the implementation of neo-management that set itself the task of realizing fundamental reorganizations. If these institutions—often the remnants of

the welfare state—were not fully privatized, their functioning was fundamentally revised and largely outsourced. Permanent appointments were replaced by temporary contracts wherever possible and as many tasks as possible were delegated to private companies and freelancers. In Europe, this latter group, for example, has grown by 43 percent (cf. UNIZO). At the same time, the centrally organized hierarchic control within such institutions has been replaced by intelligent management that drives and controls labour at a highly individual level through coaching, monitoring, and evaluation interviews. By contrast, the quality control of the organization has been decentralized and wherever possible privatized by outsourcing audits, accreditations, coaching, and monitoring to a whole array of private research and consultancy agencies. And although there may be less regulation—neoliberalism does after all favour deregulation—the rules that do exist are followed more and more strictly or checked more frequently in this internal competition. This leads to an increase in accountability and paperwork in the workplace, with growing functional inefficiency as a result. The point here is that so-called deregulation does not fulfil the promise of neoliberalism of more freedom. Less regulation is after all compensated for by the rigorous enforcement and excessive formal checks of the rules that have remained in place (Power).

This subtle authoritarian approach is primarily aimed at the middle class, as we observed earlier. This means that a repressive liberal policy and management leads to precarization on at least four levels: economic, social, mental, and political:

1. On the economic level, and especially in the creative sector, we see a growing competition that makes many freelancers take on commissions below cost price or even for a purely symbolic compensation. In addition, people incur more and more debts, also because the dismantling of the welfare state degrades other services too, such as free or cheap education and study grants. This means that the recently graduated often start their first commissioned work while still paying off their study loan (Graeber 106; Lazzarato 51). Also, freelancers take big financial risks because

they take out cheap or no health insurance at all and postpone saving for their pension as long as possible. In doing so they effectively take out a mortgage on their future economic situation.

2. On the social level, increasing flexibilization and high mobility take their toll on the social and private life of freelancers. As Richard Sennett states, freelancers and project workers are often forced to travel a lot and to move house frequently (*Corrosion of Character*). This means that they have less time, and thus capability, to engage in profound friendships or invest in family relationships. Professional network relations may increase strongly, while at the same time the quality of those relations decreases. Finally, the competition among freelancers and team workers is also not conducive to establishing trusting relationships.
3. On the mental level, our own research has detected signals of stress, more burnouts, and depressions (see, for example, Gielen and Volont). The combination of economic insecurity and social deprivation, as argued above, makes a growing number of creative entrepreneurs seek psychological support and engage in all sorts of therapeutic coaching. The neo-management and excessive paperwork mentioned earlier also drive creatives and knowledge workers in regular employment to therapy.
4. Finally, on the political level, freelancers and project workers are quite underrepresented politically. In order to obtain commissions they had best not voice their ideological preferences. Especially unions are relatively taboo in the world of artists and creative workers.

This multiple precarization generally leads to (a heightened sense of) insecurity. Freelancers are never sure where the next commission will come from, they don't know whether they can confide in their competitors, and they can to a far lesser degree rely on the structural solidarity that was once safeguarded by the welfare state. This mounting insecurity is closely related to the hyper-individualization that drives repressive liberalism.

The Governance of the Precariat

As we have described, precarity seems to have a pivotal role in today's hegemonic modes of governance and thus it becomes crucial to unfold its different forms of articulation. As *A Guidebook of Alternative Nows* (2012) indicates, precarity has its roots in the notion of "obtaining something by prayer" (Precarious Workers Brigade 41). That is, precarity can be recognized when the ones who suffer it, the precarious, depend on something external in order to assure their security in a concrete context. By praying to a "protector" (the non-vulnerable), the precarious seek to end insecurity and hence diminish their vulnerability. However, vulnerability acquires a double logic here. On the one hand, the precarious feel vulnerable and thus pray for security. On the other hand, once the precarious obtain what they were praying for, they become extremely dependent on the force, or the protector, that secured them in the first place. In other words, if the counterpart of being precarious is protection and immunization against social and political instability and vulnerability, the result of such protection comes with processes of domination (Lorey, *State of Insecurity*).

With this logic, and by using the state of vulnerability, the precarious becomes a regulated figure in post-Fordism, a mode of governing that relies on dependency as a source of domination. By expanding insecurity as a normalized state, the precarious is forced to constantly rely on a protector that increases its security following a concrete scheme of dependency, the logic of which was explained by our introduction of repressive liberalism.

Philosopher Judith Butler distinguishes between *precariousness*, relating to the conditions by which bodies survive in a certain way, and *precarity*, pointing to the structural inequality of symbolic and material insecurities (Butler, *Frames of War* 24-26). By identifying precariousness as a universal corporeal vulnerability, as a shared condition, Butler is able to stress the political notion of precarity. What Butler is suggesting is to theoretically approach precariousness as a common human condition, shared by all bodies, as they are equally subjected to suffering, injury, and death. What changes, then, is how some of those bodies are more protected or more exposed than others, depending, here, on their pre-

carity. In Butler's discourse precariousness becomes a condition of existence, which is shared by everyone. By doing so, she is able to dismantle the opposition between insecurity and security by affirming that living bodies can never be totally protected as they are permanently subjected to social and political conditions (*State of Insecurity* 20). Precariousness is a common condition, and it is the false race for individual security and the nervousness of being exposed to existential vulnerability that have overshadowed the possibility of communal solidarity and collective political action.

Relying on Butler's distinction between precariousness and precarity, Isabell Lorey puts forward a third dimension of the precarious: "governmental precarization" (*State of Insecurity* 13). Supported by Foucault's concept of governmentality explained above, Lorey describes the complex interactions of a neoliberal instrument of governing that regulates its members through specific conditions of domination and exploitation. Precarization becomes a neoliberal act of governance that rules through social insecurity and a constant fear of the other. It is easy to detect here the similarities between Lorey's analysis and our arguments to use the notion of "repressive liberalism." It is also highly relevant to scrutinize such an instrument of governing in the cultural sector or the artistic terrain. Here, it is important to bring forward how the normalization of acts of exploitation, such as the overall acceptance of non-paid internships, low remunerated labour time or project-time-based funding, has revealed the multi-layered and unsustainable mechanisms of a terrain that is currently sustained by free labour. This idea resonates with the four levels we described above in which repressive liberal policy and management lead to precarization. The subject internalizes false realization fantasies, which, as Lorey signals, make processes of self-precarization seem natural (*State of Insecurity* 70). In other words, the interiorization of artistic and design practices as vocations and the acceptance to forgo material wealth for the love of it produces permitted acts of "voluntary exploitation" by the subjects embedded in it. This analysis becomes hugely relevant in a moment in which the figure of the entrepreneur has become the paradigm for the ideal post-Fordist worker in the so-called creative class.

Klasse-an-sich to a *Klasse-für-sich*

At first sight, the remedies for this specific growing precarization seem to lie in collectivization. Just like Karl Marx, who advocated the (international) organization of the proletariat, which required the change from a *Klasse-an-sich* (class-in-itself) to a *Klasse-für-sich* (class-for-itself) (cf. Marx), we may ask ourselves whether the solution for the creative class today lies in forming such a collective class consciousness.[1] But are the political, social, and economic conditions of yesteryear's proletariat really comparable to those of today's creative-middle-class precariat? And are there similar obvious solutions available, such as realizing good social security, solid solidarity structures, and unionizing?

We can point out a number of fundamental differences between the proletariat and the specific creative precariat described above that make it unlikely that similar solutions for improving their social position are available. In the first place, there is the difference in origin and education. Whereas the proletariat of Marx's days or the working class at the time of Pierre Bourdieu consisted of semi- or unskilled workers whose parents also lived at the lowest social level (Bourdieu), the present-day precariat's origins are more diverse. This group includes both the skilled lower-class and certainly also the members of the so-called creative class, who have a mostly middle-class background and have all enjoyed a decent education. This also means that this creative-class precariat is fully qualified to easily become a *Klasse-für-sich* and take political action. Yet this qualified precariat barely seems able to do so at the moment. Of course, there frequently are collective actions, but they never seem to hold out for very long. In addition, this part of the precariat is hardly building the kind of collective backbone that the proletariat did manage to realize in its day by founding and institutionalizing trade unions. The internal division of the creative class of today appears to be too great a hindrance. The reason for this is not only the hyper-individualism within a highly competitive market of distrust mentioned ear-

[1] In his study about the revolutionary proletariat Karl Marx made a differentiation between *Klasse-an-sich,* a working class as an objective empirical group (individuals thrown together as part of capitalist production) and *Klasse-für-sich*, a working class as a subjective revolutionary agent (individuals conscious of their own power and class aims: a conscious revolutionary class capable of producing change).

lier. The various levels of precarization listed above also make it hard to arrive at solidarity and collective positions. A cultural entrepreneur may, for example, be totally deprived socially or mentally but still do very well economically, while someone else may be living on the edge of poverty for years but still feel mentally healthy and creatively dynamic. It seems difficult to reconcile the wishes and demands of these two creative "precarians."

Finally, there is another fundamental difference between a working class of employees who may confront their employers jointly and the class of creatives of today, who, because of the prevailing freelance statute, are the employers of themselves as employees. This creative employer-employee has no other social class to point an accusing finger at. After all, the reason for their precarization lies partly in the risks that the creative entrepreneurs take upon themselves nowadays. Within the creative class the cause of precarization therefore partly lies in what we have addressed by using Lorey's terminology of "self-precarization" ("Governmentality and Self-Precarization").

The difference between proletariat and precariat, between the working class and the creative class, does suggest that the solutions to their problematic social situation cannot simply be the same. One possible remedy, especially collectivization and mutual solidarity, may be quite similar, but all signs seem to suggest that the path toward that goal will be quite different. Our research seems to suggest that besides classic remedies such as a social security system, unions, or, more generally, the welfare state, other forms of solidarity and collective self-organization are being explored. Against the current hegemony of repressive liberalism we now see a completely different counter-hegemony in the making.

Crucial to emphasize here is how both Butler and Lorey understand "recomposition" as a resistive moment, as forms of coalition in the contemporary politics based on "bodies in alliance" (Butler, *Notes* 66-98) against a common economic precarity.[2] One necessary question to be

[2] As Lorey argues, "this precarization is the capacity for refusal, and hence precarization is a process of recomposing work and life, of sociality, which thus cannot be—not immediately, not so quickly, and perhaps not even at all—economicized. In these re-compositions, interruptions occur in the process of normalizing precarity, that is, in the continuity of exploitability" ("Becoming Common," n. pag.).

raised is nonetheless how that composition of the precarious, that fearsome mode of constituting, can be transformed into new forms of institutionalization of a collective movement. Understanding how self-precarization is subjected to and formed by certain labour and economic conditions, could the process of self-precarization be interrupted by imagining and experimenting with new economic and social configurations?

Seeing precarization as an empowering and unifying factor, Guy Standing has named the precariat a "class-in-the-making," "emerging as a potentially transformative new mass class" (5). The precariat, Standing argues, is dangerous because of its rejection of the old mainstream political traditions. Whereas national industrial capital in the great transformation gave the proletariat access to labour and a stable existence, Standing observes how today's global capital aims to normalize unstable labour and living for the precariat (9-24).[3] Like Butler, who suggests concentrating on precarity as a political force in order to highlight and address structural inequality, Standing similarly encourages the precariat's struggle to develop mechanisms to achieve a new system of distribution. Although the idea of precarity as a potential form of coalition in the contemporary politics based on "bodies in alliance" has proven to be very powerful for protests or occupations such as the Occupy movement, it is important to highlight how in many occasions it has tended to be limited to powerful moments of insubordination that dissolve before envisioning proper positive political projects (Lorey, *State of Insecurity*). Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams have coined the term "folk politics" to address precisely those practices from the left that rely on emotions and sensations as a resistance struggle that dissipates before formulating any desirable vision for the future. One possible implication on focusing too much on the momentary politics of public exposure and the romanticization of the assembly as a "form of liveable life" is the incapability of building any counter-hegemonic form or future institution-

[3] We refer here to *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (1944) by Karl Polanyi, in which the author analyzes the transformation of European civilization from the preindustrial world to the era of industrialization. It is during this great transformation that Polanyi identifies the starting point of a "Market Society": a society with a different economic mentality, more economically rational, affected by the creation of capitalist institutions.

ality.[4] That is why, rather than understanding the precarious or the precariat as a "class-in-the-making," as Standing proposes, we understand precarity as a point of articulation towards the formation of a society based on common principles. A starting point, as Srnicek and Williams have signalled, to test new forms of organization able to go beyond the unions or past revolutionary forms and build more creative platforms of resistance and new social forms that are more collaborative.

Building a Counter-Hegemony

Through his analysis of the concept of hegemony, the Italian theorist and politician Antonio Gramsci broke the Marxist class essentialism that reduces identities into a single logic of class, and challenged the understanding of collective identity formation. By proposing to consider hegemony as the articulation between different social actors who occupy different positions within the social fabric (Laclau and Mouffe 13), Gramsci affirmed how

> the proletariat can become the leading (dirigent) and the dominant class to the extent that it succeeds in creating a system of alliances which allows it to mobilize the majority of the working population against capitalism and the bourgeois State. (324)

Political theorist Chantal Mouffe developed Gramsci's conceptualization of hegemony and collective identity formation further to define the process of counter-hegemony as a *disarticulation* of existing discourses and practices (Mouffe, *Gramsci*). This disarticulation is moreover followed by a process of *re-articulation* that leads towards new mechanisms of *re-identification*. In order to avoid the re-articulation by non-progressive forces in moments of hegemonic disarticulation, Mouffe highlights the necessity

[4] Here we are referring to Judith Butler's argument in *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly,* in which she assures how "[a] social movement is itself a social form, and when a social movement calls for a new way of life, a form of liveable life, then it must, at that moment, enact the very principles it seeks to realize. This means that when it works, there is a performative enactment of radical democracy in such a movement that alone can articulate what it might mean to lead a good life in the sense of a liveable life" (218).

of a political articulation if an oppositional consciousness is to be really established. Such a statement resonates with that exposed above by Srnicek and Williams and the long-term inefficiency of "folk politics."

From the standpoint of the hegemonic approach, artistic practices have a necessary relation to politics as they either contribute to the reproduction of the "common sense" that secures a consensus for a given hegemony or, on the contrary, contribute to challenging it. In that sense, the Italian philosopher Paolo Virno stresses how advanced capitalist labour processes have become *performative*. For Virno, social production has become virtuouso and labour, political action, and the intellect are no longer separable as they are interchangeable nowadays (49). This transformation, nonetheless, also permits to imagine new configurations in which art and work are able to open the way for new social relations and thus the production of new subjectivities and political action. Moreover, as discussed above, the current incapacity of identifying a unified proletariat in Marx's terms clearly indicates that a counter-hegemonic proposal can only be articulated by transcending class reductionists' discourses. The importance of the hegemonic approach to artistic practices is hence precisely the conviction that artistic and cultural practices can offer spaces for resistance as they contribute to the disarticulation of previous ideological principles and the re-articulation of new forms capable of inaugurating a new "common sense."

Before discussing concrete examples of artists and cultural organizations, we would like to further refine the analysis of a possible build-up of a counter-hegemony. From the synthesis of the work of Butler, Lorey, Standing, Gramsci, Mouffe, Virno, Srnicek, and Williams we may conclude that such a counter-hegemony should be constructed on a number of levels. In the first place, there is the level of the articulation in which the current economic and political system is criticized and alternatives are formulated. Articulations mainly take place in the public and discursive space, where ideas are confronted with each other in dissent. In the public space, both visionary ideas and utopias, as well as new ideologies, can be articulated as counter-hegemonies. However, ideas alone cannot produce real social change. This takes actions or acts. Citizens take initiatives to build, for example, alternative social formations and

forms of self-organization, or, in the parlance of Butler and Lorey, respectively, build "recompositions" based on "bodies in alliance." We call this space of "acting" the civil space, which is often informed by the criticism and ideas that were articulated in the public space. Self-organization, however, is usually initiated locally and may therefore become stranded in "folk politics" as noted earlier. In this case, economic and political problems, such as precarization, are addressed for a relatively small and primarily closed community but do not build an effective counter-hegemony, which after all requires structural interventions. In order to build an effective counter-hegemony—i.e., one that can really overturn the present neoliberal hegemony of precarization—alternative models must be distributed and, especially, shared. This is what we call the process of "commoning." Alternative economies and forms of self-organization must demonstrate their effectiveness to others if they are to generate structural effects. This necessitates the preferably free or very cheap sharing of information and knowledge, of materials and logistics, but also of business models and new solidarity structures based on trust and mutual support. A counter-hegemony strategy that fundamentally addresses precarization should also influence institutional bodies. Processes of sharing, or commoning, force governments into an alternative legislative organization, as we have seen with, for example, the Creative Commons licences or the Bologna Regulation for the Care and Regeneration of Urban Commons.[5] It is only when actions take place on this political and legislative level that counter-hegemony reform may actually take place and the current precarization can be addressed in a structural manner.

To conclude, we will look at how artists and art organizations develop activities of articulation, composition, and commoning on these three levels: public, civil, and commons.

[5] Bologna Regulation for the Care and Regeneration of Urban Commons; Regulation at http://www.comune.bologna.it/media/files/bolognaregulation.pdf; context via https://wiki.p2pfoundation.net/Bologna_Regulation_for_the_Care_and_Regeneration_of_Urban_Commons

Artistic Organizations of the Commons

Those who have been scouring biennales and arts festivals over the past decade have been treated to a veritable feast of political discussions and social debates. Sometimes art is hardly the topic anymore, but rather globalism, neoliberalism, precarity, "commonism," or ecology, to name but a few. However, those activities of articulation are mostly limited to the discursive space, which in addition hardly moves beyond the borders of the parish of the already converted. The debate is limited to the level of the (often quite limited) public domain. Words and actions are often still very far apart here, which means that true civil initiatives do not materialize. However, this takes nothing away from the fact that the professional art world is increasingly taking the role of civil "education" upon itself. The time-space that is skimped on in education seems to be shifting to biennales, museums, and theatres. If we add to that the thinning of the (democratic) debate in new structures and practices, the austerity measures and cutbacks imposed on research journalism and the commodification of the writing and speaking space in mainstream media, we may perhaps conclude that cultural institutions are among the few remaining places for articulating counter-hegemonic ideas and strategies.

And there is more than just lessons, or room for debate. The space itself is being experimented with. For example, discussions may take place in a setting that looks like the British Parliament, and we only need to think of the artistic projects of Jonas Staal to see how more and more thought goes into the shape or architecture for civil actions. The artistic domain offers the opportunity to experiment with the form of public debate. Admittedly, sometimes it is just about building aesthetic façades or backdrops, but more and more artists are also deliberately experimenting with the composition of real social settings and the organizations of their own labour. Artistic collectives and organizations such as Brave New Alps (Italy/UK), Recetas Urbanas (Spain), or organizations such as Supermarkt (Germany) are using the artistic terrain to suggest, as philosopher André Gorz argues, "new practices of living, consuming and collective appropriation of common spaces and everyday culture" (209). In different ways, these collectives and organizations demonstrate the necessity to break with components that feed processes

of self-precarization, by experimenting with forms of collective self-organization and networks of solidarity. As designer Bianca Elzenbaumer, part of the collective Brave New Alps, states,

> [f]or design practice, this implies a shift from merely proliferating signs and artefacts of resistance, to proliferating ways of doing and relating that refuse to be governed at all levels by the more – or less – subtle procedures of precarization. (199)

Related to our former synthesis, it is not only about the articulation of alternative ideas in public space, but also about *doing* and organizing in the civil space. In line with this, Brave New Alps (created around 2010) started to experiment with practices of "communing" (Linebaugh), or being-in-common, to generate a critique around political economy and its precarious value practices. As argued before, precarity functions here as a point of articulation towards the formation of an organization based on common principles. In that line, Brave New Alps have chosen to set up a Community Economies Research and Resource Centre in their place of origin, the Vallagarina district in the Italian Alps, to avoid the pressure of project-based processes. Here, Brave New Alps argue that at least for Christmas, summer holidays, or for family matters they would always return to that place and that, if something would go wrong economically or jobwise, it would be the place where they would return to live and share their families' houses. On the economic level, Brave New Alps have decided to not take out a mortgage by relying on the social level of precarization mentioned earlier, but to lean towards social bonds. By doing so, they break with processes of mobilization and take their chances by engaging in deeper social relationships of barter and solidarity. However, it should be noted that they still finance part of the activities of the project through other economic sources, following a classical model of post-Fordist precarious and unsustainable labour: multi-jobbing. Moreover, here too, looms the danger of the already mentioned folk politics in which practices of commoning are limited to a small and relatively closed community.

The Supermarkt organization is in any case making an attempt to transcend this small community scale by setting up an alternative market. The organization understands economy not as a fixed entity, but as something that is always in the process of becoming. It is precisely in the process of rethinking economy outside of a capital-centric discourse, and thus confronting and opposing the idea of economy as a bound object separated from other social processes, that they believe that new economic subjections can emerge. Here, by reorganizing economy in social terms and understanding economy as a common good, as culture, economy becomes a site of civil struggle, of dissent, where both processes of becoming—subjection and economy—become processes of agonistic maturation (Sennett, *The Uses*). Supermarket, in any case, comes up with proposals for an alternative economy that may transcend a local community.

Recetas Urbanas appears to be taking this practice the furthest by building houses, schools, and community centres wherever associations and communities deem them necessary. So, Recatas Urbanas does not cater to the free market, or to governments, but rather to citizens who feel a civil need. In response to their requests, Recetas offers strategies to occupy public spaces to create places of agony in which the opportunity for action, appropriation, occupation and use of the city is given back to the citizens through architectural interventions and actual buildings. Rather than working in the margins, Recetas Urbanas' proposals transit between legality and illegality, playing with the established order to re-articulate laws and to compose new social and economic exchanges around building projects. In Gramscian terms, Recetas Urbanas disarticulates existing discourses and praxis by offering moments of re-identification in which citizens become the initiators of actions, appropriations, and occupations as responses to their collective needs and common necessities. Rather than a withdrawal, Recetas Urbanas provides citizens with the tools to engage, as Mouffe would say, with the authorities and dispute their power from within. Those articulations and alternative social compositions do not stay at the level of the local spot or community. Recetas went beyond such folk politics by building a huge national and even European network (The Group for the Reuse and Redistribution of Resources) of exchange of knowledge,

(building) materials, and practices. In this network, for example, legal precedents established in one city are communicated and used to fight for the same civil rights in another city. So, the network is not only used to exchange information, but also to develop counter-hegemonic strategies and practices.

Projects such as Brave New Alps, Recetas Urbanas, or Supermarkt do not just experiment with forms of resistance against repressive liberalism and processes of precarization in public space, but also organize effective strategies and practices in civil space. Those are used as testing grounds that enunciate counter-hegemonic discourses and practices in order to activate possible ways of civil governance. By exploring legal systems and alternative economic exchange practices, they experiment with processes of commoning. While developing these counter-hegemonic practices, solutions emerge to the multiple precarization mentioned earlier. Social relationships appear to be key in this. They are deployed to take care of economic risks and initiate alternative exchanges. Mental precarization is also partly countered by bonds of social trust, but also by the civil terrain in which various artistic groups are active. In turn, such actions lend social meaning to creative labour, so that precarious workers can refresh their mental energy. Finally, civil actions also create new political formations that transcend class distinctions. Recetas Urbanas, for example, collaborates with intellectuals, architects, activists, organizations of the social midfield, builders, and suppliers. Completely different social layers work together within their projects, towards the same civil goal. Especially these heterogeneous social formations make a counter-hegemonial politics possible.

As long as futurology is not an empirical science, it will be hard to predict whether an effective counter-hegemony will succeed. But the observed potential of the collectives and organizations for generating more sustainable creative labour, makes further research necessary, to say the least. At the moment not science or the academic world, but artistic organisations dare to experiment with the future by composing laboratories of such counter-hegemonic strategies.

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