



1. Pilvi Takala, *The Trainee*, "February 25, A Day at Consulting," 2008, video still (artwork © Pilvi Takala)

The future social order will take its shape from compatibility with the theoretical principles of art.
—JOSEPH BEUYS

For some time now, artists, critics, and historians have noted the increasing overlap between art making and other forms of labor within neoliberal capitalism. Many of these observations stem from the correspondences between the seem-

ingly ever more flexible concept of art and the flexibility of post-Fordist modes of accumulation.¹ Some commentators have focused on how both artists and workers in many parts of the world have ceased producing objects and instead engage in performances, provide services, or manage interpersonal exchanges.² Others have commented on the professionalization of art as an entrepreneurial undertaking, along with its particular degrees, institutions, and markets.³ A further approach understands art making within the context of a

global "precariat" of contingent freelance workers whose livelihoods are wholly subject to the flux of economic forces.⁴ Often these concerns intersect in ways that can be illuminating and provocative, pointing to the tensions and fissures between art and work that disclose differential forms of privilege and value.⁵ Increasingly, however, it is corporations, managers, and business theorists who are making explicit the association between art and the kind of labor valorized within a neoliberal framework. A recent article in *The Economist*, titled "The Art of Management," is typical of the tendency. The author presents a series of arguments for the value of art as a model for business management:

Business has much to learn from the arts. . . . Studying the arts can help business people communicate more eloquently. . . . Studying the arts can also help companies learn how to manage bright people. . . . Studying the art world might even hold out the biggest prize of all—helping businesses become more innovative. Companies are scouring the world for new ideas. In their quest for creativity, they surely have something to learn from the creative industries.⁶

On the one hand, such promotions of art as a model for business management could be dismissed or justified on the basis that they merely serve as attempts to find new ways of generating profits for companies or organizations beholden to bottom-line imperatives (e.g., "better" communication, management, and ideas). However, as I will argue through an investigation of two recent encounters between contemporary art and corporate labor at the multinational accounting and financial consulting firm Deloitte, recourse to artistic activity transcends particular and immediate profit motives and can be linked to a broader structural shift in the political meanings associated with art and labor since the 1960s. Instead of treating these examples merely as evidence of art's indistinguishability from other forms of immaterial labor in post-Fordist capitalism, we should see contemporary art, in particular performance art, and corporate management discourse as parallel responses to the political challenges launched against postwar capitalism and its cultural apparatuses in the late 1960s. This shared genealogy suggests that rather than the co-optation or recuperation of an initially oppositional practice, performance functions in a variety of contexts as a model for antinormative behavior.

Sami Siegelbaum

Business Casual: Flexibility in Contemporary Performance Art

The epigraph is from Joseph Beuys, "Not Just a Few Are Called, But Everyone," trans. John Wheelwright, *Studio International* 184, no. 950 (December 1972): 226.

1. Though I use the terms "neoliberalism" and "post-Fordism" somewhat interchangeably here, I see the latter as referring to the particular way in which late-capitalist production is organized, whereas the former designates, in the words of the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, "a program for destroying collective structures which may impede pure market logic." Bourdieu, "L'Essence du néo-libéralisme," *Le Monde diplomatique*, December 1998, at www.monde-diplomatique.fr/1998/03/BOURDIEU/10167, as of November 25, 2013. On post-Fordism and "flexible accumulation," see David Harvey, "From Fordism to Flexible Accumulation," in *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Malden, MA, and Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1990), 141–72.

2. See Andrea Fraser, *Museum Highlights: The Writings of Andrea Fraser*, ed. Alexander Alberro (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005); Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Noah Horowitz, *Art of the Deal: Contemporary Art in a Global Financial Market* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); and Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).

3. See Howard Singerman, *Art Subjects: Making Artists in the American University* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); and Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 2011).

4. See Pascal Gielen, *The Murmuring of the Artistic Multitude: Global Art, Memory and Post-Fordism* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2010); *Are You Working Too Much? Post-Fordism, Precarity, and the Labor of Art*, ed. Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, and Anton Vidokle (New York: Sternberg Press, 2011); and



2. **Pilvi Takala, *The Trainee***, "Working at Deloitte for a Month," 2008, PowerPoint slide, (artwork © Pilvi Takala)

A young woman sits at a desk. The desk is part of one workstation among several in an open-plan office space surrounded by private offices and meeting rooms. Based on the PowerPoint slides and video that record her activity, it is unclear exactly what kind of work is done here. In fact, it would be difficult to imagine a more generic looking corporate office. At other workstations, men and women stare at laptop computer screens, converse with each other, and make periodic trips to the printer. Their behavior seems perfectly suited to the space in which they are situated. In other words, they are performing the type of work for which such a space is created. The young woman, however, doesn't seem to be performing any work at all. There is no computer at her desk and she appears to be simply staring into space, occasionally receiving quizzical glances from her coworkers. Clearly her behavior is at odds with the environment. One might surmise that she will not receive a stellar assessment on her next performance review. Yet, there is a space in which this behavior is not only right at home but indeed laudable—that is, within the space of a contemporary art gallery as a work of performance art. In such a context, the woman's refusal to perform work is itself regarded as a different sort of performance and a different kind of "work." Hired as trainee "Johanna Takala" by the Helsinki marketing division of the global professional services corporation Deloitte, the woman—actually the Finnish artist Pilvi Takala—gradually ceased to perform any work activity during her month-long stint at the company. She recorded her conspicuous inactivity and the reactions of her coworkers by hidden video camera and e-mails that were sent to a supervisor who was aware of the project. The installation for *The Trainee* comprises the video, along with a PowerPoint slideshow and objects such as Takala's

the recent special issue of *TDR/The Drama Review* 56, no. 4, "Precarity and Performance" (Winter 2012).

5. Exemplary in this regard is Julia Bryan-Wilson, "Occupational Realism," *TDR/The Drama Review*, 32–48.

6. "The Art of Management," Schumpeter blog, *Economist* (February 17, 2011), at www.economist.com/node/18175675, as of November 25, 2013.



3. **Pilvi Takala, *The Trainee***, 2008, installation, Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki, 2008 (artwork © Pilvi Takala)

employee ID card, a welcome letter from Deloitte, and office furniture.⁷

Takala describes the piece as a disruption of the supposed consensus that governs normative behavior in a work environment.⁸ It is important to note that disruption here is not dependent on the mere suspension or interruption of productive labor. After all, Takala does not explicitly challenge the compulsion to work but instead refuses its standard performance—responding that she is engaging in "brain work" when asked by a coworker what she is doing sitting idly at a computerless desk or riding the elevator up and down all day. From the perspective of the viewer of the installation, the result of this breach in accepted office conduct is that one performance is substituted for another: artistic performance, with its specific values, is offered as a kind of mirror reversal of work performance, whose value is more obviously subject to instrumental demands and institutional protocol. However, *The Trainee*'s pathos derives not from the humorously awkward encounter between two different forms of performance but instead through their mutual reciprocity.

Performance art emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s as one of the most vibrant challenges to modernist aesthetics. More than simply a genre, movement, or medium, performance seemed to indicate both the process of artistic production itself and a category for the evaluation of all social behavior. As social theorists began to increasingly see everyday actions and discourse in terms of theater and ritual, performance art was positioned as a marginal practice that revealed the performative nature of social praxis while also challenging its norms.⁹ In particular, performance art's focus on live bodies emphasized how bodies were gendered, racialized, and otherwise made visible or invisible in ways that were

7. Since the initial exhibition at the Kiasma Museum in 2008, *The Trainee* has been shown at over twenty other venues around Europe and the United States.

8. Pilvi Takala, "The Trainee," at <http://pilvitakala.com/thetrainee01.html>, as of November 25, 2013.

coextensive with the struggles of oppressed groups during the same period. In particular, feminist artists and theorists developed powerful formulations of performance that complicated traditional definitions of labor and production.

Around the same time, however, performance began to acquire a completely different meaning in the realm of organizational management. In the roughly two decades following World War II, as most large American firms separated the functions of ownership and management, “performance” became the central category in the evaluation of labor. In explicit distinction from the Taylorist focus on disciplinary control of worker activity, which dominated work appraisal in the first half of the twentieth century, firms and organizations in the United States during the 1960s and in Europe during the 1970s began to focus more on the development of worker initiative and self-management. This shift in the meaning of organizational performance was extended to various sectors of the economy in the 1980s and 1990s as US and Western European firms relocated their manufacturing operations to newly industrializing countries. While Taylorist principles still applied to such secondary-sector economic activity, new paradigms were developed to manage the proliferating service and information industries. Performance was seen as a more appropriate rubric for the flexible and decentralized management structure suited to a post-Fordist, globally integrated economy. In management literature, increasing emphasis was placed on the value of “creativity,” “innovation,” and “inspiration,” replacing questions of efficiency, professionalism, and motivation.⁹

By the 2000s, management theorists were beginning to note the correspondences between organizational and cultural performance, sometimes going so far as to argue that artistic activity had become the horizon toward which all post-Fordist labor was oriented. These assessments consistently argued that this artistic turn was not confined to the so-called creative industries (entertainment, advertising, research and development, fashion, design, media, computer programming, and so forth) but affected all sectors of economic activity. Richard Florida, the commentator perhaps most associated with the championing of this tendency, has argued that creative labor, whether productive or nonproductive, is the single most important and valuable resource in today’s new economic arrangement.¹⁰

More recently, the business management guru Daniel Pink has achieved notoriety by making claims such as suggesting that the Master in Fine Arts (MFA) degree is the new Master in Business Administration (MBA).¹¹ Pink’s claim, directed not so much at artists as at managers and business consultants, is presented as a critique of the rigid application of traditional management methods. Instead of focusing on achieving maximum productivity and efficiency, managers should think of themselves as “meaning makers” who produce concepts and emotions. What is noteworthy about this new management culture is the extent to which it promotes the challenging of norms and static hierarchies as both economically necessary (in order to innovate, achieve flexibility, meet client needs, and so forth) and as socially desirable (worker participation, initiative, excitement, creativity, autonomy, and more).

The obvious absurdity of Takala’s response to her questioning coworkers that she is conducting “brain work” by sitting still at an empty desk suggests why performance is a more appropriate rubric for work evaluation in the post-Fordist era. On the one hand, performance appraisal provides a flexibly variable tool capable of focusing on an array of factors rather than strictly on output. Further-

more, as evidenced by the distressed e-mails sent by Johanna’s coworkers to the supervisor, the diffuse structure of performance—its application to attributes such as behavior, attitude, and sociability—means that it can be assessed throughout the workforce rather than in a strictly hierarchical manner. At one level, then, *The Trainee* indicates the ways in which the turn to immaterial labor engenders new forms of discipline.

The media and performance studies scholar Jon McKenzie has proposed the emergence of a “performance stratum” underlying the fields of culture, economy, and technology that binds together their disparate activities and discourses in a common disciplinary imperative. McKenzie notes the seemingly opposed connotations of performance in artistic production and organizational management but identifies a “rapid expansion of performance concepts into formalized systems of discourses and practices, into sociotechnical systems that have themselves become institutionalized first within the United States and then subsequently worldwide.”¹² Takala’s installation can be taken as an example of this more encompassing notion of performance, as it inserts the standard media of the corporate environment (PowerPoint, e-mails, office furniture, employee ID cards) into the context of the museum, thereby highlighting the ways in which normative behavior is structured by such platforms, similar to the stage setting of a dramatic performance. Likewise, the body is highly mediated and fragmented by these systems, rather than asserting its physical and temporal presence as in much early performance art. Furthermore, Takala’s gradual yet idiosyncratic change in behavior at Deloitte does not fit into traditional patterns of worker resistance or refusal (e.g., strike, protest, absenteeism, unionization), which typically involve collective organization and clear messages. Takala has claimed that the marked illegibility of her actions is more provocative than established forms of opposition to work: “The non-doing person isn’t committed to any activity, so they have the potential for anything. It is non-doing that lacks a place in the general order of things, and thus it is a threat to order. It is easy to root out any ongoing anti-order activity, but the potential for anything is a continual stimulus without a solution.”¹³

The refusal by Takala to engage in oppositional transgression does not so much indicate a poststructuralist rejection of classic forms of worker struggle and their ontological presumptions; rather it reveals the ways in which worker discipline is no longer administered by superiors, as in the Taylorist model, but has instead become a system of collective self-management diffused throughout the labor force. The troubled interoffice e-mails sent to supervisors note Johanna’s “weird and funny, but also scary” inactivity, while the reactions of coworkers to encountering her riding the elevator up and down range from bemused to perturbed.¹⁴ Such responses make it clear that this abnormal behavior is threatening to their own sense of purpose.

It is in this sense, then, that *The Trainee* highlights the differences between as well as the convergence of performance art and work performance, presenting the former as a critical subversion of the latter. Yet, given Deloitte’s sponsorship and direct collaboration with Takala in *The Trainee*, one might be skeptical of any claims of resistance or criticality made for the piece. When viewed from the perspective of Deloitte, the friction of such fault lines offers the tantalizing possibility of justifications for worker commitment beyond exclusively profit-driven

9. Seminal texts include J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962); and Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1959).

10. See Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2005), 78. This survey of 1990s management literature focuses largely on French sources. However, performance management is largely the result of the export of American business models to Western Europe since WWII. Boltanski and Chiapello also indicate that many of the terms used in French neo-management discourse are translated or borrowed directly from American sources. *Ibid.*, 72–78.

11. Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It’s Transforming Work, Leisure, Community, and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2002); and Richard Florida, *The Great Reset: How New Ways of Living and Working Drive Post-Crash Prosperity* (New York: Harper, 2008).

12. Daniel Pink, *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future* (New York: Riverhead, 2006). For a critical take on the realignment of work with artistic creativity, see *Critique of Creativity: Precarity, Subjectivity, and Resistance in the “Creative Industries,”* ed. Gerald Raunig, Gene Ray, and Ulf Wuggenig (London: Mayfly, 2011).

13. Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (London: Routledge, 2001), 13.

14. Pilvi Takala, “The Trainee,” at <http://pilvitakala.com/thetrainee01.html>, as of November 25, 2013.

15. Pilvi Takala, “The Trainee: February 26 a Day at Tax and Legal,” at www.pilvitakala.com/taxvideo.html, as of November 25, 2013.

interests, posing the question of how the artistic subversion of work becomes an organizational value.

Corporate sponsorship of contemporary art has become an increasingly common phenomenon, replacing governmental sources of funding while altering the sites and functions of the artwork.¹⁶ In turn, the corporate sponsor receives the benefits of publicity, tax breaks, and cultural capital. In the case of *The Trainee*, for example, the Deloitte-sponsored Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art in Helsinki, where the piece was first exhibited in 2008, acted essentially as a middleman or contracting agency by bringing the artist and the corporation together for the project. Deloitte paid Takala's fee directly and purchased one edition of the final piece, donating it to Kiasma's collection. The company's annual report for 2008 features Takala's piece under its "Socially Responsible Acts" section as an instance of collaboration with a major cultural institution.

The report suggests other possibilities for Deloitte's interest in contemporary art. Following a brief and vague description of *The Trainee*, the section of the report also includes a statement from Tuomo Salmi, head of "integrated services and innovation" for Deloitte Finland. "Throughout the project we had the opportunity to place ourselves in the game and take part in a unique work of art," Salmi explains. "Our staff reflects the positive attitude of an open-minded approach as well as the ability to throw ourselves into new situations."¹⁷ Within the context of Deloitte's annual report, Salmi's statement sounds appropriately accommodating while remaining abstract. Yet as Takala has pointed out, strategic branding concerns underlie such statements and Deloitte's decision to support contemporary art. For Deloitte, Takala notes, the work "functioned as a marketing project, something that supported the idea of the company being very open, self critical, young and cool. Even if my videos showed the work place as a more traditional place, just letting me do this project makes them appear cool."¹⁸

This observation may point to a new stage in the dialectical evolution of artistic practices that became identified in the early 1970s as institutional critique. Much as art museums have responded to such artists as Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren, and Hans Haacke and groups ranging from the Art Workers Coalition to the Guerilla Girls by trying to accommodate their critiques rather than ignore or censor them, corporate sponsors are now adopting this approach as well.¹⁹ The accommodation indicates the further development of what the German philosopher Herbert Marcuse termed "repressive desublimation," whereby alternative forms of behavior are tolerated by being given outlets in commodity consumption. That is, what was previously a safety valve for critical energies has now become a crucial marketing strategy.

Yet Salmi's characterization of *The Trainee* as a "game" or "new situation" for Deloitte's employees suggests that the value of the engagement for the company was not exclusively directed toward external image manipulation (branding, PR, promotion, and marketing) but also internally, for its own staff. In this sense, it shares a great deal with another Deloitte subsidiary's interest in contemporary art.

In early 2012, the New York branch of Deloitte Consulting held the first of a series of monthly workshops in its New York City office in which artists were invited to discuss their work with Deloitte employees (mostly financial consultants and analysts). Art Think, as the program was called, was presented as a model of "creative" thinking; it directly equated contemporary art with financial

consulting, thereby encouraging Deloitte staff members to approach their work for the firm as a form of creative activity similar to art. As the press release announces, Art Think is "intended to spark new perspectives on the consulting practice, by looking at how artists ideate and innovate."²⁰ In order to demonstrate the relevance of contemporary art to financial consulting, both artists and consultants were described as engaging in a set of activities that are familiar descriptors of post-Fordist immaterial labor: "implementing solutions," "interacting with collaborators," "dealing with uncertainty," "innovating alternatives to pre-existing models," and "creating within a set of restraints."²¹ The premise of the program, therefore, rested on a set of equivalences that Deloitte identified between contemporary artistic labor and the informational work of financial consulting performed by its employees.

The first Art Think invitee was the New York-based performance artist Ryan McNamara. In many respects McNamara was an ideal choice for the program, as his work demonstrates many of the qualities touted by business management ethos since the 1990s. In his pieces McNamara often adopts a role as a somehow whimsically disadvantaged or charmingly inept performer who nonetheless insists on finding ways to perform, thereby transcending the constraints of the situation. Pieces such as *Make Ryan a Dancer*, in which the artist attempted to mimic the moves of a professional dancer throughout the galleries of MoMA PS1, or a 2011 performance (Fig. 4) in which McNamara and a collaborator, buried up to their necks in the ground six feet apart, sang popular love songs in duet, seem to offer metaphors of adaptability.

For his presentation at Deloitte, McNamara is depicted as someone engaged in a multitude of heterogeneous projects with different collaborators at different sites. To a striking degree, McNamara is presented as possessing the qualities that the sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello have identified as adhering to the ideal worker described in corporate management literature since the 1980s: "enthusiastic, involved, flexible, adaptable, versatile, having potential, employable, autonomous, not prescriptive, knows how to engage others, in touch, tolerant."²² A draft PowerPoint presentation of Deloitte's Art Think indicates that "Ryan embodies the 'dealing with uncertainty' and 'enthusiasm for experiments' aspects of design thinking."²³

Deloitte's presentation suggests that McNamara's flexibility and enthusiasm represent an ideal model of work performance under the volatile and ever-changing conditions of neoliberal capitalism. This characterization stands in sharp contrast to *Trainee* by Takala, whose unorthodox performance of immaterial labor is troubling and alienating within the work environment. This alienation is central to the distinction the piece draws between cultural and work performance, a distinction reinforced and to a certain degree normalized by the installation's location in an art institution. Deloitte's engagement with both works, however, suggests not only that the line between critique and compliance has become blurred but, moreover, that a particular mode of critique associated with contemporary performance art has become potentially useful to firms such as Deloitte. Rather than merely a process of repressive desublimation, however, such a condition in fact acknowledges the success of performance art's challenge to the hermeticism and objectification of art that paralleled the political challenges to Fordist capitalism during the 1960s and 1970s.

16. See George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); and Chin-Tao Wu, *Privatizing Culture: Corporate Art Intervention since the 1980s* (London: Verso, 2002).

17. Tuomo Salmi, quoted in "Deloitte Finland Annual Report 2008" (Deloitte internal document), 16.

18. Pivi Takala, e-mail to author, June 2012.

19. This tolerant and solicitous response by institutions and organizations has placed many artists in the curious position of what the art historian Miwon Kwon has identified as valuable service providers of subversion and critique. See Kwon, 47–51. In this respect, a work such as Andrea Fraser's 1994–95 project for the Generali Foundation, the art-collecting organization of the Generali insurance corporation, marks an important transitional moment. Fraser contracted her services to the foundation to research the ways in which the acquisition of contemporary art functioned within the corporation. She also performed an "intervention" with the corporate collection at its Vienna location. See Andrea Fraser, *Report* (Vienna: EA-Generali Foundation, 1995).

20. "Deloitte Consulting Hosts Contemporary Artists to Explore Problem Solving," press release, Deloitte Consulting LLP, April 2012.

21. Deloitte Art Think 2012, draft (Deloitte internal document).

22. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, 112.

23. Deloitte Art Think 2012 Overview (Deloitte internal document).



4. **Ryan McNamara, II**, 2011, Watermill Center, Water Mill, NY, 2011 (artwork © Ryan McNamara; photograph provided by the artist)

Perhaps no artist promoted as radically expanded a notion of art as the German performance artist, sculptor, and teacher Joseph Beuys. Though redolent of other twentieth-century avant-garde attempts to sublimate art into life, Beuys's work proposed precisely a reverse approach.²⁴ That is, rather than advocating a rerouting of artistic production and consumption to industrial processes, phenomenological perception, political activism, or social interaction—to name but a few options pursued by other artists—Beuys espoused the reconceptualization of such spheres of life and society as art. In a statement written in 1973, Beuys elaborated on his notion of “social sculpture”:

Only on condition of a radical widening of definitions will it be possible for art and activities related to art [to] provide evidence that art is now the only evolutionary-revolutionary power. Only art is capable of dismantling the repressive effects of a senile social system that continues to totter along the deadline: to dismantle in order to build “A SOCIAL ORGANISM AS A WORK OF ART” . . . EVERY HUMAN BEING IS AN ARTIST WHO—from his state of freedom—the position of freedom that he experiences at first-hand—learns to determine the other positions of the TOTAL ART WORK OF THE FUTURE SOCIAL ORDER.²⁵

It was this redefinition of society as a *Gesamtkunstwerk* that underwrote Beuys's extraordinary political and organizational activity: the 1967 founding of the German Student Party, the 1971 Organization for Direct Democracy through Referendum, the 1974 founding of the Free International University for Creativity

24. This critique of Beuys remains most forcefully articulated by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh's response to the artist's retrospective at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. See Buchloh, “Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol: Preliminary Notes for a Critique,” *Artforum* 15, no. 8 (January 1980): 35–43.
25. Joseph Beuys “I Am Searching for Field Character” (1973), first published in English in Caroline Tisdall, *Art into Society, Society into Art* (London: ICA, 1974), 48, upper case in original.



5. **Joseph Beuys, Ausfeigen (Sweeping Up)**, 1972, Berlin (photograph © 2013 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn)

and Interdisciplinary Research, and a founding role in the formation of the German Green Party in 1980. Inherent in such projects was the assertion that “creativity” was an essential demiurgic capacity possessed by all individuals—a “free individual productive potency.”²⁶

Such a universal yet individualized conception of creative labor was in explicit contrast to both the institutional models of engagement offered by the great collective organizations of modernity—labor unions, political parties, national academies—and to the insular coherence of avant-garde groups from the Futurists and Surrealists through Fluxus. Situated within the historically overdetermined context of West Germany during the late 1960s and early 1970s—at the nexus of reconstruction, revolt, and traumatic division—Beuys conceived of art as the only means by which those political challenges could be addressed.²⁷ The 1972 performance *Sweeping Up* demonstrates to what extent the concept of “social sculpture” involved a cleansing purge of the Marxist rhetoric and political expression that remained prominent in the German Left. Beuys, along with two students, swept up the refuse left behind after a major May Day demonstration at Karl-Marx-Platz in West Berlin. Organized with support from the recently formed Deutsche Kommunistische Partei (German Communist Party), the May Day march constituted an example of the quasi-official character of anticapitalist activity that existed in an increasingly tense relationship with the more anarchic tendencies of the so-called New Left in the years following 1968. Attempts to reconcile workers, still overwhelmingly represented by labor unions, with the student movement and extreme leftist groups proved to be one of the greatest obstacles to the formation

26. *Ibid.*

27. Though Buchloh originally argued that Beuys's self-mythologization and artistic approach to politics resulted in the avoidance of any true confrontation with the [Naz] past, he has more recently acknowledged that Beuys was, in fact, one of the first German artists of the post-war era to explicitly address that history and its legacy. See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “Reconsidering Joseph Beuys, Once Again,” in *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy*, ed. Gene Ray (New York: DAP, 2001), 75–90.

of a broad challenge to capitalism—particularly in Western Europe, where many unions were allied with the Communist Party. Beuys's *Sweeping Up* action plays on this tension by performing labor as incompatible with Marxist political activity. Only through art can labor attain the status of creative activity necessary to change the world, while labor in turn transforms art into a use value.²⁸

In this sense, Beuys's regenerative role for an expanded art paralleled leftist political theory of the time, particularly that associated with Marcuse. In his *Essay on Liberation*, written at the height of the political ferment of 1968, Marcuse suggested that the development of productive forces, by reducing necessary labor time, had opened up the possibility of transcending the division between work and leisure to the point where labor itself would lose its oppressive, purely instrumental, and exploitative character and instead constitute a form of free creative expression.²⁹ The role of aesthetics would be to bring about a "new sensibility" of behaviors and affects for this less alienated mode of production. Therefore, what was called for, and indeed signaled by the new forms of rebellion evident in the New Left and the counterculture, was the extension of an aesthetic approach to all productive activity—not just in the realm of art—which would pave the way for a free society. Beuys's idea that every human is an artist ("jeder Mensch ist ein Künstler") thus not only finds resonance in Marcuse's call for the generalization of an aesthetic approach to life, but the notion of social sculpture finds its articulation in Marcuse's claim that a society shaped by such an approach would assume a "Form." "The essentially aesthetic quality of this Form," he writes, "would make it a work of art, but inasmuch as the Form is to emerge in the social process of production, art would have changed its traditional locus and function in society: it would have become a productive force in the material as well as cultural transformation."³⁰

But such an expanded definition of art also overlaps with the more recent notion of immaterial labor as introduced by Italian Marxists involved in the Autonomia movement of the 1970s and 1980s, who attempted to complicate classical formulations of labor to include "the labor that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity."³¹ Theorists of immaterial labor such as Michael Hardt argue that it has become hegemonic in the sense that advanced sectors of the global economy are "transforming other forms of production and forcing them to adopt its qualities, to become communicative, informational, image-oriented, and so forth."³² The philosopher and former Autonomist Paolo Virno has even argued that under the conditions of post-Fordist immaterial labor, performance art has collapsed the distinction between productive labor and political action.³³ Both are premised on the virtuosic self-management of intellectual and communicative abilities—to "exercise an art of the possible, to deal with the unforeseen, to profit from opportunities."³⁴ Though for Marcuse the emerging "new sensibility" held the promise of superseding the violence and inequality inherent in the capitalist accumulation process, Virno suggests that the redefinition of both production and political action in terms of aesthetic creation has engendered a condition whereby previously "unproductive" attributes of workers (language, personality, intellect, and so on) have been more fully brought under the sway and logic of wage labor, as previous definitions of professional competence and skill are dematerialized into the affective qualities of individuals.

As the performance studies scholar Shannon Jackson has recently noted, however, a vast gulf separates Virno's conception of "virtuosity" from its colloquial



6. Ryan McNamara, *Make Ryan a Dancer*. 2010, MoMA PS1, New York, 2010 (artwork © Ryan McNamara; photograph provided by the artist)

connotation as the mastery of a highly specialized set of artistic competencies.³⁵ The nearly opposite meaning of the two understandings of virtuosity can be mapped, for example, onto the distinction between performance art and theater—the former imbued with values of presence, risk, indeterminacy, and transgression, while the latter is associated with supposedly conservative features such as illusionism, rehearsal, professionalism, and structure. The conceptual value of performance art is thus in an inverse relation to the technical expertise, or virtuosity in the colloquial sense, of the skilled performer. McNamara's *Make Ryan a Dancer* presents the two opposing definitions of virtuosity: the professional dancer and the performance artist. The performance turns on the discrepancy between the specialized professional and the dedicated amateur, and thus functions as a parable of the redefinition of virtuosity in post-Fordism. It is precisely the "clear awkwardness" of the performance artist that makes the performance "engaging."³⁶ Or, as Jackson succinctly puts it, "mediocre dancing can be good conceptual art."³⁷

While immaterial labor transforms nearly all workers into a global reserve of proletarian virtuosos by incorporating every aspect of an individual into the production process, Hardt and others have claimed that it thus also provides the basis for a generalized social creativity capable of transforming the world in terms similar to those advanced by Marcuse and Beuys and picked up by recent management discourse.³⁸ A 2009 article in *Business Strategy Review*, published by the London Business School, recommends that business managers draw inspiration from the work of Beuys. Quoting Beuys's affirmation that creativity constituted the "true capital of human beings," the authors argue that "Beuys's approach to

35. Shannon Jackson, "Just-In-Time: Performance and the Aesthetics of Precarity," *TDR: The Drama Review* 56, no. 4, "Precarity and Performance" (Winter 2012): 10–31.

36. Mark Beasley, "Greater New York 2010," *Frieze* 134 (October 2010).

37. Jackson, 20.

38. See Michael Hardt and Antoni Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 42.

28. Refracting labor through such a performative matrix also obscures the fundamental class differences between, for example, menial maintenance work, financial consulting, and art making. This is a difference between *Sweeping Up* and a work with which it has been occasionally compared, Mierle Laderman Ukeles's *Maintenance Art* (1969), in which the artist washed the steps and swept the floors of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in Hartford, Connecticut. In Ukeles's performance, precisely the opposite assertion is made—that it is only thanks to such menial forms of nonartistic labor, typically marginalized and rendered invisible, that autonomous art can be presented as a higher form of creative activity.

29. Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 21.

30. Ibid., 32. Marcuse, however, had earlier advanced a negative conception of "performance" as the suppression of libidinal energy and pleasure through its channeling into alienated labor. See Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (New York: Beacon Press, 1955).

31. Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," in *Radical Thought in Italy*, ed. Michael Hardt and Paolo Virno (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1996), 133.

32. Michael Hardt, "Immaterial Labor and Artistic Production," in *Rethinking Marxism* 17, no. 2 (April 2005): 176.

33. Paolo Virno, "Virtuosity and Revolution: The Political Theory of Exodus," in *Radical Thought in Italy*, 189–209.

34. Ibid., 192.

creativity can offer practical insights on boosting creativity for individuals and organizations.”³⁹ The article goes on to explain how Beuys’s notion of creativity and social sculpture can be applied to the management of immaterial labor:

By looking at Beuys and understanding his approach to creativity, managers can become aware of ways to foster the creative process and how to enable people to unfold their very own creative potential. . . . Rather [than] being constrained by the boundaries of established management culture and legacy organizational practices, managers need to recognize the potential to sculpt their organization’s innovation practices and social interactions, just as Beuys created new forms of artwork through his understanding of the process of creativity.⁴⁰

The recourse to expanded artistic models of creativity as a means to break management and labor out of outdated structures and patterns is consonant with Boltanski and Chiapello’s diagnosis of the “new spirit of capitalism.” Proceeding from Max Weber’s analysis of the rise of capitalism, Boltanski and Chiapello argue that moral justifications for the capital accumulation process are not inherent to the system but must be made by drawing on the most persuasive cultural resources available at a given conjuncture. Such resources sustain the “spirit of capitalism”—the justificatory mechanisms that compel participation and deflect critique. Because capitalism is not oriented to an essential morality (capital accumulation is an end in itself), “the spirit sustaining the accumulation process at a given point in history is thus imbued with cultural products that are contemporaneous with it and which, for the most part, have been generated to quite different ends than justifying capitalism.”⁴¹

In response to the stagnant growth that beset the economies of several industrialized nations by the mid-1970s, firms began to restructure their operations and press for deregulatory policies that would enable them to shed or bypass their obligations to workers and lower labor costs.⁴² Implementations such as outsourcing, flex-time, subcontracting, and freelancing radically limited the in-house operations of firms and reorganized production from a ladder-like structure of largely repetitive tasks and into networks of various temporary projects. In order to justify the loss of security such transformations induced for workers, firms drew on the very forms of critique of Fordist capitalism most vigorously expressed by artists, students, the counterculture, and other groups associated with the New Left that denounced the repressive hierarchy, alienation, and homogenization forced on individuals by an industrialized world. The new work structures were thus hailed for promoting individual initiative, creativity, and a sense of purpose.

The term “network” so frequently applied to the new work structure refers not only to the geographical spread of connections enabled by telecommunications technology, but also to the use of consultants, subcontractors, service providers, temporary personnel, and other sources of contingent labor that previously formed part of the permanent in-house operations of the firm or organization.⁴³ Deloitte itself is a perfect model of this reticular organization. As the company explains, Deloitte does not directly provide services to clients but instead functions as an umbrella brand under which various member firms around the world operate independently and in conjunction with regional subsidiaries or affiliates. Central to Deloitte’s ability to function flexibly, this structure

absolves the parent corporation of virtually any liability claims to which either clients or workers may have recourse. Essentially, Deloitte operates as the manager of a vast network.⁴⁴

Deloitte Consulting’s artist talks program is thus a prime example of the new spirit of capitalism in its emphasis on the creative autonomy of each financial consultant engaged in project-based immaterial labor. Boltanski and Chiapello note the imminent conjunction of advanced service and artistic labor whereby the latter “constitutes the limit . . . towards which the ideal of the ‘manager,’ as outlined in the works of consultants, seems to be headed.”⁴⁵ As artistic activity today consists of various projects, and the paragon of the contemporary artist has become a networked, globetrotting nomad, it has become all the more attractive as a model for the new manager or consultant no longer bound by the constraints of rational planning, company hierarchies, or standardized procedures.⁴⁶ Boltanski and Chiapello ask, “Is not the neo-manager, like the artist, a creative figure, a person of intuition, invention, contacts, chance encounters, someone who is always on the move, passing from one project to the next, one world to another?”⁴⁷

Deloitte’s Art Think made this connection explicit in its presentation of McNamara. For example, the prevalence of the word “charming” applied to both McNamara’s work and personality in press reviews is congruent with Boltanski and Chiapello’s description of the “great man” of the new spirit of capitalism.⁴⁸ It is particularly McNamara’s ability “to engage others” that harmonizes with the new management ethos. For his 2012 solo gallery debut, at the Elizabeth Dee gallery in New York, McNamara constructed an installation as the setting for ongoing improvisational performances. By entering the gallery, visitors agreed to participate in the performances and were then given different instructions, roles, costumes, and props. McNamara photographed the resulting tableaux; he then posted the images to the gallery’s website and also collaged them onto objects presented in a second phase of the exhibition. “It’s not a super-tangible skill,” McNamara has stated, “I’m not very flexible or a good dancer or something, but I think I’m kind of okay at making people feel comfortable and getting them to step outside their comfort zones. It’s a weird skill, but I found a job to utilize it.”⁴⁹ Indeed. As Deloitte’s Art Think makes clear, such “intangible skills” are very much at the heart of the new spirit of capitalism. According to Boltanski and Chiapello, these qualities are considered desirable insofar as they are capable of multiplying connections and extending networks, thus proliferating further projects.⁵⁰ McNamara’s assertion that “performance almost acts as a way of meeting people—interesting people—and learning” finds validation in the connectionist world of flexible immaterial labor.

The point here is neither to single out Deloitte nor McNamara as particularly officious or even conscious promoters of capitalism’s new spirit. A central premise of my argument has been that such encounters between artistic and nonartistic labor result from the ways in which various parties, across various fields, and with a variety of intentions, articulated and addressed the cultural and political challenges of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The irony, of course, of the corporate management insistence on the parallels between art and work is that art must still be able to carry the values it acquired during an earlier phase of capitalism—autonomy, freedom, self-expression, subjective investment, creativity—in order for it to function today as a model for those forms of economic activity from

44. This is not to discount the crucial role Deloitte plays in providing and maintaining “brand equity” to its various local operations. In addition to, or as part of, the supposed “brain work” Johanna claims to be performing in *The Trainees*; she occasionally replies that she is working on a grad thesis that involves “localizing a brand, a global brand, for marketing.” Pivi Takala, “The Trainees: February 25 a Day at Consulting,” at <http://pivitalakala.com/consultvideo.html>, as of November 25, 2013.

45. Boltanski and Chiapello, 312.

46. On the contemporary artist as networked nomad, see James Meyer, “Nomads: Figures of Travel in Contemporary Art,” in *Site-Specificity: The Ethnographic Turn*, ed. Alex Coles (London: Black Dog, 2009).

47. Boltanski and Chiapello, 312.

48. *Ibid.*, 112–14.

49. Ryan McNamara quoted in Mike Vilensky, “No Spectators at Gallery Show,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 20, 2012, A21.

50. Boltanski and Chiapello, 111–12.

39. Jörg Reckenhich, Martin Kupp, and Jamie Anderson, “Understanding Creativity: The Manager as Artist,” *Business Strategy Review*, Summer 2009, 69–73.

40. *Ibid.*, 73.

41. Boltanski and Chiapello, 20.

42. See Boltanski and Chiapello, 217–242. See also David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 9–19.

43. Claire Bishop has recently pointed to the shared tendency of recent performance art and corporate management to outsource labor, something Boltanski and Chiapello cite as symptomatic of the post-Fordist flexibility extolled by the new spirit of capitalism. However, Bishop argues for a distinction between critical contemporary performance and corporate labor, due to the former’s capacity to enhance the consciousness of the viewer. Bishop, “Delegated Performance: Outsourcing Authenticity,” *October* 140 (Spring 2012): 91–112.

which art had distinguished itself previously, at the time it acquired such values. The transposition of those values to the business of financial consulting raises a host of questions, certainly about art's specificity and critical potential, but further, about how we periodize the contemporary: Rather than the postmodern or neo-avantgarde turn to "criticality" we have grown accustomed to in discussions of the art of the 1960s and 1970s, we might also see many of these practices as part of a broader turn to flexibility.

I am reminded of this when reencountering Takala's *The Trainee*—the lone worker doing absolutely nothing to project enthusiasm, engage others, adapt, extend networks, or proliferate projects. I have argued that Deloitte's involvement with contemporary performance artists indicates massive changes in the world of work since the 1970s. Yet looking at *The Trainee*, one might be surprised how little the appearance of administrative work and its environment has changed since that time—how much Deloitte's offices still look like "a traditional place" despite the "business casual" attire of the employees. One would be hard pressed to conceive of the activities of any of Johanna's coworkers in terms of artistic creation. Within the corporate work environment of Deloitte Helsinki, Takala's behavior is alienating and borderline threatening. Presented in a museum or contemporary art gallery, it is framed as a critical performance in contrast to the world of instrumental labor. However, it is precisely those coworkers most clearly irritated or troubled by Johanna's inactivity who appear the least flexible and tolerant, or the least "open-minded" and "adaptable," to use the terms of the Deloitte executive Salmi.

From the perspective of Deloitte management, *The Trainee* therefore serves purposes beyond merely the symbolic capital acquired through involvement with contemporary art. As Takala indicates, the critical cachet of performance art functions as an instance of "subversion for hire," making the company appear self-critical and "cool." Further, if Salmi's words are to be accepted, *The Trainee* also serves as a means to gauge the adaptability of Deloitte's staff—to see how the workers would respond to a challenging situation. In many respects, Takala's work represents the ambiguous situation much performance art finds itself in at this moment of its institutionalization. In collaboration with the very entity it critiques, *The Trainee* nonetheless reveals a disjunction between the supposed creative autonomy touted by today's promoters of immaterial labor, and the ways in which bodies and behaviors are diffusely disciplined at the micro-level of advanced work structures. Though mediated in multiple ways by video, e-mail, PowerPoint presentations, photo ID, language, and office furniture, the body's presence is not fully erased. Following Michel Foucault, these elements of the corporate environment may function as so many techniques of surveillance, producing docile bodies.⁵¹ Yet, as the ripples of discomfiture surrounding Johanna attest, those bodies have a stubborn materiality, an inertia that when awkwardly asserted presents an obstacle to the flexibility of dematerialized flows of information, finance, affect, and creativity in the post-Fordist, post-Taylorist era of hyper-performance.

Though completely at odds in content and approach, both *The Trainee* and McNamara's work as presented within the context of Deloitte Consulting raise questions about the critical nature of performance art—indeed about contemporary art in general and its distinction from other forms of labor. If we hope to understand how such seemingly disparate forms of performance can be reconciled within the spaces of corporate financial capital or elsewhere, we must adjust our

51. See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1977), 135–69.



7 Ryan McNamara and collaborators, *Still*, 2012, Elizabeth Dee Gallery, New York, 2012 (artwork © Ryan McNamara; photograph provided by the artist)

perspective on the historical moment when performance art's critical claims emerged. The historicization of such claims reveals the ways in which contemporary art, particularly performance, and contemporary corporate management developed from reactions against a collapsing Fordist-modernist order. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, artists and workers rejected what they perceived as the stultifying rigidity, the oppressive hierarchy, the bland conformity, and the enervating predictability of the political, cultural, and economic structures of the postwar period. Perhaps it is only fitting that artists are now called on to show workers how exciting the precariousness and unpredictability of dynamic neoliberal capitalism can be.

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